



# BOLIVAR

## *Polk County*

# PRIDE & PROGRESS

A Special Supplement to the Bolivar Herald-Free Press  
Wednesday, March 30, 2022



# PILLAR IN BUSINESS AND AGRICULTURE

# Matt Henenberg

“I understand the problems that farmers and ranchers have with weather, markets, disease and other issues.”



Matt in his business world, at his desk at LimeBank in Bolivar.

Interview and photos by Linda Simmons

## Banking on agriculture for the future

Moving to a small town from the city in the mid 1980s was the beginning of Matt Henenberg’s agricultural journey in Polk County. Putting down roots in Polk County later led him into the banking business, as well. His involvement in business and agriculture has been ongoing and has grown alongside the community.

Matt and his wife LeAnn, a physical therapist at Citizens Memorial Hospital, have strong roots in Polk County now. Having their family — Neil and his wife Erica, and Seth, Audrey and Maude Henenberg, along with grandchildren, Skylar, Avery, Eleanor, Memphis and one on the way — makes for a strong bond to the community.

Working with farmers and businessmen alike, Matt has taken part in many projects in Polk County. He is a past member of the Kiwanis Club and the Polk County

Cattlemen’s Association. He served 8 years as head of the Missouri Family Rodeo Association and Missouri High School Rodeo Association. Also, he is co-owner and broadcaster of Bolivar Liberator Web TV, sharing games, other school functions and community events live online.

Matt served as president for the Bolivar Area Chamber of Commerce in 1995 and has continued working closely with the organization. Currently, he’s working with the chamber as board president of the upcoming inaugural Missouri Beef Days in Bolivar. The six-day event, running Monday through Saturday, May 16-21, will feature various activities — including a rodeo, concert, parade and farm tours — that highlight Matt’s two passions, business and agriculture.

The BH-FP visited with Matt and found out what Polk County business and agriculture means to him.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### What brought you to Bolivar?

In 1982, I came to Bolivar to visit Jim Hacker, whom I went to college with at MU. I made a return visit in the fall of 1983, and we watched SBU play their first football game, and I decided I would come to Bolivar and play football at SBU. I called my mom and told her I found the place I was going to live the rest of my life, and I have been here ever since.

### How long have you been in the banking business?

I started my banking career in July of 1991. Joe Rayl and Morris Lawson of Southwest Bank hired me. I worked there until the bank was sold to Mercantile Bank in 1995. After that, I worked at the Bolivar Herald-Free Press for 6 months,

then I went back to school for a year. I worked a year at Sac River Valley Bank in Stockton until they sold to Liberty Bank. In 2001, I went to work at US Bank and worked there until 2003, when I came to Farmers State Bank, now LimeBank.

### Who was your greatest influence in the banking industry?

Joe Rayl and J.C. Meador.

### What’s your agricultural background?

My mom was from a little farming town in South Central Illinois. I always loved being there, so I went to Ag School at MU. When I moved to Bolivar, I worked for Hackers Spring Valley Ranch, then

Triple C Farms. I shoveled fescue seed at Gardner’s Seed House at night and hauled hay. Later I did work on the Kifer Ranch, as well. We got our own farm in 2003. We have raised sheep, goats, chickens, dogs, horses and cows. The best thing we raised on the farm was our kids, though.

### What makes you proud to be a part of Polk County?

I chose Polk County to be my home. The fact that people accepted a “knuckle headed” kid from St. Louis and helped him grow and prosper says everything. I try to remember that as I live my life and do my business to help others and help them succeed.



**You're a part of the Missouri Beef Days event coming up. What's important about this event?**

I created the mission statement for Missouri Beef Days, and it is three pronged. All three areas of the statement are important to me. Educate people on the importance of beef on our environment, our economy and our nutrition. Honor and recognize our local beef producers and beef industry. Bring people to Bolivar to see how great our town and the beef industry is. People should be looking for a fun and educational week.



**“I called my mom and told her I found the place I was going to live the rest of my life.”**

Matt's Longhorn/Corriente cross cattle, as well as his donkeys and horses, wait for him to bring them their feed.

**What should people look forward to during this week-long event?**

There will be something for everyone. We have Temple Grandin coming, who is not only a legend in the beef industry but also a champion of people with autism. There will be a parade, rodeo, concert, beef expo and beef tours. Plus, we are going to be giving away two sides of beef and five \$100 gift certificates to our sponsoring businesses. We are expecting a lot of visitors from all over the region, so I hope everyone will make them feel welcome and they will want to come back to Bolivar again. We are all praying for a nice day on May 20!

**How do you think both your business life and agricultural life meld?**

We do not have to make a living on our farm, and I respect the people who have to and do make a living on their farms. I understand the problems that farmers and ranchers have with weather, markets, disease and other issues, because I have them as well.



**FROM THE SOURCE**

*The following excerpt comes from a nomination letter for Matt Henenberg:*

**W**e affectionately call Matt the “King of Beef” for his leadership of this new Missouri Beef Days adventure. The idea to host something special to say thanks to the ag and beef industries in Polk County has been talked about for several years. Without Matt, we might still be talking. Thanks for saying “yes,” Matt.

Banking. Beef. Bolivar. When it comes to customers, cattle and community, Matt is truly the champion for all. And a guy has to be pretty good when he looks to Will Rogers for inspiration, right? We’re all for the better because this Bearcat decided to make Bolivar his home.



A bull calf comes up to get water and greet Matt.





Matt shares his love of agriculture with his granddaughter Eleanor.

### PREVIOUS BUSINESS WINNERS & NOMINEES

- Linda Bunch (2019)*
- Downtown Business Association (2020)*
- Citizens Memorial Hospital (2021)*
- Rose Roweton
- Steve Henderson
- Mike Gardner
- Justin Ballard
- Susan Sparks
- Jason Farmer
- Jerry Hamby
- Gail Noggle
- Stephanie Rains
- Tanner Isenberger

### PREVIOUS AGRICULTURE WINNERS & NOMINEES

- Kathy Drake (2019)*
- Velynda Cameron (2020)*
- Jered and Ashley Brown (2021)*
- Sukovaty family
- Mark and Donita Stanek
- Dale Edmondson

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# PILLAR IN EDUCATION

## POLK COUNTY *Soil & Water Conservation*

### DISTRICT BOARD



Members of the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation Board and district employees include:  
Seated — David Hale, treasurer, and Ben Gorden, chairman  
Row 2 — Kody Agee, district specialist, Paula Welter, NRCS soil conservationist, and Vicky Fieth, office manager.  
Row 3 — Quent Riedesel, incoming member, and Keith Stevens, state commissioner and member.

Interview and photos by Linda Simmons

## Educating, supporting, conserving

**“There is no such thing as throwing it away.”**  
—Ben Gorden

The board of supervisors for the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District takes its job very seriously. For its members, education has and will always be an important part of what they do.

The board is made up of four men — chairman Ben Gorden, vice-chairman Jim Hacker, treasurer David Hale and member Keith Stevens, who is also currently a member of the Missouri Soil and Water Districts Commission. In April, Quent Riedesel will take over Jim Hacker’s seat as he steps down.

Each volunteer board member is a land owner and a tax paying resident of Polk County. They represent four areas of the county, each serving four-year terms. The board’s responsibility is to promote the protection, improvement, maintenance and wise use of the soil and water resources within the district.

Its official mission is “to educate and assist the public in the wise use of our natural resources while improving agricultural production and quality of life.”

In order to reach local students with the message of conversation, the board sponsors an annual poster con-

test. It helps even the youngest Polk Countians consider soil and water conservation as an important topic.

The contest starts at the local level at area schools and goes on up to the national level. From this contest, Polk County has had many state winners, and even some national winners.

While the contest has been put on hold for the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the board hopes to get back into schools in the near future.

The board has also sponsored a water festival, field days, spring forage conference and many years of grazing schools. Education for farmers about rotational grazing is a resource they are proud to offer.

The Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District, located at 1333 E. Broadway in Bolivar, shares an office with the Natural Resources Conservation department.

The BH-FP visited with the board members, as well as office manager Vicky Fieth, NRCS soil conservationist Paula Welter and district specialist Kody Agee, to learn more about how the board educates the community.

# Jim Rush

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This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Can you give some history behind the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District?**

**Vicky Fieth:** Throughout the years, this group of board members has initiated different ideas, events and practices to enhance the services of the district. They have reached out to other agencies to expand on educational, technical and financial support. Under the supervision of board members, landowners can receive education, conservation, technical support and financial incentives they need to conserve their soil and water resources.

**Ben Gorden:** Several years ago, Missouri was one of the leading states in soil loss, but since that time we have turned that around, and we are now one of the leading states in soil conservation.

The thing that has happened in the last few years, a lot of people have the misconception that the only soil loss that we have is when people plow their ground. They didn't realize that grazing practices and things we do here in southwest Missouri can cause a lot of soil erosion, as well. Since that time, the commission has developed some programs for us, and we have been able to develop some rotational grazing and other strategies to make sure we address soil loss all across the state.

**What is your mission?**

**Gorden:** We offer programs for the landowners to take part in and help educate them in soil and water conservation practices. Financial incentives are available to assist agricultural landowners who install concentration practices to decrease soil erosion and improve water quality. Over the past 25 years, Polk County landowners have received over \$2.2 million in cost-share money for conserving the soil and water sources.

Board members are here to help educate landowners about soil and water conservation practices, rotational grazing practices, irrigation management, animal waste management, nutrient and pest management.

**Feith:** These men know the land and water conditions of the county and know the practices that can improve conditions of the land. They are energized, open minded, positive thinkers and always looking out for the landowners in Polk County.



Ben Gorden, Quent Riedesel and Keith Stevens are ready to work with landowners on their projects.



Kody Agee helps Dustin Lenox with getting the right materials for fencing.

**'PART OF THE SOLUTION'**

Ben Gorden shared the following letter he wrote to the Missouri Soil and Water Commission in February 2020.

After listening to recent interviews and reading about the new administration's ambitions about the environment, I'm concerned about the impact on soil and water districts across the state. I would like to share a few of my thoughts.

In the past we have set back, waited to see what happens and then complained. I suggest we not do that this time. It's now time to announce to the whole world what we do, what we have done and what we are trying to do to conserve soil and water across the state. Like never before, it's time for us to tell our story. If not, others will try to tell our story to the detriment of our efforts. If we can show we are part of the solution and not part of the problem all agriculture will benefit.

Many citizens have no idea about our efforts. Because they don't understand agriculture they come up with wild, exaggerated claims and solutions. It's time to tell our story.

First we must state we share the goals of protecting our environment, conserving soil, protecting our water and tell what we are doing and have done to achieve these goals. Change is coming, let's help shape that change by providing information and input.

*Sincerely, Ben Gorden*

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**Why is it important to educate the population on soil conservation?**

**Gorden:** It takes hundreds of years to make an inch of topsoil, and one hard rain can wash that away in 30 minutes. With the water, we can put stuff in the water that we can never get out. I always say there is no such thing as throwing it away. Once it's in the groundwater, it's polluted. So it's important people understand more about soil and water conservation and what needs to be done.

**How has the pandemic affected your program?**

**Gorden:** Like all businesses during the pandemic, there were no appointments that could be taken care of inside the office. We were still able to work with individuals by meeting in the parking lot and work out their plans there.

**What other services do you offer?**

**Gorden:** There are no-till drills for rent. There also are items for sale that landowners would need to build electric fences. Some of the cost-share practices require specific types of materials to build the fence with. These items will meet the specifications of the practice requirements. It is helpful for the landowners to be able to find these items and get instructions on the use of the items also.



Barrett Pierce and Paula Welter with the Natural Resource Conservation Service work in the field. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS/ BARRETT PIERCE

**MORE ABOUT GRAZING SCHOOL**

The Regional Management-Intensive Grazing School consists of four evening workshops on the management of intensive grazing for economic and environmental sustainability. The school is sponsored by the Polk and Dallas County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and University of Missouri Outreach and Extension Service. This year, the evening classes are set for Tuesday, April 26; Thursday, April 28; Tuesday, May 3; and Thursday, May 5. A daytime field trip is planned for Saturday, April 30. For more information and to register for the class, call 417-326-5993.

**“Change is coming, let’s help shape that change by providing information and input.”  
—Ben Gorden**



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**“A lot of people have the misconception that the only soil loss that we have is when people plow their ground.”**  
**—Ben Gorden**



**FROM THE SOURCE**

The following excerpt comes from a nomination letter:

I can sincerely say these men take their positions as supervisors very seriously. They have taken their moral responsibility to the local people to assume the responsibility of running the district's business.



Barrett Pierce and Paula Welter with the Natural Resource Conservation Service work in the field. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS/ BARRETT PIERCE

**PREVIOUS WINNERS & NOMINEES**

- Renee Sagaser (2019)*
- Joy Rothdiener (2020)*
- Jean Vincent and the Polk County Historical Society (2021)*
- Tim DeClue
- Steve Henderson
- Randy Jones
- Danielle West
- Meilani Conley
- Jena Whetstine
- Hillary Glauser-Patton
- Renfang Taylor
- Sandy Krueger
- Beth Grabowski
- Joe Shelton
- Robby Hoegh
- Jeff Davis
- Kim Ware
- Betty Glasgow
- Dustin Davis

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# PILLAR IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

# Ben Salmon

“Seeing someone light up and find their true purpose in life is worth getting out of bed in the morning.”

Ben Salmon of KLIFE Ministries poses for a photo in the recently updated KLIFE house on South Lillian Avenue.



Interview by Talya Holgate-Allen | Photos by Linda Simmons

## Making disciples who make disciples

**B**en Salmon is a big part of biblical leadership in Polk County. His love for Jesus and desire to bring Him into the lives of others is what brought him to KLIFE.

As the executive director of the Polk County KLIFE branch, founded in 2004, Salmon’s primary mission is to bring Jesus into the lives of local children and youth. He mainly does this through small group ministries within KLIFE.

In these groups, children are able to get closer to God, their peers and work to become future servant leaders. There are also larger groups that get together for worship, games and skits.

Ben hails from Hermitage, graduating from the high school there in 2010. He went on to graduate from Truman State University in 2014 where he re-

ceived a Bachelor’s of Science degree in business finance.

Outside of KLIFE, Ben prides himself on having a home filled with coffee (made by his wife), life, music and fun. He also welcomes college students, who may be looking for a place to stay, into his home.

And, his ministry today is a family affair. He has been married to his wife Stevie for 7 years. They have a son Malakai, who was born in 2020, and a daughter on the way. While Stevie’s day job is as a physical therapist with the Bolivar R-1 school district, she is also a volunteer Women’s Shepherd at Polk County KLIFE. Her duties include mentoring, discipling and shepherding the ladies of the ministry.

Ben visited with the BH-FP about his community service and work with the area’s young people.

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## FROM THE SOURCE

The following excerpt comes from a nomination letter for Ben Salmon:

**B**en Salmon, with the help of his wife Stevie, has been an excellent influence in the lives of so many children in our area through the K-life ministry in our town. K-life is a community wide, interdenominational Christian ministry. He has worked tirelessly to let kids know they are important by leading various activities and small groups. His bright outlook and good attitude are contagious. He has been able to bring together people from many different backgrounds to work together toward the common good of raising children with godly values and stability in a world that can be so difficult sometimes.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



SuperK Leaders Cole Knight and Tyler Gallion work with the sixth grade boys' small group at Open Hearts Methodist Church.

### What is KLIFE?

KLIFE is a ministry focused on providing discipleship for students in cities across the country. Through a variety of activities, KLIFE kids grow in their faith and have lots of fun in the process! Our hope is that we would equip students to live the rest of their life for Jesus and make Him known to others.

### How do KLIFE and the community work together?

KLIFE works alongside churches and families in the community to teach and encourage kids to be strong in the Lord in spite of all the negative pressures they face as teenagers. KLIFE networks kids from different churches, and those without a church home, to build positive, Godly relationships that can withstand the negative peer pressure so prevalent in today's youth culture.

### What's the heartbeat of KLIFE?

The heartbeat of KLIFE is our small group ministry. Our hope is that kids would participate in a small group led by our full-time staff or volunteers. The purpose of these groups is for kids to gain a greater knowledge of God's Word, build Godly relationships with peers, and have a Godly leader who comes alongside them as they navigate the difficult adolescent years. Supporting and surrounding our small group strategy are the more visible components of our ministry: large group gatherings, activities, events and retreats. Gatherings consist of games, skits, worship and talks that contain lessons with relevant life applications from the Bible.

### What is KLIFE's mission and vision?

In short, we make disciples who make disciples. Our vision is for more students in Polk County to know Jesus and know how to effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ. We want to eventually become KLIFE for all of Polk County! Our hope and goal is to hire more staff and expand our ministry to the other communities/school districts in Polk County (Pleasant Hope, Morrisville, Fair Play, Humansville, Halfway). We desire to impact the youth culture for Christ in our county!

### How is the organization structured?

Full-time staff — Me as executive director, Campbell Lakatos as ministry director. And after our successful "\$30,000 in 3 days" giving campaign, we plan to hire a women's ministry director to start in the fall. Board — our board is completely volunteer, and they work hard! Eleven members currently.

Leaders — all volunteers, and they are the magic sauce for PoCo KLIFE! Forty-five college and young adults give hours every week to mentor and discipline students, serve in various capacities in the ministry, and learn and grow through ongoing training and development.

KLIFE HQ — our national office is based out of Branson. KLIFE has about 70 full-time staff across the country and was founded in 1979 in St. Louis.

### What's your favorite part of KLIFE?

I love seeing the transformation the Holy Spirit brings to people through the process of discipleship. Seeing someone light up and find their true purpose in life is worth getting out of bed in the morning. In addition, I love developing leaders and watching others lead out in various areas. Furthermore, I LOVE connecting with people in our community and partnering together to make this a better place to live, work, play and do ministry.

"I love connecting with people in our community and partnering together to make this a better place to live, work, play, and do ministry."

## GET INVOLVED

Polk County KLIFE groups meet at the following times:

SuperK (3-5 grade) — Wednesdays, 3:15-5 p.m. at First Baptist Church Gym

MS Klub (6-8 grade): Mondays, 6:30-7:45 p.m. at 424 S Lillian Ave, Bolivar, MO —the KLIFE House

HS Klub (9-12 grade): Thursdays, 7-8:30 p.m. at the KLIFE House

Small groups meet on various days at various times. KLIFE currently has 15 small groups that meet weekly (age and gender specific: i.e. 6th grade boys, 12th grade girls, etc). Salmon called small groups the heartbeat of the ministry.



Ben Salmon and Campbell Lakatos, KLIFE's ministry director, join in to worship with a group of kids.

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"Our vision is for more students in Polk County to know Jesus and know how to effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ."



Ben Salmon and fellow leaders take time to pose for a photo at the KLIFE house with the large group of teenagers that gather each week.



**How can people get involved with KLIFE?**

If someone wants to learn more about plugging into our ministry, they just need to reach out to me or Campbell. There are a lot of different ways to be involved. Sending your kids to be a part of the ministry, serving as a volunteer leader, serving as a board member, supporting the ministry financially, simply being an advocate for the work we do in your church, neighborhood, etc.

**What's the KLIFE model of mission?**

**FELLOWSHIP:** Our desire is to provide a safe environment where kids can have tons of fun with other like-minded believers. A place where the truth is heard and the right to build a relationship begins to be earned.

**INFLUENCE:** Our small groups meet weekly to dig into God's Word and each

other's lives. All of our small group leaders are vetted and trained and are passionate about pouring into the next generation of Christ followers.

**IMPACT:** Our small group leaders are trained to pursue students outside of a small group to provide the truest form of discipleship. This context is so valuable to provide the greatest level of support for students during their ever difficult teenage years.

**Why is KLIFE important?**

Research shows that for every 10 Christians who step foot on a college campus, only two graduate still professing to believe in Jesus. The overwhelming common denominator for the two out of 10 is they had someone intentionally investing in them during their teenage years, someone like a KLIFE small group leader. Teenagers are

walking onto college campuses unable to defend their faith, but when a young adult shares their life with a teenager, transferring spiritual truths and life experiences, they are far more likely to continue walking with Jesus through college.

**How has the ministry grown in the past few years?**

Polk County KLIFE saw tremendous growth in the number of students reached about 6 years ago, while at the same time adding to our volunteer leader base. We directly interact and impact about 200 students on a weekly basis with about 50 volunteer leaders. However, it wasn't until the last couple of years that we saw our serious growth in our budget, which has allowed us to hire more staff and provide some MUCH needed updates to the KLIFE House.

**PREVIOUS WINNERS & NOMINEES**

- Nancy Harris (2019)*
- Linda Wollard (2020)*
- Community Outreach Ministries (2021)*
- Carol Poindexter
- Rosie Meyer
- Stacy Turnage
- Louise Wimberly
- Dorothy Isdell
- Jack Glendenning
- Mark Stanek
- Dean Ponder
- Kermit Hargis
- CMH Auxiliary
- Margaret Vest
- Ed Kurtz
- Michelle Morris
- Marcella Brown
- Leta Gass
- Steve Henderson
- Polk County Health Center
- Polk County Community Connections
- Susan Sparks
- Andrew McFarland
- Angel Haun
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# PILLARS IN HEALTH AND WELLNESS

*Gary Fulbright  
& Michael Calhoun*

**“CMH is a community based health care system that really puts the community first.”  
– Michael Calhoun**



Gary Fulbright and Michael Calhoun celebrate Gary's retirement in December.

## FROM THE SOURCE

The following excerpt comes from a nomination letter for Gary Fulbright and Michael Calhoun:

One cannot overlook the quality of leadership CMH has had over the years, especially during the trying times brought on by the pandemic. Thanks to the thoughtful, caring, financially responsible leadership of Gary Fulbright, the hospital not only survived but thrived during COVID-19. CMH's care of the community was literally lifesaving. As Gary passed the torch to Mike Calhoun, Bolivar, the county and surrounding communities can rest assured they will continue to have access to critical medical care for years to come.

Interview by Jill Way | Photos by Linda Simmons

## Building the future upon the past

Citizens Memorial Hospital and the Citizens Memorial Health Care Foundation have experienced more than their fair share of challenges and changes over the past few years.

The retirement of longtime CEO and foundation executive director Donald J. Babb in January 2020 was soon coupled with the often unpredictable and sometimes overwhelming hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gary Fulbright — the faithful employee of nearly four decades, former chief financial officer, third employee hired when CMH opened in the early 1980s and only second CEO in its history — certainly had his hands full when he took over the healthcare organization's top job from Babb.

However, Fulbright worked diligently to steady the ship as the hospital and community navigated turbulent waters.

And, even in hard times, he saw the healthcare organization and community staple continue to expand and grow under his leadership.

On Dec. 31, 2021, Fulbright retired and handed the helm over to Michael Calhoun, whose more than 20 year career at CMH has included a variety of positions in hospital and clinic administration, home medical equipment, materials management, information services, finance and pharmacy.

Calhoun was a natural choice to steer the ship, having served as CMH's chief operating officer for the hospital during Fulbright's tenure as CEO.

As CMH's newest leader, Calhoun is in a unique position — he can look back on the successes of those who came before him, learning from their examples, as he charts the path of the organization's future.

The BH-FP sat down with Fulbright and Calhoun in the fall of 2021 before their transitions.

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**This interview has been edited for length and clarity.**

**What do you think makes CMH special?**

**Michael Calhoun:** CMH is a community based health care system that really puts the community first. We put the patients first, and we take care of our people who provide the services. We have good employee engagement and good physician engagement. Our core values and CMH pride have permeated throughout the organization.

**How has your staff survived the hardest moments of COVID-19?**

**Calhoun:** You know, our staff has been really engaged with us through the pandemic. We've had relatively low turnover rates. They've been through so much. At first, it was that we closed so many things down. And then it got to where we had volumes greater than what we could have anticipated. People picking up extra shifts, working overtime. We try to take really good care of our staff, and they've stuck with us through this. We work to listen and work with them. We're really glad about that, because they're really the most important piece of what we do.

**How do you combat burnout among staff? Fight staffing challenges?**

**Gary Fulbright:** I think just the leaders being engaged, supporting them. Working hard to retain our employees that we have. That's probably the greatest opportunity we have — to retain the good people we have.

**Calhoun:** The ownership the employees feel in the organization, our mission, in what we do. It's more than a job. They are a vital part of what we're doing, and I think they feel that. We have a lot of longtime employees here at CMH who are active members in the community. They've been here for their entire careers. It's really important that CMH is successful to the point they feel person-

ally responsible to make it that way. You get enough people doing that, and it allows you to overcome some pretty significant challenges. We saw that through the pandemic. I think we'll continue to see that, whatever tomorrow brings.

**What's it been like to lead during COVID-19?**

**Fulbright:** I just think we have a really strong management team here. There were a lot of things to do quickly and adjust. It wasn't like the guidance was the same the whole time. One of the best things about CMH is that we're small enough to be agile but then we're large enough to have some nice resources. Most of those resources are really just our staff, management, physicians. For instance, we were able to react very quickly. The infusion center came up in 7 days, I believe, after we received the drugs.

**Calhoun:** That's something that's amazing, looking back. How rapidly we were able to respond to the community's needs. As things changed, we were able to provide what the community needed at the right time.

**Fulbright:** And we were able to work with our partners for the care of our community.

**Tell us about your leadership journey at CMH:**

**Calhoun:** I was a freshman in college when I started here in the pharmacy, and I was doing pre-pharm. I didn't know if I was going to be a pharmacist or a physician. Then after my first year, I decided pharmacy wasn't for me. It just didn't fit.

So after that, I took other positions. I was a courier delivering mail for a while, while I tried to figure out what I was going to do in school. I enrolled in business school at Southwest Baptist my sophomore year.

But actually, around that time, I was an



CMH staff take time to visit with Fulbright at his retirement celebration.



Community members make sure to congratulate Fulbright on his retirement.

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intern for Gary. I was on the courier route, and he stopped me one day and asked me if I had ever considered doing the business side of healthcare. I really didn't know what that meant.

So, he said, "If you'll be my intern for a while, then you'll see if it's something that interests you."

So, I was an intern for him all during school. The largest part of my career, I was the director of our physician clinics for 12 years. And then, the last two years, I've been the chief operating officer since Gary started as the CEO.

**What qualities did you see in Mike that made you want him as an intern?**

**Fulbright:** We had some projects I thought he would be good for. I assigned him a variety of projects. One of the more amusing ones, I asked him if he could drive between here and our clinic in Greenfield in less than 35 miles, because the government was proposing a change in reimbursement, and we were going to lose money if that clinic was more than 35 miles away. So he tried several different ways, and he just couldn't get it. He got within a mile.

But the fact that he tried so hard. He was just really young, and I noticed even other employees would come up to Mike and say, "Mike, what do you think we ought to do about this or that?" Here he was, the intern, and they were asking him. I think I saw his leadership abilities early on.

**Who mentored you along the way?**

**Fulbright:** Well, I think Mr. Babb made such an impression, really on everybody in the organization. I worked very closely with him on a lot of new projects and had a lot of good opportunities to grow being around him. Probably for all of us who worked for him, including Mike, there are parts of us that are different than if we hadn't worked with him.

One thing I saw him do — he might hire someone for a certain job, and I would be like, I don't understand that. But then in a few months, I would be like, "Oh, yeah. He really saw something in that person that was unique. They had the skills that were

needed for that role."

That's something I tried to mimic. Try to put people in roles I thought they could succeed in. And that's something that's very satisfying to me as a leader.

**Calhoun:** He taught me to always be thoughtful and to stay calm in the face of difficulty and not get too excited. To think it through, so that rubbed off on me, and I try to be more like that.

**What's your primary goal as CMH's newest leader?**

**Calhoun:** In my role, I have already been very involved with our strategic planning and what we have planned for our future, in terms of our one year, three year, five year goals. So when I think about what my vision is, it actually includes a lot of what we already have in our strategic plan. But, I think there are some quality initiatives and expansion I have in my mind as we get started that might be able to unite us toward some of those goals we already have.

I don't know that I look for the organization to change significantly. I believe in our culture. I like who we are. I think this organization is a great organization right now. But, we continue to make it better. We always look for ways to improve upon what we're doing and that won't change. I look forward to continuing that.

**What's CMH's main focus?**

**Calhoun:** Our focus historically has been to reach out to communities with primary care services and then connect them to the care we provide throughout the whole continuum.

We've been talking a lot about doing outreach with our specialists where it makes sense, where we can provide better access for patients. We want to send specialists out to those communities. I think continuing to grow is in our DNA, not for the sake of getting bigger but for the sake of providing services to patients who would otherwise be underserved.

We operate our entire business model in an underserved area. If we weren't there,



Gary Fulbright shares his thoughts with family, friends and wellwishers at this retirement reception at CMH in December.



Michael Calhoun, CMH's new CEO, shares happy memories about his colleague and mentor, Gary Fulbright.

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**“I think we’re always desiring to offer care, any type of service, we feel like we can economically and financially provide.”**  
**— Gary Fulbright**



As Fulbright celebrates his retirement as CMH’s CEO, he spends time with his predecessor Donald J. Babb.

they wouldn’t have any access to healthcare services. So our goal, as it always has been, is to provide care better than what people could get if they traveled. Get it close to home. It’s high quality care that they get.

**Fulbright:** I think we’re always desiring to offer care, any type of service, we feel like we can economically and financially provide. Some specialties would never make sense to be provided here, but for those things that do make sense, we want to provide it.

**How do you balance home life with the responsibilities of your job?**

**Calhoun:** Everybody’s busy. I just always feel like it’s important to be where you’re needed in the moment. I try to be at my kids’ activities, when they have them, especially those things that are very important to them. My wife is very supportive. Without her, it wouldn’t be possible to do any of this, honestly. She’s been supportive of my career and always there for me.

I really enjoy what I do with work. It’s part of who I am. So you do the work that needs to be done, and you go to the places you need to go for your kids, for your family. It’s when you enjoy what you’re doing, it’s not a chore, it’s easier to feel like you’re balanced.

**You’re also the pastor of a local church. How does that come into play in your role at CMH?**

**Calhoun:** I’m just one person, regardless of where I am. I’ve got different responsibili-

ties in different areas of my life, but I’ve tried to just be the same person, whether I was working at the hospital or involved in my church or involved with my family. That’s been my focus, to just be the same.

**How do your pastoral strengths benefit you as a hospital administrator?**

**Calhoun:** I think it goes both ways. Working with so many people at the hospital, I’ve learned a lot about human nature, and

that spills over into what I do at the church. There are things I’ve learned there that help me here. I love involvement with people. I don’t know if I’m necessarily an extrovert by nature, but I do enjoy working with people and learning about people’s lives and seeing if I can help them in some way.

**What kind of legacy will you leave behind?**

**Fulbright:** I worked on the finance side, really up until I became CEO. I worked to determine how to finance things and how to make

it all work financially. One of the doctors one time told my daughter, “I don’t see how your dad does what he does.” I would say, “I don’t see how you do what you do, either!”

**What are your plans for after retirement?**

**Fulbright:** Well, we have grandkids, so we plan on spending time with them. Farm a little bit, golf a little bit, travel a little bit. We plan to stay in the area. Probably get some rest. We’ve had a strong team here that’s allowed us to get through this.

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