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On the cover: Haywood Christian Ministry Food Pantry Manager Dave Bryan prepares to load up a weekly food cart for Ron Hall, who relies on HCM not only for sustenance but emotional support.

This special commemorative magazine celebrates and honors Haywood Christian Ministry's 50+ years of serving the people of Haywood County.



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Designer Jack Snyder • Editor Becky Johnson • Advertising Exec. Jan George

Spirit of cooperation

Haywood Christian Ministry unites partners to form a safety net

When faith leaders across the county joined hands 50 years ago to create Haywood Christian Ministry, the lives of the most vulnerable would forever be changed.

Generational poverty in Appalachia ran deep. Families struggling to put food on the table, clothe their children and heat their homes often fell through the cracks. A safety net was needed, and it could only be accomplished by working together.

“That concept was novel,” said Victor Dingus, vice-chair of the Haywood Christian Ministry Board. “It was a breakthrough of cooperation among congregations and social service agencies. Not only as a hand-out, but with improving lives — and it was based on Christian love.”

The early vision of uniting faith leaders to change and save lives is as strong today as it was 50 years ago.

“There would be a huge hole in the community if there wasn’t Haywood Christian Ministry to turn to,” said Beth Johnson, chairman of the missions committee with First Presbyterian Church in Waynes-



Matthew Blackburn of First United Methodist in Waynesville leads volunteers to pack food boxes for dialysis patients, with food stores provided in part by Haywood Christian Ministry.

ville. “It fills a need that individual churches cannot do.”

The strength of Haywood Christian Ministry lies with its partnerships. The philosophy of a shared network — one that spans churches, nonprofits, social service agencies and charities — is now ingrained in the community culture.

“No one organization can meet all the needs. It takes all of us working together and uniting to help those who are most vulnerable,” said Patsy Davis, director of Mountain Projects. “We try to form a safety net to ensure nobody gets left behind.”

Davis said the community is blessed by the cooperation among the human services network.

“If one of us can’t do it, we call somebody else to see if they can,” Davis said. “Haywood Christian Ministry is such an important part of that. We refer a lot of folks to them.”

Sharing the wealth

Haywood Christian Ministry’s massive food distribution network moves thousands of pounds of food every week — picking it up from suppliers, grocery stores and food banks; sorting, organizing and boxing it; and getting it into the hands of those in need.

The Ministry races around the clock to keep the never-ending cycle going. The Ministry not only supplies food to its own clients, but serves as a middle-man in the supply chain for churches and other nonprofits that do food distributions of their own.

“They share the wealth with a lot of different organizations,” said Matthew Blackburn, director of youth ministries at First United Methodist in Waynesville.

The church relies on Haywood Christian Ministry to supply it with food for its various outreach ministries. Every Saturday morning, the Ministry provides food to help stock the shelves of First Methodist’s Friendship



Evelyn Haney relies on food from The Friendship House at First Methodist, which is stocked with the help of Haywood Christian Ministry.

House, where those in need can “shop” for free groceries. The Ministry also helped with ingredients for the church to make hot Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for seniors last year.

It’s not uncommon for Blackburn to get a call from the Ministry when it receives a big shipment — whether it’s for the church’s own monthly food distributions or snacks for its after-school program.

“They are very aware of what’s happening in the community,” Blackburn said. “If they have something in abundance, they make sure to get it to us.”

Haywood Christian Ministry also meets a huge need in the food supply chain when it comes to fresh produce, thanks to a large refrigerated trailer it purchased for \$14,000 to



Waynesville Rotary Club members supply “cake in a bag” kits to Haywood Christian Ministry to help people who may not otherwise get a cake to celebrate their birthday.

increase its cold storage capacity. The Ministry shares space in the trailer with other food pantries in the county.

“They are great at keeping things cold for me,” said Nicole Jaspersen, director Feeding the Multitude based in Canton. “I’ll ask ‘Can you hold this for me until the day of my distribution?’ and they say ‘Sure.’” Jaspersen regularly gets a call from Haywood Christian Ministry offering them surplus

food.

“They’ll say ‘I have a couple pallets for you,’” Jaspersen said. “I share with them, as well. We work together to make sure the food gets out there before it spoils. It’s a network.”

Two-way street

Churches are integral to the mission of Haywood Christian Ministry, including First Presbyterian Church of Waynesville, which makes an annual donation to the

Ministry due to its vital role as a safety net.

“It is a more efficient way of helping people,” Johnson said. “As a small church, we wouldn’t be equipped to do what Haywood Christian Ministry does. So we tell anybody who comes in needing help, ‘Just walk down one more block to get all kinds of services.’”

The church also holds a monthly food drive to help stock Haywood Christian Ministry’s pantry. Each month, they ask the Ministry what one food they need most — sometimes cereal, sometimes vegetables, and frequently peanut butter.

“Every month, it’s a different thing, but it’s been peanut butter three times,” Johnson said. “It’s basically indestructible, and you can do anything with it, even eat it out of the jar.”

First United Methodist also holds food drives on the Ministry’s behalf every Wednesday, which is apropos given the Ministry in turn provides food back to the church for its own pantry every Saturday.

“We are all on the same team. It’s really cool,” Blackburn said. “When there’s a need in the community, I know we can always call them. Every organization is so impacted by Haywood Christian Ministry and what they do.”

The symbiotic spirit that fuels Haywood Christian Ministry today was exactly what the founders had in mind 50 years ago.

“That’s the cooperation that was originally envisioned,” Dingus said.



Rick Johnson with First Presbyterian of Waynesville loads up peanut butter collected from church members during a monthly food drive to help stock Haywood Christian Ministry’s food pantry.

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Rising to the occasion

When the going gets tough, Haywood Christian Ministry gets going

During the darkest hours of the pandemic in 2020, Haywood Christian Ministry proved its mettle like never before.

As the lock down plunged families into financial desperation, thousands of people who'd never needed assistance before turned to the Ministry. Seemingly overnight, the Food Pantry operation increased more than 10 fold, with lines of vehicles wrapping around the block waiting to pass through Haywood Christian Ministry's parking lot for food boxes.

"It was busy, busy, busy. We didn't realize how much we could do until we started doing it," said Bill Faircloth, a long-time Food Pantry volunteer.

The food distribution operation went from seeing 25 clients a day on average to as many as 160 a day. As the rest of society came to a screeching halt, the Ministry had the infrastructure and capability to rise to the occasion.

"We never stopped," said Frannie Hibbert, secretary on the Haywood Christian Ministry board. "We did what we always do. We provided."



Cars line up at Haywood Christian Ministry to receive food boxes during the shutdown in April 2020.

While many volunteers had to bow out over COVID safety concerns, those who remained labored around the clock.

"They worked their tail off," Hibbert said.

Haywood Christian Ministry not only helped keep food on the table during this time of crisis, but simply knowing there was a safety net eased the fear and anxiety of not knowing when, or if, people could go back to work again.

Haywood Christian Ministry also

served as a distribution point for getting food to those who suddenly became housebound, including hundreds of seniors who were afraid to venture out to the store or even to pass through the drive-through food lines.

Fleets of vans from Mountain Projects and Haywood County Transit passed through the Ministry to load up food for home delivery. The Ministry also provided food for churches to deliver to housebound members of their congregations.

"We have always been a hub for meeting the needs of the community, but it was true more than ever," Faircloth said. "There would be a gap without Haywood Christian Ministry."

Many of those helped during their times of crisis will no doubt remember the support they received and will become supporters of the Ministry once they're back on their feet.

Hibbert has seen it before. She recalled a cabinet maker whose work dried up during the recession of 2008. He'd never needed assistance before, but found himself turning to Haywood Christian Ministry for help buying heating oil one winter.

"He came back almost two years later and gave us \$300 and said 'I'd like to pay it forward,'" Hibbert said.



Joe Foell and Dave Bryan of Haywood Christian Ministry load food boxes onto a Haywood Public Transit van that are delivered to the homebound during the height of the pandemic.

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

MEET THE VOLUNTEERS WHO MAKE IT ALL POSSIBLE



Elsie Norton

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Haywood Christian Ministry. More than 25 volunteers work in every aspect of the operation to keep the wheels turning.

Volunteers heft thousands of pounds of food every week, unloading and sorting it, boxing it up for distribution, and loading it into the daily caravan of vehicles passing through the ministry for assistance — all with a smile.

An army of volunteers toil behind the scenes of the thrift store, the financial lifeblood of the ministry. Volunteers sift through the never-ending mountain of donated items that pour in — hanging the clothes, scrubbing off the toys, dusting off the books, and repairing electronics to ready them for sale.

They log hundreds of miles each month fetching food from the loading docks of grocery stores and supply points across the region, picking up donated furniture from homeowners, and retrieving damaged returns and rejects from Walmart.

Volunteers parcel out items to go directly to clients in need, from linens and dishes to clothes and toys. And a specialized crew of volunteers fix donated bikes to gift children at Christmas.

Volunteers also interview new clients to assess their needs, decide what assistance they're eligible for and connect them with resources — both within the Ministry and through other organizations in the community.

And most of all, they give hope to those in crisis who turn up on the doorstep of Haywood Christian Ministry when there's nowhere else to go.

Elsie Norton, jack-of-all-trades volunteer

When Elsie Norton loaded up some clothes following a closet purge to drop at Haywood Christian Ministry's thrift store, little did she know that her life was about to change.

"When I pulled up to the donation

door, the executive director was standing outside and said 'Would you like to see the operation?'" Norton recalled. "As he showed me through, I realized this is where I wanted to volunteer."

Norton knows it wasn't a coincidence. It was God steering her to serve with the Ministry.

"The Lord leads you to certain places to do the things that he needs done," Nor-

Continues on page 11

Got a minute? Lend a hand.

Haywood Christian Ministry's mission would not be possible without volunteers. There is always a desperate need for more volunteers, with numerous roles available. To find out about volunteering, call 828-456-4838.



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Judy Blackburn

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ton said. "I open my eyes and let Him lead." Norton, a second-home owner, has been volunteering with Haywood Christian Ministry for three years. Each spring when she arrives back in town, she rolls up her sleeves and heads to the Ministry.

"I say 'I'm here, what's your need? I have two hands and two days a week. What do you need me to do?'" Norton said.

Each year, she's worked in a different area of the operation — sorting and hanging baby clothing for the Thrift Store one year, working with the Food Pantry the next, and in the linen department the next.

While Norton's volunteer days may be spent folding comforters, grouping sheets and pairing towel sets, she never loses sight of why she's doing it and who she's helping.

"Someone may come in with a family of five and say 'I need sheets and towels and blankets,' and we put a box together for

them," Norton said.

It's a Godsend for clients who simply don't have the money to outfit a household with those items.

When Norton was approached about serving on Haywood Christian Ministry's Board of Directors, she gladly accepted. She not only knew it was what God wanted her to do, but also how important the Ministry is to the community.

"The mission of Haywood Christian Ministry is critical to individuals living in the county for 50 years," Norton said. "And I believe in giving back."

Judy Blackburn

Judy Blackburn is the picture of calm as she slides a hanger into a jacket, fastens the buttons and turns down the collar, seemingly unfazed by the towering bins, boxes and shopping carts piled high with clothing all around her.

The never-ending churn of donated clothing that cycles through the base-

ment of Haywood Christian Ministry's Thrift Store is dizzying, but Blackburn didn't skip a beat when asked if she ever felt daunted by it all.

"Never," she said.

Blackburn finds it therapeutic.

"I like what I do. It's just sorting clothes, but I really like it," she said.

Sorting and organizing the clothing borders on controlled chaos, but is adeptly navigated by the volunteers who all seem to know what goes where.

"As clothing donations come in, we sort it into two groups: what we'll sell upstairs and what we'll give away to clients," Blackburn said.

It's then sorted further. It's sliced and diced by season, by gender, by children's and baby's clothing, and so on.

Blackburn also enjoys the camaraderie of working with the fellow volun-

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teers.

"You get to know everybody," she said. "Everyone here are good people."

Blackburn began volunteering at the ministry after being recruited by fellow church members at Antioch Baptist Church.

"At first, I wanted something to do, and after being here, I realized what a great Ministry it is," Blackburn said. Blackburn is cognizant of how her work behind-the-scenes makes it all possible.

"What we send upstairs supports the Ministry," Blackburn said.

About half the donated clothing goes directly to clients, however, not the Thrift Store. The organized stockpiles of clothing allows the Ministry to provide clients with exactly what they need based on size and gender — whether it's a single-mom who needs winter coats for her kids or flood victims needing to replace their entire wardrobes.

Blackburn shared one story of a woman who came in needing profes-

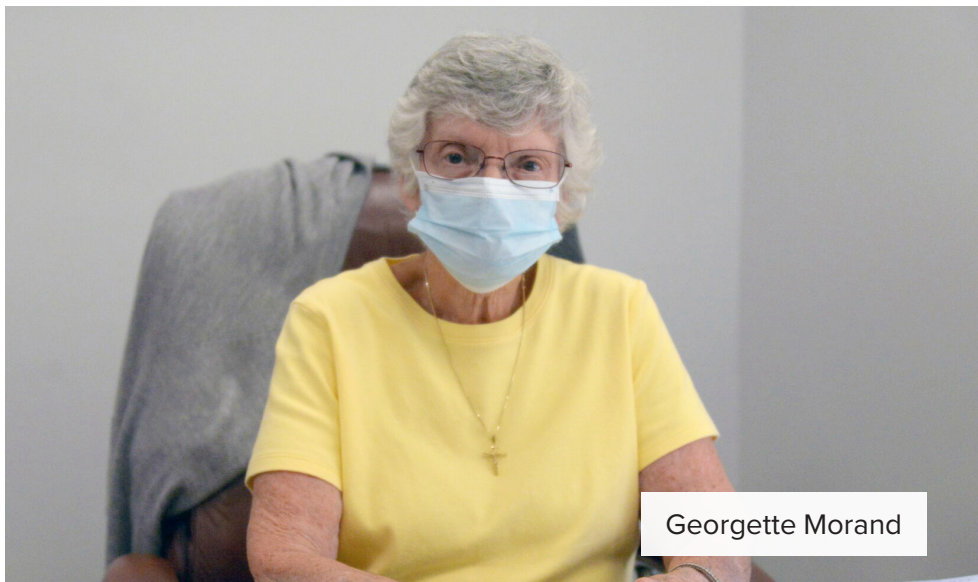
sional clothing for a job interview. They found her the perfect outfit, and Blackburn hopes she got the job.

"That's what we are here for, is to help people get back on their feet and be self sufficient again," she said.

Georgette Morand, client in-take volunteer

Volunteering with Haywood Christian Ministry for the past five years has given Georgette Morand meaning and purpose in her life.

"It is very rewarding," she said. "When I go home at the end of the day, I feel gratified. I feel like I've done something. I am doing God's work by volunteering."



Georgette Morand



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Morand volunteers on the front-line of Haywood Christian Ministry — namely interviewing new clients coming through the doors for assistance.

“A lot of the older people don’t even want to come in here for help,” Morand said. “I tell them, ‘That’s what we are here for. Don’t feel embarrassed because you’re not alone.’”

Morand listens to their story to determine what kind of assistance they need and what they’re eligible for. Their situations run the gamut, from flood victims to people who got COVID, missed work and fell behind on bills as a result.

For Morand, one of the hardest parts about being a volunteer is wishing she could help people more.

“Sometimes I want to take money out of my pocket and give it to them,” said Morand, a member of St. John’s Catholic Church in Waynesville. “But you can only do so much.”

While it can be heart-breaking, there are many moments of joy. Clients are often overcome with gratitude.

“They are ecstatic. They are so thankful,” she said.

Their gratitude isn’t merely for the tangible assistance. They’re thankful for the kindness of Haywood Christian Ministry that restores their hope and faith in God and life.

“Some people cry, and I sit here and cry with them,” Morand said.

John and Helen David, Thrift Store volunteers

John and Helen David fill a unique niche in the behind-the-scenes — or rather below-the scenes — operation of Haywood Christian Ministry’s Thrift Store. While shoppers bustle about overhead, the Davids toil away in their basement lair to make sure every item going on the floor is in tip-top, sellable condition.

“I test anything that comes in with a plug on it — kitchen appliances, clocks, icemakers, anything you can imagine. I put batteries in toys to see if they work.

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Helen David

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And if it's something really complicated, I'll take it home and test it because I have to read the instruction book, like some of the high-end coffee makers," Helen said.

If something needs repairing, it's sent over to David's side of the workbench.

"He's really handy and can fix almost anything," Helen said.

The couple is acutely aware of how their volunteer work fits into the larger puzzle of Haywood Christian Ministry.

"If we can send it up and they can sell it, all of that money goes to helping out the needy in every way that you can think of," Helen said.

Like so many of Haywood Christian Ministry's volunteers, the Davids are second-home owners — and they worry how the Thrift Store will manage without them over the winter. So as fall approached, they ramped up their volunteering to multiple days a week to try to get as many items processed as possible before their departure to Florida.

John is not only a fix-it man, but is also the electronics guru. Computers, DVD players and digital devices get queued up on John's work station for testing.

His side of the work bench is more cluttered



than Helen's — a tiny source of contention for the couple who's been married 51 years.

But John points out that he's at a disadvantage when it comes to clutter. Things needing repair end up stacked on his side. Plus, his side is home to the dedicated

charging bank, where gadgets and devices and electronics are rotated through to get juiced up before testing. And his side is also home to the cord repository.

"A lot of things come in without a charger or without a cord, so John has his boxes and boxes of cords," Helen said.

Once the Davids have given an item the all clear, it goes in the ready-to-sell pile. Thrift Store employees swing by the Davids' workstation regularly to price the ready items and haul them upstairs to the shopping floor.

For the Davids, volunteering in the Thrift Store operation is not only incredibly rewarding, but also helps keep them active.

"I was sitting on my porch in my rocking chair or watching TV, and I was so bored," Helen said of her pre-volunteer days.

She'd shopped in the Thrift Store upstairs before, but had no idea what kind of operation was going on below.

"When I came in and took the tour, I knew this was the place for me. Everyone is so nice," Helen said. "It's rewarding to do something for somebody else, and it is always exciting when really good stuff comes in and we get to send it upstairs."



Making every penny count

100 + 100. That's the message Victor Dingus drives home when talking to donors about the impact of their contribution to Haywood Christian Ministry.

"100% of your donation — every dime of every dollar — goes directly to clients or families, not overhead or salaries or administration," Dingus said. "And 100% stays in Haywood County to serve Haywood County people."

The promise that every penny of donations go directly to helping those in crisis is made possible thanks to Haywood Christian Ministry's Thrift Store, which is on track to make \$400,000 this year. That revenue stream funds the Ministry's operational overhead, from salaries to the light bill.

"That philosophy was consciously arrived at when the Thrift Store was formed," explained Dingus, vice-chair of the Haywood Christian Ministry Board. "That was the aim of the Thrift Store — to ensure that 100% of the donations we collect are used for the clients."

The mission of Haywood Christian Ministry to help those in crisis takes many forms: winter heating assistance, help paying rent and power bills, emergency dental care, food distribution and providing clothing and homewares.

That mission, along with knowing where their money goes, speaks to donors.

"They have seen what Haywood Christian Ministry has done for 50 years," said Elsie Norton, a Board member and volunteer.

Become a donor now

Make a donation to Haywood Christian Ministry online by visiting www.haywoodministry.org and clicking on donate at the bottom of the page.

Checks can be mailed to Haywood Christian Ministry; 150 Branner Avenue; Waynesville, NC 28786. Or contact 828-456-4838.



"It has been true to its mission, and living out the mission is what leads people to believe in Haywood Christian Ministry."

2020 was a record year for the Ministry, serving 26,000 individuals.

"That's probably triple what it was in 2019," said Dingus, citing the financial hardships many experienced due to COVID.

No two clients are cut from the same cloth, however.

"We have people walking in because life happens. It's people of all walks and all dimensions," Dingus said. "It's people who have lost their jobs, people who've had a traumatic emotional experience, people who've been impacted by the floods, people affected by a serious health issue."

Reflecting God's love for all people, Haywood Christian Ministry connects with every client as an individual.

"People come in the door with a crisis or need, but we look at the whole person — not just the food or heating assistance or medical attention they might need — but also the spiritual longing they might have," Dingus said. "We want to understand their life story. We have developed a loving capable Ministry to help give people a fair chance at a reasonable life in Haywood County."

Vetting the needs

Another critical factor in earning the trust of donors is an assurance that assistance goes to those who are most deserving.

"It is the credibility and trust of Haywood Christian Ministry to use their donation effectively," Dingus said. "That's why we interview clients to understand their story, whatever their loss or situation is."

Everyone has a unique set of life circumstances. Maybe they lost their job due to illness, were left by their husband, or have become the caretakers of grandchildren.

The intake process is primarily run by volunteers who interview clients to assess what kind of assistance they need and what



Volunteer Dawn Pidkaminy

they're eligible for. The process is a thorough one.

"It's not just handing stuff out," said Dawn Pidkaminy, who serves as a client intake volunteer. "You can tell who is genuine and who's feeding you a story. We want to make sure our clients are legitimate."

There's also a mechanism to safeguard against the possibility of double-dipping, thanks to a shared database called Charity Trackers. Clients are entered in the shared database — including what kind of assistance they got, how much and when — by nonprofits and social service agencies in the county.

"So we can keep track of who's going where, and if they're getting double help," Pidkaminy said.

The eligibility bar is much lower for food and clothing, but is more rigorous for those seeking financial help — be it one-time rent assistance, paying an electric bill, buying heating oil or getting dental care.

"They have to provide proof of income and expenses," Pidkaminy said.



Moved by the huge surge in need during the pandemic, Patty Davis delivers a drive-by donation check in April 2020.

As a crisis agency, some clients are turned down if they don't meet the criteria.

"If it's simply that they aren't managing their affairs, there's no crisis there. We may do something token, but the next time, until they prove they are going to step up and change their behavior, then

we aren't going to meet their needs," Dinges said. "It's tough, but it has to happen."

It's all part of ensuring that money coming in goes to the greatest need.

"We are looking at how we can help this person in crisis sustain themselves," Dinges said.



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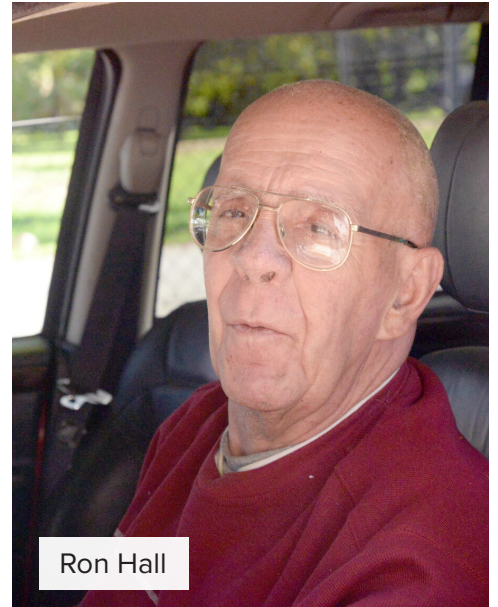
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In times of need

*Ministry provides a safety net
when there's nowhere else to turn*



Julie Spencer



Ron Hall

When Ron Hall took a bad fall three years ago, he was told he'd never walk again. Now, four back surgeries later, he's beaten the odds, thanks in part to Haywood Christian Ministry.

"They have been so good to me. They

look after me," said Hall, 80. "I don't have any family — it's just me and my cat Famous Amos. There is no one else. But Haywood Christian Ministry is my family. I would say an 'Amen' twice on that."

Other than doctors' appointments, Hall

ventures out of the house just once a week — to visit the drive-by Food Pantry at Haywood Christian Ministry. And how he looks forward to those trips.

The staff and volunteers greet him by name and with a smile. It's often the only personal connection he has all week.

"They know what my favorites are and set things aside for me," Hall said. "Haywood Christian Ministry is people to people. This is a true love."

Aside from keeping his spirits up, Hall relies on the weekly food for basic survival.

"My surgeries and rehab wiped me out, and I don't have any income," Hall said.

He couldn't manage going to the grocery store anyway. He shuffles along with baby steps, aided by a cane. When he returns home from the Food Pantry, getting his food inside one item at a time can be an all day undertaking.

"It's bit by bit," Hall said.

But he's never stopped counting his blessings.

"When I get up in the morning at 6



Joe Tuero

o'clock and take my medicine, I start thanking my Lord for the day, for what I have and for the friends who help me, and they're not many," Hall said.

Haywood Christian Ministry is also a lifeline for Julie Spencer, whose world came crashing down 14 years ago. Plagued by a chronic illness that causes crippling and debilitating pain, Spencer — college educated and once a manager of 120 employees — can no longer work or drive.

Thankfully, she's within walking distance of Haywood Christian Ministry's Food Pantry.

"I can't afford my medication, rent and food," said Spencer. "But since I can walk over here and stock my cabinets, I don't have to choose. Without Haywood Christian Ministry, many of us would be on the street."

For Brenda Woody, making ends meet would be difficult without food assistance from Haywood Christian Ministry.

"I live on Social Security and it don't go very far," Woody said. "Stuff just keeps going up."

Woody especially appreciates the fresh fruit



Roger and Brenda Woody

and vegetables that fill the food boxes.

"It helps her out a whole lot," said her son, Roger.

Clients driving through the food line routinely express their gratitude for Haywood Christian Ministry's assistance.

"They are very grateful and tell us what a blessing it is. They say 'I don't know what I'd do without you,'" said Joe Tuero, a volun-

teer with the Food Pantry and a member of Antioch Baptist Church.

After loading food into a vehicle, Tuero always calls out "You have a blessed day" before sending clients on their way.

"That's what the Ministry is all about," Tuero said. "God drives this truck, and we are just helping Him to accomplish the things He wants done."

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From vision to mission

The 50-year history of Haywood Christian Ministry

There is an official beginning to Haywood Christian Ministry, a time of charter and incorporation, when churches joined forces to aid those in need. But like most births, its story begins before emergence, in the hearts of people realizing a need.

Haywood County health nurse Rubye Bryson saw families living in poverty, with medical needs unmet. In the late 1960s, she took her concerns to First Methodist of Waynesville, which began a “Christian Ministry” program.

In Canton, storeowner Loranzo Smathers was allowing some folks to buy groceries on credit, knowing they could not pay. He told civic leaders there had to be a better way to aid the hungry.

Department of Social Services Director Edgar Israel saw needs his agency could not meet. He believed the first step in meeting those needs was to awaken Haywood citizens to their neighbors’ plight. He also realized there was a need to coordinate efforts.

In the winter of 1970, Israel went to Clifton Metcalf, editor of *The Mountaineer*, and invited him on a “poverty tour.” Metcalf still remembers that tour and the effect it had on him.

“We went back to an area that was very rural, and it was toward Crabtree,” Metcalf recalled. “We went up on the side of a hill to



Ina Moore laments the nearly empty joint food pantry serving Haywood County in March 1970.

a house that was little more than a log cabin. There was a very nice lady who lived there by herself.

“At some point I got up and went in the kitchen. I wanted to see what food was there. There was one thing, a box of oatmeal, and that was it. I’ve never forgotten that. I was just stunned by what I saw.”

The editor spent much of the next day writing a story about that tour. Published Feb. 27, 1970, and headlined “Need Crawls Out From Under the Snow,” the article graphically described some of the situations Metcalf had witnessed:

“Family A has six children, all young, one just 4 months old. They live in Waynesville; you can see their house by standing on the roof of nearly half the businesses on Main

Street. Until Wednesday, the house had no windows; it did have water but no electricity. Thursday morning the mercury fell to 10 degrees above zero. Two windows had been installed, but the water had been cut off....

“Family B has another problem — malnutrition. Mother B went to work one day this week but she became too sick to stay on the job and had to go home...She thought she was having a nervous breakdown; she was, in fact, starving.”

Soon after, a group of ministers and church members met at a home to brainstorm ways to address needs of the poor. On April 27, 1970, under the county ministerial association, delegates from 16 churches organized as Haywood Cooperative Christian Ministry, later shortened to Haywood Chris-



Ed Israel



Ruby Bryson



Clifton Metcalf



Loranzo Smathers

tian Ministry.

The group elected officers and established a call-in system to connect callers with resources. From October 1970 until May 1971, the newly formed Haywood Christian Ministry assisted at least 900 people.

Running on a shoestring

HCM survived that first winter on a budget of less than \$1,800, with all but \$110 (for postage and legal fees) going directly to those in need. At the end of its first year, 30 churches were supporting the Ministry. It would be 16 years before any HCM worker would receive a salary.

The early years were a series of small steps, including a few stumbles. HCM was a call-in system with volunteers staffing phones seven days a week. It was a clothes closet, operated out of Canton, followed by a food pantry a few years later. And it was a woman who offered her house for a mental health clinic.

One of the early goals of the association was to provide long-term solutions for those in poverty — assistance in managing finances and dealing with problems including drug abuse and domestic violence.

In August 1971, Margaret Hyatt Pilarski leased a frame house on Balsam Road to HCM for \$1 year to be used as a mental health clinic, keeping a small apartment on the second floor for herself. Before that time, those with mental health issues were traveling to Asheville or Western Carolina University for counseling. Pilarski's contribution evolved into a separate organization, Smoky Mountain Mental Health, which continues operation today as Appalachian Community Services.

The stumbles

In the next 10 years, the number of churches supporting HCM remained between 20 and 35. In 1977, funds were so low by December that the Board agreed to assist only the most needy cases. The next year it asked supporting churches to raise their contributions from 60 cents to \$1 per member.

In 1981, the agency faced a differ-



First officers of Haywood Cooperative Christian Ministry Mary Giles, Dan Fitch and Tracy Streater

ent challenge. That May, delegates from 20 supporting churches met to decide HCM's fate while facing a serious volunteer shortage.

Many workers were burning out; some were no longer physically able to work. Directors voted to keep HCM operating, but pleaded for help. They turned to Margie Noland, chief nurse for the Haywood County Health Department, who had served two terms as president in HCM's early years, to take

the role again.

HCM had survived a crisis, and its funding gradually improved, as did its volunteer base. In 1985, the directors voted to end the clothes closet, since the Salvation Army had established a thrift store that provided free clothing to people in need. HCM would revive its own clothes closet with later creation of a thrift store of its own.

Continues on page 23



Students at Tuscola High School with 500 pounds of food collected for the joint Salvation Army/Haywood Christian Ministry food pantry in 1976.

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Continued from page 21

Surging forward

In March of 1986, Haywood's Interagency Council, comprised of service organizations including DSS and Mountain Projects, asked HCM and local churches to prepare for federal budget cuts that would affect the needy. The next year, directors hired Ralph Storm as HCM's first full-time paid director. The decision, and Storm's work, would energize HCM.

Storm's first weeks were tough. Haywood commissioners provided him an office in the county's annex II — unfurnished. It took three weeks for Storm to receive office chairs, donated by Champion International, and an old desk from DSS.

But Storm hit the ground running, helping directors reorganize the agency, setting up free food distributions, meeting with churches, presenting new bylaws and budget, and coordinating volunteers. He put some volunteers to work helping him write grant applications. And he started looking for a permanent HCM home.

In November 1988, HCM opened its first facility to the public at 10 Woodland Drive in Waynesville. Eighteen volunteers had been trained as receptionists, interviewers, food pantry and clothing room workers.

By January, the facility was open five days a week. Fundraising was under way, including a "Hunger Walk for Christ" and grants from major foundations totaling at least \$18,000 that year. In 1992, a golf tournament was born, eventually growing to bring in \$100,000 annually.

In 1991, the ministry purchased a building at 2436 Asheville Highway, having outgrown its first location. It moved in the next May. Storm retired, and the agency hired its second director,



Edna Kelly in the Haywood Christian Ministry clothes closet located in Canton in January 1985.

Donna Snyder. A decade after almost folding, HCM pulled off a remarkable feat — thanks to a matching grant and local fundraising, the new building was debt-free by October of the same year.

In 1995, HCM offered a free medical clinic, led by Dr. Donald Teater. Initially the clinic operated one day a week, staffed by Teater and a rotation of nurses. Local dentists provided emergency care. In 1998, the medical clinic would branch off from HCM, becoming the Good Samaritan Clinic, now part of Blue Ridge Health.

In 1998, the agency hired John Berrong as an assistant director and opened a thrift store. By the next year, HCM had a roster of 102 volunteers and was supported by 110 churches.

Tragedy and loss

The year 1999 was traumatic for HCM. Director Donna Snyder died suddenly of an apparent heart attack, at age 49. Berrong became director with Kay Beaman taking the

role of assistant director.

Then the Department of Transportation informed the agency that the widening of U.S. Business 23 would take its building. While the loss of Snyder was painful, the loss of the building became a blessing — the agency purchased the old Magnolia Antique Mall on Branner Avenue in Waynesville, doubling its space and bringing its thrift store to the new location.

From its origins 50 years ago in the concerns of local leaders, Haywood Christian Ministry has matured into an agency serving an estimated 25,000+ clients each year.

Support of the original 30 churches has grown to more than 100 congregations. And like many well-developed ideas, HCM in turn has its own offspring that matured into an independent medical clinic and a mental health facility. It's a noble and thriving legacy for an idea conceived in a Canton grocery, a social services office, a newsroom and churches throughout Haywood.

The following is an excerpt from a column by The Mountaineer Editor Clifton Metcalf in February 1970, making the case for why an organization like Haywood Christian Ministry was desperately needed.

"Notice those little shacks you drive by on your way to work? The ones with the passel of skinny kids in the front and the curtains blowing out the windows?

In two to three scores of those houses where the poorest of Haywood's poor try to find shelter there is trouble these days. It comes in several ugly forms, but there is a single common denominator — NEED.

This is a story of real life, of poverty. Right now. In Haywood County. Most of us never see the face of need — not real, life-or-death need. We are only vaguely acquainted with the people who live face to face with it every day.

Mostly we don't notice. But need never misses a trick. It just sits there — a growling stomach, chilled feet, a fevered brow staring back as we roar past, on our shiny set of wheels."



50 years and counting

Tracing Haywood Christian Ministry's legacy



- **Feb. 27, 1970:** Mountaineer publishes “Need Crawls Out From Under the Snow” describing terrible living conditions for some of Haywood County’s poorest families.
- **March 1970:** The Haywood County Ministerial Association creates an emergency committee to help with immediate crisis support and long-term change.
- **April 1970:** Representatives from 16 churches organize the Haywood Cooperative Christian Ministry. The first directors are Tracy Streater, president; R. Stuart Roberson, health dept. director, vice president; Mary Gillis, secretary; Marvin Culbreth, treasurer; Joy Doyle, Charles Cable, Norma Long, Loranzo Smathers, Daniel Fitch, Jr.; Clifton Metcalf, The Mountaineer editor; and O.T. Tomes. Supporting churches are Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian and Presbyterian.
- **Sept. 1970:** A free clothes closet is opened on Main Street in Canton.
- **Oct.-May 1971:** The new ministry, with volunteers manning phone lines, helps at least 900 people with services including housing, fuel, food, electricity, medicine, furniture and plumbing. Waynesville First Methodist provides transportation assistance.
- **August 1971:** Margaret Hyatt Pilarski leases her two-frame house on Balsam Road to Haywood Cooperative Christian Ministry for \$1 per year for use as a mental health facility to be staffed by the Western Carolina Mental Health Center based in Cullowhee. This program will eventually spring off as Smoky Mountain Mental Health.
- **Sept. 1971:** The name is changed to Haywood Christian Ministry.
- **April 1972:** HCM puts out a call asking for more volunteers to staff phone requests. It has 26 couples committed to a 24-hour shift one day a month and needs at least 30.
- **Sept. 1973:** An article on the clothes closet reports that it receives \$15 per month from the HCM treasury to be used for emergency purchases, such as baby diapers. All other clothes are donated.
- **1974:** HCM and the Salvation Army establish a joint food pantry.
- **Dec. 1977:** Facing a critical shortage of funds, the HCM Board decides to assist only those with “the greatest evidence of need” until its treasury is replenished. Treasurer Mike Burkhart, in appealing for more church support, states “We are probably the only helping agency in the county with no overhead, and every cent contributed through area churches goes directly to assisting individuals in need.”
- **May 1978:** The clothes closet is relocated to a room at the Canton YMCA.
- **1981:** The agency faces a “do or die” moment in May when its directors, facing a serious volunteer shortage, must decide whether to fold. Instead, the board decides to continue and puts out an urgent request for volunteers.
- **1984:** United Way of Haywood County makes its most significant donation to HCM to date, \$5000 — up from \$700 in 1981.
- **1985:** HCM closes its clothes closet. The Salvation Army’s thrift store is also operating as a clothes closet.
- **March 1986:** The Interagency Council warns HCM to prepare for increasing needs in the community, thanks to looming federal budget cuts to services.
- **1987:** The Mountaineer reports only 32 county churches are providing support to HCM.
- **July 1988:** HCM hires its first executive director, Ralph Storm, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church.
- **Nov. 13, 1988:** HCM moves into its first facility, to include a food pantry, clothing room, reception and interview area. Eighteen volunteers are trained to staff it. It serves 223 clients in the first six weeks.
- **April 23, 1989:** A 4-mile “Hunger Walk for Christ” around Lake Junaluska is held to raise funds for HCM.
- **May 1989:** HCM reports it now has 62 supporting congregations.
- **Dec. 1991:** Having outgrown its first office, HCM puts a down payment on a building at 2436 Asheville Hwy., where it will move in June. It will pay off the debt and renovation cost on that building by the next October.
- **1992:** The annual golf tournament is born.
- **May 4, 1995:** HCM opens its first medical clinic, spearheaded by Dr. Donald Teater and supported by First Baptist and First Methodist churches of Waynesville.
- **1998:** The medical clinic spins off to become the Good Samaritan Clinic, opening in February 1999. HCM’s first thrift store is opened.
- **2000:** A road widening project claims HCM’s facility. It purchases new property at the former Magnolia Antique Mall at 150 Branner Ave. in Waynesville, doubling its space, also relocating the thrift store there.
- **2016:** HCM expands by purchasing the house next door for administration and client services, freeing up more space for the food pantry and thrift store operations.
- **2017:** The agency that operated on a budget of less than \$1,800 its first year is now managing a more than \$1 million annual budget.
- **2020:** Needs soar due to the pandemic, and HCM provides services to a record 26,000 clients.

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FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN HAYWOOD COUNTY

From young single mothers to seniors on fixed incomes, hundreds of needy families in Haywood County rely on Haywood Christian Ministry's Food Pantry to keep food on the table.

The food distribution program is one of the core outreach services provided by Haywood Christian Ministry, and it takes a Herculean effort to keep the food boxes flowing every week. Donated and discounted food is mustered from multiple sources across the region, and then sorted and boxed for distribution to clients every week.

The enormity of pulling off the operation day in and day out, week after week, is a daunting job — one that requires a certain leap of faith.

"There are times we wonder, 'Are we going to make it?'" said Dave Bryan, manager of the Food Pantry. "But then a church will come in with two pick-up loads, or somebody will call and say, 'I have two pallets of some food. Can you use it?' I have seen miracle after miracle."

When Bryan became manager of the Food Pantry several years ago, food distribution was provided to clients only once every two months. He was struck by the volume of food sitting on shelves.

"When I walked in and saw hundreds of



Dave Bryan, manager of the food pantry, constantly shuffles thousands of pounds of food.

cans of food, I asked, 'Is this a food museum?' It wasn't doing people any good just sitting," he recalled. "I said 'People eat every day, so let's get this stuff out to the people.' The first day food comes in should be the first day the food goes out."

That's where the leap of faith came in, and God delivered.

"When we started getting more food out, we started getting more food in. It was like the loaves and fishes story in the Bible," Bryan said.

Bryan worked in food services for most of his career. After retiring from the restaurant industry, he worked for the largest food bank in Sevierville, Tennessee. After moving to Haywood County in 2015, he began volunteering with the Haywood Christian Ministry in furniture pick-up. But it did not take him long to find his way to his first love.

"My main interest has always been feeding people whether in the restaurant

Continues on page 29



Melissa Southerland and Dave Bryan loading food boxes into a client's vehicle.

What's in a food box?

Weekly food boxes provided by Haywood Christian Ministry consist of around a dozen canned goods; dry items like pasta, rice, oatmeal, and peanut butter; five to ten meats; dairy products; a huge amount of vegetables; and bread.

A single family will leave with multiple boxes weighing 120 to 150 pounds in all. Larger families receive more food boxes.



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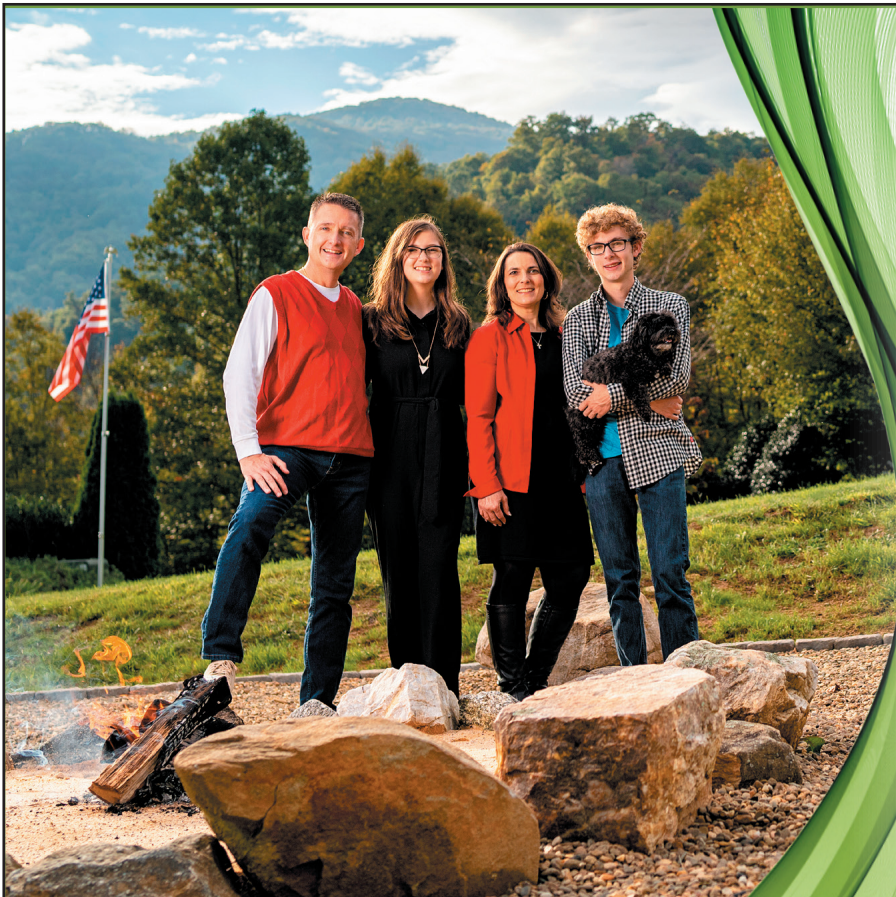


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business or in the benevolence business,” Bryan said.

Stepping up to the plate

The importance of Haywood Christian Ministry’s Food Pantry came into laser focus in 2020, when the line of vehicles to pick up food boxes stretched around the block during the height of the pandemic.

“The pandemic had an enormous effect on us,” Bryan said. “We ballooned to over 975 clients per week. We were feeding thousands and thousands of people.” Keeping pace with the need took a well-oiled machine.

“It really changed up how many food boxes we needed to stay ahead on. In the old days, if you were 75 boxes ahead you were good, but the pandemic forced our staff to stay 400 boxes ahead,” Bryan said.

The dire need came at a time when HCM lost most of its food pantry volunteers.

“Since most of our volunteers were older folks, our Board did not want to risk any of these folk’s health,” Bryan said.

Food pantry partners

The largest source of food for Haywood Christian Ministry is MANNA Food Bank. HCM makes runs to Asheville at least three times a week to pick up food directly, saving on the delivery costs.

“Sometimes, it can be more than three times,” Bryan said. “One of our sources may call and say they have two pallets of pork ribs, which is an amazing amount of meat. Yes, we will send a truck right away for that.”

Locally, Walmart, Publix and Food Lion make weekly donations, with Dollar General slated to come on board, as well.

Churches — both large and small — make a tremendous commitment to donating to the Food Pantry. Connections extended beyond the region, too, including a food delivery from the Mormon Bishops Storehouse in Knoxville every couple of months.

The Haywood Christian Ministry is a mighty warrior in the war on hunger in our county. The public is invited to take a tour of its impressive operation at 150 Branner Ave, Waynesville. Please call the Ministry at 828-456-4838 to set an appointment.



K.T. of KT’s Orchard and Apiary regularly delivers donations of fresh berries to the food pantry.



Haywood Christian Ministry food pantry staff and volunteers Royce Spurling, Bill Faircloth, Dave Bryan, Melissa Southerland and Margaret Poore.

GETTING IN GEAR

IT'S A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE TO PROVIDE CHRISTMAS BIKES FOR KIDS



Phil Loyer & Bob Burnett

The sound of whirring gears and the smell of grease wafted through the open door of an old stone cellar beneath Haywood Christian Ministry, where Phil Loyer was hunched over a bike, eyes fixated on the chain as he gave the tire a spin.

Loyer seemed happy as a pig in slop in the cramped underground workshop packed cheek to jowl with parts, tools and bikes — hanging from the ceiling, stacked in corners, leaning against walls, mounted on repair stands — with nary an inch to spare.

"I've always been a tinkerer," said Loyer, a screwdriver in one hand and rag in the other. "I was always taking my bike apart even though it didn't need fixing. I just liked taking it apart."

Loyer has found the perfect calling to satisfy his tinkering while doubling as one of Santa's elves in the bike workshop of Haywood Christian Ministry.

A team of four volunteers toil year round fixing and repairing bikes that will brighten Christmas for nearly 200 needy children this year. A bike is a classic part of childhood, yet for many kids in Haywood County, they've

never ridden a bike, let alone had one of their own.

"Every kid deserves to have a bike in their lives, but a lot of kids can't. A bike is a luxury their family can't afford," said Kent Stuart, one of the bike ministry volunteers.

Like Loyer, Stewart loves bikes and loves tinkering. He also made a conscious decision to dedicate the rest of his life to volunteering.

"I'm spending my retirement volunteering," Stewart said. "This also scratches my itch because it's something I like to do. So this was a perfect marriage."

The four volunteers — Bob Burnett, Phil Loyer, John Bryan and Kent Stewart — who keep the bike ministry humming dedicate three mornings a week to the operation, processing the stream of incoming bikes, getting them in tip-top shape and then squirreling them away in storage until Christmas.

Well-oiled operation

For Bob Burnett, keeping track of all the inventory is one of the best parts of volunteering for the bike ministry.

"I enjoy keeping records," Burnett said,

flipping through his binder of color-coded spreadsheets.

An off-site storage pod is chock full of 70 bikes ready to give out, and won't be opened up until Christmas. But Burnett's spreadsheets will help them match the bikes to kids in advance.

When each bike comes in, Burnett assigns it an inventory number and tracks it through the system — from "awaiting repairs" to "ready to give away."

Bikes donated by Walmart are the lifeblood of the operation.

"Walmart is a big benefactor," Burnett said.

Bikes that have been returned by customers, were improperly assembled or have some sort of damage are picked up by Haywood Christian Ministry. The serial numbers are then scratched off — one of the requirements for the donated Walmart bikes — before making needed repairs and touch ups.

"Walmart has been incredibly generous," Stewart said.

The Waynesville Police Department has

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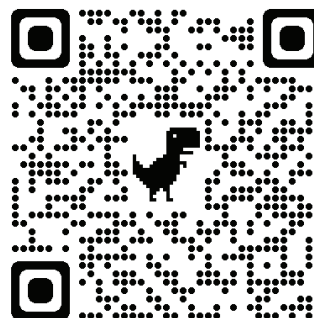
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**LANDEN
STEVENSON**

Continued from page 30

also begun sending bikes HCM's way, including impounded bikes, abandoned bikes and stolen bikes when their owners can't be identified.

Now accepting bikes

Donated bikes also come in from the general public, of course. As word of Haywood Christian Ministry's bike program has spread, the volume of bikes coming through the doors has grown. As the crew toiled and tinkered at their work stations one morning in September, a voice called through the open door.

"I've got a couple bicycles to donate," a man said. He and his wife just didn't ride them anymore, and after seeing an article in The Mountainer about the bike ministry, they decided to put them to good use.

Burnett ducked out through the low door jam and was back a minute later, negotiating the first of two bikes down the stairs. Where to put them was another matter entirely, but they never turn down a bike.

"We have more demand than we have bikes. If you are out there in the community and you have a bike you no longer need or no longer ride, we'd love to have them," Stewart said.

As the operation has grown, the volunteers realized their workshop needed an upgrade to handle the volume, as well. They took time earlier this year to turn the old cellar into a bonafide bike workshop.

They jettisoned clutter and created four workstations with proper lighting. Their



Bicycle Ministry volunteers Bob Burnett, Phil Loyer, John Bryan and Kent Stewart.

workshop upgrades got a boost from Bicycle Haywood, a local bike advocacy group, which donated tools, work stands and other accessories. Liberty Bicycles of Asheville also donated specialty bike tools, a bike work stand and a pump.

Meanwhile, the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club provided a \$1,000 grant to purchase helmets, so when a bike is given away, there is a helmet to go along with it. The Safe Routes to School partnership also has donated bike helmets this year.

Full circle

Thanks to the outpouring of community support and the dedicated volunteers, Haywood Christian Ministry provides bikes for

adults in need, as well. For clients trying to get back on their feet, a bike can be a vital stepping stone.

"We now have bikes for people who can't drive and need a bike to get to their job," Burnett said. "We have the opportunity to be able to help people out of their desperation."

Clients rebuilding their lives through the Haywood Pathways Center occasionally need bikes, also, and Pathways knows just who to call.

"When they need a bike down there, we have plenty of inventory to help," Burnett said.

A few adult bikes donated by the community are sold in the Thrift Store to generate money to buy parts and tools to sustain the bike operation.

"Just about every bike that comes through needs something," Burnett said.

Last year, the bike team spent \$1,500 out of their own pockets to buy the parts and supplies for the children's Christmas bikes. But now, a donated adult bike that's sold in the thrift store is ultimately an investment in the bikes for kids.

"That cash comes back for us to be able to buy parts, so the circle is beginning to work," Burnett said.

To donate a bike, call Haywood Christian Ministry at 828-456-4838 or bring it by the bike workshop Monday, Wednesday or Friday morning, located at 124 Branner Ave., Waynesville.



A storage room in the basement workshop loaded with future Christmas cheer for well-deserving children and teenagers.

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Welcome to our Thrift Store, *a cornerstone of Haywood Christian Ministry*

Betty Francis will never forget the first day she came to work as the manager for Haywood Christian Ministry's Thrift Store five years ago.

"The sun was shining, and the birds were singing, and I looked up and said, 'God this is where I am supposed to be,'" Francis recalled. "I felt it in my heart."

The Thrift Store is the lifeblood of Haywood Christian Ministry's outreach. It provides a critical source of revenue to fund the charitable, faith-based mission of providing assistance to those in poverty or crisis.

"It is very motivating to know that your work efforts go toward helping others," Francis said.

The Thrift Store generates around \$400,000 a year, which covers all the administrative costs, salaries and overhead. That in turn means 100% of every dollar that comes to the Ministry through donations and fundraising goes directly to helping clients.

The better the Thrift Store does, the more help the Ministry can provide. That higher calling drives Francis and her staff every day.

"When I first started here, our sales goal was \$600-\$700 per day. I just thought that was just not good enough. Now I tell the staff, 'Let's shoot for \$1,000 per day,'" said Francis.

Francis first discovered the Thrift Store as a shopper herself and was instantly taken with it.

"I fell in love with this place," said Francis, who worked in retail management at Belks for 23 years before retiring, only to be called back to work again.

Unfortunately, the Thrift Store was closed for six months during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Without the critical revenue source, the Ministry suffered from financial strain at a time its services were needed more than ever. Despite the funding blow, the Ministry's commitment to the community never faltered during the trying



Betty Francis

times.

Meanwhile, Francis was thrilled when the Thrift Store reopened last September.

"Our customers were happy because shopping here is like therapy for them," she said.

Outreach hub

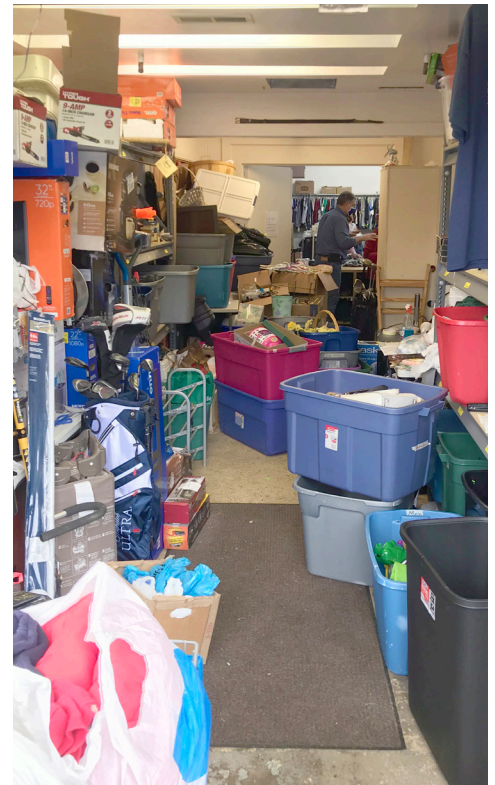
The Thrift Store is so much more than a funding source for Haywood Christian Ministry's operations, however. It's also a first point of contact for many of the clients it serves.

Francis recalled a moving experience last winter as she and a co-worker were preparing to open the store for the day.

"It was a cold and icy morning. I looked out the front window and saw a young lady standing there without any shoes on," Francis recalled. "I went outside and asked her how she was doing, and she said that she was doing okay but she was homeless. I invited her into the store where it was warm."

Francis and her co-worker decided to buy her shoes and a coat on the spot, but before they helped her pick something out, then-ex-

Continues on page 36



A never-ending stream of donations from the public keep the Thrift Store in business.

Continued from page 35

ecutive director Steve Nowakowski happened to walk through.

"Steve told me to send her across the street to our Ministry's office and we would get her processed in the system and get her some clothes. We help people here, and this is what I like about this place," Francis said.

Currently there are five volunteers in the retail store, but there's a big need for more. Volunteers can help out for as little as two hours per week. The store has a weekly covered dish meal for its volunteers, providing a sense of camaraderie and unity among the helpers.

"Working here is therapy for our sweet volunteers," Francis said.

Donations are accepted anytime during regular hours. Your donations to the Thrift Store support the Ministry's work.



Shirley Massey prepares clothing to go out on the floor of the thrift store.

Let's go thrifting!

On the hunt for an end table or exercise equipment? Need to round out your guest linens or kitchen gadgets? Got a hankering to refresh your home decor without breaking the bank?

If you love the thrill of the hunt, look no further than Haywood Christian Ministry's Thrift Store for top-shelf finds at bargain basement prices.

"I think the quality of the items in our store is what makes us special," said Betty Francis, manager of the HCM Thrift Store. "There are probably only a couple of thrift stores in our area that maintain the quality of items that we do."

The constant churn of donated items flowing through the store are sorted, inspected and priced before heading out to the display floor. Household wares are some of the most popular, whether it's full sets of beautiful china, single plates for around \$1.50 each, or art work ranging from pottery to paintings.

Furniture is another big seller, offering some of the biggest savings compared to buying new.

"We don't overprice it," Francis said. "If a furniture item has not sold in a week, I will take the price down each week

until it sells."

The Thrift Store also has a staggering inventory of books.

"Our book room is unreal," Francis said. "We have a special volunteer, Andy Bartleson, who does a great job. He is devoted to our books."

While donated items make up the bulk of the Thrift Store merchandise, there's a steady inventory of brand-new items, as well.

"I get brand-new items from area stores, but I don't sell them at a new price. I take 75% off those items," Francis said.

Every Tuesday is "Super Tuesday," with an additional 25% off items purchased that day.

The clothing selection runs the gamut from evening gowns to work-out wear.

"We get name-brands on shirts, pants and shoes," Francis said. "Our men's department is fantastic, and of course, lady's wear is always fantastic."

The well-organized store even has arts and crafts supplies and home office supplies.

The Haywood Christian Ministry Thrift Store is located at 150 Branner Avenue in Waynesville. Hours are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday. 828-452-2909. Happy browsing!



Assistant Thrift Store Manager Rita Bolin



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When Haywood Christian Ministry began in 1970, its founders were drawn together by a simple but powerful corporate prayer.

*Take our hands...work with them.
Take our lips...speak through them.
Take our minds...think through them.
Take our hearts...set them on fire.*

This mission has remained the foundation of Haywood Christian Ministry for 50 years and continues to inspire the dedicated volunteers and donors who are called by God to help others.

God's presence in the work of Haywood Christian Ministry has been witnessed through miracles delivered during times of need as the organization has grown into its mission during its five decades of service.

"We might be running low on food, and here comes a truck with 20,000 pounds of food," said Bill Faircloth, a long-time volunteer with the food pantry. "That is God answering prayers. When you need stuff, all of a sudden it shows up. It's just amazing how it happens over and over again. God is good."

Randy Wood, a "hands-on" board member who serves as the organization's handyman, feels blessed to be part of an organization that's carrying out God's work.

"I'm luckier than most of the other board members because I get to go down there and fix the commodes or just about any other thing that breaks. I get to be there to see the miracles take place every day," Wood said.

Wood recounted a story from the past year when he'd been called in to fix something

and encountered an elderly man in dire need of fuel oil. Despite the cold weather, it was technically spring according to the calendar, and thus past the cut-off date for heating assistance.

Fearing the man would freeze to death in his home, HCM staff bought him heating oil anyway — even though their pool of winter heating funds were already tapped out for the year.

As Wood was finishing up his repairs that day, he heard a loud scream from another room. It was the assistant director, who just opened an envelope with a donation check for the exact same amount as the heating oil they'd just purchased.

"God always provides when we are short of funds. He always has," said Dot Wood, a long-time supporter and volunteer for HCM.

'The Lord will provide'

For Ellen Russell, who has volunteered for Haywood Christian Ministry for more than two decades, helping those in need gives her life purpose during her retirement years. She felt called to serve in part because of her own upbringing living in poverty as the child of a single mother.

"The things that our clients have to deal with daily are the very things that I dealt with growing up. I get it," she said. "My mother's and grandmother's Christian faith were the crux of our hope. My mother said continuously, 'The Lord will provide. The Lord will provide.'"

Today, her mother's words live through her, and she passes that same message along to clients.

"I let the clients know that God is our main re-



Dot and Randy Wood

source, and there are good people in the world who will help them, which is what they witness firsthand with the ministry," said Russell.

When Russell connects with a client, she counsels them on the power of prayer to comfort them and give them strength through trying times.

"I tell them, 'Prayer doesn't have to be in big, fancy words. You can talk to the Lord 24/7, just say, 'Help me, help me! I am hanging on by my toenails, Lord,'" Russell said. "God knows everything that is going through your mind and is listening."

Haywood Christian Ministry welcomes anyone to tour their operation and see for themselves how God could work through your hands, speak through your lips, think through your mind, but most importantly, set your heart on fire.

HCM is located at 155 Branner Ave and their phone number is 828-456-4838.



Ellen Russell



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Answering the call to serve

The same mission that called to the founders of Haywood Christian Ministry 50 years ago continues to drive and inspire its leaders today.

"I just couldn't stand the thought of people not eating," said Kevin Murphy, chairman of the Haywood Christian Ministry Board of Directors. "That's the thing that attracted me to start helping here, and it just snowballed."

Snowballed is an apt word to describe Murphy's involvement in the Ministry over the past dozen years. When he retired to Haywood County in the 2000s, he envisioned his golden years filled with leisurely days on the golf course and walking the dogs. But he was soon recruited into volunteerism.

"A fellow church member at First Methodist came up and said 'What are you doing?' I said 'I'm playing golf and playing tennis.' He said 'That's going to change. You aren't doing that anymore. I need someone to deliver Meals on Wheels,'" Murphy recalled.

He was quickly hooked on the rewards of giving back. So when the same church member approached him again about volunteering for Haywood Christian Ministry's Food Pantry, he jumped in feet first.

"I started that week and never looked back," Murphy said.

It's clear that God led him to Haywood Christian Ministry for a reason. In short order, he was asked to join the Board of Directors and soon found himself serving as chairman for three years from 2010-2013.

He then returned to volunteering, but was once again recruited to the Board in 2020, and once again, he ended up chairman. Ironically, both times he joined the Board it was supposed to be for "only a year," simply filling out the remaining term of a vacated seat. But both times, it turned into much more.

"If that's the plan, that's the plan. I'm



not going to argue with the plan," Murphy said.

Like so many who have been called to serve the needy through Haywood Christian Ministry, Murphy rolled up his sleeves and went all in — most recently by filling in as a de facto executive director this year.

Doing the most good with every dime

As twice-chairman of Haywood Christian Ministry, Murphy has had a front-row seat to its impact as a safety net within the community.

"For so many of our clients, this is their last hope. We are a true crisis ministry," Murphy said.

To do the most good, Haywood Christian Ministry must stretch every dollar it gets. It's also adopted a financial model that ensures every dollar that's donated to the ministry goes directly to help clients — not to overhead.

"If you give us \$10,000, none of that money will go to the electric bill or the dumpster bill. People don't want a nickel of their dime going to anyone's salary," Murphy said.

That model is made possible through the Ministry's Thrift Store operation. The Thrift

Store generates around \$400,000 a year to cover all the administrative costs, salaries and overhead.

"So every other dime that comes into this Ministry goes directly to serving people," Murphy said. "Plus, every dime stays local. Everyone we help are Haywood County residents."

Part and parcel to that is ensuring that assistance goes to those in greatest need. Clients seeking help must go through an intake process to determine eligibility.

"We budget it out to the people who are really desperate. They have to really need it," Murphy said.

To safeguard against clients double-dipping, Haywood Christian Ministry participates in a system called Charity Tracker. It's a shared database used by nonprofits and charities to document who's gotten assistance — including when, what type and how much. The Ministry can cross-reference clients in the database to ensure people aren't charity shopping.

"We want to help people, but we don't want people to take advantage of the system," Murphy said.

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Many hands

While Haywood Christian Ministry was between executive directors this year, Murphy stepped in to keep the wheels on

the bus by acting in de facto role and handling daily logistics. But he shunned any credit, instead pointing to the Ministry's staff and volunteers, as well as the other Board members who've been pinching hitting, as well.



Kevin Murphy helps food pantry client Brenda Woody into her car as if she were his own mother.

"Our Board has been very supportive during the interim period," Murphy said.

Most notably, Murphy credits Haywood County's churches for making the work of Haywood Christian Ministry possible. Volunteers who work with the Ministry keep their home churches apprised of the good work that's being done, and encourage the church to support the mission.

"They're huge advocates," Murphy said. "They go to their missions committee and say 'We've got to increase the amount of money we're sending to the Haywood Christian Ministry.'"

Indeed, churches pulling together to fill a need has been the modus operandi for Haywood Christian Ministry for 50 years now.

"It was started 50 years ago by the churches that saw the need. People were falling through the cracks," Murphy said. It's important not to forget what times were like without Haywood Christian Ministry to serve as a lifeline for those in crisis.

"The mission is just as important, if not more so, today," Murphy said.

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Driving the mission

Annual golf tournament provides critical support for Haywood Christian Ministry

The work of Haywood Christian Ministry would not be possible without the generosity of its donors, big and small, throughout the year.

But one fundraising campaign stands above the rest: the long-held tradition of Haywood Christian Ministry's annual golf tournament. It brings in more than \$100,000, providing critical funding for the crisis ministry to serve clients in need.

"This is a huge event for support of the Ministry," said Barney Neal, co-chair of the golf tournament committee. "The people of Haywood County are so giving and supportive of charitable organizations, and we are blessed at Haywood Christian Ministry by the outpouring of community support we have."

The golf tournament's humble beginnings date back to 1992 when a small group of golfers decided to combine their passion for the Ministry's mission with their favorite pastime.

"It was very local, with very few players and only made \$4,000," recalled John Berrong, a long-time supporter of the ministry. The tournament grew steadily the first few years as the golfers recruited fellow players to the cause. Then came a turning point in the tournament's evolution that can only be described as a God moment.

Two men from Waynesville — both golfers — had a serendipitous meeting while on a cruise, Berrong recounted. One of the men, Morris Thompson, was a volunteer with Haywood Christian Ministry and shared the message of the Ministry's good work with the other man, Allen Braswell.

Upon returning to Waynesville, Braswell joined forces with Thompson in serving as an emissary for Haywood Christian Ministry. They "talked up" the Ministry during a men's Bible study held at Clyde's



Golfers Rick and Dorris Schlapkohl and Roxanne and Jerry McCarthy partake in the annual tournament to support Haywood Christian Ministry's work.

restaurant on Wednesday mornings. And some of those were golfers, as well.

"The Lord did an amazing work," Berrong said. "These were men with means who lived here part-time and they said, 'Let's take this thing to another level.' As the saying goes, 'Golfers know golfers.' So they kind of leaned on their buddies to encourage them to play in the tournament."

Those connections paid off, quite literally, with that year's golf tournament bringing in \$50,000 — and the tradition of writing big checks in conjunction with the tournament was born.

"The tournament went from raising a few thousands dollars to \$100,000 over a period of 10 years," said Victor Dingus, vice-chair of the Haywood Christian Ministry board of directors.

The tournament grew so much, that it is now played on two courses to accommodate the number of golfers. Meanwhile, the Ministry began holding an annual gala in conjunction with the tournament.

"The gala is a time to celebrate what we do. It's an opportunity to have fun in the mountains, promote the Ministry, recog-

nize our contributors and tell Ministry stories," Dingus said.

The golf tournament's long-standing success funds numerous client services, including winter heating, utility, food, clothing, dental care, prescriptions and rental assistance.

The Ministry's financial reliance on the tournament posed a quandary in 2020, however, when the tournament and gala were canceled due to COVID. The need for assistance during the pandemic was greater than ever, and the ministry couldn't do without the contributions raised through the tournament.

Thanks to God, donors came through anyway — contributing \$105,000 through a virtual campaign in lieu of what would have been the 28th annual tournament.

One reason donors are so willing to step up is Haywood Christian Ministry's pledge that 100% of donor contributions go directly to help clients, with none going to operational overhead or salaries.

"I don't know of any other ministry that can say 100% of the dollars donated go to client services," Neal said.

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