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# Women of Wells

## MAGAZINE

- »» Perfect Pet Owners  
Amanda Clark & Emily Striker
- »» My Sister, Jerri Lehman
- »» Informed to Transformed
- »» Wells County Women  
in Leadership: Building  
a Stronger Community  
Through Empowerment and  
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OCTOBER 2024



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Agencies apply for LiGHT grants in September.

In October, members are invited to cast a vote at the annual business meeting to determine which agencies will receive a grant.

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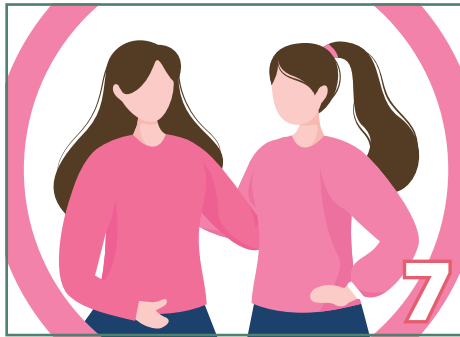
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# Helping Our Community

## By Audry Dudley

Audrey Hepburn once stated, “As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.”

While I still consider myself to be not that old, I’m no longer in my 20s, and often reflect on just how much life has been lived in my last decade. One could say I have lived many lives, and with that, many lessons learned. I recognize now more than ever that my community and those I choose to surround myself with greatly influence what I learn and how I grow.

I graduated from Ball State without the pomp and circumstance or shift-

ing of tassels due to the 2020 curveball. As hard as being a “non-traditional” student was for my ego, it did me great service entering the professional world.

I was considered non-traditional due to my departure from college with my associate degree, entering the work field, and returning to obtain my bachelor’s degree — this was unlike most of my classmates who were on the typical four-year post high school path. Extending my college career and working between degrees helped me to refocus my purpose in pursuing higher education. It could be “just a piece of paper” proving I was “teachable” or it could help me to connect with the people that make a difference in the world around



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them.

Bluffton had come up in conversation with one of my professors as he had worked to complete a study done in my hometown called “From Bland to Brand: Wells County and its Tourism and Leisure Potential.”

I’ve always had great interest in tourism and destinations of intrigue, and had my fair share of the travel bug throughout my youth. I was blessed to serve on multiple mission trips in South America and spent time solo backpacking Europe after a short stint of being an au pair (a live-in foreign nanny). The study intrigued me, and I had heard more buzz of revitalization efforts in the heart of downtown, which further drew my curiosity.

Meeting with Erin Prible and Chad Kline was a turning point in my transition to “the real world” and the start of my professional career. I wanted to know what my hometown was doing to

*(Continued on page 5)*



*(Continued from page 4)*

create such positive changes and how I could be part of it. Chasing after what interests and excites you is the best advice I could give to a young graduate. No job comes without growing pains, learning curves and the occasional feeling of being an imposter.

When I started, I was no expert in anything — I barely knew what the Chamber of Commerce even did at the time. In my fourth year of working for the Wells County Chamber of Com-

merce, my appreciation and understanding of local Commerce, economic development, visitor economy and community development has grown immensely.

This organization created an environment for the community that empowers connections and fosters growth. It extends far beyond commerce and carries connectivity and communication to non-profits, government bodies, schools, potential residents and many more.

I started my journey with the Chamber as an intern tasked to promote the community and embrace the newly unveiled Parlor City Plaza in downtown Bluffton. I've worked for the board of Bluffton NOW! to provide administrative support, communications, event coordination and more. I've seen the impact of a rejuvenated downtown business district flourish not only to the benefit of building or business owners of downtown but also to the benefit of the county and its residents as well.

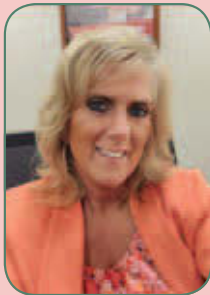
When I committed to working with the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development full-time, I was given the opportunity to focus on our visitor economy and researching successful strategies of Indiana's destination marketing organizations. I've gained valuable insight to the do's and don'ts of marketing. But what I really appreciate about my role is how connected I am to my hometown and my county.

I get to see the behind-the-scenes as numerous business professionals step into active roles as volunteers, giving resources for the improvement of our community. Those who use one hand to help themselves create a strong business and use the other to help their community, create the foundation for a community to flourish.

You don't have to know it all and have a title of expert in your role, you just need to be willing to learn from others and help others along the way. Be blessed and bless others.

## Julie Quinn

Julie Quinn, branch manager at 1st Source Bank, has been serving the community of Bluffton for 29 years. As a Wells County native, she believes in the community's future and supports its businesses and residents' financial needs and goals.



Julie enjoys spending time with her two children, their spouses, and her five grandchildren. She has a passion for supporting local economics. Julie currently serves on the board of directors for the Wells County Chamber of Commerce and participates on several committees within the Chamber. She also served eight years as treasurer for the Kiwanis Club of Greater Bluffton of which she was a member since 2015.

Julie has a passion for helping individuals and businesses achieve financial security, build wealth and realize their dreams.

Julie values the trust of her clients and their relationships that have been built over nearly three decades of service to the community. She is grateful to serve generations of local families, businesses and farms.

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# Perfect Pet Owners: Amanda Clark & Emily Striker

Leaders in their own right, they have made their home town business one of the most respected pet care and training institutions across the Midwest.

Perfect Pet Food & Accessories was founded in 2005 with the belief that a well-fed dog was a healthy dog. Perfect Pet offered permanent solutions to everyday issues that were frustrating to pet owners. The products in the store have been carefully selected to ensure pets are receiving the highest quality at an affordable price. In 2016, Perfect Pet was sold to Amanda Clark and Emily Striker.

Growing up with a desire to help animals, Amanda started her pet career in 1998 working at a local veterinary clinic. It was there she realized a dog's mental health is just as important as a dog's physical health.

Amanda attended the master trainer course at National K-9 School for Dog Trainers, earning certifications in advanced obedience, behavior modification, service dog training, police K-9 training and search and rescue. In the year 2000, Canine Crossroads was born. Canine Crossroads was founded on the principles of helping dogs and their owners work as a team to alleviate problem behaviors.

Word started to spread about the amazing service Amanda had to offer, so it was time for her hire extra help. In 2008, Emily joined Amanda's team through the work-based learning program at her local high school. Emily always knew she wanted her career to focus on helping animals. Amanda opened her eyes to the world of dog training.

Upon graduating high school, Emily also attended the master trainer course at National K-9 School for Dog Trainers, earning her full list of certifications as well. After graduating from dog training school, Emily accepted a full-time position as head trainer at Canine Crossroads.

Throughout the years, Perfect Pet and Canine Crossroads worked together to better the overall health and well-being of the dogs in their community. When Amanda and Emily were presented with the opportunity to purchase Perfect Pet in 2016, they jumped on it together. In 2017, Emily and Amanda decided to merge Canine Crossroads and Perfect Pet together so they could give their clients easier access to all of the wonderful services they provide. After the merge, Emily and Amanda spent countless hours building the phenomenal team they have today. Perfect Pet is proud to offer several avenues to help with your pet's needs, including training, grooming, and proper nutrition.

Amanda and Emily have worked to design a dual-purpose space providing an ideal setting for pets while also empowering mothers to build successful careers. They are dedicated to creating a harmonious balance between career advancement and family responsibilities, creating a flexible environment for working mothers.

They believe that a mother should have the ability to balance work commitments and participate in her child's school life without conflict or even bringing them to work when needed. By allowing children to join their mother's at work, it not only helps socialize dogs to remain obedient in the face of every day household distractions, it also takes away the stress of the mother to find childcare for the day.

Amanda and Emily are actively engaged with area schools, regularly sponsoring yearbooks and athletic teams. Every other week, they also visit Southern Wells Elementary School with therapy dogs, encouraging students to read to them and frequently receive feedback about the enthusiasm for these Wednesday interactions, not only from the students but from the staff as well.



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# My Sister, Terri Lehman

**By Sally Tinkel**

My sister was born on April 17, 1953; she is 11 years younger than I am. But don't think for even a moment we are the only children. I am the eldest of 12 children, five girls and seven boys. My parents asked the neighbor boy to come live with us when he was in junior high school, as his mother was hospitalized with cancer. That gave us an even dozen. Jerri was raised among five boys, so she was prepared for any adventure or challenge that might come her way.

She was in the ICE program at Southern Wells and continued to work at the Caylor-Nickel Clinic after graduation for 36 years. When it was transitioning to Lutheran Bluffton Regional, several older and part-time employees were replaced by younger staff with degrees.

As the year 2000 approached, the world was in a state one could only describe as panic. Would the world continue to function as it did in 1999 or would the transition to 2000 be met with malfunctioning computers? Would the cell phones continue to work? The country was in a state of emergency manage-

ment.

The federal government launched FEMA, the state founded SEMA and Wells County got on board and re-named their Civil Defense Unit to Emergency Management Services. As the CD director was ill and resigned, the commissioners sought applicants for a part-time position. Jerri Lehman was selected as the recipient.

Who could have predicted Sept. 9, 2001? Emergency preparedness took on a new urgency in light of the 9-11 attack on America.

As reported in The News-Banner on Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2001, Lehman appeared before the commissioners to report that the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) had added a large amount of paperwork needing immediate attention, some due in January. "These are not quick fix plans, but tactics that take time, planning and development to implement and make functional," Lehman explained. After going through the list of major duties of her "part-time" job — being on call 24-7 for tragedies, incidents, and accidents, and

seeking to bring respect to the position — she cited the work now as overflowing from the Sept. 11 induced added demands. She indicated it was unrealistic to expect her to meet the suddenly increased job demands on a part-time basis for which gets a bit over \$10,000 a year.

She indicated the need for \$7,500 more (to be accounted for on an hourly basis) to handle the workload created by post-Sept.11 reports need. While not wishing to make the position full-time, they voted 3-0 to grant the request citing the importance of federal and state compliance.

## Emergency Management Director Receives State Award

Realizing a need for Ice and Cold-Water rescue training, Lehman took classes, and then developed a training program for emergency responders in Wells and surrounding counties. She was instrumental in securing funds for the purchase of equipment, suits and all necessary gear. She was awarded the Outstanding Special Projects Award

*(Continued on page 8)*



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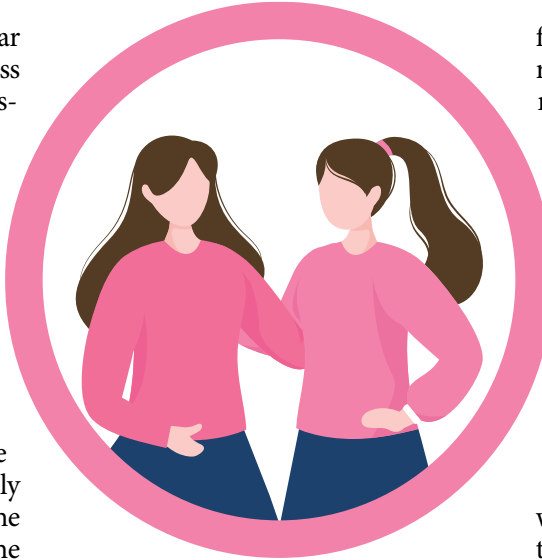
at the state meeting held in December 2004. The plan was adopted by FEMA to become a part of their library in February 2006.

#### Her First Disaster

On July 4, 2003, a tornado hit near Liberty Center, destroying a business owned by Richard and Patsy Mossburg. And then the rain came and kept coming until it reached a crest of 18.3 feet. This was referred to as the Great Flood of 2003. On July 11, 2003, "Disaster 1476: Severe Storms, Tornadoes and Flooding," July 4-Aug. 6, 2003, was declared by FEMA, thus providing much needed financial help.

The Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) was set up by FEMA under the direction of EMA director from July 11, 2003, through Sept. 22, 2003, in the County Annex conference room. The disaster estimated at \$2 million included: \$700,000 for the buy-out program; \$500,000 in direct grants to individuals; \$1.2 million in small business loans;

over \$300,000 to the city of Bluffton designated for infrastructure repairs; and another \$200,000 for compensation of FEMA, overtime, and related expenses.



es. The town of Vera Cruz was severely damaged, as were houses along East Washington Street in the city of Bluff-

ton. The county project for the victims of Vera Cruz was still pending on January 10, 2008.

#### The ICE Storm January 2005

"It looks like a flood to be about 1.5 feet less than the Great Flood of 2003," reported Jim Barbieri in The News-Banner. Later he describes in an editorial on Jan. 12, 2006, "But in recent days ... Her office is out there on the front lines where help is needed. Since she took the EMA job for a part-time wage but an endless task in the combined seas of disasters and bureaucracy Lehman has been up-front and out front — right at the scene if disaster and adversity in flood, fire, windstorm, ice snow, power outages and more."

The biggest concern Lehman had was that there would be people unable to get help. She organized volunteers and firemen to check on the rural areas. This was the right decision as many expressed thankfulness for the contacts and attention from real people. This was only about a 10-year job, but it took an emotional toll on her. To this day she gets emotional when she remembers about the people who lost everything.

#### Present Day Activities

Jerri has always been a person who multitasked, including her personal life and work experiences. EMA was considered part-time, so she became a bus driver. When she was no longer employed by EMA, she decided to go to barber school. Upon completing the degree, she opened a "full service" shop offering barber and beauty shop, nails and pedicures. She was active in the state Bus Drivers Association for several years. She closed her shop and resigned from the bus driver's board. Today, she keeps busy as an appointee to the Cemetery Commission. Her current project is focused on the Murray Cemetery, cleaning and restoration.

She is married to Don Lehman who is also retired. They have one daughter, April Webber, and a granddaughter named Bristol. Don has a daughter, Lachelle Clifton, whom Jerri considers her daughter as well. Jerri's parents were Joe and Ferne Holloway.

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# Around the World and Back Again

## BHS student returns from year in Thailand

By Holly Gaskill

*Originally published in The News-Banner on Aug. 10, 2024*

This time last year, a 16-year-old Leah Brown landed at an airport in Thailand, on her own and without knowing a word of the native language.

Though she had only just been given the responsibility of a driver's license, the Bluffton High School sophomore was then trusted to live across the world for nearly an entire year. With endless optimism, Brown zealously rose to the opportunity for all she could learn and experience.

Over 10 months in a foreign country, Brown would grow to be conversational in the native language, travel to several other countries, teach English to children and collect cross-cultural experiences to last a lifetime.

Brown traveled to Thailand through the Rotary International Youth Exchange program, a high school exchange program that partners with other Rotary clubs across the world. She was sponsored by Bluffton's Rotary Club, which partnered with a host club in Phuket, Thailand. Brown attended a Thai school and stayed with three host families, an intentional part of the program to experience different family cultures.

Altogether, Brown's cultural experience of Phuket is nearly the complete opposite of Bluffton — the coastal province is roughly two-thirds the size of Wells County but with a population of over 400,000. People speak Thai and other regional native dialects — although English isn't uncommon — and practice Buddhism.

Brown also found that the area had quite a different relationship with food — most meals were street food eaten at markets, where Brown could buy a bowl of noodles for 45 cents. Breakfasts were also typically savory, sometimes including chicken, and most meals were fried and served with rice.

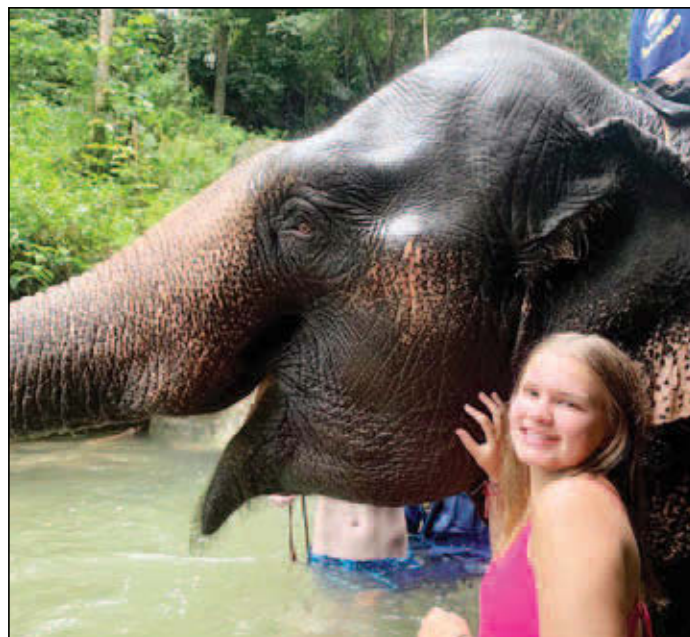
If meals were prepared at home, they were often done in an outdoor kitchen. Brown also learned that most dairy products weren't culturally stored in the fridge. "So I didn't eat cheese," she laughed. She did eat, however, a variety of bugs, scorpions and chicken feet.

The country also celebrates numerous holidays, with Brown's favorite being the Thai New Year. The April holiday is accompanied by a three-day country-wide water fight.

"It was probably one of the craziest experiences," Brown shared. "There's just people lining the roads with these water guns. It was just actually the most insane experience and everybody was soaking wet."

### Homesickness & Health

While culture shock could be considered an understatement, Brown found that the varying familial cultures were of-



Leah Brown, a Bluffton High School student, spent her junior year as an exchange student in Thailand. Brown is pictured with an elephant at left. (Photo provided)

ten the most jarring. Little questions, like how to turn on the shower or what was appropriate to wear for different parts of the day, were constantly popping into her mind.

All the while, Brown was careful about communication back home. Brown and her parents, Dustin and Rebecca, had been advised by RYE to be intentional about how often they spoke, to stay in touch but not worsen homesickness. She estimated she spoke with her parents about once a week — about 30 times across the 10 months.

"I was so overwhelmed the first week or so," Brown said. "And then after the first week, I got into the swing of things. And then every switch (in host families) ... there was a week where I was like, 'Get me out of here' ... Talking to my mom, I always felt better."

Brown feels lucky about her experience with homesickness, but it was at its worst when she wasn't feeling well. Although she never encountered any serious illnesses, Brown ended up in the hospital twice in Thailand — once from a concussion while whitewater rafting and another time after getting a ring stuck on her finger. Both were handled relatively easily.

### Back to School

As part of getting to know the culture, Brown attended a Thai school throughout her time in the country. In a school of 4,000 students in uniforms, she thought she would be able to blend in a bit.

*(Continued on page 10)*



Leah Brown was able to volunteer at a local Burmese school while she studied abroad in Thailand. She's pictured with some of the students she worked with above. (Photos provided)

### *(Continued from page 9)*

"I very much was apart from the crowd," she laughed, adding, "I had to learn real fast to be real confident in myself."

Most of the classes were taught half in English and half in Thai, which helped to learn the language. While Brown was already bilingual in English and Spanish, Thai has its own alphabet and is entirely different from Germanic and Latin-based languages.

While it was difficult for Brown to say Thai names, many of her peers struggled to say "Leah" as well. Brown ended up getting a Thai nickname after a common Phuket flower. "It was cute," she said. "They actually give that nickname to a lot of foreigners who stay for a while."

Luckily, Brown clicked with friends who helped her practice her Thai speaking skills. Brown said she was largely flu-

ent in speaking and understanding the language by the time she left, but recognized that it's a skill that will probably fade with time.

### **Ambassadorship**

Perhaps the most unexpected part of Brown's study abroad experience was the extent to which she was asked to represent U.S. politics to those around her. Everyone Brown encountered wanted to know her takes on all kinds of U.S. issues.

"I think being an American in the current year and last years — everyone wanted to know my opinion on everything," she said. "I was questioned about everything"

In her Rotary Club alone, there were 16 different nationalities present, and more throughout the clubs she interacted with in the region.

Brown tried to handle subjects with care, often providing context to differing opinions. However, she also found the conversations challenging as she was actively exposed to different cultural experiences and perspectives that were broadening her own views.

"They would find out I was American and the first thing they would ask about is school shootings," she shared. "Which is really sad, especially being a high schooler, like that's something we think about. Often in Thailand, they just don't have that problem because arms aren't a problem there."

It became even more difficult to consider as Brown learned that there had been a firearm found at BHS in April. "It

*(Continued on page 11)*



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### *(Continued from page 10)*

was very difficult for me to grapple with it, honestly,” she said.

Although the subject matter was an unexpected burden, it was one Brown found herself grateful to have experienced. She had hoped to learn how to “live life not in a box,” she told *The News-Banner* in August 2023.

“I think that’s actually a common theme throughout my exchange year,” Brown said. “I think the big one was (learning that) your perspective is valid, but so is everybody else’s . . . I think traveling and meeting people all over the world has made me a better person in a lot of ways.”

In addition to her experiences in Phuket, Brown was able to travel to Bali, Thailand, and the country’s capital, Bangkok. She also went out of the country to Singapore and Laos.

#### **A Bittersweet Goodbye**

During the last few months in Thailand, Brown’s host parents were a retired couple who were primarily involved in humanitarian work. Because she was on break from school, she took the opportunity to be involved in this work, teaching English and music to children at a Burmese school.

While Brown is hesitant to place many ‘favorites’, she does credit the last three months as being the reason it was bittersweet to come home.

“Much of my exchange year was very — I want to say selfish — but it was very much about me and what I was learning,” Brown said. “And it was so cool to teach other kids.”

Brown spent those days teaching at the school, spending time with friends and Rotarians, and exploring parts of the city with her host parents.

“Oh, my host dad — I love him, he’s so funny,” Brown shared. “He plays the harmonica. And so I would go to the most random bars, like literally bars, and we’d walk in and sit down, and he’d play music. That was one of our favorite things to do together. We’d play music all the time.”

She added with a smile, “And then I’d wake up the next day and do it all again.”

#### **Back Home Again in Indiana**

In the months leading to her return

to the U.S., Brown learned something about her flight plans had messed up and she had to change the dates. And thus, a plan was hatched.

Brown returned three weeks earlier than expected and surprised her close friends one by one. She even planned a series of social media posts to look like she was still in Thailand, all while boarding a plane to Chicago or sitting at home. “And I bamboozled everybody,” she smirked.

Of course, she was also ecstatic to be reunited with her family.

“The moment I landed in Chicago, I was bawling, like all the waterworks,” Brown laughed. “I was so excited to see my mom. I was so excited to go home. And drink Dr. Pepper.”

Readjusting home has not always been a seamless process, but she takes it one day at a time. Now 17-years-old, Brown finds herself realizing that her friends, BHS, and Bluffton aren’t the same as when she left. She’s not the same as when she left either.

“My best friend kept me grounded a lot because she would say things like, ‘It’s exciting to meet a new version of Leah,’” she shared. “I mean, I left a sophomore and came back as a senior — that’s bizarre.”

It’s also helpful that Brown is always looking forward. She started a mixed soda stand business with her dad and hosted her first event. She’s organizing an internship for her senior year. She wants to host a Bluffton fundraiser for the Burmese school she volunteered at. She’s planning a trip back to Thailand with her family for next year.

“I cannot sit still, I simply cannot,” she joked.

Before Brown’s year abroad, she was thinking about studying international relations after high school, but now she’s leaning toward the government policy side. Wherever she lands, the sky’s the limit — and she’ll always know where the best view is.

Brown smiled, “Now I’ve seen sunsets literally on the other side of the world. Indiana sunsets — nothing like them, nothing like them.”



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# Informed to Transformed

**By Bekah Shaffer**

What do you do with the lessons you've learned?

The gift of living in today's world is the ability to learn anything you want — with relative ease. The downfall of living in today's world is that you drown in the information you so easily learn.

But the Women in Leadership organization in Wells County is changing the narrative on lessons learned. They aren't drowning in the information. They've learned to swim against the cultural tide and make a difference in their own lives, their families, their workplaces, and their community.

How?

Under the teaching of the “Run Hard. Rest Well.” leadership team of Brenda Jank, Stacey Dumbacher and Wells County's own Alicia Hill, this group of women has continued the conversation of Restorative Wellness introduced to them two years ago. A series of workshops, luncheons and conferences gave way to unique monthly meetings tailored to continuing education and discussion on how to practically and consistently employ the lessons designed to change lives and leave a powerful legacy.

The Women in Leadership group, made up of around a dozen women from Wells County, represents an array of gifts and responsibilities. Collectively they are intricately connected throughout the county, making a deep impact on the people they serve. They seek to grow professionally while balancing the demands of busy personal lives: marriage, motherhood, hobbies, side jobs and dreams that haven't yet come to fruition. And as they balance it all, they've been learning and implementing strategies to empower them to do their best by making time for rest.

Rest, by the way, is not a synonym for a nap. Naps might be part of rest, but



they are not the fullness of rest. The women have been learning to connect with like-minded friends, understand how to best care for themselves — relationally, physically, emotionally — and set boundaries to help them pour from a “full bucket.”

Erin Prible, executive director at the Wells County Chamber of Commerce, has appreciated the permission these workshops and conversations have given her to take time to intentionally rest. Our society insinuates that sitting and breathing are luxuries, but they are no longer that for Erin. She employs these practices regularly, along with eating and exercising differently, and the combination of intentional changes has made a noticeable improvement in her overall health, for which she is grateful. Erin assures that such strategies, once learned, are easy to implement for anyone who chooses to make the time to do so.

Helping Hands' Executive Director Kylie Tomlin agrees. “I take rest more seriously. A lot of us can feel guilt surrounding rest, especially when there's always something we could be doing, but we can't pour from an empty bucket.” Kylie is also quick to add that

rest doesn't have to take a lot of time or planning and financial resources. Rest can be found in a short walk on the grass outside, soaking up the sun, or even taking a lap around the office, just to get moving.

Mental health conversations have increased post-pandemic, but are still relatively new discussion items, and this group has learned the value in coming together to encourage, brainstorm, and validate one another in their choices to rest and rejuvenate in purposeful, restorative ways. Erin has found the interactions to be eye-opening to the change taking place in the culture around us. Self-care doesn't just change one person. It impacts all those around — and what a gift it is when that impact can be positive and encourage others to also make life-improving changes!

When making such all-encompassing changes, practice may not make perfect, but it does make progress, and Kylie has seen that in her own life over the past year. She likely speaks for all the group when she says the demands of her work and personal life haven't lessened, but she has learned to find ways to rest more naturally within the

*(Continued on page 13)*



*(Continued from page 12)*

busy days. She's learned to prioritize and isn't afraid to recognize when a task could wait until another day, giving her space in the current day to rest and refill her bucket.

The ways the women choose to rest are as multi-faceted and unique as each of them. Sometimes rest comes through



addition and other times through subtraction. Erin shared that she has learned to spend her resting time adding more moments of prayer, connecting with God and keeping her relationship with Him at the front of her mind in ways she hadn't done in the past. On the other hand, Kylie learned that she

had been multi-tasking her rest. She loves to grab a fuzzy blanket, curl up on the couch and watch a movie, but she'd been simultaneously pulling out her laptop to work while she rested. She's learning to create space to truly sit and enjoy by subtracting work from her rest time.

For all the women in the group, the past two years have taught them information, yes, but also transformation. And they're eager for more women to come alongside and learn the freedom of the skills they've developed. As Erin wisely said, "Women are programmed to be programmed. We do things for everyone else, but we're not conditioned to care for ourselves. Habits form, and if we don't slow down, we'll feel the impact on our bodies." The freedom she has found in resting, breathing, praying and sharing in community is something she longs for other women — from young mothers all the way up to senior citizens — to find and enjoy too.

Kylie adds, "Even in middle school and high school, I remember it being a badge of honor if you were involved in more extracurricular activities. Now I think it shows up in who is at the office the earliest and stays the latest. Who doesn't utilize all their PTO? Whose weekends are the fullest? I wish we



would all have a healthier understanding that our bodies need rest in order to do our best at home, work, and everywhere."

Indeed, the Women in Leadership have taken information and used it for transformation.

They invite you to do the same!

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# Wells County Women in Leadership: Building a Stronger Community Through Empowerment and Connections

Since its inception in 2022, the Wells County Women in Leadership organization has become a beacon of support, fostering connections, personal growth and the empowerment of women from diverse walks of life. The committee's mission is simple yet profound: "Learn, Lead & Leave a Legacy." This guiding principle has shaped the organization's events, initiatives, and outreach efforts, impacting women in the community and beyond.

This past year, the committee hosted a series of events featuring outstanding speakers who brought relevant and engaging topics to attendees. From discussions on "Burnout" to "The Power of Meaningful Relationships" and even a session on "How to Avoid Being Squirrels," the programming has resonated with women navigating the complexities of life and career.

As the year comes to a close, the organization is preparing for its signature event — the annual EmpowerHer Conference in November. This confer-



ence is designed to inspire women by featuring professional speakers who address essential topics like decoding the body's signals, transforming health, and reclaiming vitality. Attendees will also learn how to tap into their heart's strength to live with purpose, resil-

ience, and authenticity. Through the C.O.M.P.E.T.E. method and speakers' personal stories, women are encouraged to take meaningful action in their lives.

The importance of these events cannot be overstated. Women, often balancing numerous roles, struggle to slow down and prioritize self-care. The Wells County Women in Leadership organization has addressed topics such as the importance of sleep, strategies for self-care, and the impact of cortisol on overall health — reminders that women need to take care of themselves in order to care for others.

"The topics are relevant to any woman at any stage in life," says Erin Prible, a Women in Leadership committee member. "We want to give strategies to

*(Continued on page 15)*

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*(Continued from page 14)*

women that can be helpful and transformative, so they can be healthy, connected and embrace their roles with confidence.”

Since its founding, more than 500 women have attended these events. One of the most remarkable aspects of Women in Leadership is the diversity it brings together. From entrepreneurs and stay-at-home moms to CEOs and community leaders, each woman brings a unique perspective and plays a vital role in shaping the community. Together, they are creating a stronger, more united Wells County.

To continue this journey of growth and connection, we encourage the women of Wells County to join our Wells County Women in Leadership Facebook page. The page is a space

for inspiring stories, updates on upcoming events, and highlights of local women making an impact in our community.

With a commitment to continuous growth and empowerment, the Wells County Women in Leadership organization remains dedicated to helping women thrive, lead with confidence, and leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

We would like to take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate the dedicated Women in Leadership Committee members: Jessica Beste, Alyssa Brown, Kim Gentis, Alicia Hill, Molly Hoag, Jayde Ketring, Beth McConn, Erin Prible, Beth Singleton, Tammy Slater, Julie Thompson, Kylie Tomlin and Hattie Wondercheck. Their commitment and contributions are vital to the success and growth of our organization.



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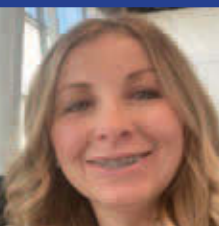
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# How an Ossian native became a W.A.S.P.

**By Kayleen Reusser**

*Originally published in Winter 2023 Senior Living*

Elizabeth 'Betty' White's interest in flying began when a family member paid for her to take a plane ride at Smith Field in Fort Wayne, Ind. The year was 1934 and White, who was born in Ossian, was 12 years old. Even though aviation was in its infancy, her interest was cemented. "Amelia Earhart was my hero," she said.

Upon graduating from Ossian High School in 1940, White studied at Manchester College for a year, then worked at General Electric in Fort Wayne.

Her interest in soaring through the skies was renewed in 1942 when she read a magazine article about a new program in the military that needed women as pilots. The article explained that female pilots were being recruited to help the war effort on the home front. The women would be called WASP (Women's Air Service Pilots). They could ferry aircraft, test planes, instruct male pilots, and tow targets for anti-aircraft artillery practice.

Applicants were required to have 35

hours of flight time. White paid for lessons at Smith Field at a cost of \$10 per hour. It was an exorbitant amount for a young, single working woman on a budget. "I didn't eat much," she said.

Prior to being accepted into the military, White traveled to Sweetwater, Texas, where WASP training was held. She met Jacqueline Cochran, the woman in charge of the program. White submitted her application and was accepted. Among the 25,000 applicants, White was one of 1,830 applicants selected to train and serve as Army pilots. She left for Texas in January 1944.



Betty Dybbro

The seven-month WASP program was equivalent to training given to male pilots.

"We had ground school in the mornings that included college-level courses in math, physics, Morse code and navigation," she said.

In the afternoons the women, wearing belted men's jumpsuits because they had no uniforms, completed hands-on training with Stearman and AT6 aircraft. "We had to take an airplane engine apart and put it back together," she said. The women learned how to navigate by instruments only and had to

complete a 2,000-mile solo flight from Texas to California before earning their wings as pilots.

When White had her wings pinned on her in August 1944, she was one of 1,074 women who completed the WASP program.

Not everyone was thrilled with women pilots. At a base at Marfa, Texas, a male commander would not allow White and other WASPs to fly. White transferred to a gunnery school in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she towed targets with a B-17 for live target practice by male pilots. "Some planes were hit but not mine," she said.

By December 1944, the war in Europe was turning in favor of the Allies. Male pilots, needing a rest from combat, were sent back to the States. The WASP program abruptly ended so the men could resume control of pilot positions held by the WASP.

White was disappointed, but had fallen in love with a fighter pilot, Robert Sheehan. They married and Betty lived with her in-laws in Washington State while her husband was sent to India to continue with the war in the Pacific.

After the war, Betty and Robert became parents to two children. Sadly,

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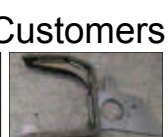
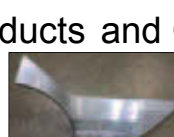
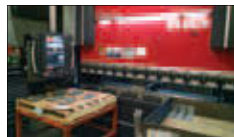


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*(Continued from page 16)*



On Betty Dybbro's 95th birthday, members of a local flying club offered her the opportunity to fly in two planes she had flown in as a young pilot, a Piper Cub and a Stearman bi-plane. (Photos provided.)

Robert was shot down over Korea during the war there in the 1950s. His body was never recovered.

Later, Betty married Phil Dybbro and their family grew to include six children. Betty provided flight instruction for several years after the war.

At the time of the WASP dismissal, the women were awarded no honor or military benefits. That changed in 1977 when President Jimmy Carter granted the women status as veterans. In 2010 a group of WASPs was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington DC.

In 2017, on Dybbro's 95th birthday, members of a local flying club near her home in Seattle offered her the opportunity to fly in two planes she had flown as a young pilot – a Piper Cub and a Stearman biplane accompanied by fellow pilots. "It was a wonderful experience," she said. "I really enjoyed it."

*Do you have a story to tell or know someone who does? kjreusser@gmail.com*

*Editor's Note: At last report, Dybbro remains active and was honored in March as the last surviving Women's Auxiliary Service Pilot in Washington State.*



Kayleen Reusser, of Bluffton, has written a series of books, sharing the stories of area veterans. This is an excerpt from "We Gave Our Best." It is available at The News-Banner office in Bluffton and on Amazon.

# Recipes

By Barb McBride



## Stuffed Pepper Soup

- 1 lb. Hamburger
- 1 Green Pepper
- 1 cup Diced Onions
- 1 29 oz. Dice Tomatoes
- 1 15 oz. Tomato Sauce
- 1 14 oz. Chicken Broth
- 1/4 t. Thyme
- 1/4 t. Sage
- Salt and Pepper Taste
- 1 cup White Rice

## Pizza Dip

- 8 oz. Phil. Cheese
- 1/4 cup Par. Cheese
- 3/4 t. Garlic/org.
- 1 cup Mott. Cheese
- 1 cup Cheddar cheese
- 1 lb. Sausage Mild Ital.
- 1/2 cup Green Pepper
- 1/2 lb. bacon
- 1 can tomatoes

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