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The **2026 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS**
is produced by the
Malvern Daily Record, 219 Locust St.,
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BEST WRECKER SERVICE, BEST SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR & LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS



Charlie Puckett, Ben(Mike)Smith, Melissa Smith and Christy Dugan

Bailey's Wrecker
1507 Smith St, Malvern, AR
501-332-3400

Small Business of the Year: Bailey's Towing & Recovery Inc.

By **Heather Bennett Ritter**
Staff Writer

For Bailey's Towing & Recovery Inc. owners Mike and Melissa Smith, being named the Malvern Daily Record's 2026 Readers' Choice Small Business of the Year is all about serving the community that has supported their business.

"We were extremely excited to find out we had won," Melissa Smith said. "There were a lot of businesses in that category. For us to be chosen, we just feel blessed."

The couple has owned Bailey's for the past five years, after Mike worked for founders Phil and Debbie Bailey for years before purchasing the business when Phil retired. Rather than reinvent the company, the Smiths said they have focused on preserving the reputation the Baileys built.

"It's old-school customer service," Melissa said. "That's always been the big thing, along with rapid response. We try to treat everybody with respect and like they're family."

While the business has updated equipment and added employees, the Smiths say their mission has remained focused on helping people through some of the worst moments of their lives.

Many customers call Bailey's after waiting hours for roadside assistance. Others arrive after serious crashes, dealing with the emotional aftermath. The Smiths said towing often requires far more than moving vehicles.

"People don't see the human side," she said. "Sometimes our guys are sitting with a mom who just lost her child or helping someone who's completely traumatized. That's the part of this business people don't think about."

The Smiths also credit their staff for helping maintain the company's reputation. Office worker Christy Dugan has been with Bailey's Towing for about a year and a half, while driver Charlie Puckett has spent the past four years with the business. Alongside the Smiths, they help provide the quick response and personal service their longtime customers have come to expect.

The company keeps a toy chest for children visiting the office after crashes, offers water and reassurance to stranded motorists and, when necessary, gently advises grieving families against viewing severely damaged vehicles.

Mike acknowledges the job often puts him on the scene of accidents that are emotionally charged. Much like first responders, tow truck drivers encounter heartbreaking situations in order to serve those who need them most. "It's something you have to adapt to, and I would rather be the one doing that than someone who might not be able to compartmentalize it," he said.

"We try every day to be the person you need us to be," Melissa said. "We want to make a bad situation just a little easier."

Community ties also run deep. Mike is a lifetime Malvern native, while Melissa has called the city home since elementary school. They credit loyal customers — some dating back to the years of the Bailey family's ownership — for the business's continued success.

One of the company's most recognizable symbols is its pink breast cancer awareness truck, which debuted in the 2022 Malvern



Christmas parade. Inspired by Melissa's two aunts who died from breast cancer, the truck features custom pink emergency lighting, a heart-shaped version of the company's crossed-hooks logo, and winches named in the aunts' honor. "That's because the winches are the strong parts," Melissa said.

The truck is a symbol of the business's commitment to stand beside those they serve as they face some of the most challenging circumstances of their lives. Those connections are why the office walls at Bailey's are covered with awards from years of being recognized as one of Malvern's most trusted businesses.

"We're just self-made hometown people," Melissa said. "We work hard, try to make people happy and every day strive to be a little better than we were yesterday."

Large Business of the Year: Malvern National Bank

By **Heather Bennett Ritter**
Staff Writer

Malvern National Bank's continued investment in the community has once again earned the institution one of our highest honors for a third year in a row.

Named the Malvern Daily Record's 2026 Readers' Choice Big Business of the Year, MNB President Brent Black says the bank's success is rooted in the people who represent the bank every day.

"Our employees spend countless hours volunteering," Black said. "They genuinely enjoy doing it."

Whether helping with Cookies with Santa, Easter Bunny visits, community festivals or countless local fundraisers, Black said employees are consistently generous with their time and effort.

"When we ask our employees for volunteers, we usually have more than we can use," he said.

That spirit of service extends beyond individual events. With about 70 employees working in downtown Malvern, Black said the bank has made a point of investing in the city's future through projects like its new Main Street pocket park, sponsorships for the city's sesquicentennial celebration and continued support for fellow downtown businesses.

"I think it's important to us that downtown keeps growing like it has," he said. "We want to support the restaurants and the events that are down there so when our employees come to work every day, they have a nice place to go."

Since arriving in Malvern nearly a decade ago, Black said he's watched the city steadily build momentum.

"I can tell a big difference," he said. "There are more things going on. Businesses are fixing up their storefronts, and the community wants this to be a nice place for everybody to live."

MNB has continued growing about 8% over the past year, adding several local jobs, moving forward with renovations to its Riverview branch in Rockport, and making preparations to build a new branch in Hot Springs.

Although these moves signal a promising path into the future, Black believes credit for Malvern's progress should be shared.

"If nobody wants to volunteer or help or sponsor, your community is going to go downhill pretty quickly," he said. "There's quite a few businesses and organizations that are trying to make this a better place to live."

Just as important as moving beyond the bank's walls to support the community, Black said, is the culture within the bank itself. Approximately 20 employees in Malvern have worked for MNB for at least two decades, with many retiring after 30 and even 40 years of service.

"I think our employees enjoy working here," he said. "As we grow, we want to offer more to them as well."

Looking ahead, Black expects MNB to sustain its spirit of involvement.

"Continue to take pride in your community," he said, "and it'll continue to grow."



Woman of the Year: Elissa Mitchell

By **Heather Bennett Ritter**
Staff Writer

For two decades, Elissa Mitchell has been an effervescent presence on the front line of customer service at Malvern National Bank, greeting generations of community members with a familiar smile and an unwavering commitment to service.

Her graceful consistency — both inside the bank and throughout the community — has earned her recognition as the 2026 Malvern Daily Record Readers' Choice Woman of the Year.

Mitchell said she was genuinely surprised to learn she had been selected for the honor, describing the announcement as something she "never saw coming."

"I don't know who nominated me or why," Mitchell said with a laugh. "It was a big surprise."

Those who know her, however, would likely point to qualities that have defined her life in Malvern for decades: a servant's heart, a warm smile and a commitment to helping others, regardless of their station in life.

Mitchell is currently celebrating her 20th year at Malvern National Bank, where she serves as a customer service representative, assisting customers with new accounts and guiding them through life's financial milestones. After spending more than two decades working her way from hourly employee to manager at Andy's restaurants, she joined the bank in 2006 and quickly found the career she believes God intended for her.

See **Elissa**, page 8



MALVERN NATIONAL BANK

**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR BUSINESS!**

Best Bank

Large Business of the Year

Woman of the Year - Elissa Mitchell

Best Mortgage Broker - Kyle Keeney

Best Boss - Erica Gage

Best Local Volunteer - Ashley Savage

Best Banker - Cameron Reed

1st Runner Up Bank Teller - Hannah Freer

1st Runner Up Property Manager - Natasha Adams

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**Congratulations to
all Reader's Choice Award Winners!**

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FDIC**



Elissa

Continued from page 7

"I absolutely love my job," she said. "I'm a people person. I love dealing with the public."

Mitchell said she loves being a guiding hand through the transitional periods in her customers' lives. "My heart melts with the elderly people, and I love helping teenagers getting their first accounts," she said.

Outside the bank, Mitchell's passion for serving the community continues through a personal ministry she calls "God's Got a Blessing." From her home, she assembles bags filled with toiletries, snacks, bottled water and handwritten scripture cards before personally distributing them to people experiencing homelessness or hardship.

"I just want them to know somebody's thinking about them,"

she said. "When we see people in certain situations, we need to remember that could be us as well."

The ministry reflects values she says were instilled by her mother, whose compassion for others inspired Mitchell's own desire to care for people in need. Looking toward retirement, she hopes to one day open a shelter or pantry where families can find food and other necessities.

A longtime member of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Mitchell said she hopes Malvern's future is built on unity and neighbors working together to create more opportunities for each other.

Although she prefers to stay out of the spotlight, Mitchell believes kindness speaks for itself.

"If you really have a genuine heart, it shows," she said. "I'm not looking for a pat on the back. I just go where my heart moves."

Man of the Year: Boyce Mitchell

By Heather Bennett Ritter

Staff Writer

Boyce Mitchell has spent three decades helping people through some of the hardest moments of their lives. The lifelong Malvern resident's dedication to so many of the most vulnerable in our community is why he has been voted as Malvern Daily Record's 2026 Readers' Choice Man of the Year.

As a mental health caseworker with Ouachita Behavioral Health, the chair of the Hot Spring County Homeless Coalition, and one of the establishing figures of the Hot Springs Community Resource Center, Mitchell has become well known for connecting people with housing, treatment and resources -- work that he describes as "giving a hand-up, not a hand-out." His reach has expanded from assisting about 60 people a year when he first began managing a federal homelessness grant, to serving nearly 1,000 individuals annually.

Mitchell's path into mental health began almost by accident. After repeatedly asking for a job at a group home despite being turned away, his persistence paid off.

"I was willing to hear no as many times as it took," he said. "The more I got into it, it was almost like it was second nature."

While his work now spans five counties, Mitchell said his heart has always remained in Malvern.

"I've always wanted to do something great in Malvern. I've been here all my life, and I love this place. I just want us to grow," he said.

That vision extends far beyond addressing homelessness. Mitchell believes Malvern's greatest opportunity lies in building a renewed identity around its natural assets and strengthening community connections through collaborative problem solving.

"I see Malvern almost waking up," he said. "We have the river here. We've started making it where people can come out and walk the trails, but I want to dig deeper into that. We have thousands of people coming here floating, but we need to play a stronger role in servicing them."

Mitchell said he believes incentivizing visible improvements, developing Malvern's historic business district and promoting wise stewardship and use of nearby natural resources will encourage residents to take pride in their hometown, although he insists physical improvements alone won't solve the city's challenges.



"Everybody has a lot of good ideas," he said. "But those ideas mean nothing without work, without us moving together in the same direction."

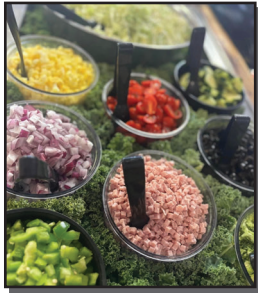
Throughout his career, Mitchell has learned to look beyond immediate crises and focus on their root causes.

"We've got to start working on problems, not symptoms," he said. "Whether that's education, mental health, lack of health care or employment, there's always an underlying problem."

His message to the community is ultimately one of shared responsibility.

"Malvern is only as strong as the weakest person in it," Mitchell said. "We've got to get to the point where we help one another. If we're ever going to overcome these barriers and make this place better, we have to come together as a community with a common vision that includes all of us."

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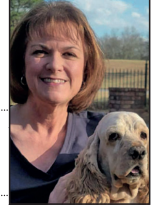
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**Stacy Brown
D.V.M.**

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— MAN OF THE YEAR —



CARRIE CANNON

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To be selected Runner-up **"Best Political Figure"** by those participating in the Malvern Daily Record voting is both humbling, and a great honor. Let's continue to work together continually improving our community for our families, and future generations.

Rick McClure

State Representative District 29
Pastoral Staff Lifepoint
Community Church
Hot Spring County Economic
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Best School District



Elementary Employee/Teacher - **Treva Tarkington**

High School Administrator - **Greg Hughes**

Superintendent - **1st runner up Janet Blair**

Middle School Administrator - **1st runner up Ben Dial**

Best Boss - **1st runner up Catherine Watson**

Librarian- **1st runner Stony Evans**

2026 Readers' Choice Winners List

COMMUNITY

Large Business Of The Year (+ 10)

Malvern National Bank
Central Arkansas Telephone Cooperative

Small Business Of The Year (-10)

Bailey's Wrecker
Bronze + Boujee

Church

The Well
LifePoint Church

Civic Club

New Ground Discipleship Group
Lions Club

Man Of The Year

Boyce Mitchell
Stephen Shirron

Woman Of The Year

Elissa Mitchell
Kristin English

AUTOMOTIVE

Auto Body Shop

CrutchField's Auto Body & Collision
Gordy's Collision Repair

Auto Glass Dealer

Key's Auto Glass
Glass Doctor

Auto Oil Change

Quik-Way Lube & Tire
Big A's Automotive and Transmission

Auto Parts Dealer

NAPA
Autozone

Auto Service Shop

Big A's Automotive and Transmission
Boyett's Garage & Wrecker Service

New Car Dealer

Teeter Chevrolet
Smart Ford

Preowned Car Dealer

Smart Ford
Teeter Chevrolet

Recreational Vehicle Dealer

John's Honda
Timberland CDJR

Small Engine Repair Shop

Malvern Power Equipment
Tank's Tires

Tire Dealer

Big A's Automotive and Transmission
Quik-Way Lube & Tire

Wrecker Service

Bailey's Wrecker
Malvern Towing

DINING/RESTAURANTS

Bakery

KB's Love by the Pound
Just in Kase Cookie

Barbecue

Craig's BBQ
3J's Wings

Biscuit

Andy's
Early Rizers

Breakfast

HWY 270 Grill
Shelley's Diner

Burrito

El Parian
Valdivia Bros.

Catering Service

Craig's BBQ
Blended & Blessed

Catfish

Sam's Southern Eatery
Dorey's Catfish

Cheese Sticks

Larry's Pizza
Brick City Pizza

Chicken

Popeye's
Sam's Southern Eatery

Chicken Fried Steak

Mama K's
HWY 270 Grill

Coffee

Coffee Records
Mug Shots

Desserts

KB's Love by the Pound
Blended + Blessed

Donuts

The Donut Hole
The Donut House

Fast Food

Burger King
Andy's

Food Truck

Early Rizers
Valdivia Bros.

French Fries

Mel's Dairy Bar
Andy's

Friendliest Service

Hobo Joe's
Mama K's

Hamburgers

Mel's Dairy Bar
Shelley's Diner

Home Cooked Meals

Mama K's
Shelley's Diner

Hot Dogs

Sonic
Mel's Dairy Bar

Ice Cream/Yogurt/Milkshakes

Mel's Dairy Bar
Andy's

Locally-Owned Restaurant

Shelley's Diner
HWY 270 Grill

Mexican Food

El Parian
Cotija

Pizza

Larry's Pizza
Brick City Pizza

Plate Lunches

Shelley's Diner
Early Rizers

Salads

Larry's Pizza
Shelley's Diner

Sandwiches

Coffee Records
Early Rizers

Steaks

HWY 270 Grill
Mama K's

Tacos

Valdivia Bros.
El Parian

Wings

3J's Wings
Brick City Pizza

FINANCIAL SERVICES**Accounting Firm**

Kindy & Elliott
Fred Penny

Bank

MNB
Clearway Credit Union

Drive Thru Banking

Clearway Credit Union
Southern Bancorp

Financial/Investment Services

Gerald Black
Monica Yarbrough

Insurance Company

Monica Yarbrough
Farm Bureau

Mortgage Company

Southern Bancorp
Clearway Credit Union

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Malvern Chiropractic
Dr. Delee

Dental Office

Efird Dentistry
Teale Dentistry

Eye Clinic

Arkansas EyeCare
Pope Eye Clinic

Gym/Fitness Facility

BodyWorks
Vision Martial Arts

Hospice Services

Elite Hospice
Hospice Homecare

Medical Clinic

Higginbotham Family Clinic
Brick City Health & Wellness

Mental Health Services

Hope & Wellness, PLLC Psychiatric Service
Ouachita Behavioral Health

Nursing Home

Arbor Oaks Nursing & Rehabilitation
Encore Health & Rehabilitation

Pharmacy

Community Care RX
Miller's Drug

Physician Office

Baptist Health Family Clinic
Higginbotham Family Clinic

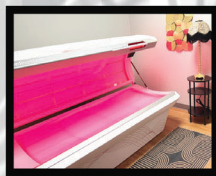
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1ST RUNNER UP WOMAN OF THE YEAR- KRISTIN ENGLISH



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Excavating Service

Johnsons Excavating
Hobbs Contractor

Farm/Feed Supply

Farmers Association
JA Farm and Feed

Furniture Store

Browns Furniture
Jordan Bedding

Hardware Store

Davis Lumber
JA Farms Feed

Heating/Cooling Services

Bennings Heating & Air
Edwards Heating & Air

Insulation Contractor

Hardy Insulation
Southern Insulation

Landscaping

Johnsons Excavating
Craigs Land Service

Lawn & Garden Center

JA Farms Feed
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Paint Dealer

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Davis Lumber

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City Termite

Plumbing Service

Holland Plumbing
Wingo Plumbing

Roofing Service

Walker Roofing
Willis + Son Roofing

Tree Service

Dyer Tree Service
Crites & Tackett Tree Service

PEOPLE**Accountant (CPA)**

Keith Elliott
Fred Penny

Administrator

Kay Bishop
Vick Barrett

Appraiser

Allen Pulley
Justin Pulley

APRN

Rachel Scrimshire
Mona Simms

Attorney

Cecilia Ashcraft
Sherry Burnett

Auctioneer

Blake Riggan
David Stafford

Bank Teller

Jackie Lawson
Hannah Freer

Banker

Cameron Reed
Reggie English

Barber

Brent Whitley
Jeremy Cheatham

Best Boss

Erica Gage
Catherine Watson

Chiropractor

Michael Paul
Dr. Delee

City Elected Official

David Cross
Lynn Davis

City Employee (Not Elected)

Bo Draper
Jacob Wright

Contractor

BJ Paul
Chad Orr

County Elected Official

Eric Henson
Dennis Thornton

County Employee (Not Elected)

Candi Perry
Page Floriani

Day Care Worker

Riley Saunders
Julie Phillips

Dentist

Leah Edwards (Efird)
William Voss

Doctor

Dr. Shane Higginbotham
Dr. Bruce Burton

Electrician

Dean Lock
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EMT/Paramedic

Barbara Davis
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Noah Lankford
Gerald Black

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Heath Loy
Joshua Thompson

Fitness Trainer

Stephanie Wilks
Ron Latina

Floral Designer

Christie Chandler

Funeral Director

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John Allan Funk

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Jenna Brown
Lyndi Kitchens

Hospital Employee

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Jeff McJunkins

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Monica Yarbrough
Brent Thompson

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CJ Savage
Brandon Russell

Librarian

Claire Graham
Stony Evans

Loan Officer

Reggie English
Brian Coston

Local Volunteer

Ashley Savage
Kina Burruss

Mechanic

Keith Starkey
John Doss

Mortgage Broker

Kyle Keeney
Tammy Passafiume

Nail Technician

Sable Nix
Amy Nguyen

New Car Salesman

Donnie Baker
Steve Michael

Nurse

Jill Hughes
Megan Hobbs

Optometrist

Dr. Curtis Zachry
Griffin Smith

Pastor

Matt Crutchfield
Dave Holland

Pharmacist

Shelyn Davis
Sable Miller Emerson

Physical Therapist

Michael Johnson
Tiffany Weston

Plant Manager

Allen Thacker
Brent Leopard

Political Figure

Eric Henson
Rick McClure

Preowned Car Salesman

Donnie Baker
Dale Horn III

Property Manager

Kay Bishop
Natasha Adams

Real Estate Agent

DeAnn Williams
Stephanie Collie

Receptionist

Allison Strother
Casey Caradine

Restaurant Server

Lillie Edwards
Brook Clifton

State Employee

Zack Owens
Jamie Moran

Tattoo Artist

Chryssa Stovall
Amy Neighbors

Therapist

Carrie Cannon
Lisa Carpenter

Veterinarian

Ricky Hughes
Sophie Mauldin

PETS

Animal Clinic

Hughes Animal Hospital
Animal Medical

Animal Shelter/Rescue

Cuddle Babbies Rescue
Malvern Animal Shelter

Pet Boarding

Hughes Animal Hospital
Country Tails

Pet Grooming

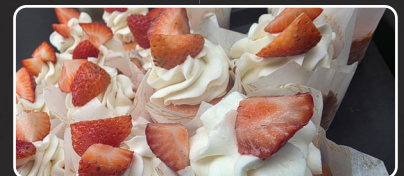
Country Tails
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Arkansas Transload
JM Bozemen

SCHOOLS**Bus Driver**

Jason Bowdley
Rena West

Coach

Keith Barrett
Bryan Wetherford

College Employee (Not Certified)

Heather Dial
Michelle Buie

College Instructor

Chris Stovall
Andrea Gross

District Superintendent

Cameron Alexander
Janet Blar

Elementary Administrator

Kandy Aaron
Lori McJunkins

Elementary Employee/Teacher

Treva Tarkington
LeAnn Wells

High School Administrator

Greg Hughes
Darrell Ellis

High School Employee/Teacher

Shauna Harper
Tammy Alexander

Middle School Administrator

Kristen McLaughlin
Ben Dial

Middle School Employee/Teacher

Stephanie Stevens
Meshele Long

Pre-School Employee/Teacher

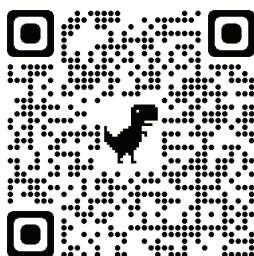
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Karen Ware

School District
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Magnet Cove School District



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GLEN ROSE SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Bus Driver - **Jason Bowdles**
Elementary Administrator - **Randy Aaron**
Middle School Teacher/Employee - **Stephanie Stevens**
Coach - **1st runner up Bryan Weatherford**
High School Administrator
- **1st runner up Darrell Ellis**
Elementary Employee/Teacher
- **1st runner up LeAnn Wells**

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dedication, and pride to
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Eric
HENSON
— SHERIFF —

*Together we can make Hot Spring County
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THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING ME TO SERVE YOU!

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MAGNET COVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Friendly People • Small Community • Big Hearts

Magnet Cove Schools want to say "thank you Hot Spring
County readers" for recognizing six of its employees in the
HSC Best of 2026 (Readers Choice).

Employees receiving recognition are as follows:



Superintendent - Cameron Alexander

High School Employee/Teacher - Shauna Harper

Middle School Administrator - Kristen McLaughlin

1st runner up Best School District

1st runner up Elementary Administrator - Lori McJunkins

1st runner up High School Employee/Teacher - Tammy Alexander

1st runner up Middle School Employee/Teacher - Meshele Long

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Best Doctor



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Malvern Housing Authority



I am truly honored and grateful to have been voted **Best Administrator** and **Best Property Manager**. I am equally thankful that **Malvern Housing Authority** was voted **Best Apartment Complex**.

Serving as Executive Director is more than a title to me. It is a responsibility that I carry with pride, compassion, and a commitment to doing what is best for our residents and our community.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to vote and for the confidence you continue to place in me and in Malvern Housing Authority. Thank you to our residents, our Board of Commissioners, and our dedicated staff. This recognition belongs to all of us because it takes a team that genuinely cares to provide quality housing and meaningful service.

It is an honor to serve the City of Malvern, and I look forward to continuing the work of making Malvern Housing Authority a place our residents are proud to call home.

**With sincere appreciation,
Katencia "Kay" Bishop,
Executive Director
Malvern Housing Authority**



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Best Plant Manager
Best Industry 1st runner up





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MAN OF THE YEAR**
1st Runner Up
★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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appreciation to everyone
who voted for me as
Man of the Year.**

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Children's Church - 10:30AM
Worship - 10:30AM



WEDNESDAYS - FAMILY NIGHT

Junior Bible Quiz - 6:30PM
M1A Youth - 6:30PM
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