

20 Under 40 2022

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20
Under
40

is a celebration of young people, age 40 and younger, in West Central Missouri who are contributing to their community through business, education, civic involvement and community service. Through nominations from the community and the Democrat staff, the newsroom narrowed it down to the 20 Under 40 group for 2022. These young citizens are helping create a bright future for our area.

Cover photo by Skye Melcher | Democrat

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CONGRATULATIONS
LAURA WEISENBURGER
Nursing Educator And Recruiter



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We are thankful for all you do for the
Bothwell family and the community.



Weisenburger recruits nurses by selling Sedalia

Small-town girl offers nurses a simpler life

By Chris Howell

chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

Laura Weisenburger, 39, is the Nursing Recruiter at Bothwell Regional Health Center. Her job is to convince nurses to relocate to Sedalia.

"Laura is fantastic," Chief Nursing Officer Michelle Lass said. "She's my official first nurse recruiter. She has lots of experience in teaching and that ability to speak to people lends into her style and how she embraces people and coaches them. It's the relationship that she builds with them that then helps us and our facility bring them on into nursing."

And post-COVID, nurses have many tempting offers.

"There's a lot of competition right now," Lass said. "Nurses are sought after, they're a hot commodity so providing an environment that promotes people being included, that's a big deal. Laura teaches them, she takes them under her wing and takes care of them."

Kim Perez, Bothwell's Director of Clinical Education, is Weisenburger's supervisor and said Weisenburger is the exact person the hospital needed.

"She's an amazing employee," Perez said. "You can give her a task and she wholeheartedly completes them. Most of the time, I don't have to really give her tasks, she identifies them and says, 'Hey, what about this?' and runs with it."

"I'm a boomerang," Weisenburger admitted. "I started here 16 years ago working in perioperative services and they took a chance on me because back in those days, you worked Med-Surg before you went anywhere else."

Weisenburger was a bit of the "pilot" going into the program without the experience, but she worked in the operating room for two years and then

moved to same-day surgery for another five years.

She left for a bit during COVID and was looking for something with a work-life balance to spend more time with her children. Then fate intervened.

"Everything works out for a reason," Weisenburger said.

As she was getting set to return to perioperative surgery, an offer appeared with her dream job.

"I was getting ready to sign on," Weisenburger said, "when they said, 'Hey, we think we have something else you might be interested in,' and I haven't regretted the decision to go work over in education and recruitment since."

Weisenburger is sold on Sedalia and now recruits nurses to Bothwell by selling the small-town life she also enjoys.

"I grew up in Green Ridge," Weisenburger said. "I can't imagine being anywhere else. It's reassuring to know that anywhere you want a community, there's other people that you know. I tell the student nurses, whenever I need to come to the hospital to care for myself or my family it's different, you're not just a number. We are a perfect location if you want that small-town feel, but you want to have the experience of an hour one way or the other for a fancy night out on the town. The cost of living is great here, we have everything that the big cities have."

Weisenburger is the perfect person to welcome nurses and invite them to work at Bothwell, according to her bosses.

"With Laura's open and helpful attitude, people just kind of gravitate towards her," Perez said. "It helps her connect with the candidates that she's recruiting and visiting with."

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.



Laura Weisenburger is Bothwell Hospital's nursing recruiter and regularly sells nursing prospects on the small-town life in Sedalia.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT

Pedal or metal, Nucor's Rowland feels at home

By Bryan Everson

bryane@sedaliademocrat.com

Nucor Corporation was a name completely foreign to the area. Five years later, Aaron Rowland, one of its first Sedalia employees, feels as native and engrained as the mill itself.

A Kentucky native, Rowland finds himself involved in a number of ways outside of work these days.

A graduate of Murray State University, where he majored in occupational safety and health, Rowland adopted the Chiefs

as his NFL team after relocating here. He's now in his third year as a season-ticket holder at Arrowhead Stadium.

Banging the drum is part of the festivities at Arrowhead, and one of Rowland's favorite hobbies. He picked up the sticks in high school, but after moving to Sedalia, Rowland was tagged in a Facebook post by hard rock band Sweetshot, who had been looking for a drummer. He got the job, and now also fills in for another band, Twisted Fate.

"Sedalia has a lot of music history, and it's fun to be part of that scene," Rowland said.

The 29-year-old was unsure of what he wanted to do after graduating high school before finding out about the program he eventually took up at Murray State. Rowland discovered it meant good job placement with good companies, one of which was Nucor. He ended up getting an internship in Jackson, Mississippi, and the company enjoyed him so much his first summer there that they brought Rowland back for the following one as well. He enjoyed it, too, and knew when he graduated, he wanted to work with the company.

Rowland was eventually hired in Arkansas full-time as a safety coordinator in 2016 and spent two years there. After the announcement in November 2017 that the steel and steel products company would be bringing hundreds of jobs to Sedalia, he bid on and got the job as EHS (Environmental Health Safety) Supervisor.

As supervisor, Rowland oversaw several aspects of commissioning and getting the project started. Stephanie Garrett, Nucor controller, has been alongside Rowland as two of the first 10 employees hired for the Sedalia mill.

"He was instrumental in making relationships in the community and doing a lot of things while we were building a team," Garrett said. "He jumped right in, working on a lot of permits with the state."

Good with his feet on the pedals, Rowland also lends his efforts through water and air. Garrett pointed out that he jumped in at the opportunity to help fish with kids — it's another of his big hobbies — as part of Nucor's partnership program with Smith-Cotton students that began this year. He also was a drone pilot for the company, taking aerial photos that illustrated the mill's construction growth over time.

"He's always willing to help, whether it's as a teammate or with the community, to make the best in everywhere he goes," Garrett said.

Rowland said being part of a fraternity at Murray State was an experience that helped him develop a lot of his leadership qualities that he's now put to use in Sedalia. Since this summer, he's served as interim environmental manager.

"I think naturally I had some (leadership) qualities, and early on in my career, I think (Nucor) saw that and the company



Aaron Rowland

helped me prioritize what I needed to work on and improve to succeed in a leadership capacity," Rowland said.

Part of that new role means overseeing and maintaining environmental compliance that applies to the Sedalia facility. Some of it also involves meeting with vendors, discussing projects, and heading to visit other facilities to meet with fellow environmental personnel.

Next to reeling in fish and filling drum rolls, Rowland also rocks with the Sedalia Young Professionals. He's been involved with the organization since earlier this year and serves as its treasurer.

With his continued involvement in different walks of life, at this point, Rowland said Sedalia feels much like his hometown and that the reception from locals has helped make that transition somewhat seamless.

"Between the people and the atmosphere, Sedalia feels a lot like where I grew up, which made it easy to meet people," Rowland said. "The other wise of that is, since Nucor was announced, people have been so accepting and accommodating. The community really embraced us from the beginning. It definitely made it feel like I was right at home."

Bryan Everson can be reached at 660-530-0142 or on Twitter @BryanEversonSD.



Alongside fishing and attending Chiefs games, drumming is a big hobby for Nucor's Aaron Rowland.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AARON ROWLAND

Tilley building relationships as financial advisor

By Nicole Cooke

ncooke@sedaliademocrat.com

Adam Tilley’s career path led him from the University of Missouri directly to his current role as a financial advisor, where he gets to build relationships and help others with their financial needs.

Tilley, 30, is a Smith-Cotton and Miz-zou graduate, and he jumped straight from college to working for Edward Jones in 2015. He’s now pursuing a mas-ter’s in personal finance planning.

Tilley worked for Pettis County Title, now Truman Title, for a summer, which gave him experience and connections in real estate. While at Mizzou, he studied business and was following a path toward real estate finance, but an internship at Edward Jones changed that trajectory.

“I have always had an interest in personal finance and I love talking with people about their money and help-ing them understand it better and have it do the right things for them,” Tilley said of his decision to pursue a finance

career. “As far as finance jobs go, this is so relationship-driven; that’s what I love about it. I’m building those long-term relationships.”

As a financial advisor, Tilley helps his clients with a little bit of everything, depending on the needs of the family.

“Take inventory of what they have, what they need and want, what their goals are, and find the right solutions to get them that,” he explained. “It could be anything under the sun, from invest-ments to insurance.”

Tilley said there isn’t one concrete rea-son for his interest in finance, but he said he’s always been good at planning and likes math. He said some finance jobs are much more intense than his, but he enjoys the relationship-building aspect of personal finance.

“The success of this role is built on a foundation of trust,” he said. “I am all about investing in the right relationships and building trust with the right people. Just being fully invested in their lives and helping them accomplish what they want to do with their kids and their kids’ kids.

It’s fun to see that evolve and play out and to play a little part in planning that. It’s fun to be friends with the people you’re helping.”

Tilley’s dad started about a year ago as an Edward Jones advisor in Warrens-burg. Although his dad was already a CPA, becoming a financial advisor was a career jump, so Tilley has been offering some advice along the way.

“It’s a non-traditional way of father-son in the same business,” Tilley added. “It’s not a family affair, but it’s neat that we’re both in the same business.”

When he’s not at work, Tilley is involved in the community and is busy raising his two daughters, Sloane and Blaire, with his wife, Kaylin.

As of Oct. 1, Tilley is the President of the Central Missouri chapter of BNI (Business Networking International), a position he’s held previously. He also serves on the Boys & Girls Clubs of West Central Missouri Board of Directors and the Tilley family is involved at First Christian Church.

See TILLEY | Page 24



Adam Tilley, 30, of Sedalia, poses for a photo with his wife, Kaylin, and their children, Sloane and Blaire.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM TILLEY

Congratulations to
AARON ROWLAND
for all of his remarkable work
in the community,
we are proud to have you
as a member of our team!

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“ We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. **Small acts**, when multiplied by millions of people, **can transform the world.** ”

— Howard Zinn

Kelsey Raines: Art is an active inquiry

By Faith Bemiss

fbemiss@sedaliademocrat.com

Local artist Kelsey Raines, 37, of Florence, continues to grow in her art experiences, even finding a way to keep her creative force flowing through the pandemic.

Raines owns Art by Kelsey Raines LLC and has a studio in her rural home near Florence. She also teaches art at Skyline Elementary School in Sedalia. Raines is a frequent exhibitor with the NoBro Art Walk and she has branched out since COVID to paint seasonal art on business windows.

"The window painting has been really nice," she noted. "There's been a lot of support in Sedalia. And, it's fun — you get to decorate windows and I love it."

When she began painting Christmas windows in December 2020, she only had 11 windows. Last Christmas, she'd grown her window art to 35 businesses and already has inquiries for this year.

"So, hopefully, we'll grow even more," she added. "It's just time-consuming with teaching too."

She noted she's branched out to include

seasonal art, too, such as spring, summer, and fall scenes.

"It's sort of been carrying me through the year," Raines said.

Raines is also known for pet acrylic portraits. She exhibited some pieces upstairs at Fitters 5th Street Pub during the Oct. 1 NoBro Art Walk.

Dustin Schmidt, co-organizer of NoBro, said Raines' work is distinctive.

"Through NoBro, I regularly work with ambitious and talented artists, but Kelsey's work has always stood out," he noted. "Her wildlife and animal paintings are realistic and clearly offer her artistic point of view."

"Kelsey is generous with her time, regularly participating in the art walks and often making suggestions to make the events better," he continued. "And her work doesn't seem to stop — she exhibits her work at other events, hosts children's art classes and can be seen around town creating custom window display paintings, all on top of her regular job as an art teacher."

Raines noted she enjoys painting animals and landscapes the most.

"I sort of love to paint everything," she added. "If I have a choice, I'd just paint



Local artist Kelsey Raines, 37, stands with her painting of a horse Saturday, Oct. 1, during the NoBro Art Walk in downtown Sedalia. DEMOCRAT FILE PHOTOS



In December 2020, artist Kelsey Raines sits with her dogs George, left, and Stella, beside one of her earlier paintings of a horse. Raines also has a cat and four horses on her rural property near Florence.

mainly horses and animals. Horses are my passion outside of art."

Raines has always loved animals. She has an animal science degree with a minor in fine art from Missouri State University in Springfield. Raines eventually moved to the Sedalia area and received her master's degree in art and art education in 2014 from the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg. She has taught art at Skyline for seven years, teaching kindergarten through fourth grade.

"I really enjoy it," she noted. "I love seeing the kids experiment and learn and try new things. And they are always excited. So, that's the fun part — at that age, they're always excited about art."

Raines has also just started teaching art classes for children at the C-Mo Art Studios, 1501 S. Grand Ave., and at the Cooney Studio at the Hayden Liberty Center, 111 W. Fifth St.

She added she recently completed the "Sedalia Let's Cross Paths" mural in down-

town Sedalia and said she'd love to create additional murals.

"I'd love to grow more and do more windows," she noted. "Maybe expand to surrounding areas as well as Sedalia."

"I'm not leaving education anytime soon," she continued. "But I would love to do more during the summer. Business murals, even kids' rooms murals, that sort of thing too."

She added she enjoys art because she finds it "satisfying to complete something, to have it in your head and put it down on paper or canvas."

"I just love to try new things, and to me, art is sort of an active inquiry," Raines said. "You're always learning, and I like that."

For more information about Art by Kelsey Raines LLC, visit artbykelsey.com or contact Raines at kelsey8685@gmail.com.

Faith Bemiss can be reached at 660-530-0289 or on Twitter @flbemiss.

Scott rules the waves at Sedalia pools

Aquatics Manager for Parks keeps people swimming

By Chris Howell
chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

Clara Scott, 29, is the Aquatics Manager for Sedalia Parks and Recreation and is indispensable, according to Parks and Rec Director Amy Epple.

"She's fabulous," Epple said. "She's come a long way with the department in a little over four years. The amount that she's done in four years is amazing. The passion that she has for aquatics is amazing. She does an excellent job for us locally, but she is also very active in Missouri Parks and Rec. She's the president of the aquatic section for Missouri Parks and Recreation Association. She just got nominated for that and was voted in by her state colleagues."

Scott credits her career to her early start at a neighborhood pool.

"I started back lifeguarding when I was 15 for my hometown Odessa Parks and Recreation," Scott said. "In college, I worked as a pool manager in Columbia, and it led into a full-time job here in Sedalia."

Now she manages the aquatic staff at the Heckart Community Center Natatorium as well as Sedalia's two outdoor pools.

"Back in March, when we opened up, we went from having two medium-sized outdoor pools to a big indoor Natatorium, so I had to work a lot. I taught a lot of lifeguard classes because we had to really double our staff," Scott said. "During the summer season, I had 80 lifeguards compared to last summer, where I had 40, so we really did double it. We've had a lot of lifeguards that stayed on staff during the school year, so we're sitting at 75 lifeguards right now, which is great."

Scott is a Certified Pool Operator and Aquatic Facility Operator, two demanding certifications Epple is glad Scott has.

"It's impressive to have someone on staff that has both of those," Epple said.

Also important is Scott's attitude of infectious enthusiasm she brings to the job every day.

"She brings a lot of joy and fun and creativity," Epple said. "She doesn't complain even on days it's 110 degrees outside and you're short on staff and the pools are packed; she's still got a smile on her face and she's loving what she does."

That creativity showed in the design work Scott did on the Hubbard Park splash pad.

The exciting aquatics programs at the Heckart pools have something for every age or fitness level.

"We are open a ton of hours," Scott said. "We have our early morning lap swimmers, we open at 5:30 (a.m.) during the week. Our fitness classes are really big hits for water, we have a water therapy class, we have water aerobics, and then we have Aqua Fit, which is a little more like a high-paced intensity class."

And the activities continue as Scott's active mind finds ways to engage swimmers.

"We have like a little bit of everything," Scott said. "I love that we have a lazy river because we have a lot of ladies that are on the river walking in there right now to get some of that exercise. Starting Oct. 1, we have indoor swim lessons as well."

Scott knows her team is who keeps her afloat and praises them for their good work.


"We're really lucky that we do have a really good staff here," Scott said. "Part of the reason that makes me look so good running this pool is because I have really good instructors and I have really good managers."

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.





Clara Scott is the Aquatics Manager for Sedalia Parks and Recreation. She teaches lifeguard classes and manages the staff at the Heckart Natatorium and the two outdoor pools.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT



Sedalia School District 200
congratulates
Hilliary Hubbs and
Kelsey Raines on being
selected for the Sedalia
Democrat's "Top 20 Under 40"



Hilliary Hubbs
Kelsey Raines

"Ms. Hubbs and Ms. Raines bring their best every day for their students and fellow staff members. Their drive and innovation help make Sedalia 200 better each day."
- Superintendent Dr. Todd Fraley

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Gerke helping community stay healthy

By Bryan Everson

bryane@sedaliademocrat.com

SERC Physical Therapy office coordinator Pam Peterson calls Adam Gerke “one of the hardest driven people I’ve ever seen.”

Peterson, who has worked with Gerke now for nearly four years, has watched him grow from just a PT to an area director over multiple local clinics.

“It just goes to show his character,” Peterson said. “People believe in what he brings to the table. He’ll remember something about a patient from two years ago, those personal details. It’s neat to see people relate to him.”

Gerke said physical therapy wasn’t something he was always incredibly interested in. In junior high, he shadowed a professional and said at the time, it didn’t click. But pre-med as a Mizzou undergrad, Gerke said he wasn’t enjoying the coursework, so he reevaluated, did some shadowing again and fell in love with PT.

“The second time I kind of came back to it, I had someone who sat through things, talked through it,” Gerke said. “I think being older and having more of an understanding of what went into it, the thought process behind it... it’s very much about figuring out a puzzle through a pattern.”

After completing his undergrad at Mizzou, Adam obtained his doctorate at

Southwest Baptist University. In between, he and his wife Alyssa married; the two began dating as underclassmen at Smithton. That made it natural the pair would return close to home.

“We have family up here and this is the community we both know and enjoy being a part of,” Gerke said. “It was always the plan to come back to this area.”

In 2018, Gerke completed his orthopedic residency and began to grow leadership-wise with SERC. At the end of that year, he became a clinic director and in 2020 held that position for the Sedalia clinic, as well as the one in Warrensburg.

Taking hold of those posts just before the COVID-19 pandemic, Gerke said of the experiences, “There were ups and downs, but people are always hurting, there’s still surgeries. You still have to be there (for them). Now, it’s just a different level of safety. You’re doing so many things to make sure we stayed healthy, that patients stayed healthy, and that you’re still meeting the needs of everyone you worked with, making sure they’re OK.”

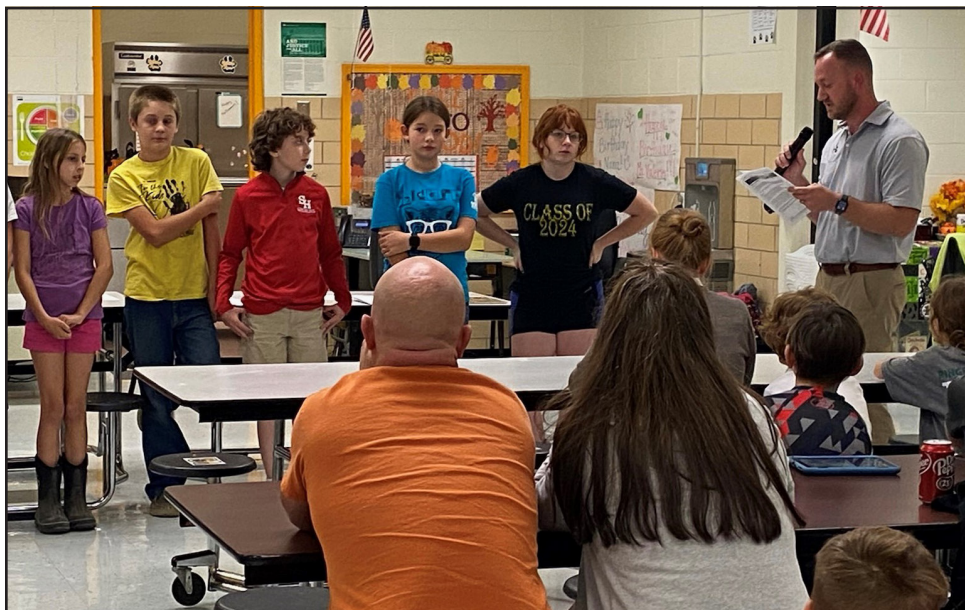
Now 31, Gerke’s family — he and Alyssa have a 3-year-old and a six-month-old — has grown alongside his place in SERC.

“Being an area director, when you’re in a leadership position, it gives you a chance to allow other people to grow, and encourage growth in people,” Gerke said. “I see that a lot in people I’ve worked with, and it’s probably



With a patient on the table, Adam Gerke works to trigger point dry needling to the lumbar spine at SERC Physical Therapy.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADAM GERKE



Alongside new 4-H officers for the year, Adam Gerke, far right, guides them through installation.

one of the best parts (of the job).”

Alongside his work at SERC, Gerke is an assistant leader with the Ringen Brushy 4-H Club, an organization that had a huge impact on him and helped him develop as a leader and a speaker. He’s also the vice president of the Smithton Fair Board.

“The fair is something I always enjoyed as a kid, and I wanted to jump in and help with it,” he said. “That organization (provides) a great way for the community to get together, but we also raise money to give scholarships to seniors at Smithton and any other projects we can help with.”

Part of giving back also means now letting future physical therapists shadow him. Gerke has had more than a handful of students do so, and a few going into athletic training. He harkens back to his own experiences to try and make it a meaningful understudy.

“Whenever I have them, no matter if they’re in high school, college or trying to

decide (if this is something they want to do), it’s important to me that if things don’t make sense at the time, I explain why things are happening so they get that view of what goes into the profession and it’s not just throwing out exercises,” he said.

As far as patients go, much of Gerke’s enjoyment in what he does comes from getting them over the finish line.

“(Some tell you) when they start, they don’t think it’s going to work, and those are the biggest success stories and motivators to me,” Gerke said. “Physical therapy is something I feel like is becoming more known and understood, and being part of what changes people’s minds, making them feel better, it’s nice being part of that and being someone they can come to. Injuries will never go away and people will always need help, so it’s nice to be able to provide that.”

Bryan Everson can be reached at 660-530-0142 or on Twitter @BryanEversonSD.

Dance instructor credits God for success

By Faith Bemiss

fbemiss@sedaliademocrat.com

Dance instructor Anna Crumley Nelson, 36, opened Studio A Dance Conservatory in 2010, and since that time, she has taught hundreds of young people the art of dance. She doesn't take credit for her success but gives credit to God.

Nelson and her husband, Josh, have two children, Aveline, 3, and Asher, 2. At the studio, students learn ballet, jazz, and tap. She's also teaching jazz dance this semester and tap and musical theatre next semester at State Fair Community College. So, her students' ages range from 2 to adult. She noted her passion for dance and the arts is her drive to keep teaching. Between the studio and the college, she is currently instructing 150 students.

"I'm on faculty there (SFCC) helping," she noted. "It's really fun and exciting. I enjoyed teaching that class a lot. We're hoping to develop the program."

She hopes her involvement at SFCC will encourage her studio students to do the same.

"I hope it opens up that window for my students also," she said.

Kim Windle, whose two children, Natalie, 15, and Jake, 12, receive lessons at the studio, noted Nelson means much to the Sedalia arts community.

"Miss Anna is a huge asset to the Sedalia community," she said. "Not only does she provide an excellent dance education to students, but is a mentor to them."

"She promotes values such as being on time, being kind, serving your community, and supporting the arts," she continued. "Both of my children have learned much about dance and life from her, and I am forever grateful for the impact she has on their lives."

Nelson noted her faith in God is what helps her start each day.

"When I first opened the studio, I was just teaching dance and education of dance," she explained. "But then



Anna Crumley Nelson, 36, owner of Studio A Dance Conservancy, opened her business in 2010. In 12 years, she has taught hundreds of students ranging in age from 2 to adult.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNA CRUMLEY NELSON

relationships started developing. And different needs started happening with my students and their families.

"I didn't open the studio thinking it would be like a Christian outreach or a ministry," she continued. "But, it has turned into that over the last 12 years. Everyone knows Miss Anna's faith in God, and ... my recitals kind of all function around that."

Nelson added that the studio isn't a Christian studio, but her faith is known among her clients.

"I have a strong mission to be the best human, the best woman, the best example I can for my students," she noted. "And I want them to always trust me, and look up to me, and desire to be like me. And that only can happen because of the Lord and the gifts He's given me."

She added talent means nothing in the end, but if she can make an impact on one child due to her faith, that's "enough" for her.

"I've noticed a real need in the last five years," Nelson said. "For more

counseling, for more how can dance help you for therapy? My kids come here and use it as therapy because the world is so crazy.

"So, we come in here, and it's just about dance," she continued. "It's about working hard, and we never say, 'I can't,' it's only 'I will.' We say, 'I can't do it yet, but I will.'"

She noted dance teaches discipline and self-respect, adding it's an individual sport.

"(Dance) just kind of funnels through your whole life," Nelson said. "That same discipline and that same desire and drive to be your best goes into all of my walks of life. So, I try to teach that to my students too. Be somebody, somebody wants to be like."

Often people don't understand the work that goes into dance.

"The steps are either right or wrong," she explained. "It is so difficult to do. People don't understand the difficulty of the craft of dance, and the artistry of dance, and everything it entails until you start learning it."

"Dance is so personal," she continued. "It's just you and the dance floor."

She added her goals are to expand and grow in building size and student base.

"I hope just to be able to continue inspiring people through my gift of dance and love of teaching," Nelson said. "My plans were laid out long before I was born. I want to honor God and praise Him through my business."

"And in doing so, I hope to bring



Each year, Studio A Dance Conservancy students perform the ballet "The Tale of the Nutcracker." In 2015, owner/director Anna Crumley Nelson decorates the Christmas tree for the "Nutcracker" production at the Heckart Performing Arts Center.

DEMOCRAT FILE PHOTO

glory and honor to His name," she continued. "It's all His doing. So, no matter what my future holds ... which we all hope as humans is to grow and shine — for me, it's totally because the Lord has called me to do so."

Faith Bemiss can be reached at 660-530-0289 or on Twitter @flbemiss.

**Congratulations to all Sedalia's
20 Under 40 Winners**

SERC
Physical Therapy

**And a special
congrats to
our very own
Adam Gerke!**



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667353JH

Couple serves the Sedalia education system

By Skye Melcher

skym@sedaliademocrat.com

A Sedalia couple is serving the community by wanting to improve elementary and post-secondary education.

Hilliary and Justin Hubbs both strive for the betterment of education and help young and older minds get the education they deserve. Hilliary serves the young minds of the Sedalia School District 200, while Justin serves the older generation at State Fair Community College.

Hilliary Hubbs

Hilliary, 35, supports the teachers at Horace Mann Elementary as an instructional coach.

"I help plan with teachers, planning the curriculum that the district has come up with, planning lessons, going into classrooms and observing and then giving feedback and support to help them (teachers and students) reach their goals," Hilliary explained.

She has been teaching since 2011 but has always had the aspiration to become an administrator so she could impact more students.

Being in the role of instructional coach gives her the balance of overseeing an entire building and those teachers who will impact students without being an administrator.

She is a Smith-Cotton High School alumna who earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in elementary administration. During this time, she joined the public education system.

"Our public education system is really what is left of community in my mind as far as it's the first time they (students) are coming together and forming community in their classrooms," Hilliary said. "It's where we get to teach them all the things that our society says they need to be learning, reading and writing."

Hilliary added that it's an exciting thing to see, especially at the elementary level, where students are still excited to learn. Being able to influence the future of Sedalia is fulfilling for her.

She also serves on the PBS committee and building leadership committee at Horace Mann.

Horace Mann Principal Sara Pannier said Hilliary has the best attitude and is a

go-getter.

"She wears so many hats for me and then takes a lot upon herself," Pannier said. "If she sees if there's an area where we can coach a teacher up or help with instructional strategies, she'll just jump right in and she'll meet with those teachers..."

Pannier added that what fueled Hilliary's fire for leaving the classroom was the indirect impact she has on every student in the building.

"She was an excellent teacher, so she's using her best practices," Pannier said. "She is a researcher by nature, so she loves to learn some of those best practices within our field. She's constantly educating herself on new curriculum ideas and more instructional strategies and involves herself in book studies."

Pannier called Hilliary a wealth of knowledge and said she's in constant support of the teachers.

"They trust her, they believe in her because, again, she is so knowledgeable and supportive," Pannier said. "The proof is in the pudding."

Justin Hubbs

Justin, 40, serves as a real estate agent for Big Iron Reality but also as the treasurer for the State Fair Community College Board of Trustees.

In his role as a real estate agent, Justin helps clients negotiate and navigate through purchasing land and residential and commercial properties.

"Not a lot of people realize the company (Big Iron) has been around since 1984, but in the last four years, it's come to Missouri and we have definitely at a high rate of speed, so it brings a lot of exciting and challenging times to my day to day activity," Justin said.

Before running for the Board of Trustees, Justin had served for three years as a Foundation Director for the SFCC Foundation.

"I decided to make a run for trustee because I wanted to help continue to set policies and procedures that affected our staff to help out students be successful," Justin said. "I am a State Fair Community College alum and I wanted to be able to give back and then continue to see the college grow and develop going forward."

Justin was on the board when the Olen Howard Workforce Innovation Center opened and will see other new projects come



Justin and Hilliary Hubbs stand together outside of the new Big Iron Reality office on Liberty Park Boulevard. Hilliary serves the young minds of the Sedalia School District 200, while Justin serves the older generation at State Fair Community College.

PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT

about.

"Secondary education is, they (students) have an opportunity to get a certificate; they got an opportunity to come out of high school with dual credit, get a work certificate and really make a difference in their lives and the community fairly quickly," Justin said. "They'll get a job that allows them to put back into our economy here locally, they'll get a job that allows them to better themselves. Some of these kids are first-generation college-bound for their families and they can just really change the cycle of their family."

Justin added that some college students wouldn't have this opportunity if Sedalia didn't have SFCC because it provides an economical solution to getting a stronger and more rewarding career.

SFCC Foundation Executive Director Mary Treuner met Justin when he was on the foundation board and is now the trustee

liaison for the foundation board.

"His personal interest, I felt, at the time when he was asked to be selected to be a foundation board member was because of his involvement within the community, but also he was a graduate of State Fair," Treuner said. "I think he had the love of our community plus the love of our college and dedication to serving our community."

As he transitioned to the Board of Trustees, Justin showed more dedication to the community and happily accepted the position of foundation liaison when it became available.

"Justin's always been upfront and honest and wanted to know the deeper of the story," Treuner said. "He's more able to research into projects and understand the two sides of every story."

Skye Melcher can be reached at 660-530-0144.

Hammer helps others in times of need

By Nicole Cooke

ncooke@sedaliademocrat.com

Florian Hammer has dedicated his career to working in emergency medical services and helping others in their time of need.

Hammer, 39, has been working for the Pettis County Ambulance District since it started almost a decade ago. However, his entire career has been in emergency medical services, whether at hospitals or ambulance districts, including stints at Warsaw-Lincoln, Cole Camp, Golden Valley, APSI and Appleton City.

He started as a paramedic when joining PCAD, followed by field training officer, captain, and finally, his current role of battalion chief.

Hammer, who goes by Flo, was a German citizen until he became a naturalized U.S. citizen about five years ago. His dad was in the German military and in 1998, the family was stationed at Ft. Leonard Wood.

Once he graduated from high school, he used the A+ Scholarship Program to attend State Fair Community College; he and his brother were the only family members remaining in the U.S.

Hammer's plan was to attend medical school eventually, but a coworker at Applebee's talked about his experience working in EMS. That conversation sparked Hammer's interest in that area of health care, and the rest is history.

Hammer soon obtained his EMT license and married his wife, Jessica. Once they started their family — they now have three children, Paris, Julian and Annika — medical school seemed out of reach, but Hammer had already found his niche in EMS.

He's gained a variety of experiences through his numerous employers over the years.

"Each service does something different, different rules, different protocols. They would work under different medical directors, so it gives you a different perspective of rural ambulance service versus in the city," he explained. "Rural, there are lots of long response times; you have to be a pretty good medic to work in the rural settings because you don't have a hospital close

by. Here, if you have a critical patient, you have the hospital and helicopter close by. In rural service, you have to be confident in your skills and know your stuff.

"... In the hospital, I was able to learn a lot of different skills, like suturing, a lot of labs, all the different medications we gave, giving blood products. That's all stuff that we don't have on the ambulance; we're well equipped, but there's all the specialty products ... that we just don't carry."

Roughly 20 years later, Hammer still enjoys what he does, and he said he appreciates that every day at work is different.

"If you come in, you might not run anything, you might deliver a baby, you might have someone with a heart attack, or just someone who needs help in their home who has fallen. It keeps it exciting and fresh," he said.

"The other thing is the family atmosphere. I think that's what drew me to EMS in the very beginning," he continued. "My parents live in Germany, no family here. I have some great in-laws now that I married into, but it was that family atmosphere I really enjoyed. I have brothers and sisters, people that work back there that are my dad's age. You can depend on a lot of those guys at work or outside of work."

As one of three battalion chiefs, each overseeing one of three 48-hour shifts, Hammer makes sure daily operations run smoothly and responds to high-priority calls such as car accidents, cardiac incidents or time-critical diagnoses. He also handles much of the "customer service," whether that's a complaint or a question, or simply some extra support during a difficult time.

"A lot of times we support the crew on scene, but afterwards, we help out with some phone calls we have to make or maybe that wife of the husband who just had a heart attack and we're bringing to Bothwell, she needs a ride because she's flustered and emotional," Hammer said. "I try to stick around a little bit and make sure the family is taken care of. Answering questions of what we did on scene because a lot of times stuff goes pretty fast. ... Keep them in the loop of what's going on and walk them through the next steps."

See HAMMER | Page 24



Battalion Chief Florian Hammer, 39, stands next to a command vehicle outside the Pettis County Ambulance District headquarters in downtown Sedalia.

PHOTO BY NICOLE COOKE | DEMOCRAT

*Congratulations
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Entrepreneur Kroeger finds success in many fields

By Bryan Everson

bryane@sedaliademocrat.com

Before she was wearing a host of hats, Allison Kroeger got her start at the Sedalia Democrat. "I moved to Sedalia probably 10 years ago and my first job was at the Democrat in the advertising department," said Kroeger, 26. "I probably learned most of my professional marketing skills from that job, and I've carried things ever since then into a little of everything I've done. It was a good start for me to get in town and familiar with local businesses."

In the decade or so since, Kroeger has continued to take on more challenges professionally while trying to make some time for family life that's going to demand more of her in the coming months.

Following her initial foray into advertising, Kroeger dipped into the insurance business with State Farm and Bryan Jenkins' agency, who she worked with on and off for about seven years. She's still with State Farm now, working with three agents remotely across the state as a middle-man between underwriting and the agency team, helping them stay organized with urgent policy matters.

That remote work blended into



Allison Kroeger

Kroeger obtaining her real estate license and becoming part of the team at Pettis County Real Estate Company, where she's enjoying a sterling year.

Again, that toolbox of skills from other endeavors has helped Kroeger enjoy success.

"It's been really handy having the insurance background and be a one-stop shop for a lot of the stuff that not a lot of people want to think about," she said. "I try to make it easier on them by being that knowledge base for everything that has to do with new home purchases and selling, all of that."

Adding to her duties, Allison began helping out with her husband Josh's construction company before the two were married in 2020.

"All of it was little by little until it's built up into what it is now. I didn't jump in all this at once," Allison said, laughing. "I just built on piece-by-piece."

Allison takes care of bids, types everything up; Josh says he could ask her to run to Columbia and pick something up, and she would grab a truck and do it.

"(Allison's) never taken something on and not done it 110%," he said. "A lot of my success falls at her feet."

Josh and his partners own The Crossing on Broadway shopping center, and when another interested party didn't end up bringing a Fazoli's franchise to Sedalia, Allison and Josh decided to take the reins.

"Josh felt we really needed something in there," Allison said. "Sitting around the table one night, we were like, 'Heck, let's do it. How hard can it be?' We weren't restaurant people going into it, so we were self-taught everything, and it's a big eye-opener. You don't realize how much goes into any business behind the scenes until you do it yourself and learn it all from scratch, let alone in a pandemic, which was a whole lot of fun."

Allison handles the accounting payroll and marketing for that endeavor, which expanded by opening a Warrensburg location in September 2021. She credits a team that includes great managers as well to help carry the day-to-day operations.

Ironically, though she admits she's always been uncomfortable doing sales, it's played a part in every job Allison has had.

"With real estate, I was hesitant to even get my license because it's a sales gig and working off commission is hard not knowing what to plan for, but I fell in love with it due to the organizational

aspect," Allison said. "That's what I focus on in every business. I'm an organizational freak, and I think that's what helps me stay on top of everything. I love how in insurance, real estate, construction, there's a definitive way to do everything. I love being a problem solver."

Josh made the honest admission that neither he nor his wife is great about making "me time."

"I'll be honest, when we don't have something to do, we kind of look at each other like, 'Now what are we going to do?'" he said.

Josh compliments her ability to help make sure things are taken care of around the house, or take Josh's 12- and 14-year-old sons somewhere, but also pointed out she's got a talent for painting.

"She's a very good artist on wet pastels — like Bob Ross, I guess you could say — and we have a couple in the home she's done," said Josh.

The newest addition for Allison and the family is a happy and welcome one: she's pregnant with a baby that's due in January.

"I know that's going to be a juggling act, to make time, come January," Allison said. "I won't really have a choice (but to) slow down, enjoy the little things."

Josh talked about how it'll require adjustments, including taking a little off Allison's plate.

"A lot of people are good at one thing, and she's good at a dozen," he said. "I'm not saying it to be biased, but if you're looking through the eyes of a business person and an all-around partner, she just checks all the boxes. I couldn't be happier with her."

With everything she's already done and accomplished, Allison wants more young entrepreneurs to know what's possible.

"There's no age restriction on success," she said. "If you wake up and do the work every day, anything is possible. If you have a goal in mind, you just have to have the correct mindset and work ethic to hunt for what you want. It's totally possible."

Bryan Everson can be reached at 660-530-0142 or on Twitter @BryanEversonSD.



Pictured here with Josh's sons Cole, left, and Grant, right, family photo sessions like this are set to soon expand for entrepreneurs Allison and Josh Kroeger. The couple are expecting a baby together, due in January.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALLISON KROEGER

Officer Camirand patrols the streets and skies

'Instrumental' in SPD drone unit

By Chris Howell

chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

Officer Nick Camirand, 37, is a Sedalia Police Department patrol officer who has been integral in forming the fledgling Sedalia Drone Unit.

"The first thing I'd probably say about Nick is he's hard-working," Sedalia Police Chief Matt Wirt said. "He's very consistent and reliable. He's developed within the department. He's become very instrumental in our drone program with his knowledge and skills not only as a pilot but just his technical knowledge. He has to be able to help us build that program, get the right equipment. He's also sought out and helped with some grants with State Farm."

"Drones are useful for lots of different things," Camirand said. "We just successfully used it to capture somebody that was running on a four-wheeler. We recently located someone at Bothwell State Park that was autistic and had gotten away from his family; we located him really fast. It's just a great tool."

The Drone Unit also recently flew a drone inside a Sedalia home during a hostage situation.

Camirand is technically proficient and loves the challenge of drone piloting and the equipment needed. Recently the unit purchased a larger, more expensive drone with better night-vision, guidance systems and cameras.

"It's constantly changing," Camirand said. "There are a few of us in the unit that are pretty passionate about it and always spend time researching, trying to look for what is the latest and greatest, the best of the best and then spending time behind the scenes looking for funding and grants."

The Drone Unit is working on

purchasing a vehicle set up as a drone command unit, capable of launching drones much quicker.

Camirand has worked with local State Farm agent Margaret Ward on funding for the drone program.

"She's been great at being able to help us find money, find grants, as well as being supportive herself of the drone program," Camirand said.

The chief said he has only begun to use Camirand's considerable expertise and hopes to pick his brain for some other projects.

"He's really grown. He's quiet, but he's very level-headed," Wirt said. "He has a lot of exceptional radio knowledge and understanding, which I'm looking forward to using his expertise because I need somebody to help as I do a lot of the radio stuff."

Wirt said Camirand is also taking the initiative to do more in the department, which in turn, helps his fellow officers and the community.

"Camirand is known for doing the best he can every day," Wirt said. "He takes a lot of reports and works on several different aspects of the department. Over the last several years, he has become more involved in the planning, which is great. As you see, officers take ownership in the department and the community to help support our mission; it's always a very positive thing."

Camirand hinted at his true motivation as a law enforcement officer.

"I really enjoy helping the public," Camirand said. "We have a constant source of motivation at our police department that makes us strive to do our best, whether that be solving a case or bringing closure for someone, helping someone through a difficult time."

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.



Officer Nick Camirand is instrumental in the growth of the Sedalia Police Department's Drone Unit, from raising money to researching and purchasing drone systems.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT

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'The best of both worlds'

Leach helps train dogs, helps people

By Faith Bemiss

fbemiss@sedaliademocrat.com

With love for people and animals, Emma Leach, 25, has found a niche training service dogs at Retrieving Freedom in Sedalia.

Leach, of Warrensburg, who has been with the company for two years, works with the people who foster the pups that become service dogs. An obedience dog trainer, she also trains the dogs to work with veterans with PTSD or children with autism.

Savannah Lynde, who fosters dogs for Retrieving Freedom, said Leach is a "phenomenal asset to the community."

"She is changing lives for veterans and autistic children by training and working with fosters to help train service dogs free of charge for those who benefit from them," she noted. "Emma is full of knowledge and a very helpful resource for fosters and helping pair dogs with people who have disabilities. Emma is changing lives for the better."

A day at work for Leach takes in many aspects of Retrieving Freedom.

"We have a lot of different roles that we play," she explained. "The trainers have their own string of dogs, and so that can be anywhere from three to 10 dogs — it just depends on the number of dogs we have in the facility."

The training staff works on advanced obedience after the dogs come back to their puppy foster homes. Then they begin teaching the dogs tasks after determining if the dog will be on the autism or veteran path.

Leach said they also offer client training.

"They will come for day training, or they will stay at the facility for multiple days at a time," she explained. "We'll do that (training) here and out in public."

The training staff also fills in for the

Stage-One Puppy Classes and helps out in the kennels.

Leach noted when she came to Retrieving Freedom, she was hired as the program coordinator but soon worked up into her current position.

"That was 50% client services," she said of the program coordinator. "So, we did all the application intake for our clients; we did all the phone consults and in-person consults for them to be accepted into the program."

She also did 50% of the Stage-One

Puppy Program, where she coordinated with the foster homes and the training staff for the different programs.

"I was in that position for probably eight or nine months, and then I was promoted up into this position," Leach said. "And I've had my string of dogs since then."

She added with a laugh that since she started training the dogs, she's had too many to count.

"The way this program works is a little different than other programs,"

she noted. "Our dogs rotate between programs and facilities all the time."

"So, you have your hands on a lot of dogs," she continued. "You don't finish a lot of dogs. So, for the training position, I've had about 20 dogs on my string. So far, I've had three placements — I've had two autism (placements) and one veteran placement that I placed myself."

She also had several assisted placements.

Leach said she enjoys this particular

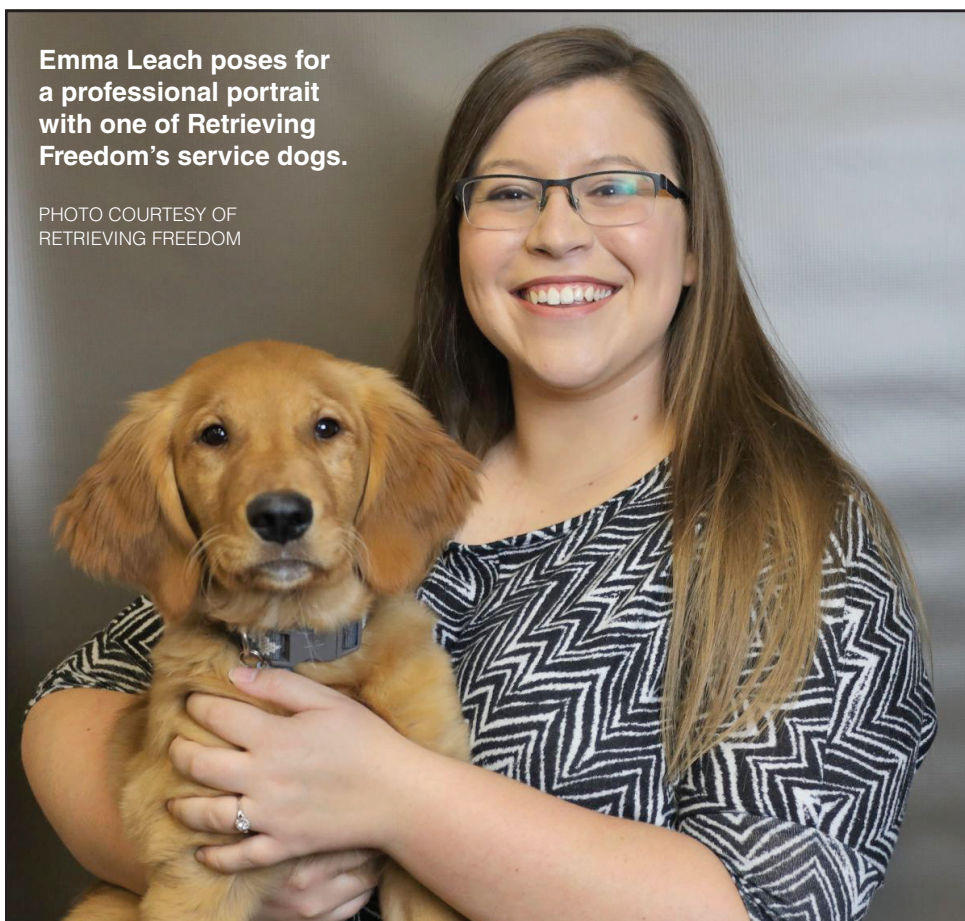


Emma Leach, 25, an obedience dog trainer at Retrieving Freedom, sits with Casper, a male yellow Lab, recently at the facility. Leach has been working at the facility since October 2020.

PHOTO BY FAITH BEMISS | DEMOCRAT

Emma Leach poses for a professional portrait with one of Retrieving Freedom's service dogs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
RETRIEVING FREEDOM



job because she gets to work with dogs and people.

"Which has been a lifelong passion of mine," she added. "I started training dogs when I was 8 in 4-H. So, it was really cool for me to take a childhood hobby into a career.

"And I also get to help people," she continued. "I mean, that's just the best thing for me, the best of both worlds. The dog training aspect of it, I enjoy the learning of something new ... teaching a dog how to pull a wheelchair and turn on a light switch is probably one of the coolest things ever."

She added for the client side of her job, she loves "hanging out with kids" in various programs.

"That's a really cool aspect of tying it all together," she explained. "And also, the veterans, my husband is active duty Air Force. So, just being able to tie in all of those things."

Leach is married to Staff Sgt. Joshua Leach, who is stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base. The couple has four dogs: two border collies, a heeler mix, and a golden retriever.

Leach noted her goal is to move forward in the program to the assistance dog trainer position.

"That's kind of the highest training position that this organization offers," she said. "And I'm almost to that point; I just have a few things that I need to finish up on my end."

When Leach reaches the assistance dog training position, she will have all of her own dogs and clients.

"Right now, I'm assisting our lead trainer at the facility," she explained. "Seeing them (the dogs) from 8-weeks all the way up until they're placed — seeing that progression is one of the best things.

She added there's satisfaction knowing the staff is changing lives for the better.

"That's my favorite part of it, is just to be able to have that direct impact on people," Leach said. "That's the clients, that's our puppy raisers, that our staff, that's anyone who's involved with the dogs, it's changing their life. I think that's the coolest thing."

Faith Bemiss can be reached at 660-530-0289 or on Twitter @flbemiss.



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Dixon's love for service helps community

By Skye Melcher

skyem@sedaliademocrat.com

A love for service and helping others is motivating a young professional to fight the housing crisis in Pettis County.

Pettis County Community Partnership Housing Director Chessa Dixon, 27, oversees and administers all of the organization's housing grants and programs.

Outside of the housing program, PCCP has other programs that support it. Many of those provide household and human essentials.

Dixon started at the partnership in 2017, working part-time at the front desk as a communications specialist before moving to full-time.

"As time went on and positions became open, then I moved into case manager positions and then started this position at the beginning of 2020, right when the pandemic started," Dixon said.

Dixon has always been someone who wants to feel like they are making a difference. Before starting at the partnership, she worked a lot with animal rescue groups and fostering animals.

"When I started here (the partnership), I continued the animal rescue for a while, but once I was working here and seeing the folks that were coming in from our community that

were needing services, it just kind of shifted my mindset to help people," she explained.

Dixon added that this felt like it was something she needed to do. She began volunteering at the warming shelter and focused her volunteer time there instead of on animal rescue.

"I think my personality, I just have a drive to help people," Dixon said. "Seeing people in distress and knowing someone is in a crisis and not doing anything about it, I just can't. The is the same when I was doing the animal rescue."

Dixon's position at PCCP is very important to Pettis County residents due to its impact on the community.

"We provide rental assistance and utility assistance to folks that need it and provide services to people that are experiencing street homelessness along with folks who are at risk of homelessness," Dixon said. "Just being able to provide those services to keep people in their homes or help them obtain housing is just really fulfilling and it's a crucial service to our community."

Dixon said residents don't realize the volume of people who need these services and it's not something residents can necessarily see.

"But it's there and they need folks to advocate for them and be the voice for them," Dixon added. "I just feel like that's really important."

Dixon said she hopes that one day



Chessa Dixon stands with the Pettis County Community Partnership booth during the Community Engagement Fair at State Fair Community College in April 2022.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHESSA DIXON

there could be more awareness for the homeless in Sedalia and that not everyone trying someone assumes about them is true.

"The people in our community who are experiencing homelessness in our community have dignity. They're not just bums, they're not just alcoholics or drug addicts. They're someone's child, they're someone's brother," Dixon said.

In tears, Dixon said one of the things Sedalia needs the most is a homeless shelter. The partnership staff and Dixon try as hard as they can to help provide some type of assistance to the homeless in Sedalia, even when it's difficult.

"Having a homeless shelter in our community would be a game changer," Dixon said. "There is a lot of negativity surrounding that from community members."

Dixon said in her position, she sees youth, seniors, veterans and families who are experiencing homelessness and that the community can help these everyday people.

United Way of Pettis County Executive Director Samantha Gilpin said the Pettis County Community Partnership is a UWPC funded partner for 2022.

Gilpin interacts with Dixon daily about housing needs and the housing crisis in Pettis County.

"Chessa is very passionate about the housing situation in Pettis County, making sure she talks about housing being a human right," Gilpin said. "She's also very compassionate with her clients that walk in and out of the partnership every day."

Gilpin said Dixon was present during the city's Transitional Committee meetings just to make sure she was properly educating the people involved.

"Her passion definitely extends past the normal 8 to 5. She's always willing to answer questions after hours," Gilpin added. "She's very driven and motivated to create a positive change in our community."

Gilpin said Dixon is very kind and intelligent, compassionate and understanding but also very professional.

"There's not any task that I've seen her not handle well," Gilpin continued. "If she doesn't know the answer, she'll do the research to get an answer or connect people with the proper person who can better answer their question."

Skye Melcher can be reached at 660-530-0144.



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"This community nomination is such an incredible honor. I am grateful for the opportunity to offer an early enrichment education program to families with young children. It is truly a privilege to be among my fellow peers who are also making a tremendous difference in our community. Thank you!" -Tisha Sparks

Sparks brings non-traditional learning to young minds

By Skye Melcher

skyem@sedaliademocrat.com

The owner and director of Lil Sprouts Prep inspires young minds to learn and be adventurous through a non-traditional curriculum.

Tisha Sparks, 38, started a half-day enrichment preschool opportunity in 2020, right before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Really, it’s kind of a non-traditional spin on preschool. It’s not in a regular building, if you will; it’s an extension of my heart and my home,” Sparks said. “It’s a merriment of my professional experiences, experiences as a mother and what I hope to create for our community.”

Sparks previously taught kindergarten in the Sedalia School District 200 and taught at private schools before that.

“In probably the last 10 to 12 years, in some capacity, I was working with children directing or teaching in some way,” Sparks added. “Also took some time to mom, I have three daughters. That’s a big part of one of my roles. I guess I wear many hats, so that was what kind of led me to where I’m at now.”

Sparks and her family lived in California for a brief time and she was taken aback by the number of educational options for children. When they returned to Sedalia, Sparks wanted some form of that education in California but didn’t find any of those types of options locally.

“So I took a chance — I literally started in my dining room with about four other kiddos,” Sparks said. “I just put it out there and said this is what I am going to try to do and I had other families with young children who were also interested and curious in something a little different.”

Those families believed in what she wanted to do and since then, Lil Sprouts Prep has grown into a full-blown preschool.

Sparks, along with her husband, built an entire classroom in the basement of their home to help expand her dreams beyond the dining room.

“I currently serve 21 families; last year, I had 28 families,” Sparks added. “I think it’s grown an interest because I hope that what I’m offering here is another option. It’s not anything better or greater than, it’s just what I



Lil Sprouts Prep Owner and Director Tisha Sparks, 38, sits next to the library that she built in her classroom.

PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT

experienced when I was out of our small-town community. We’re not a one size fits all.”

Sparks said that from a young age, she has always been interested in education and thinks about the teachers who inspired her to be an educator. She earned an associate’s degree from State Fair Community College before earning her bachelor’s degree in early childhood from Central Methodist University.

When Sparks was teaching in a traditional classroom, following the curriculum and checking every box made her feel like she was in her own box.

“So what we do here and what I’m able to do here with an emergent type of curriculum is really tailor the classroom to meet their (students’) needs,” Sparks said. “Each class has its dynamic or culture, if you will, that they built on based on their ages and stages. I am able to tap into that as we get to know each other a little bit more and then set my classroom up to reflect that.”

Having her classroom in her home allows Sparks to use the set-up to fit the needs of those students and gives her creative freedom.

“I know that my ripple is small at this moment, but I’m hoping to be the catalyst to propel the understanding that we can have choices and growth in our community

for what education can be and look like...”

Sparks said. “There’s a movement, a shift right now in education, so I hope with whatever I’m equipped with helps propel that into something more.”

Stay-at-home mom Ashley Weymuth met Sparks when her child joined Lil Sprouts Prep last year and continues with Sparks this year.

“Every single day you go in there, you will see her (Sparks) on her knees interacting with the kids,” Weymuth said. “She’s reading them stories, she’s playing with them and she has something new set up every single day for the kiddos to explore and she’s really good into all your senses.”

Weymuth added that Sparks increases the children’s imagination through roleplay and theme plays.

Weymuth said they continued with Lil Sprouts Prep after seeing the growth and change in her daughter.

“When your kid runs up and talks about Mrs. Tish all the time, talks about Lil Sprouts and is excited to go to school and is excited to learn and what new things are going to happen, just shows you how much it impacts them and everybody,” Weymuth said. “It kind of warms your heart that you’re sending her to a good place where she’s well cared for.”

Weymuth added that Sparks loves the students like she loves her own children and

has never seen anything like that before.

“She always gets down to their level, talks to them, works through their feelings,” Weymuth said. “She’s an open person that anybody can talk to and the kiddos really feel that and thrive off of that.”

Weymuth added that Sparks is a diamond in the rough and truly supports each of the children in her school.

“It’s not uncommon when it’s raining outside, I haven’t seen this anywhere else, she will have those kiddos out there,” Weymuth said. “She has rain boots for every single one of the kids and she has umbrellas for every kid and they will be outside splashing in the mud. She does the things that parents cringe about.”

Weymuth added that Sparks will have glitter, glue, paint and all the other things that parents hate.

“I overheard her one day tell somebody one day that ‘We do these things here at Lil Sprouts so you don’t feel like you have to do them at home,’” Weymuth said. “That’s just such a warming feeling because, as a mom, you don’t want your house messy, you don’t want to cause any more stress or clutter at your house and she does it there so you don’t feel that guilt of ‘my kid is missing out on this.’”

Skye Melcher can be reached at 660-530-0144.

Veteran, advocate brings awareness to other veterans



Daniel Avegalio

By Skye Melcher

skyem@sedaliademocrat.com

Veteran and advocate Daniel Avegalio, 37, has lived in Pettis County for a short amount of time but has dived right into the community wanting to spread awareness and help other veterans.

Avegalio grew up constantly moving around due to both of his parents being in the Army, but one of the locations that stuck with him was the Midwest. When he and his wife decided to make the move from California, they were attracted to Missouri.

Avegalio is the former Dean of Student Services at State Fair Community College, but the Stand-To Veteran Leadership program at the George W. Bush Institute has pushed him back into working in the veteran space.

"I feel like through all I've learned is that I can be a voice and share the knowledge that I know now to help other veterans and military families," Avegalio said.

As a veteran himself, Avegalio wants to help share what he knows to help those other families transition back into civilian life.

Avegalio served in the Marine Corps and served in three combat deployments in Iraq before getting out in 2009. Once he was out, he joined American River College in Sacramento, California, where he earned an associate's degree in psychology. Next, he earned his bachelor's degree in sociology at Sacramento State University and then earned his master's in rehabilitation counseling.

"I served from 2004 to 2009," Avegalio said. "I joined the military because both my parents served. I really wanted to join because of them and because of their service too."

Avegalio waited for a year after high school before he joined the Marine Corps at 19 years old. His first deployment came not long after joining.

"Decided to get out because the deployments were very emotional and physically draining," Avegalio said.

He added that he had a good career in the military, where he learned a lot about leadership and the other values he still holds dear.

"I owe a lot to my time in the service for helping me develop as a person and as a leader," Avegalio continued.

One of the reasons Avegalio advocates so hard for veterans is that he struggled to transition back into being a civilian when getting out of the military.

"I wanted to be that person to inform other veterans on that transitional piece, so they didn't have to go through what I went through," Avegalio said. "That's why I wanted to work with other veterans and military families, to let them know that there has been someone who has been through it before and I'm able to share that knowledge with them about community resources, who's out there that can really help them and what it meant for me when I transitioned."

Avegalio added that he wants to be that person to help guide someone in and out of those trying times and that he always has their back.

Avegalio is the only Missourian in the Stand-To Veteran program, but he is also the first Polynesian in the program. It is a difficult program to be a part of and is only

for people who work with veterans and military families.

"We go through this intense leadership program put in the Bush Institute and its geared towards bettering outcomes for veterans and military families," Avegalio said.

Throughout the year, all the participants will attend four modules in Dallas, Texas, to learn about leadership before ending in Washington, D.C.

"When I first started the program, I had imposter syndrome a little bit because there is so many amazing people in the program from all different fields," Avegalio said. "We have the head of cybersecurity for Microsoft in the program with me, we have these amazing CEOs of nonprofits in there. So for me to be selected from a small community college in Missouri is mind-blowing for me."

Avegalio also is involved with United Way, is the Chair of the Military Affairs Committee for the Sedalia Area Chamber of Commerce, executive board member for the Base Community Council for Whiteman Air Force Base and is on the Higher Ed Military Council for HigherEdJobs.

DeFeet board member Robin Balke has worked with Avegalio through many community events on behalf of the organization. They first met at an event hosted by VFW Post 2591.

"I found out he was the new dean of student services at State Fair Community College and his desire was to start a veterans resource center on campus to assist veterans with not only a career path after their active duty was completed but also spouse support and transitioning from active duty to civilian work life," Balke said.

Balke added that this was to be extended to career assistance and would help familiarize himself with services available in the community and surrounding areas.

From the very start, Balke said it was obvious that Avegalio was passionate about helping veterans and knew the struggles that some veterans face.

"He's definitely family oriented, I rarely see him without his family..." Balke said. "He's very friendly, he's really interested in getting to know more about the community and the people in it."

Skye Melcher can be reached at 660-530-0144.

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Rupe offering fitness, nutrition options for busy families

By Nicole Cooke

ncooke@sedaliademocrat.com

A personal passion for health has turned into two small businesses for 40-year-old Ahfton Rupe.

Rupe, a Sedalia native who now lives in Green Ridge, has been a nurse for more than a decade and she said the simple reason for her career is that she loves to help people. She now works from home doing inpatient reviews, which she said is more behind the scenes. That allowed her to start AR Fitness in April 2021 as a way to help others with a healthier lifestyle.

"I have struggled with my weight like most of my life, but I got really serious about it after I had my third kid. Obviously, I wanted to be able to keep up with them and all of the activities," she said. "I had a lot of people asking, 'What are you doing? How are you doing it?' and with having kids and working. I thought, 'I'll just start my own.'"

As Rupe worked with AR Fitness clients, that led to new questions about nutrition and how to fit healthy meals into a busy lifestyle. Just like with AR Fitness, those questions led to another new business, Fresh to Fit, which began in July 2022.

Customers can purchase small- or large-sized meals for delivery from Rupe's rotating

menu, then keep them in the fridge and heat the food when it's time to eat. She has clients who buy meals as an easy meal prep option and some older customers who don't want to cook a whole meal for just one or two people.

Rupe said she tries to use as many locally-sourced ingredients as possible in her freshly-made meals.

"Nutrition is No. 1, you can't out-exercise a bad meal," Rupe said. "I feel like Fresh to Fit, what I make is basically family meals, just with simple modifications that can make it a little healthier for you. There's not a lot of options for that in the area for family size."

Both business ventures are going well less than two years in. Rupe started with group fitness classes and now offers one-on-one coaching in-person and online. She prefers face-to-face interactions, but overall, she hopes her clients find her relatable as a fellow working mom who's been through it all.

"It's never something I wanted to be ginormous," she noted. "I don't want people to feel like they're just a number."

Fresh to Fit is going so well that Rupe hired an assistant — she said she's the first to admit it's OK to ask for help — and she's working on securing an office that will house both businesses.

In whatever spare time she has left, Rupe is president of the Green Ridge PTO, vice president of Sedalia Young Professionals, a member of the Sedalia Area Chamber of Commerce, a member of the Sedalia Runners Club and she's involved with the Broadway Presbyterian preschool. She and her husband also enjoy gardening and love summer vacations that incorporate history and fun.

Rupe and her husband, Josh, have three children, Finnlee, Sawyer and Lila. She tries to incorporate her healthy habits and her passion for helping others at home, too. As they've gotten older, she said they love to work out with her.

"It's important for your kids to see you working out and working on yourself, not just to get skinny or have the perfect image, but to make sure you have strong bones and are heart healthy," she said. "I always talk about that aspect with them; I hate the word fat, I just don't use it. It's more about being strong and being able to run."

The kids also make sure Fit to Fresh



Ahfton Rupe and her husband, Josh, pose for a photo while on a trip with their children, Finnlee, Sawyer and Lila.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AHFTON RUPE

meals are kid-approved and even help in the kitchen. Rupe said she likes giving them hands-on opportunities to learn, such as cutting vegetables or stirring ingredients in a pot.

"I love showing them how you can be healthy but still have fun. It's a lifestyle, not one or the other," she added. "Do we go through the drive-thru still? Absolutely. But there are choices you can make that will help you feel better. I want my kids to grow up learning that so they know how to make good choices, but we also have fun. We have all the treats, just everything in moderation."

As a working mom, Rupe said she under-

stands it's hard to make yourself a priority, but she said it's not impossible. Through her two businesses, she's offering herself as an example that it is possible. Rupe said it's never too late to pursue your dreams, and seeking help is encouraged.

"And now I work full-time and run two businesses, so if I can do it, anybody can do it," Rupe said, smiling. "But it doesn't hurt to have help. That was the other thing — helping other moms find that balance and what works for them was probably my biggest goal."

Nicole Cooke can be reached at 660-530-0138 or on Twitter @NicoleRCooke.



Ahfton Rupe and her three kids, Finnlee, Sawyer and Lila, pose for a family photo.



Eisenmenger developing Sedalia with heart

Building the future in family real estate business



Erica Eisenmenger, Vice President of Furnell Companies, hopes to improve Sedalia by developing quality, affordable housing and offering exciting venues like the Historic Downtown Pavilion and Hotel Bothwell.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT

By Chris Howell

chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

Erica Eisenmenger, 37, is the Vice President of Furnell Companies and is a powerhouse in local real estate development.

“Furnell Companies was actually started by my grandfather Doyle Furnell,” Eisenmenger said. “My father, David Furnell, continued in the family business then I eventually had the opportunity to do the same. Furnell Companies, over time, have evolved. It started as a lumber company, on into a construction company and now we’ve really taken a foothold in real estate development of owning multi-family apartments. We built apartment buildings, we own the Hotel Bothwell, Ivory Grille, we own several other commercial properties. We also own apartments outside of the Sedalia community.”

With 70 years in Sedalia, the Furnell Companies have based their daily business activity on consistently working on perfecting the basic idea upon which the company was founded. Furnell Companies has shown remarkable growth by continually offering its customers quality, affordable homes, rental apartments. With nearly 275 employees across 50-plus counties in Missouri, Furnell Companies keeps a family-minded business outlook.

David Furnell said he trusts Erica’s instincts and finds her youth to be valuable in the ever-changing industry.

“Erica is very dedicated to her job and to the individuals that she works with,” he said. “She considers them team members and not just employees.”

Eisenmenger works with her team to develop winning plans for Furnell Companies’ future.

“Whenever she comes in, she brings a new perspective, she brings an attitude and youthful spirit and just knows what today’s millennials want,” David Furnell said.

With apartment developments in and out of Sedalia, the new Downtown Pavilion, and the dozens of projects Eisenmenger manages she remains busy seeing to the housing needs of Missourians.

“We’ve been very fortunate to be received by the community the way we are,” Eisenmenger said. “We hope as we move forward year to year to always add to the value of the community. Through commercial listings, affordable, attractive apartments for our community members, we always want it to be a value-added project for the community.”

From young people hoping to live in Sedalia to retirees hoping for affordable housing, Eisenmenger instinctively knows what people want.

“We are always looking for ways to attract, to promote to the younger generation,” Eisenmenger said. “What do people want to see, what do they want to do, where do they want to travel, what do they want to eat, where do they want to visit? I think those are things very vital to a community, no matter its size. It’s always been very important to our family to provide for senior adults as if they were part of our own family, they are such a key part of our community.”

Eisenmenger admitted to being caught by surprise when told she was selected as one of Sedalia’s 20 Under 40.

“It came as a big surprise, to be honest, I was not expecting it,” Eisenmenger said. “I’m just very grateful that I would be even considered.”

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.



Deputy Brian Morley, 33, stands outside the Pettis County Sheriff's Office, where he has worked since 2019. Morley has served in many positions while at the office but is now a full-time road deputy. PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT

Deputy Morley feels rewarded working for Pettis County

By Skye Melcher

skyem@sedaliademocrat.com

A life of commitment and service has led a former airman to the Pettis County Sheriff's Office to fill the role of deputy.

Deputy Brian Morley, 33, is a law enforcement officer for Pettis County. In his position, he enforces laws and responds to emergencies and calls of service from the public.

"I was deputy coroner for the first two years. I started in September of 2019, I got my peace officer license in January 2020 and then I became a reserve deputy until September 2021 and then I became a full-time road deputy," Morley said.

Before moving to Pettis County, Morley was a civilian federal police officer for the Air Force in San Antonio, Texas.

Morley grew up in Michigan but has been moving around due to being deployed to different bases.

"Before that, I was in the Air Force for six years as security forces," Morley said. His wife, Ashley, also serves in the Air Force at Whiteman Air Force Base.

Morley said he wanted to be in law enforcement to help people when they're in need and save their lives.

"It's just rewarding to me, I guess," Morley added. "There's been times where you go to a person who's suicidal and talk them out of it and stuff like that. I like that part of the job much more than having to arrest people part of it."

While working in the road deputy position, Morley was working on a Sports and Health Science degree. Finding the time to do everything was hectic, but he managed to make everything work.

"I went online, so it wasn't as difficult as if I went in person, but at the time, I was the deputy coroner, so I was on call all the time," Morley said. "I had to get up in the middle of the night to go do stuff, then I was also full-time online classes and then the reserve deputy thing. It was a lot of work all at once, but I just did it."

Morley said when he joined the Sheriff's Office, then-Sheriff Kevin Bond told him to get his POST test due to all the experience he had built up. He didn't have to go through the police academy due to that experience.

See MORLEY | Page 24

Congratulations, Erica Eisenmenger!

Vice President, Furnell Companies



Thank you for years of dedication and for enriching the communities you serve.

Furnell Companies and Sedalia both benefit and say Congratulations on your 20 Under 40 recognition!





Carol Martin is a certified peer specialist at Recovery Lighthouse. Martin uses her experience with her recovery in relating to those seeking help with drug addiction.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT

Martin shines brightly at Recovery Lighthouse

A kindred spirit for those in recovery

By Chris Howell

chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

Carol Martin, 37, is the certified peer specialist at Recovery Lighthouse, 1809 W. 10th St., an outpatient service for those in recovery or seeking recovery. Martin easily relates to people seeking treatment for substance abuse and explained her unique path to a position welcoming and helping

those willing to escape addiction.

"I'm a person in long-term recovery," Martin said. "I have been four-and-a-half years sober. I have lived the experience, so when people come into the Lighthouse for outpatient programs, I can say I understand, and I mean it because I've been there."

Just a few years earlier, Martin was hopelessly addicted to methamphetamine. Intervention only came when she was arrested, a bitter reality check that put Martin on the road to recovery.

"The Department of Family Services actually jump-started my process and I'm so grateful," Martin said. "My kids were in foster care, they came and they picked them up. I got pulled over with a hypodermic syringe and some methamphetamine and they picked them up the next day. They came home eight months later."

Martin was convinced she needed help with her recovery, help she found at Recovery Lighthouse. Therapists and counselors at Recovery Lighthouse worked patiently with Martin to examine the root cause of her addiction and to treat it through a multi-focused approach.

"I just wanted a better life," Martin said. "What I was doing wasn't working. My addiction started with a pain pill script from a dentist when I was 22 and it just took off from there. Eleven years later, I was in a crippling heroin addiction, homeless and my kids were in care. My life today is completely different."

Martin faced her addiction and overcame the drug's powerful grip.

"You've got to pay that rent every day," Martin said. "You've got to make that choice every single day when you wake up that you don't want to go back to that life. Four years ago, I was in the paper as well under the police reports. It's not like that today. You don't belong in the trenches, you literally can come back from anything. Nobody needs to live in somebody's shed or to live in their car."

Martin's compassion and positive attitude were noticed and one day, she walked in and asked for a job answering the phones. She offers a living example of a recovered life and brings that light to work every day. She believes anyone can find the strength to overcome addiction with help and a willingness to

make a change.

Nicole Larkin is the marriage, family therapist and recovery counselor at Recovery Lighthouse, and she said she appreciates Martin's outlook and empathetic perspective.

"Carol has a personality that just shines," Larkin said. "She's always willing to advocate for people. She takes time to be with a person on their level and one-on-one. She shows compassion and is very dedicated to anyone that she meets in the recovery community."

Martin's disarming personality and desire to help those seeking recovery make her an invaluable team member.

"Having someone who understands from their level," Larkin said, "to have that personal experience of being in recovery and having this addiction that every single day they have to they have to battle, they have to overcome every single day, so I think having the empathy that Carol gives to anyone that she meets is just so important, it provides them that comfort, it provides them that understanding that someone is in there battling for them."

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.

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Funky Bunch Pet Care expands to Springfield

By Faith Bemiss

fbemiss@sedaliademocrat.com

Collin and Meghan Funkhouser, who own Funky Bunch Pet Care LLC, opened the Sedalia business in 2018. Since then, they have watched the pet-sitting business grow to include Springfield. They now employ eight people.

Collin, 34, Meghan, 31, and the staff offer pet sitting and pet walking services, which often go beyond the norm. Funky Bunch also looks after the homeowner's house and property when they are gone while ensuring the pets are well looked after. They currently care for pets in Sedalia, Marshall, Warsaw, Knob Noster, and Warrensburg.

The idea of branching out came to the Funkhousers about a year ago.

Meghan noted the Springfield area is "very pet friendly." Funky Bunch was also receiving requests from the Springfield area for pet sitting.

"We knew we wanted to serve more pets," Meghan noted. "We knew we wanted to allow people the opportunity to not rush home in the middle of the day or take a long lunch break running home."

"We can come over and provide that peace of mind for you," she continued. "Where you can go on your honeymoon or take your trip because your pet can stay in the comfort of your home, and you don't have to worry about them."

Collin laughed and said they do a lot of "absolution of pet parent guilt."

"They feel guilty or stressed that they can't come home," he explained. "Or they are stuck between a rock and a hard place. They need to go and celebrate this big birthday or go to this funeral in Florida, but I have my pet at home."

"So, we saw a need and brought on eight amazing people," he continued. "We are very, very fortunate through this time that we've been able to bring on the people we have."

The Funkhousers have three part-time employees in Sedalia and five in Springfield. All the staff is well trained to care for pets.

"We do pet first aid and CPR certification," Meghan explained. "Because that's

obviously very important for going into people's homes."

"We don't really know what's on the other side of the door," she added. "So, we need to be prepared if the pet is injured or is not OK."

Collin and Meghan also shadow new staff members and attend visits with them.

"We'll walk through the pet's care," she said. "Let them out in the backyard. And do a little bit of home security check."

Collin noted they teach environmental hygiene, such as washing pet bowls and wiping down surfaces to prevent cross-contamination.

Meghan added that pets must be up-to-date on vaccinations before becoming a client.

Funky Bunch also does a 90-day probation period for new staff members.

"We train them on animal behavior," Collin noted. "And fear-free protocols."

The Funkhousers emphasize fear-free pet care training and are fear-free certified.

"We teach all our staff how to do that," Collin noted. "Fear-free certification is done through the Fear-Free Organization, and it means that we read body language with dogs. And we use alternative methods to meet the dog's needs."

For example, getting a dog to go outside on a walk can be dicey when it's backed into a corner, and its neck hairs have bristled. Therefore, one should not force the dog to go outside; instead, the sitter should sit down and be quiet for a time, offering it treats until it calms down.

Melissa Turner, a Funky Bunch client in Sedalia, said the business has been good to her and her dogs, T-Bone and the late Bubba. Turner noted that T-Bone is difficult sometimes, but Collin used the fear-free technique with him with great success.

"I can't say enough good things about them, honestly," she noted. "My other dog (T-Bone) is the kind of dog that ... is hard to get along with."

"And Collin came in and really took his time with my dog," she continued.

"And before you knew it, Collin was on the floor petting the dog, and they were best friends."



Collin and Meghan Funkhouser, who own Funky Bunch Pet Care LLC, recently branched out to include Springfield in their service area. DEMOCRAT FILE PHOTO

She added that since Collin hired new staff, they practiced the same fear-free techniques, and now T-Bone has many new "best friends."

Turner noted when Bubba died, Funky Bunch sent her a card and gift and also texted her to see how she was doing with the loss.

"They are so nice," she added. "I feel they were affected by his loss too. I have never had a negative experience with them. Even when they brought on new employees, it was such a smooth, seamless transition."

The business is pet-sitting insured and bonded, and it offers workers' compensation for the staff to reduce homeowner liability.

Funky Bunch also offers a podcast about different pet-sitting topics that new staff members may access. For example, Collin noted training the staff on how to walk a dog is also essential.

"How to safely do a dog walk," he

added. "That's age, breed, (and) season appropriate — how hot is too hot, how cold is too cold."

Walking a dog takes in "having eyes everywhere," Meghan said, to ensure the pet is safe from other stray dogs, traffic or other hazards.

Collin and Meghan noted the business uses a team-based approach.

"We have the three staff members here in town," Collin said. "What that means is when you hire Funky Bunch, you're not just hiring one person, you're hiring four people — hiring the three staff members and Meghan and I; there's always backups."

For booking or more information about Funky Bunch Pet Care LLC, call 660-398-9833, visit www.funkybunch-petcare.com or visit the Funky Bunch Pet Care Facebook page. The "Pet Sitter Confessional" podcast can be listened to at www.petsitterconfessional.com.

Faith Bemiss can be reached at 660-530-0289 or on Twitter @flbemiss.

Morley

From Page 21

"He basically forced me to do it, I did it on my own accord, of course, but he was very encouraging, which is what led me to this," Morley added. "I like being a deputy because I feel like county work is more fun; being out in the country and the calls are different."

Morley said being with the county feels like there are more rewarding tasks to be done as far as helping people and interacting with community members who normally don't see law enforcement officers.

Morley won Deputy of the Year in 2022, which shocked him because he felt like everyone at the

Sheriff's Office deserved the award. He received the award for his work as both the deputy coroner and a full-time road deputy at the time.

"I would work 12 hours shifts; Friday, Saturday, Sunday and on Saturday morning, I would get woken up to go out to the middle of the county to do a coroner investigation and then be at work the next morning to work a 12," Morley said. "My supervisor, Scott DeHaven, was very good about letting me come in a little late and taking care of me."

Sheriff Brad Anders said that when he took office, Morley was the deputy coroner and a reserve officer.

"His dedication was very evident from the beginning," Anders said. "He was trying

to juggle two different positions and did so very well. It came to a point with the COVID sickness we had to have him act as a full-time deputy."

Anders added that Morley jumped right into the role of full-time with hesitation after he had completed all of his field training. Anders noted Morley has a fantastic attitude and is very positive. Anything that he is asked to do, he jumps right on it.

"He excelled at it to the point where he was named our Deputy of the Year for 2022," Anders said. "His performance is stellar and his dedication is admirable and he's basically a role model for others to emulate."

Skye Melcher can be reached at 660-530-0144.

Hammer

From Page 11

EMS Chief Eric Dirck first worked with Hammer when they were both at the Warsaw-Lincoln Ambulance District, then at Golden Valley, and they eventually found their way to Pettis County.

Dirck said the role of battalion chief is a tough one. Paramedics or EMTs

on duty run calls in a rotation, but the battalion chief might have to go on several calls in a row due to the severity.

"It takes someone with management skills. I refer to all of them as choreographers — they are putting a lot of moving pieces together in a dance," Dirck said. "They do an amazing job. Flo handles it quite well. It's very demanding and he fits."

Outside of his normal duties, Dirck said Hammer

helps with the district's public outreach, whether it's soliciting donations for EMS Week, participating in mock accidents at area high schools, or doing presentations for students or civic groups.

"He does a lot of training and outreach because he's masterful at his public relations skills," Dirck said. "If he wasn't a paramedic, I'd have him working PR. Everybody loves Flo."

"... The most important thing about Flo is once

anybody meets him, they feel like they've known him their whole life," Dirck added. "EMS is a very family-oriented community, we're like brothers and sisters for sure. Flo having that quality is just invaluable, keeping people together, the cohesiveness of his shift; I wouldn't give him up for the world."

Nicole Cooke can be reached at 660-530-0138 or on Twitter @NicoleRCooke.

Tilley

From Page 5

Tilley said he enjoys working with the Boys & Girls Club due to the organization's mission of helping area children through afterschool programs. As for BNI, he said it's good to be invested in fellow business owners and to see

their businesses flourish over time.

Boys & Girls Clubs of West Central Missouri Executive Director Gary Beckman has worked with Tilley through his service on the Club's board. Tilley has served on the board's Finance Committee for several years and was recently elected as board secretary.

"Adam provides a high level of professional

fiduciary expertise in how our organization functions and adheres to policies and procedures," Beckman said. "He has a strong, dedicated focus to ensure the Boys & Girls Club is paving the way for our kiddos to be successful and bright futures on their horizon."

Beckman said Tilley is not only an integral member of the board but also the Sedalia community.

"Adam has been a highly engaged board member," Beckman added, "providing valuable direction and input in establishing a high level of expectations and goals for the Boys & Girls Club to broaden our impact in the communities we serve for not only our members but their families as well."

Nicole Cooke can be reached at 660-530-0138 or on Twitter @NicoleRCooke.

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Democrat's Under 40 Employees

Front: Editor Nicole Cooke **Back row from left:** Reporter Skye Melcher, Sports Editor Bryan Everson and Advertising Assistant Michele Newton **Not Pictured:** Customer Service Representative Celeste Forsman

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