



New Paths to New Horizons

PROGRESS

FEBRUARY 2021

A publication of THE EXPOSITOR

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Edd Rogers Valley Ford continues to provide quality and professional service

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

Edd Rogers Valley Ford, which was opened in 1987 by Eddie Rogers and has been managed by his son, Shane, since 2008, found themselves in a unique position when COVID-19 began to reach Tennessee and changes and restrictions began being imposed by the state's governor, in March 2020.

"We were fortunate in that our business was considered essential by the state of Tennessee in both sales as well as the parts and service portions of the business," Shane Rogers said. "As a result, we continued normal operations plus added our optional home delivery service."

But, just because they were able to operate "business as usual," Shane Rogers and his team still had hurdles to overcome this past year.

"Our main concern was that the shutdown would create a large loss in consumer income levels and, thereby, reducing purchases of unnecessary big-ticket items such as vehicles," he said.

While it seemed to many the sale of vehicles should not be a major concern during a global pandemic, those sales were how Rogers pays the employees at Edd Rogers Valley Ford and how he, and they, provide for their families.

Rogers said not only did job insecurities around the community result in a worry about customers having the means to purchase vehicles, but shutdowns across the country, not just the state, were causing concerns for the Sparta dealership.

"Our biggest struggle to deal with has been a large shortage in vehicle inventory after plants shut down for two months early on in the pandemic," he explained. "This not only limited our new vehicle inventory, it began to, and continues to, have a profound effect on our used vehicle pricing and inventory."

Despite the struggles and overwhelming concerns for the 34-year-old family business, Shane Rogers knows they were

some of the "lucky" ones.

"Our dealership was able to continue its daily operation with our complete staff and were able to continue to serve our community in both service and sales during this difficult time," he said.

To ensure that both staff and customers stayed safe, and therefore the dealership was able to stay open, Edd Rogers Valley Ford implemented many of the now-common safety protocols that COVID-19 has brought to the forefront of everyone's minds:

- Set up hand sanitizing stations throughout the dealership
- Use face masks if requested by customers
- Maintain social distancing suggestions of 6 feet
- Use seat covers and steering wheel covers in customers' vehicles while in the shop
- Encourage staff to wash hands regularly

"Since the duration and continued impact of the pandemic is unknown, we will continue these precautions as standard operating guidelines," Rogers said about



the changes and then added that the most difficult of the changes, by far, has been social distancing. "This is a people business, and people in our business like to interact with customers, even if it is just a simple as a handshake in greeting or to show appreciation for their business."

"We now have a greater consideration of people's personal space and security," he continued. "Before the pandemic, our normal sales approach was for a sales associate to accompany the customer on their test drive, and that has now become an option for the customer. In addition, we now offer online services in the consumer buying process, including virtual test drives, start-to-finish paperwork, and home delivery."

Despite the difficulties of the past year,

despite the changes to not only operating procedures but the way they interact with customers, despite the ever-changing consumer environment, Shane Rogers is confident that Edd Rogers Valley Ford will continue to be a place the people of White County, and surrounding areas, can count on to meet their vehicle needs safely and thoughtfully.

"There will always be a need for new and used vehicle sales, as well as dealership parts and service centers," he said. "The Rogers family has been in the automotive business since the late 1950s, and, as our family continues to grow with new generations, the tradition of the Rogers family in the automotive sales and service industry will continue for many, many years to come."



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KURT DRONEBARGER. Director of schools

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

White County schools re-invent the educational process amid pandemic

abundance of caution," he said. "The graduation ceremony took place with major restrictions. Some sports seasons were canceled, along with any other school-sponsored events in which large numbers of people might gather in one place. Health safety was, and is, the driving force behind all decisions during the coronavirus pandemic."

When the spring semester ended, the White County school board and administration went into action in an attempt to prepare for an ever-changing environment and prepare for an unpredictable future. Teachers trained on new technology as they prepared to teach students remotely. Administrators worked on implementing a remote learning model. The district prepared to transport, teach, and feed students using a hybrid model of in-person and at-home learning.

"By mid-summer, it was apparent that in-person learning would not take place as usual," Dronebarger said of the then-upcoming 2021 fall semester. "The goal was always to go to school on the normal schedule. However, it was obvious that this was not going to be a normal year."

Ultimately, White County's administrative team chose to open the school year in a hybrid approach for multiple reasons.

"First, there would be a lot of new technological changes this year, and we wanted to allow teachers, students, and families the opportunity to adjust. Secondly, we needed to practice this hybrid model so, in the event that we needed to shift, all stakeholders would know what to do," Dronebarger said, listing some of the deciding factors in choosing the hybrid model for beginning the school year. "Finally, the hybrid model allowed us to monitor the coronavirus in our community for a few weeks of school before we attempted to bring all of the students into the buildings."

After three weeks of using the hybrid model, White County schools made the decision that it was time to return to a full five-day week of in-person learning for the majority of students. With safety protocols that included mask-wearing for anyone inside the building, extensive handwashing and sanitizing, social distancing as much as possible, and tracking those exposed

to the virus, students returned to the classrooms for a full week of learning immediately following the Labor Day holiday.

"Our academic data this year has solidified our opinion that in-person learning is the best education we can provide," Dronebarger said. "Although online learning does work for some families, the vast majority of our students perform best when they are at school with their peers. For that reason, the school district had to make decisions that would allow for the majority of students to safely be in the buildings at the same time. Thus, a mask mandate was put into place, and new health protocols (such as quarantine and isolation practices) were observed. Overall, this model has proved to be successful as White County schools have remained open, in-person, all year long, while other districts in the state never opened in-person."

While in-person learning is the goal, Dronebarger said many of the tools used to get back to this point will likely follow schools into the future.

"I think that the online tools we have used are here to stay," he said. "We have found that we can provide quality education for kids at home if necessary, and that reduces learning loss. I think that video conferencing is here to stay. We save time, energy, and money by collaborating online. I also think that better communication will continue. Never before have parents been in such good communication with schools and teachers. It is my hope that this will continue to be the case."

As for what has brought White County schools and students confidently into the new year and drives them forward toward a hopeful return to normal, Dronebarger can't give enough credit to the district's employees.

"Our employees are awesome," he said. "We give them impossible tasks, short timelines, and insufficient funding, and they work miracles for kids every day. From cooks and custodians to principals and supervisors, and everyone in between, I am amazed at the way our team has adapted, overcome, and persevered."

"I have also been inspired by our incredible students," he added. "They have faced perhaps the most challenging year in the history of public education and have handled it all in stride. No one knows what the future holds for these kids, but after this school year, I know that they can handle anything."

As for long term, what he hopes that we see when we look back at that this year is that we find kindness.

"Looking back 10 years from now, I think I would say, the pandemic affected everyone on earth in some form or fashion," he said. "For some, it was a mild nuisance, while for others, it brought devastating loss. It was a time of inspiration as many went above and beyond to help their fellow man. Yet, at the same time, it was an era of heartbreak as some people navigated the crisis without any concern or compassion for others. I learned a lot about people during the pandemic, both good and bad. I can only hope that history will reflect kindly of my words and deeds."



Central Church of Christ uses latest technology to provide access to worship services

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

Attending worship services, gathering together to fellowship with community members who share similar religious views, and practicing religion in a group setting are intricate parts on many American's lives, and an aggressive virus threatened that way of life over the past year as churches worked to find ways to still provide for the spiritual and mental health of their members, and the community at large, without having large, indoor gatherings.

The leadership at Central Church of Christ became very creative and found unique ways to continue to support the Sparta and White County community.

"The elders of Central were trying to think of ways to safely offer a gathering service yet limit the spread of the virus," the church's minister, Christopher Wiles, said. "After studies we read in 2019 (pre-pandemic) on the negative effects of social isolation, we set it as a priority to offer a way to safely gather from the car in the parking lot so that we could continue to be God's family. Yet, we didn't expect this method of gathering to last so long."

Central Church of Christ began offering an outdoor drive-in worship service the first Sunday of April 2020 after a few weeks of online-only services in March. Members and non-members alike were encouraged to come to church and worship together from the safety of their cars. Wiles and his team set up sound equipment and even found a way to broadcast the sermon to a designated radio station should a member wish to remain in their car with the windows closed. They worked out the best way to arrange the cars on Sundays and ultimately settled on a theater-style parking plan, with Wiles standing on the roof of the church so that he could be seen by every participant in their new "drive-in" church services.

"We've already been livestreaming for two years now on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and our website well before the pandemic arose," Wiles explained. "Transitioning the livestream function to outdoor worship experience was only a small challenge. We have continued to only

have a drive-in worship experience ever since to follow our mission of showing God's love, telling God's story, and being God's family."

Since Central Church of Christ already had livestream services in place before Gov. Bill Lee announced a temporary ban on indoor gatherings in March 2020, they were in a position to immediately begin broadcasting but still went into action to find other ways to meet the needs of their members and provide as many "usual" activities as possible. According to Wiles, the church gained access to, and began using, many technological features for the benefit of members and the community:

The ability to have a call-in phone listening system so non-techy members could still listen to services

- The ability to host online Zoom meeting groups for small group Bible discussion, prayer meetings, and fellowship

- The ability to broadcast the services via radio signal (98.3 FM) for cars to tune in at the parking lot drive-in service

- A dedicated smartphone and tablet app for the church members to connect to worship, church news, and the church directory easier

- An online giving option for members to continue to support the community service efforts (i.e. food pantry, helping with utility bills, etc.)

"Members from our church began congregating more in outdoor formats such as grill-outs at parks, monthly hikes for the young adult group, outdoor ice-cream socials, bonfire devotionals for the youth group, and window singings at nursing facilities," Wiles said.

He stated the lack of personal meetings indoors was challenging, especially for the church's aging population, but leadership teams worked continuously to provide as many services and interactive opportunities and reach out to as many individuals as possible during the past year.

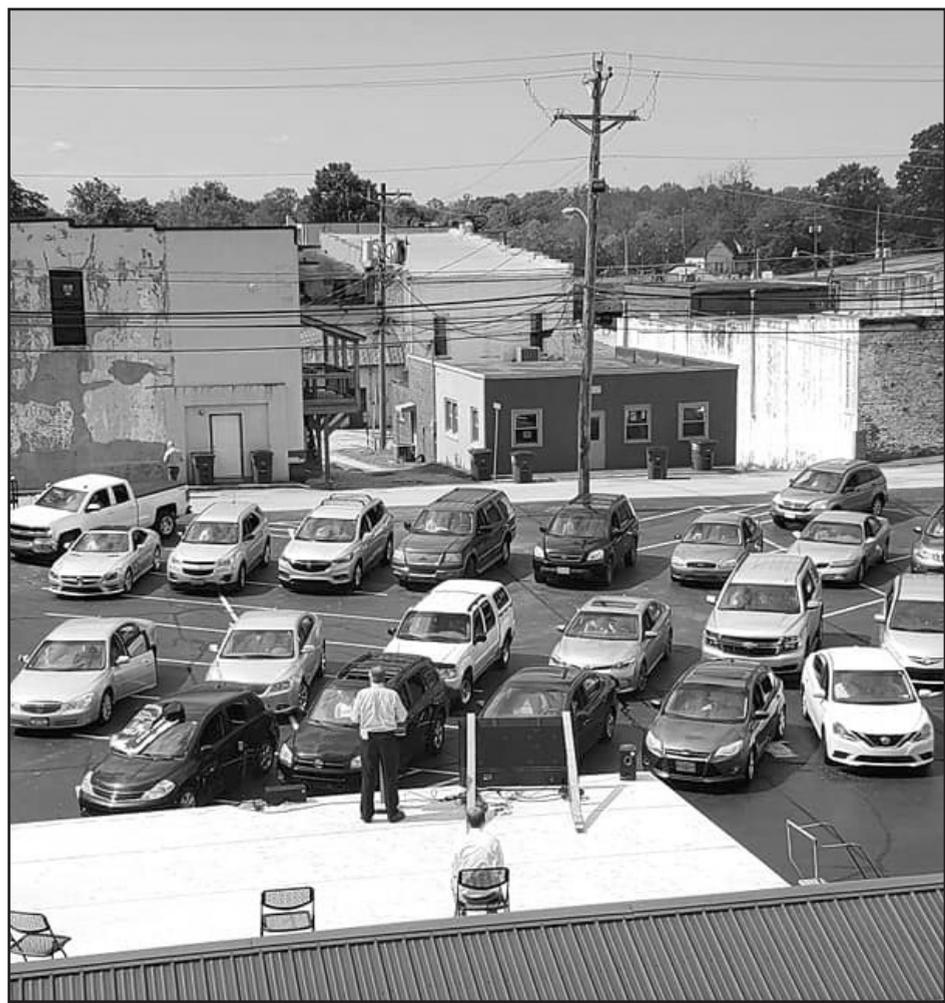
"These outdoor opportunities have provided marvelous face-to-face time in an environment that we believed safe from spreading COVID-19," he said. "We instituted regular meeting Zoom groups online through the week for our women's classes, youth classes, and for church

game nights."

When asked how the members of both his church and his community have reacted to the changes that were put in place, Wiles stated their views for online worship services have increased from an average of 40 views to 800 views per Sunday and that the parking lot remains filled with cars each week as members and regular visitors drive up to worship together from their vehicles.

"We don't believe that things will ever be normal again, exactly like they were," he said. "There have been lives lost, relationships lost in isolation, and new relationships formed. Even when we do return to indoor worship services, it will likely look very different. We have a hope that the spring of 2021 will see enough immunity and few enough active cases that our church may begin meeting indoors again on Sunday morning. The livestream

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CHURCH

CONTINUED FROM 7

services on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and our website will continue as they did before the pandemic."

Wiles said a re-start of Sunday indoor worship service won't mean all of the innovative ways they have found to reach members and the community will cease. He said the church plans to keep a heavy emphasis on small group meetings throughout the week rather than larger corporate gatherings and will also keep up with the outdoor hikes, grill-outs, and business meetings at parks as they've been largely met with approval of church members.

In addition, they will continue using a lot of the technology they have embraced over the past year.

"We will keep using the radio signal (98.3 FM) as part of our indoor worship service to broadcast to assisted listening devices (headphones) for those church members who struggle with hearing loss," he said. "The cell phone app connecting members to the online church directory, church news, and livestream is definitely a hit. We'll probably even host one outdoor drive-in service a year in remembrance of the pandemic. Many church members have enjoyed the novelty of worshipping together outside."

As well as new technology and innovative ways of gathering, Wiles said he hopes the people of his church and com-



munity carry the compassion and love for their neighbors, as well as for God, this year into the future.

"We hope that the members of Central Church of Christ and the Upper Cumberland community never lose the desire to know our neighbors and help however we can," he said. "This attribute is what makes the Upper Cumberland such a special place in God's kingdom on earth. May we continue to selflessly

look to the care of others before our own needs as we seek to honor our selfless God.

"May we never forget the increased time around the dinner table, the helping hands from our neighbors, and the love God has given to us, even when we were uncertain of what may come next. Even in the midst of the pandemic, we want to remember how God has continually inspired us to show His love, tell His story, and be

His family."

Wiles hopes people see all the positives of the past year when they look back and tell their children and grandchildren about 2020 and then added a little humor as he stated that his outdoor services, including him standing atop the church roof, were always met with "God's favor."

He said, "Also, may we never forget how God held off the rain every Sunday from 10 to 11 a.m.!"



Tavern Grill faces adversity and rises to the challenge

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor



Dan and Amy Lipinski

When Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee mandated that restaurants cease dine-in services in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 in late March 2020, Dan and Amy Lipinski, owners of the Tavern Grill, were worried about their future. However, almost a year later, they are living a success story as their business is going strong.

“Having only been open for a few months, we were very concerned that we would lose everything we worked so hard for,” Amy Lipinski said as she indicated their emotions were on a roller coaster after having just opened the restaurant of their dreams, on Liberty Square, in downtown Sparta, in October 2019.

When asked what they did to ensure they were able to continue operating their business, Amy Lipinski answered candidly, “Everything and anything that drove revenue and paid the bills. It was just my husband and I in the building running the business until we were allowed to open back up to limited seating.”

“We just modified our service to primarily takeout,” she said. “We had to close down our dining room, but Gov. Lee’s mandates helped us stay afloat,” she said more seriously and admitted that the realization that all restaurant owners were facing the same predicament leveled the field and helped them not lose customers.

In the weeks that followed, directives came from the state level specifying how businesses such as the Tavern Grill could safely reopen when the time came. Instructions on sanitation, mask-wearing, and allowable seating were daily topics.

“A lot of the procedures that we were asked to implement were already in place, like cleaning and sanitizing,

Amy Lipinski said. “We just got a little more aggressive after the pandemic out-

break. We did make an effort to be more conspicuous with our procedures to help keep our guests’ concerns at ease.”

She admitted the extra effort that was put in to ensuring the cleaning procedures were visible to customers has played a major role in the Tavern Grill rebounding as one of Sparta’s choices for dining.

“We think our conscious efforts helped reassure many of our guests just how aggressive our cleaning procedures were before,” she claimed. “We don’t think it may have been noticed if there was not so much attention drawn to it.”

Keeping the Tavern Grill operational and creating a successful blueprint for running their business wasn’t as easy as making their sanitation and cleaning procedures visible, though.

“Generally, we run a very lean operation so to speak,” Amy Lipinski said. “With that said, inventory control was incredibly challenging. The first few weeks, we lost quite a bit of product. Later, after restrictions began to ease, our staffing became a challenge. Many of our employees had moved on, and getting folks in to work was tough because we were hiring against the government’s stimulus

GRILL 13A





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GRILL

CONTINUED FROM 11 package - which we, as new small business owners, were not qualified to be a part of."

But, the Lipinskis stuck with it, put in the extra work, and today they are enjoying seeing the customers file in to their restaurant, on Liberty Square.

"We are scrappy, tenacious, and car-

ing," Amy Lipinski said about the couple's personality strengths and work ethic. "We are constantly working to improve our business even when the closed sign is turned, our doors are locked, and our curtains drawn. We want our people to feel safe and comfortable because they are guests in our home."

Today, the Tavern Grill is a full-service

restaurant that also has a full-service bar.

"The vast majority of our food served is made with love and pride, from scratch, out of our tiny little kitchen, and even our deli meats are sliced right here in house," Amy Lipinski says proudly. "We work alongside our staff every day to ensure our guests have a memorable experience. We are not perfect, but we give this res-

taurant everything we have every single day. Thanks for sticking with us during these painfully wacky times."

For more information, check out their Facebook page. The Tavern Grill, at 1 E. Maple St., offers a 15 percent discount on food and soft drinks for active and retired military, first responders, law enforcement, and firefighters.



White County Museums *Come For A Visit.*



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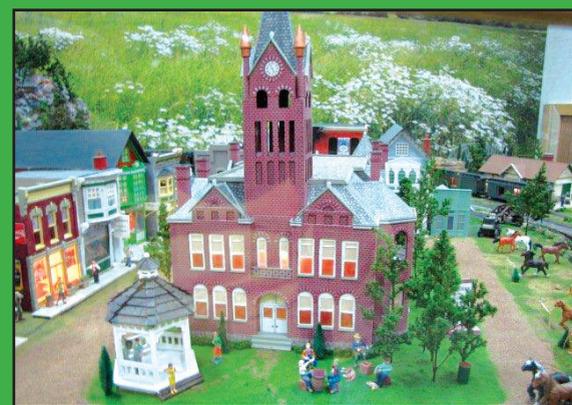
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- Veterans Museum
5 W. Maple Street
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Mark's Heating and Air Conditioning thriving in new location



RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

Mark Dickerson has been in the heating and cooling business for over a decade, but recently his company, Mark's Heating and Air Conditioning, got a facelift and a new home and he hosted an Open House and Ribbon Cutting to celebrate.

"I've been in the heating and air conditioning business for over 15 years now, but about seven years ago I took the big step and opened my own business," Dickerson said, adding that he has never looked back and that his business has been growing every year since.

Mark's Heating and Air Conditioning, which is now located at 250 N. Spring St., in Sparta, is a full-service HVAC business, offering new installations as well as basic maintenance and repair services.

"We can change out your unit, replace your duct work, install a unit on your newly built house, perform maintenance on your existing unit, or make repairs," Dickerson said as he talked about the different services he and his eight employees offer daily. "And we have a maintenance club program that helps homeowners make sure they never miss a routine checkup and that their system is always running efficiently."

Dickerson also said his company of-

fers around-the-clock emergency services.

"We don't charge for after hours," he explained, saying that a customer can't control when their unit will stop working and when they will need an emergency repair to keep their home or business at a safe temperature. "We are here for your needs 24/7, including holidays."

Mark's Heating and Air Conditioning has a reputation of being dependable and honest. A quick search for company reviews will show happy customers from not just White County but most of the Upper Cumberland region and even as far as Lebanon, Tennessee.

Dickerson said that while he is proud

of how far his business reaches and is grateful for a crew he can send anywhere near or far, he really enjoys being located and working in Sparta.

"It's great when your friend's friend or your friend's family calls you and you can go help them," he said. "I love this job but especially the part where I help my friends and neighbors and know that they know we will be there for them and they tell their friends and neighbors, too. I am blessed to have a great company and a great crew work that works for me. Sparta is a great place to live and work, full of trustworthy and honest people. I would never want to locate my business somewhere else."

County is on a positive path despite global pandemic

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

2020 brought a whole new set of challenges for local governments, and White County Executive Denny Wayne Robinson found himself navigating new waters as he, along with all of the county commissioners and government officials, tried to lead the community through the hardships, trials, and heartbreaks that come with living through a global pandemic.

"I knew it would get here, but I also knew it was like a wave moving across the country, and it wasn't here yet," Robinson said about watching COVID-19 as it crept across the country in the early spring of



DENNY WAYNE ROBINSON. White County executive

2020. "It was way too early to shut down our local economy, but I had the opportunity to watch what other communities did as the pandemic reached their areas and check for best practices."

Robinson said he and county commissioners met often with the city, health department, local healthcare providers, local doctors, and the hospital to plan and assess the needs of community.

"It did not take long to realize that we could not do anything to prevent people from being exposed [to COVID-19]," he said. "All we could do was try and keep everyone from being exposed at the same time, in an attempt to not overrun hospitals, medical industry, and medical providers."

Robinson said the county followed the recommendations they were given and did what was asked of them by health experts.

"We implemented the executive orders that worked for our area," he said. "Lots of conversations with other local officials across the Upper Cumberland took place,

and a plan was decided as to what would work best for our region."

Robinson said county officials reached out to all available resources to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies such as sanitizers, masks, and cleaning supplies. They distributed the supplies to businesses that were unable to get what they needed to operate in a safe manner, including health care professionals.

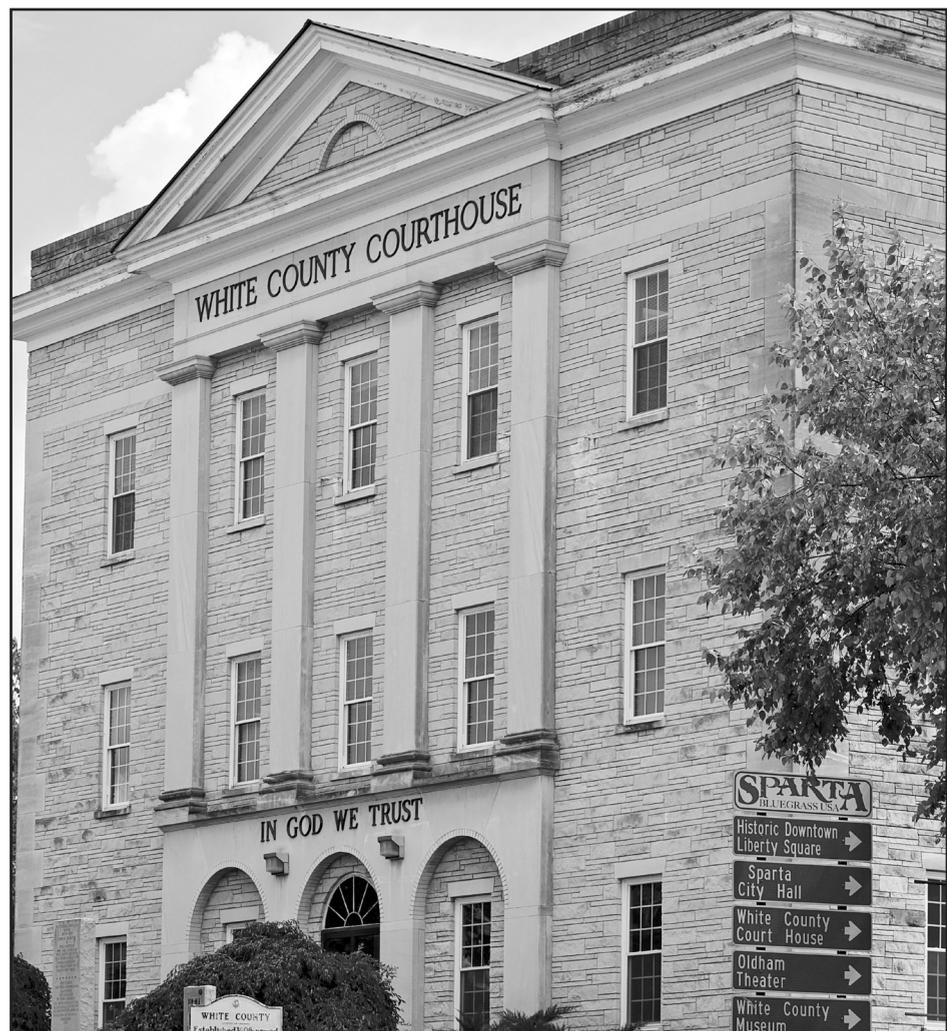
In addition, protective measures in government offices were installed so they could continue to operate as Robinson said the goal was to keep as many people working and as many businesses and offices open as possible. A "walk-up window" was installed at the courthouse for those who needed to conduct essential business with the county clerk's office. A sanitation machine was acquired to help stop the spread of the virus among those who were inside the county's offices, and UV lighting was installed in ambulances to sanitize and kill the virus between runs.

Despite all of the county's efforts, there was a mandatory shutdown of many non-essential businesses issued from the state government in the early spring. Restaurants with indoor seating, bars and pubs, gyms and fitness centers, hair salons, personal health and fitness facilities, personal service businesses, and even schools were forced to close their doors for the safety of the community.

"Watching our robust economy with our unemployment being at its lowest, our business owners producing better than ever, and job development at an all-time high, being shut down was one of the hardest things to watch," Robinson said, indicating that it may have been one of the worst experiences of his professional career. "Talking to business owners and listening to them talk about their struggles of whether or not they would be able to make it through this pandemic. Our local, robust economy had taken a devastating hit."

Afraid that the county's small businesses couldn't sustain much more devastation, Sparta and White County made the decision to re-open all businesses at the end of April.

Despite the challenges of 2020, Robinson said White County's overall economy did grow, and, while many businesses struggled to make ends meet and survive, other businesses, especially those dealing with outdoor activities, saw a large increase in the demand for their goods



and services.

"With White County's optimal business environment and our abundant natural recreational opportunities, we, along with the entire Upper Cumberland, have led the state and nation in the economy recovery from the COVID pandemic," Robinson said as he explained the trends and indicators show a prosperous future ahead for the county. "I'm am very optimistic for a successful 2021."

"I would like the citizens of White County to know that the decisions made in 2020 were heart wrenching to make, and I made those decisions to the best of my ability, for the overall good of our community, while protecting our God-given rights and liberties."

He said lots of sleepless night and lots of reading, research, and studying went into making the most informed decisions possible.

"I know some of my decisions weren't popular and even made some angry," he said. "With that being said and after all of the options were weighed, the decisions were made to keep our community as strong as it could be during this trying

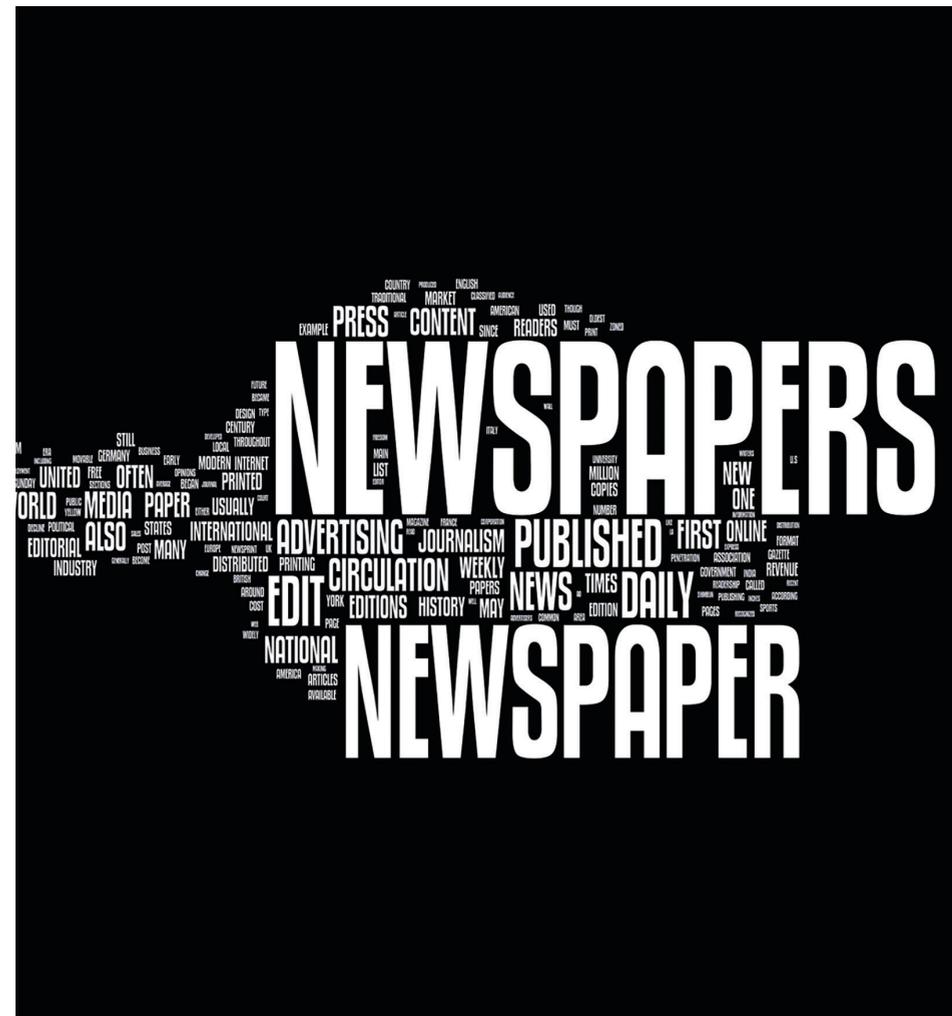
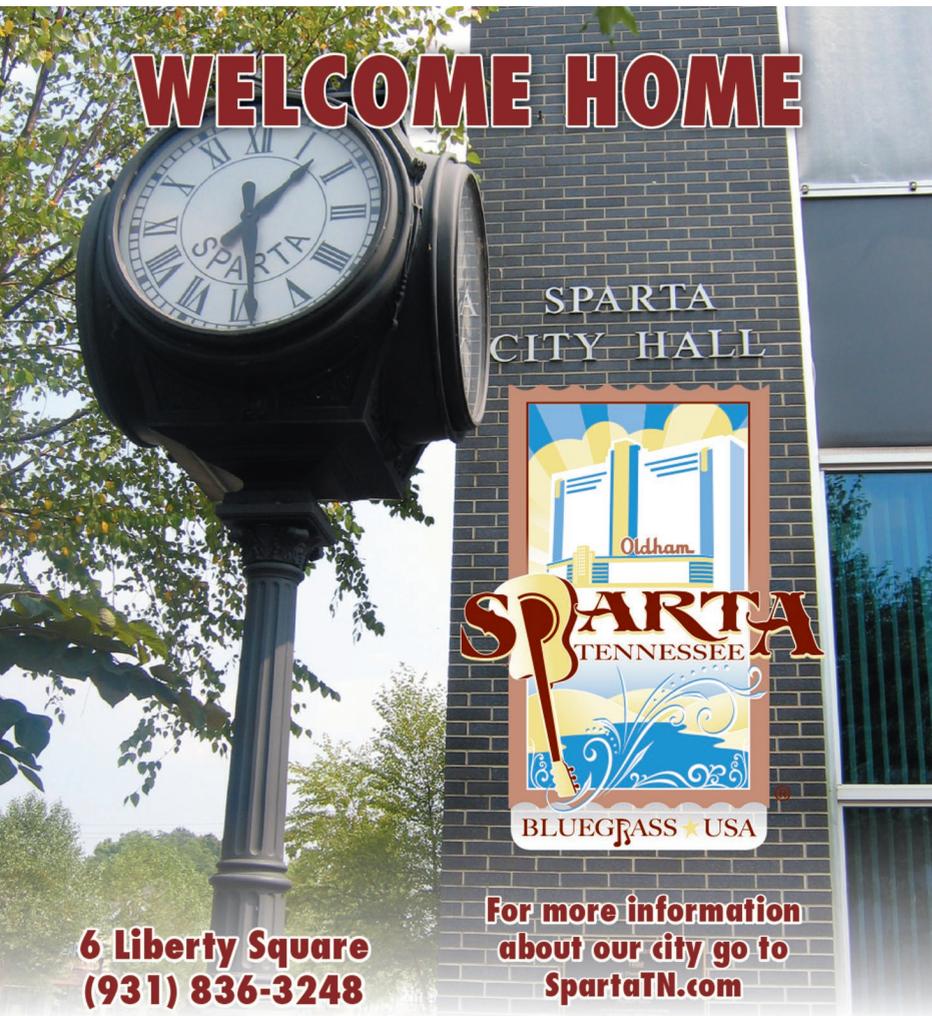
year."

Robinson went on to say there is no denying that 2020 was a difficult year emotionally, financially, and psychologically for everyone.

"Some White County citizens suffered unimageable loss, and my thoughts and prayers go out to each and every one of them," he said. "We are through the worst, and there is light at the end of the tunnel, and this time it is not another train. Together we have made it through this; it has made us stronger, wiser and more resilient. We have nowhere to go but up from here."

As for whether going up means a return to normal, Robinson said that normal is subjective and that some of the things the community is taking out of 2020 will be permanent, while others are just stepping stones to the future.

"Normal is whatever you are accustomed to," he said. "With the roll out of the vaccine, I am optimistically hopeful that people will feel comfortable to live their life to the fullest and not be scared to get out. Things will be different but different is not always bad."



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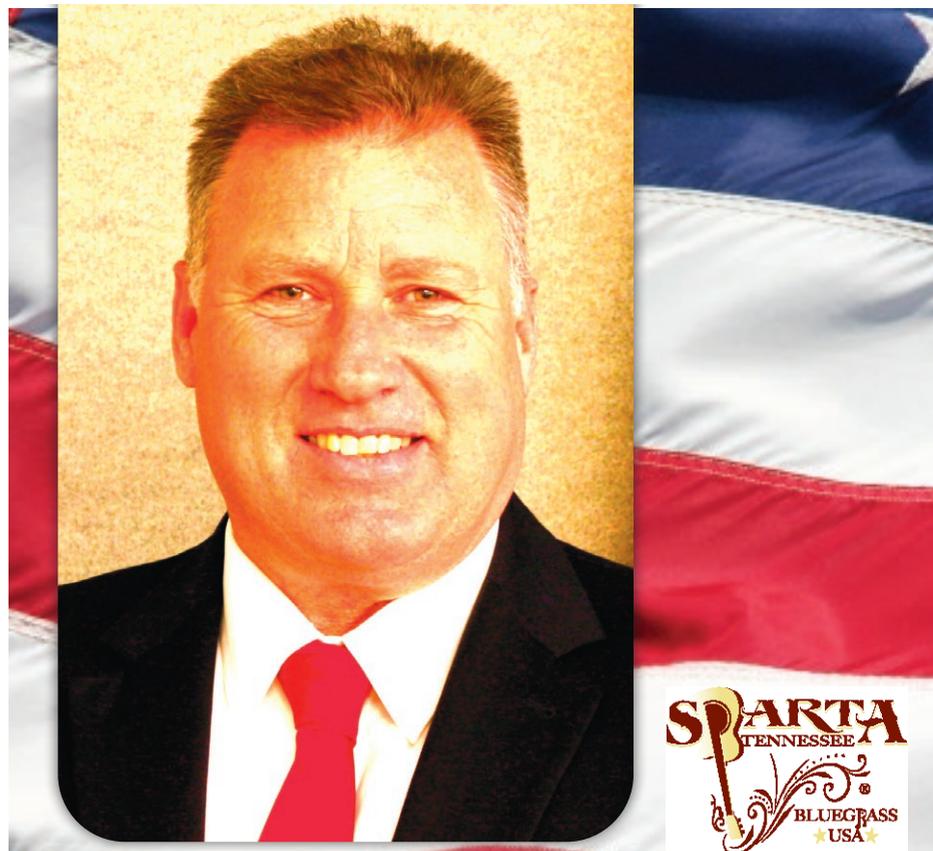
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JEFF YOUNG

Proud to serve as CITY OF SPARTA MAYOR

City of Sparta continues to improve by planning ahead

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

“For the past few years, prior to 2020, Sparta has enjoyed some of the best economic times that we have ever had,” Mayor Jeff Young said as he addressed the position the city of Sparta finds itself in 11 months after the onset of the largest global crisis of the century and expressed pride in his community. “Even a worldwide pandemic, COVID-19, could not break our spirit or our commitment to succeed as a community.

“During the worst of times in the middle of the pandemic, we proved as a city that we would always be stronger together, look out for each other, pray



JEFF YOUNG. Mayor of Sparta

for each other, and love each other. For these reasons and your efforts, we never encountered major job loss and closures of our local businesses. We mourn as a community and pray for our families who lost loved ones to this pandemic.”

Young said the commitment of the city board to manage, using very conservative principles over the past several years, put Sparta in a much better financial position than many other cities during the last year. Because of the conservative management, the city was able to continue to push forward with many improvement projects such as water and sewer line replacements and more paving in one year than ever before, despite functioning through a pandemic that brought less spending and less tourism therefore decreasing sales taxes that the city would normally have been able to access.

“The city board and I strive every year

to complete projects that will make Sparta a place we can all be proud of and attract visitors to come and see our great community,” Young said before listing plans for the 2021 year.

“In 2021, we plan to continue improving, not only the city streets with an estimated six more miles of paving, but our plans include extending our walking trail system, construction of two new gateway monument signs on Highway 111 entering Sparta, and offering grant opportunities through the Downtown Revitalization Grant to repaint store fronts in our historic downtown,” he said.

Young stated the future for Sparta is very bright, with the city experiencing quite a lot of growth and improvements over the past few years. Young pointed to many old buildings being torn down and new buildings beginning as proof of the progress the community is making.

“I feel like this will only continue here in Sparta as more and more people see the amazing opportunities this community has to offer,” he said and added that he knows the city government has to play a large hand in the growth. “Part of this equation is to make sure we continue to provide an atmosphere conducive to job creation and investment opportunities. “

“The state of our city is very bright and strong,” Young concluded. “We have a city where taxes are low and opportunities are great. We have a place for the hikers, the bikers, the brewers, the kayakers, the climbers, the coffee makers, and the shop keepers. We love our car cruise-ins and our bluegrass music as we are Bluegrass USA, the home of Lester Flatt. Whatever you are looking for in a wonderful place to live and raise your family can be found here in Sparta, Tennessee. It is my great honor and privilege to be your mayor. United we stand, and in God we trust.”



Save-A-Lot adjusts its way of doing business during pandemic

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

Grocery stores fall, understandably, in the category of ‘essential businesses,’ something that wasn’t really at the front of everyday thinking until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. But, just because they were not forced to close their doors for weeks or months doesn’t mean that stores like Save-A-Lot didn’t face their own struggles and have to scramble to make adjustments to the way they operated to meet the needs of customers in a drastically, and rapidly, changing society.

“We did not close, but did modify our services,” Save-A-Lot store manager Austin Butera, said.

He mentioned modified store hours, which would shorten the amount of time people were in the building and allow more time for cleaning and stocking. In addition, they designated shopping times for the senior population and disabled customers who were listed by the CDC as the most at-risk for developing complications should they contract COVID-19.

“Ultimately, we had to change our mindset,” Butera said. “We had to realize the greater importance of our customers’ and employees’ health and safety while ensuring their shopping needs are being met. Instead of asking ourselves what we can do to help make sure the customer finds everything they need or want, we now have to ask ourselves what we can do to make sure our customer feels safe and retains a feeling of well-being while visiting our store as we still strive to help and provide for them and their shopping needs.” In an effort to help keep customers safe, the Save-A-Lot company made a requirement for all of its employees to follow health guidelines, including wearing face masks, promoting social distancing, increasing sanitation, and disinfecting of all areas of the store in a constant manner. Butera said that in addition to the guidelines, Save-A-Lot has provided their employees with access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

But health and safety weren’t the only concerns with which the store was faced. In the early stages of the pandemic, keeping the shelves stocked was no easy task.

Butera said his store experienced a large break in the supply chain on nearly every category of products. He said there was a constant short supply on everything from canned foods, fresh foods,



L-R: Austin Butera, store manager, Jackie Brock, Sabrina Gay, Brian Taylor

and perishables, to non-food items such as paper products, cleaning products, and personal hygiene products because of manufacturing and distribution centers experiencing setbacks in an effort to keep up with an increased public demand as people across the country began preparing to be shut into their homes for an unspecified, albeit a lengthy, amount of time.

“In an effort to continue to serve our customers’ needs, we had to bring more product in from outside vendors to help fill the void that we were experiencing

with main suppliers,” Butera said. “Temporarily filling some supply gaps with alternative product and labels has been hard for both our customers and employees to get accustomed to, [but we have] hopes that product will return back to normal in the near future.”

Throughout the past year, a sense of community has become important across the globe, and Butera says that is a driving force behind how his store hopes to position itself in Sparta.

“Our number one focus and goal is customer service and satisfaction,” he

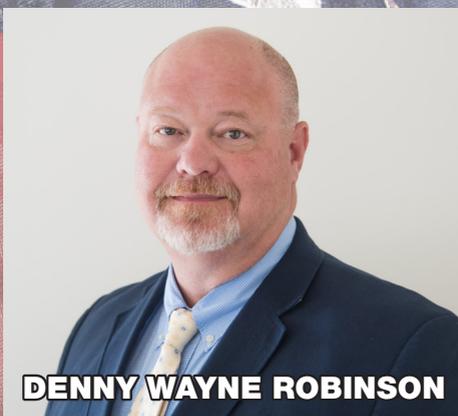
said “We are not just here serving the customer and helping their needs but we are building relationships with them. It is because of them we are even here in the first place. We will continue to listen to and put the customer first in everything we do. We will continue to always provide a safe, healthy, and friendly environment for our customers to enjoy while visiting our store. To do so, we must adapt to the changing situations we face today and strive to find solutions that will work to better the way we serve our customers and community.”



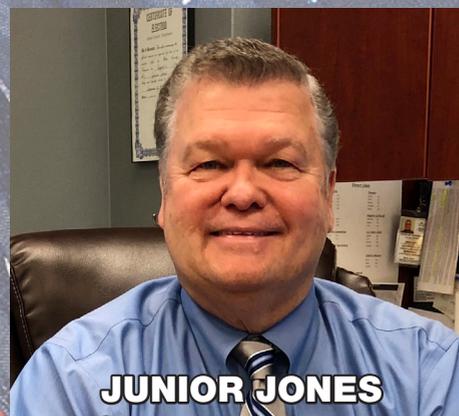
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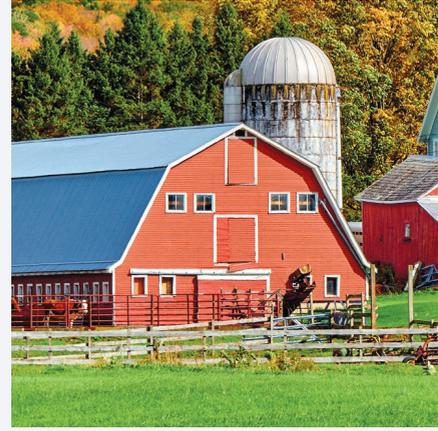
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ERG Realty adapts to ever-changing guidelines

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

In the early spring of 2020, Elite Realty Group locked their office and went home to help in controlling the spread of COVID-19, but thanks to living in a very technologically advanced society, it wasn't the end for the then 23-year-old company.

"We locked the office, and all worked from our home offices," Diana Birdwell Verble, the agency's owner, said.

Verble said she had phone calls forwarded to her cell phone and posted signs on the front door, with contact numbers and information indicating they would be open by appointment only.

However, being able to work from home didn't make things easier or create any feelings of security or make any decision-making more clear for Verble.

"Fear of the unknown was my greatest concern," she said. "In the beginning, there was a lot of unknowns and confusion. At first, we thought our business was supposed to be in lock down like many others."

Verble said other states such as North Carolina and Michigan had declared that realtors would not be considered essential workers.

"Fortunately, our governor declared that we were considered essential workers and among those who could continue to work but not knowing how we could continue to work with the public or them with us all feeling safe from getting COVID."

Being in a technological society made things bearable, however, and Verble and her team switched gears and worked through the uncertainty.

"Fortunately, over the years, our business industry has become very mobile," she said. "You can work from anywhere as long as you have internet access."

Verble said working from home was not the worst thing they could have experienced and that, among other things, she began having regular Zoom meetings to ensure that she stayed in contact with her agents and that everyone was finding ways to assist clients.

"We can pull up property information, answer property questions, and send information to clients," she said. "We can write offers and listing contracts and send electronically for signatures without anyone ever coming into the office."

When Gov. Bill Lee instituted the Tennessee Pledge, a program which guided

business owners on how to safely reopen and asked them to pledge to do their part in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19, Verble went into action to implement the safety precautions that were necessary to ensure that her business was doing its part.

"At the office, we put up plexiglas in the front lobby window, posted the recommended CDC posters throughout the office, we had ERG logo masks made for us and our customers," she said. "We have a designated office where we could meet with customers with the desk having Plexiglas around it where customers could sit on opposite side. We have a monitor on their side of Plexiglas that allows them to view properties with a barrier between us."

"In addition, we have hand sanitizers, sanitizing wipes, and spray just about everywhere you look. When meeting customers at properties to show, to avoid multi-touch surfaces and possibly unknowingly spreading the virus, we explain to them that we would open the doors, turn on the lights, and flip switches for them and have Clorox wipes in hand to wipe the surfaces down."

Living in a tech-based world has created a whole new way of conducting business as Verble said that clients and customers are tending to do quite a bit of research on the internet and viewing properties before making appointments to visit the location.

"Virtual tours and lots and lots of photos of each property are going to be the new normal where in the past they were mainly used on high-end properties," she said.

Despite the fact she and her agents were able to continue to conduct business and despite moving gracefully into the "new way" of real estate, there are still parts of the business that Verble says she has missed.

"Definitely the lack of foot traffic in the office, for both agents and clients," she said, explaining this was the most difficult adjustment she has had to make. "A lack of in-person contact, taking a client for a coffee, a meal, or having them just stopping by for a visit."

Regardless of the changes, the additions, and the adjustments, Verble said she is happy to still be conducting business in the Sparta-White County community and plans to keep on adapting as needed as the future, hopefully, becomes more clear.



"March will be my 30th year as a real estate agent and 24 years as owner of ERG, and we plan on being around for a long time," she claimed. "We will continue

to stay current and updated in our profession and most of all adapt our business to handle what life throws at us. We are survivors."



Domino's Pizza implements safety precautions to protect team members and customers

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

Jon and Danielle Powers have owned and operated the Domino's Pizza franchise in Sparta since July 2002, and their commitment to community, efforts to build a team-focused work environment, and their willingness to adapt kept their business thriving through a very scary year in which many business owners had to get creative to keep their doors open.

"We never shut down, even though we were all scared to death," Jon Powers said as he explained the main focus was safety of his team members as well as their customers. "We realized that our business was going to be a part of the solution rather than the problem, so we buckled down with our leadership team and made adjustments to stay open. My biggest concern was for our team; I never refer to our people as "employees" because they are like family to me, and we are a TEAM. So, my biggest fear was for my team's safety."

Powers said they did start with the obvious safety precautions such as wearing masks and hosting more group meetings than ever before through Zoom calls.

"We set alarms within our stores every hour to change out and sanitize utensils and tried to social distance when possible," Powers said. "We tried to figure out ways that we could always be there for our customers but respect the guidelines that we were all dealing with."

Powers said he is proud of both his small hometown team and the corporation his franchise falls under.

"We are a small business," he said. "I realize some folks see the big corporate name 'Domino's,' but, at the end of the day, it is myself, Danielle, and our local team that puts in the work and makes the difference."

Powers added that he is proud of being a part of the parent company as well.

"Domino's headquarters was on the forefront in communicating, training, and working directly with small franchisees like myself to figure out how we are going to make sure our team and our customers were safe," he said.

Some of those things included introducing "contactless delivery" in which delivery



drivers place a customer's order in a designated spot on a porch to eliminate person-to-person contact and "carside delivery" for carry-out customers to eliminate having customers in the lobby, thus reducing crowding and promoting social distancing.

"Carside delivery for our carry-out customers is awesome for anyone that just wants to pull up to the front of the store and click "I'm here" on the Domino's app, and we'll bring it right to your car," Powers said.

He stated this feature is one of the positives to come out of the craziness of the past year and added that it will be a feature that he and his team continue to offer long after the concern for spreading the coronavirus is over. However, he admitted that closing the lobbies for a period of time and not having personal conversations with customers has been one of the hardest things he has had to do.

Another difficult measure has been contact tracing and losing team members for weeks at a time, both because it takes an "all-hands-on deck" approach to being able to take care of customers and because Powers has a true love and concern for the people with whom he works.

"I am so proud of this team," he said. "They are unbelievable in what they have been dealing with, and no one complains," he said.

Powers said his team is the backbone of Domino's and the sole reason he has been able to remain open and keep the business successful.

"I have leaders in place like Brittany Tramont that have been instrumental in our success in dealing with this pandemic," he said. "I am pulling for everyone. These are tough and strange times, and a lot of folks and businesses are suffering. And I just want to do my part to help in any way I can."

Powers said his secret to success isn't so much a secret as it is a genuine concern for his community and desire to work together for the benefit of everyone.

"Myself and my team, although scared, were very fortunate to be able to keep our jobs and continue working, because we knew so many others were not that lucky," he said. "Together, we will make sure that the Domino's in Sparta and surrounding areas are doing our part to keep our team safe as well as our great customers."



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Bushido Karate Center re-invents its mission and develops additional programs

According to Rachel Auberger, owner of Bushido Karate Center, martial arts emphasize goal setting, determination, and adaptability – all things that helped the 23-year-old service-related business survive, despite government mandated shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I told our coaches that this would test us and push us to be our best selves but also give us the opportunity to show our athletes that possibility is all about perception,” Auberger said.

Auberger said she watched other athletic centers across the nation close, giving their athletes no outlet to continue training other than on their own for months.

“We were determined to find a way to continue to be an active, and integral, part of the lives of our families,” she said.

Auberger said the public school taking an extended spring break, in March 2020, provided her business with the opportunity to make the changes to transition Bushido Karate Center from in-person training to virtual.

“We usually close the center for the week of spring break anyway, so adding a couple of extra days so we could plan and organize wasn’t a cause for concern or anxiety,” she said. “However, during that time, it was obvious that things were getting much worse in regard to the spread of COVID-19, and Gov. Lee started issuing Executive Orders, including one that closed non-essential businesses and fitness centers. This forced us to close our facility for an additional 30 days.”

Auberger said she and her staff went to work during spring break to determine how they could best provide training for their athletes.

“About 18 months before all of this, we had invested in some industry software and had begun working on a Member Training App,” she said. “While we had been using it some, the shutdowns forced us to get creative if we were going to stay in business. We started teaching classes via Zoom. We uploaded pre-recorded classes as well as replays of the LIVE

Zoom classes to our Member App for our athletes who might not be able to log in ‘at time.’ We uploaded home activities and videos of our coaches reading stories that had to do with the month’s character development theme. We created ‘play along at home’ types of games and uploaded those to the app as well. We invested in a television, a paid Zoom account, an iPad, and a microphone so we could continue to train our athletes while they were in the safety of their homes.”

Auberger said that BKC members started using their app on a daily basis, and it was a great way for coaches and athletes to stay connected until in-person classes in could resume at their facility.

“In May, we returned to in-person classes, but with lots of safety precautions,” she said and listed the extensive changes that were put in place. “We installed several hand sanitizing stations throughout the building, and athletes are required to sanitize their hands before they step on the training mats. We limited classes to



10 athletes and required pre-registration for them. We scheduled classes so that there was 15 minutes between classes for cleaning and sanitizing of mats, equipment, and any public spaces. We required all non-staff to leave the building during these times. We limited the number of non-participants allowed in the building to one per family to ensure that social distancing was happening. Masks were optional for athletes as strenuous training with a mask is not practical. Temperatures were taken for any person entering the building. Those who couldn’t make it to class due to not enough space or due to having ANY illness symptoms could still log in and participate virtually via Zoom.”

The changes were readily accepted, according to Auberger, and, while class sizes have returned to normal, she says that many of the new practices became permanent, and much appreciated, parts of the programs offered at Bushido Karate Center.

“Our families love the Zoom option for classes,” she explained, saying that, ideally, athletes train in person, but realistically there are many times when that’s not possible and having the virtual option keeps athletes active and training. “It is great that our athletes can log in and participate even while on vacation, if a parent is ill, when quarantined, or if a parent isn’t available to drive them to class. Our families are loving this feature. We have students who want to participate daily, but realistically their families have other things that need their attention, so they attend On-the-Mat classes, as we now call them, a couple of times a week and log in for LIVE Zoom training the remaining days.”

Another big change for Bushido Karate Center has been their focus on day-programs offered for school-aged children.



KARATE

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"When schools decided to start the year in a hybrid format, we realized that many families didn't have anywhere for their kids to be on the opposite days," Auberger said about the driving force behind the focus change. "We immediately decided to do what we could to help the community. We offered a virtual learning camp and it quickly filled with not just our athletes, but kids from families we hadn't met yet. We realized what a place we were in to be able to reach families and help them in a unique way."

Auberger said that the focus didn't change when students returned to traditional 5-day school weeks and that her facility continues to offer a virtual learning camp for those students whose families have decided to keep them enrolled in school virtually for the 2020/2021 school year.

"We have changed our day program focus from just reaching out to our athletes to including the entire community," she continued. "Now, if White County schools are closed, our doors are open. From scheduled schools-out camps to the couple of days of virtual learning to Snow Day camps. We have met so many great families and are happy to add this service for ALL kids throughout the county. These are programs we will continue indefinitely, and we hope to provide a great summer camp option for families in the community as well."

Auberger said that the changes haven't come without their challenges, the biggest

of which has been the long hours the facility has been open and she and her staff have been working.

"We worked more during the shutdown in an effort to find ways to keep the business open virtually," she explained. "We offer sport-specific training, so it was a lot of work - lots of private lessons and reorganizing of the schedules. Then when we went to a hybrid method and had virtual learning camps. It was a lot of extra hours - sometimes 18 hours a day for

myself and our lead coach. We have had to really come up with some creative staff scheduling so we don't burn anyone out. Being with kids demands a lot of energy, so everyone has to be on their game!"

As for what the year, and years, ahead look like, Auberger said she isn't worried. Adaptability, along with the ability to set goals and work steadily toward them are what sets her and her staff ahead.

"We will be here. Whatever the future brings, we will keep adapting to find ways

to provide safe, fun activities for the kids in the community," she said, adding that with the day programs, that portion of her business will now fall under the essential category in the future. "We will continue to find ways for our athletes to train and reach goals they set for themselves. We don't know if things will return to normal across the globe or if there will be another setback. But we know we will adapt to the changing needs of the community, and we will continue to be here."



The GYM: Sparta's newest 24-hour fitness center

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

Health, fitness, and self-care are always a hot topic at the beginning of every new year, and this year they may even be more so as people work to find ways to stay healthy, both physically and mentally, as we are nearing the one-year mark of the global pandemic that has had people around the world feeling the effects of isolation.

The GYM, located at 220 W. Bockman Way, is Sparta's newest 24-hour fitness center and aims to help residents of White County fight their way back to a healthy and active lifestyle.

"By being open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year there is never a bad time to work out," The GYM owner, Ray Shafer said, adding that by unlimited hours, finding a time when The GYM isn't busy and where members can safely distance themselves from other users shouldn't be difficult either.

The GYM is conveniently located in the center of town, on Bockman Way, which provides plenty of lighting, making entry and exit from the facility safe, even at the latest hours of the night.

"We have limited parking in front of the gym, but after 5 p.m. this isn't an issue," Shafer said.

Shafer explained the fitness center shares a parking lot with the business next door, but their hours are only limited to late morning through early afternoon.

"During busy times, which are all daylight hours, there is plenty of parking in the rear of the building as well," he said.

According to Shafer, memberships to The GYM will provide members with their own key code to enter and exit the facility at their convenience.

"Right now, each member will receive an actual key, but next month we will be having an electronic passcode box installed, and each member will have their own unique code," he said.

By giving each member their own unique code, Shafer, along with the gym's manager, Rachel Auberger, will be able to know who is in the building at all times, creating an additional level of safety for members.

The GYM is equipped with both free weights and machine weights for those members who are looking to improve their strength and/or their muscle tone.

"It doesn't matter whether you are an experienced weightlifter or just starting out," Shafer said. "We have what you need to create your own personalized workout."

In addition to the weights, The GYM also has treadmills, elliptical runners, and a stationary bicycle for those members who are looking to add a cardiovascular component to their workout to maintain heart and lung health as well as work on either weight loss or healthy weight maintenance.

"We don't want anyone to feel intimidated by the machines or the facility," Shafer said. "We hope that the light, clean, open atmosphere will make everyone feel welcome, and our manager is ready and willing to give a tour and provide instruc-



tion on how to safely use any or all of the equipment,"

Auberger, The GYM's manager, has a degree in Health and Fitness with a specialty in Lifetime Wellness and has over 20 years' experience in gym management, personal training, and group fitness. Shafer encourages giving her a call at (931) 444-1456 to get started on your own fitness journey or continuing one you may have paused, today.

"We are open and have members already taking advantage of the unlimited workout hours available," Shafer said.

According to Shafer, new members can sign up and begin working out right away by signing up online at bit.ly/TheGymSparta or by calling (931) 444-1456 and scheduling a time to meet with either Auberger or himself to get a tour and pick up their key.

"We really hope that Sparta will take advantage of this opportunity to get out and get active and stay healthy," he said. "With no 'closed' hours, there are no excuses - there is always time for The GYM."



JW's Healthy Hemp offers a vast line of products

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

Jaime and James Winnett opened their business, JW's Healthy Hemp, in September 2020, with the sole vision of helping members of their community become healthier and pain free.

"We want to be able to offer CBD and hemp in a different way," Jaime Winnett, who opened JW's Healthy Hemp, on Bockman Way, said. "We want to be present and provide a space where customers can feel comfortable having conversations with us and where we can give them knowledge about our products and the ways they can help them get back to living those healthy, active lives that illnesses like arthritis or Parkinson's or anxiety may be keeping them from."

Jaime Winnett knows all too well about those illnesses because a year ago she was struggling with anxiety that, at times, became debilitating. Those struggles are what brought her to the world of CBD and hemp.

"We were in Gatlinburg, and this woman at a little shop was trying to get me to try one of her topical CBD products," Jaime Winnett said, admitting she was not a believer and only tried the product as a way to end the conversation. "But, by the time we got to the parking lot, I was feeling so much better. We went right back in and bought some."

Both Jaime Winnett and her husband, who also tried the topical product to relieve joint pain, began researching CBD and learning all they could about the products, the benefits, the industry, and even the farmers that were growing the plants.

In June 2020, the Winnetts began selling CBD oils, candies, and even the healthy hemp plants themselves at area flea markets and festivals and, three months later, were able to open their storefront in Sparta. JW's Health Hemp sells CBD oils; candies, including gummies and suckers; 11 different strands of hemp flowers; and, of course, the "Miracle Stick" just like the one that started Jaime Winnett on this journey.

"Two of the flowers we sell come from farms here in the Upper Cumberland: one from White County and one from Putnam County," Jaime Winnett.

The other nine are grown in the Smokies, and she has developed relationships with all of her suppliers. While all of her



products do contain THC, they are all verified to be within the legal limit of 0.3 percent or less.

"We know that our product is good because we have established those relationships," Jaime Winnett said.

Another thing that sets JW's Healthy Hemp apart from other distributors is their products are not prepackaged. Customers can choose to mix flavors of flowers or select different flavors of candies when making their purchases.

"We know that people may have a preference as to what they like, but they also may have several favorites or want a variety, and we don't want to make them have to purchase more than what they intended just to get that," Jaime explained.

The Winnetts' service ethics have become well known, and they have customers that come from all over the state to shop with them, and that means bringing more people to Sparta.

"We direct our customers to a lot of the unique shops and restaurants around

here," James Winnett said. "We have some customers that come on certain days of the week because they know what day their new favorite local restaurant is open or serves their favorite daily special."

As well as people coming to them, the Winnetts also ship products all over the country, saying that people in other states learn about them from their website or more often because a friend, or a friend of a friend, or family member has had a great experience shopping at JW's Healthy Hemp.

"We know that people are tired of being in pain, tired of being stressed," Jaime Winnett said, indicating she does not believe the CBD industry is a trend that is going to fade away. "We are just so thankful to have been able to get into this industry and to be able to help so many people. We hope that we are helping to remove the stigma that has surrounded THC and CBD products in the past."

JW's Healthy Hemp is located at 100 E. Bockman Way. Call (931) 644-8463.



Aerial view of Sparta 1950s



Hörmann officially opens

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor



Officials work to preserve the integrity of the community while expanding opportunities for residents, and recently, city, county, regional, and state officials and organizations collaborated to bring a new opportunity for the Upper Cumberland workforce to White County.

Hörmann, a company with German roots but a history of investing in American communities, is an industry leader who choose to locate their newest garage door manufacturing facility at 450 Airport Rd., in Sparta.

On Oct. 23, 2020, the new company opened its doors to the public and hosted a grand opening that included guest speakers from the organizations that helped bring this project to fulfillment. Tours of the facility were also provided.

"We looked at a lot of sites in Kentucky, Tennessee, and really a lot of the Southeast, but as we narrowed down the field more and more and the closer we got to working with [White County Executive] Denny Wayne [Robinson] and the economic development group here in Sparta/White County, we realized that the site was incredible," Cameron Rudd, president of Hörmann LLC, said. "From the site itself and constructability as well as just the community. There is both a good blue-collar and white-collar work force here. The cooperation in the entire Upper Cumberland was great for us. It was a really good fit for us."

"It's the largest capital investment ever in the history of White County," County Executive Denny Wayne Robinson said of the work done to bring Hörmann to Sparta. "But for this project to come to fruition, we had a lot of support."

Robinson went on to recognize county commissioners, both current as well as past, along with members of the industrial development board, and Sparta Mayor Jeff Young and city aldermen.

"We all know that to grow, you have to invest in your community, but that is a lot easier said than done," Robinson said. "I want to thank these city and local leaders for their vision. Without that, we would not be here today."

"Economic development isn't always flashy. There's a lot of behind the scenes stuff," he continued, and then acknowledged many of the departments that helped bring the manufacturing company to White County: Tennessee Department of Economic Development, Tennessee Department of Transportation, Tennessee Valley Authority, Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Authority, Sparta-White County Chamber of Commerce, Highlands Economic Partnership, and Upper Cumberland Development District.

"Our job every day is to bring jobs to Tennessee, but the other part of that job is to make sure that the communities in the rural parts of our state prosper just like the urban areas," Bob Rolfe, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development commissioner, said. "I am here to celebrate what I think is one of the great days in Sparta and White County."

"I believe this may have been the perfect trade. The general assembly funds our budget and without them we wouldn't have the tools to bring companies like this here," Rolfe continued, offering special thanks and acknowledgement to State Representative Paul Sherrell and State Senator Paul Bailey.

The addition of Hörmann LLC to White County will add 200 jobs to the community, meaning there are more opportunities for residents of the Upper Cumberland. However, according to Rudd, those jobs are just the beginning.

"We wanted to find a site that would let us grow," Rudd said. "We are on 75 acres here. We are at 325,000 square feet, 25,000 of that is the office, but we have the ability to get over a million square feet of production space here eventually."

Rudd said the garage doors they produce are large, so they require a lot of space, but that if the time comes to expand the production facility, that will also mean expanding their work force.

"We need a lot of space," Rudd said. "It [the property in White County] was a great fit for us."



The Robin's Nest provides perfect relaxing getaway

RACHEL AUBERGER
contributor

Three years ago, Robin and Rita Gipson, of Wilson County, Tennessee, happened to be driving through Sparta when they saw a church for sale, and today the former location of Crossroads Episcopal Church, at 20 N. Church St., has been fully restored and repurposed into a unique, three-unit Airbnb in the heart of Sparta's historic district.

"Have you ever spent the night in a 1932 stone church with walls which are 15 inches thick?" Rita Gipson asked. "The peace and quiet is like nothing I've ever seen or been at before. I don't know if it's because it's a church or what it is, but it is most definitely an extremely unique experience."

The Robin's Nest, as the Gipsons have chosen to name their property, has been restored, with the Gipsons doing a majority of the work themselves and keeping much of the original wood and glass from the church that was built in 1932.

"I used everything that I possibly could," Robin Gipson, a retired lineman, said. "We still have all the distorted glass windows in the building and all of the decorative stained-glass work in the foyer."

The Robin's Nest, which houses two three-bedroom apartments on the main floor and a third unit that can sleep

eight or accommodate parties of up to 99 people on second floor, still has the original beams and 20-plus-foot ceilings enclosed in the crab orchard stone that was used to construct the church when it was built almost a century ago.

The Gipsons said they hope that people will use the beautifully restored building for events as well as weekend getaways.

"With 2,600 square feet in the upstairs unit, it is perfect to hold an event like anniversary parties, reunions, or wedding parties," Robin Gipson said. "And, with the two three-bedroom apartments on the ground floor, a family that was coming in for a family-reunion or wedding or event could theoretically rent the entire building and have plenty of space."

Of course, all three units can be rented separately by individuals or families traveling through the region or who want to explore the parks, trails, and waterways of the Upper Cumberland and then visit local restaurants and breweries at night.

The Gipsons said The Robin's Nest won't be their only White County investment as they have already been working on two properties on Bon Air Mountain that will provide fun lake-centered getaways for guests, and they hope to introduce both of those properties, called Rustic Charm and Key Paradise, to the community in the upcoming weeks.

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