

# PRIDE & PROGRESS

A Special Supplement to the Bolivar Herald-Free Press  
Wednesday, March 29, 2023

# PILLAR IN BUSINESS

# Justin Ballard

Interview and photos by Linda Simmons

## Moving forward

Justin Ballard wears many hats — husband, father, son, business owner, entrepreneur, alderman. Born and raised in Polk County, Bolivar is home and watching it, as well as helping it grow and thrive is very important to Ballard.

Bolivar's downtown area has grown tremendously in the last decade with a diverse mix of business and residential lofts. "The square has shifted from a majority of retail business to more professional services since I was a kid," says Ballard, "but it's still filled with unique and interesting shops."

For Ballard that's the really exciting thing about the Bolivar square, nearly every space is filled. There are only one or two empty spaces downtown. Ballard knows first hand that renovating older buildings has a ton of challenges, especially in our construction climate right now. "But there are a lot of dedicated property owners who are investing in our square," says Ballard. In the last decade millions of dollars have been put into projects downtown.



The Ballard family, Justin, Chloe, Kayler, and Ashley, overlook the Bolivar square.

### The BH-FP visited with Ballard about his efforts and where and how it all started.

#### What has been your motivation?

Probably one of my biggest motivations is changing my mindset and many others that almost every high schooler has at one point or another. When they say, "I can't wait to get out of Bolivar

after I graduate."

There are lots of reasons for that thought process of course but the reasons to stay here are growing everyday.

Ultimately, I want our community to be so amazing that my children will want to

stay here when they grow up, or at the very least come back to Bolivar if they do leave for a short time.

To have the best chance for that to happen, Bolivar has to continue to grow and change in positive ways. Jobs, housing, entertainment, activities, infrastructure and more.

painfully slow, but things in our community are only getting better.

Bolivar is a great mix of small town charms and a lot of the big city amenities each generation needs and wants.

We have an amazing foundation of civic-minded residents and businesses who support each other in job growth, healthcare, recreational opportunities, hospitality and charity.

#### What is your future vision for Bolivar/Polk County?

To continue moving Bolivar forward. Sometimes to make big impossible things happen the only way to do that is to keep moving forward. Growth may seem slow at times, incredibly almost

#### When do you think you first started wanting to see better things for Bolivar?

My first real job as a college graduate was working for the Bolivar Herald Free-



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Press as a reporter and photographer. For a decade, I reported on every tiny part of Bolivar, from sports to school board meetings, fires and crime, city council meetings, Rotary, death and new life. Sometimes all of those things happened on the same day.

It was an amazing way to see a huge cross section of our community from a lot of angles.

Photography was my specialty in high school and college. A camera can open a lot of doors and led to my first business adventure owning a photography studio.

I photographed thousands of youth sports teams, hundreds of seniors, weddings, babies and business professionals before and after digital cameras became common.

**What are you most proud of, other than your family, that you have accomplished over the past few years?**

Owning and renovating a piece of Bolivar's downtown square has been one of my favorite adventures.

My wife and I purchased a building on the square in 2007. A year into renovations a portion of the building we did not own at the time collapsed.

That led us to purchase the fallen down part and rebuild it, returning it into a space for business and residential.

When we purchased that building, it had four available spaces for lease. After a lot of time and uphill battles, that building now has five commercial spaces and five loft apartments. We were not the first lofts on the square, but I knew those apartments would go a long way to keeping the downtown area growing.

Several years later, we had the opportunity to purchase another commercial building on Jackson Street that needed a

lot less work and renovate it quickly. Most recently, two years ago, we purchased what many locals know as the former Polk County Bank Building. When completed, there will be three lofts and five commercial spaces in it. After sitting dormant for more than 20 years, it's been a relief to see new life in that building.

**What is your background in business?**

Trial and error, lots of errors. My grandfather Bob Ballard started the family business I now operate with my dad, Ballard Septic Tank Cleaning in 1960.

It wasn't a glamorous job, but he saw a need in Polk County and found a way to meet the need.

My father David took over in the mid 80s, and then I joined him full time 15 years ago.

I purchased Creative Images portrait gallery in 2004, our first building in 2007, second in 2012.

A few failures along the way, of course, but those are part of trying new things.

**What are the biggest challenges you face?**

Owning and or managing any business is filled with highs and lows for sure.

It's all about rolling with that uncertainty and managing stress. It's not as easy as it looks from the outside looking in.

Being creative and patient are some of the ways I try to overcome unexpected setbacks or delays.

What helps any small business is support. That can be as simple as a kind word. Our family has been blessed in immeasurable ways over the years many times.

There are more good days where things go as planned than days they don't.



Justin Ballard knows about construction and detail, working with construction crews as they finish up the addition to the 'old Polk County Bank' project.



Taking care of business together for Justin and Ashley Ballard goes back to before their wedding. FILE PHOTO



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# PILLAR IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

## Leta Gass

Interview and photos by Quincy Young

### A servant's heart

Having lived in Polk County for many years, Leta Gass is a familiar face among many area residents. Leta has been a prominent member in the community, from serving individuals in need at Polk County Christian Social Ministries (PCCSM) to uncovering our county's unique history alongside her fellow peers at the Polk County Genealogical Society.

One of her most notable acts of service to the community is her volunteer efforts in PCCSM's annual Share Your Christmas event. Her many years of community service, specifically to this cause, has led other residents to notice her hard work and dedication as a devoted citizen and volunteer in Polk County.



Leta currently serves as the secretary on the Board of Directors for the Polk County Genealogical Society.

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### The BH-FP visited with Gass about her volunteer experiences in the community.

#### What is the mission of Polk County Christian Social Ministries?

The mission of PCCSM is to share the love of God. We do this by operating a clothing center, called the free store, by those who shop here. We offer clothing, shoes, linens, small knick-knacks, books, etc. There is no charge, hence the free store. A lot of the people who shop here sometimes need more than just clothing. They need someone to listen to them, to pray for them and with them, to encourage them.

#### What are some things that PCCSM does for the community?

We have the free store which is open on Mondays and Wednesdays. We also are the driving force behind Share Your Christmas. We share information about our organization with any group that wants us to. We are also the place where one can donate clothing and other items. We take anything except furniture and large appliances. We just don't have room for them. And because the people of Polk County are so generous to us, we

do not feel that we should charge our customers.

#### What is the purpose of Share Your Christmas and how does it work?

The purpose of Share Your Christmas is to help families who may not be able to afford Christmas for their children by filling gift bags for each family member and by giving food items.

#### How does SYC make a difference in the community?

We have had families tell us that there would not have been a Christmas for them if it weren't for SYC. We want to bless others and let them know they are important to us. But SYC isn't really just for those who need it. Anyone can be involved. The angel trees is a good example of being involved. We have families who have made it a tradition to choose angels from the trees found around the county and purchase the gifts listed on the angel. We have groups that do food drives. Getting involved is one way to make a difference.

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**What led you to start volunteering for SYC?**

My church had been involved with SYC for many years, packing bags for middle-aged adults. When I retired, I wanted to be more active with them, so I helped with the bags and worked at distribution. And I was hooked! It was the most wonderful experience that year for me. I was asked by a PCCSM board member if I would like to serve on the board. I thought it would be something worthwhile for me to do. I needed to have my church approve my being on the board. They were, and still are, very supportive.

**How many years have you been volunteering for SYC?**

My first year volunteering at distribution was in 2003. 2023 will mark my 21st year!

**What are some of your responsibilities as a volunteer for SYC?**

I am responsible for helping sign up families for SYC. Two years ago, I designed an online application for people to use. We had 180 families sign up online for SYC 2022. Each week during sign ups, I send a report to the adult group chairmen to let them know who and how many have signed up that week. At the end of sign ups, I send a cumulative report. During distribution, I display the names of the families on a screen so the age groups can get the gift bags ready to be picked up, along with the food.

**What's your favorite part about being a SYC volunteer?**

I have always enjoyed talking with the people when they sign up, but since COVID, they fill out an application, so I don't have the chance to talk with them. So I think my favorite part is seeing the churches come together for the people. There is no Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, etc. We are God's people doing His will together.

**How can someone get involved with SYC?**

All they have to do is contact us, or their church, to get involved. It takes a hundred or more volunteers during distribution.


**How (much) has SYC changed/grown over the years?**

PCCSM did their first SYC in 1985. It consisted of a bag of groceries for the families, which was distributed at the PCCSM Center. The next year, I believe, each child received a toy as well groceries for the family. Distribution has been held at several locations as it's grown. It has been at the old Wal-Mart building, the gym at First Baptist Church, and the current location at Bolivar First Assembly of God Activities Building. The number of families receiving SYC has grown tremendously. We've had as many as 625 families but are averaging between 380 and 425 families now.


See **GASS**, Page 6



Leta organizes genealogical research materials in collection boxes, helping to sort through important family histories and to help her create finding aids.



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### GASS

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#### What are some of the other things you are involved in the community?

I also volunteer at the Polk County Genealogical Library. I am considered to be the archivist. I take collections that are donated and create finding aids for them which helps people wanting to research. I serve on the PCGS executive committee as secretary. I have participated in several genealogy classes as a presenter. I have also presented programs to various organizations. I developed the First Families of Polk County program. I have participated in the Local History Tour by presenting the story of several different people. I am president of the Polk County Retired Teachers Association. I am active in my church, serving as church clerk and adult Sunday School teacher.

#### Why is community involvement important?

It gives me a sense of belonging. Bolivar and Polk County have given me so much throughout 70+ years, and I want to give back.

#### What does it mean to you to have been selected as a Polk County Pillar?

I am humbled. There are so many others who deserve this recognition more than me. What I do, I do not do for the recognition, but to honor God. He has given me a servant's heart, and I pray that the things I do are pleasing to Him.



Leta Gass has had a significant role in Share Your Christmas for 20 years. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Not only does Leta help out at Polk County Christian Social Ministries, she can also be found amidst the shelves of the Polk County Genealogical Research Facility as a volunteer archivist.

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# PILLAR IN EDUCATION

## MCE schools

Interview and photos by Linda Simmons

### A Legacy in education

The mission of Marion C. Early schools has always been to motivate, nurture and support students; challenge students; and educate students to be responsible citizens.

It says a lot about a school system and a community when so many alumni make the choice to return to the school that formed them. There are former students now working beside their mentors, former teachers and even family. The Marion C. Early school system is an important part of Polk County, and these pillars of the community are proud to be able to continue the legacy of MCE.



Alumni together on the steps of Marion C. Early. Front row: Hayley Cobb, Kaitlyn Leith. Second row: Annette Gray, Madison Freeze. Third row: Dustin Gereleman, Cassidy Heskett, Annette Pipenhagen, Kody Mayhew. Fourth row: Sonya Taylor, Michaela Craig, Taylor Pipenhagen, Kayla Wilson. Top row: Alan Rogers, David Francka.

### The BH-FP visited with MCE Early school staff to reflect on their career paths.

#### Tanner Corum- Class of 2010 Elementary Principal

"I entered the private sector after finishing high school," says Corum, "but after having my first child, I felt a calling to have a larger impact on my community." Corum feels that his current position allows him to have a larger positive impact on the community as a whole.

Corum remembers Mr. Thomas Hagerman as being his biggest mentor during his days as a student at MCE.

"Tutoring in Ms. Agee's elementary class," is the memory that Corum enjoys looking back on.

"It means more than I could put into words, but I'll try," says Corum, "MCE is my home. My children attend MCE. I live in the community. Having the opportunity to engage with all stakeholders of this tight knit community means that I can have a lasting impact." Corum feels that his role as principal is simply facilitating the excellence that MCE already has in the building. "The staff at MCE is amazing," Corum says, "there is truly no better place to be."

#### Cassidy Heskett- Class of 2016 Second Grade Teacher

Heskett says that after going down a different career path her heart was tugging at her to become a teacher. "It was the BEST decision," says Heskett.

"Being back as a member of the staff at MCE means I get to give back to the community that shaped me into who I am," says Heskett.

Looking back, a favorite memory from



Tanner Corum, MCE Elementary Principal.

her time at MCE was attending the FFA National Convention.

Now working with her biggest mentor, Cheryl Hinkle, Heskett says being back at MCE is 'is such a blessing'.

#### Michaela Craig- Class of 2018 First Grade Teacher

Craig wanted to start a career in education because MCE is such a big part of who I am. "I grew up knowing so many great teachers, and I wanted to be able to be the same for the community," says Craig. It is important to Craig to not only make a difference, but be shaped by each and every one of her students as well.

While attending MCE Craig says her biggest mentor probably Mrs. Woodmansee. "She was the teacher I could turn to for help, advice, and was always willing to put her students first. Through math and student council, she was the teacher who got me through."

Craig remembers from her days at MCE she always felt like she was in such a close community. "Most of my days at MCE revolved around sports and I wouldn't have changed a thing," Craig recalls.

"MCE is the only place I have ever imagined myself teaching," says Criag. She considers it to be such a special opportunity to give back to the community that has poured so much into her. Get-

ting to work with some of the people she went to school with plus some of the people who taught her means a lot to Craig.

"Marion C. Early is such a supportive school for educators and I have loved being here and pouring into the kiddos in the same way that MCE did for me when I was their age," says Craig.

#### Annette Gray- Class of 1977 SPED Paraprofessional for JH and HS

"Well to tell the truth, I felt that God was calling me to get a job where I could raise my children the way he wanted me to instead of a sitter," says Gray when asked about her reason for choosing a career in education. Getting a call from Mr. Shawgo, the high school principal at the time, helped me choose this path. "I couldn't afford to not work so when he offered me a position of a one-on-one aide, it was just what I needed. We met the day after he called me and the rest is history."

When I was in school, my biggest mentor was Mr. Ellis, my art teacher and class sponsor. "He was very good at his job and was always very good to his students," says Gray, "he always had time to answer questions."

Gray recalls some of her favorite memories being in her junior and senior year. "I went to Vo-Tech and learned two different careers. Photography and printing, I worked a little while in photography, but worked many years in print shops."

STAFF PHOTO/LINDA SIMMONS

**“I grew up knowing so many great teachers, and I wanted to be able to be the same for the community.”**

**Michaela Craig**  
*CLASS OF 2018*  
*FIRST GRADE TEACHER*



## MCE

Continued from Page 7

“I love working here. I would not trade the years I worked here while my children went to school for the world,” says Gray. For Gray, it has been important to me to be a part of this group of people. The people who work here are really dedicated and work hard to give these kids what they need to be successful. “I love what I do and I love my students,” says Gray, “it makes me happy when I am explaining an assignment and I see a spark in their eye and they get it!”

Gray has been at her MCE position for 29 years and now has grandchildren that go to MCE.

### **Kody Mayhew- Class of 2006** **JH Science & Assistant Baseball Coach**

“I have always enjoyed seeing the growth in kids, which ironically started when I would help coach my little brother’s baseball team,” says Mayhew. This easily transitioned into the classroom, and I love seeing the kids excited about

learning and hearing stories from them even when they have left my class.

“What is great about a place like MCE is that all the teachers here were like mentors because they all love the kids.”

For Mayhew, there are some great memories of his time at MCE as a student. “I really enjoyed being in the Gifted program during my elementary years with Mrs. Maze, remembers Mayhew, “she always made learning exciting and I formed some great friendships during this time.” Other great memories would stem from the success we had during this period in athletics, recalls Mayhew.

Being back at MCE feels like HOME to Mayhew. “I love this place starting with the kids, community and my fellow colleagues,” says Mayhew. Although it does feel weird when you reach an age where you start having kids in class that are your friends’ children, Mayhew has to admit!

### **Dustin Gerleman-Class of 2003** **PE Teacher and Girls Basketball Coach**

Just the love for kids and also wanting to be closer to his kids was what led Ger-

leman to a career in education

“It means the world to me,” says Gerleman about being back at MCE in a teaching capacity.

Gerleman only spent three years in school at MCE, but he considers it home. “This is where I want to raise my family,” Gerleman says.

Looking back at who he would consider his biggest mentor, he said that would have to be David Francka.

“Winning a baseball state championship in 2002 with my brother would fall under my favorite memories from my years as a student at MCE,” says Gerleman.

### **Sonya Taylor- Class of 1989** **Speech/ELL Teacher**

“I wanted to help children, to care for them and help them find success anyway I can,” says Taylor. It’s important to Taylor to be that someone who lifts a student up and cares for them. “I love the spark in a child’s eye when they finally understand something,” Taylor says.

“The trips to state in softball with my friends and winning state with an undefeated record,” is a memory Taylor con-

siders a favorite.

Taylor recalls that she had many teachers that helped her through the years. “My top three are Mrs. Barnes the Business teacher, she was one of the reasons I got my degree in Business Administration and Accounting.” And Mr. Whaley the Math teacher who spent countless hours helping her with math is on that list. “He genuinely cared for the students and their success.” Taylor looks back now and realizes that, “At the time I didn’t realize it but Coach Murphy instilled disciplines in my life that I use all the time.”

“I love MCE, Marion C. Early has always been my home and I would not want to work anywhere else,” says Taylor.

### **Annette Wiebe Pipenhagen- Class of 1984** **Food Service Director**

“After 13 years as a Respiratory Therapist, I wanted to work in the school system to have the same schedule as my kids,” says Pipenhagen about returning to MCE.

“I have worked at MCE since 2005 and have watched lots of students come through that I went to school with their



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parents," says Pipenhagen. Pipenhagen is very proud that two of her own kids are teachers there now. "I enjoy my job and the people that I work with and hope to retire here!"

Ken Cansler was Pipenhagen's biggest mentor from her years at MCE.

**Alan Rogers- Class of 1980  
Maintenance and Transportation  
Director**

"I enjoy being around the kids and this has always been home to my wife and I," says Rogers, "I guess it has worked out since I have been here thirty years."

Rogers recalls Gerald Sergent as his biggest mentor.

Going to the National FFA Convention in Kansas City is Rogers favorite memory from his time at MCE. "We saw Paul Harvey, and I got to meet and shake hands with President Jimmy Carter," recalls Rogers.

**Hayley 'Pipenhagen' Cobb- Class of 2009  
Math Teacher**

"I had just always wanted to be a teacher since I was a little girl," says Cobb about her career choice.

Cobb recalls John Woods to be her biggest mentor over the years.

"All of the FFA trips and competitions," Cobb says, were some of her favorite memories at MCE.

"I love feeling at home and being a part of the community I grew up in," says Cobb, "It's neat making the connection between students I have now and the people I used to be in school with."



**Ginger Bumgarner-Class of 1996  
School Board**

"Great district and I wanted to be a part of it," says Bumgarner.

When it comes to picking her biggest mentor Bumgarner says there were so many, just not sure it is possible to pick just one.

Looking back at her favorite memories Bumgarner says, "7th hour office aide with Cynthia Day, It was something different everyday and I loved it."

"It is an honor and a privilege to serve at MCE," says Bumgarner.

**Kayla Wilson- Class of 2004  
Elementary Counselor**

Wilson on her career in education says her interest was first sparked as a high school student planning for college. "After getting to spend some time in a different position within education, I knew school counseling was my passion."

"Mrs. Reed, my third- grade teacher was my biggest mentor."

Wilson has so many great memories of her days at MCE, and feels that the best part is that she is still making these memories as she gets to come to work there each day.

"There is no other place I would rather spend my career," says Wilson, "I love these kids, this school and this community, it means so much to get to be in this school. To get to raise our family in the place that poured so much into us as students and now to get to see this with my own kiddos is awesome! MCE is the BEST place to be!"

**Madison Freeze- Class of 2012  
Second Grade Teacher**

"When preparing for college and during my first couple years of getting my general education college classes done, I went back and forth on where I wanted to go with my career," says Freeze. "But I never

felt at peace with any other career path. Teaching is where my heart is and I'm so thankful I get to spend my days with my favorite tiny humans."

"Melinda Jamison was my biggest mentor."

"I have so many memories that I made within the walls of this school," recalls Freeze. "Whether it be Positive Action Assemblies with Dr. Condren, music class with Mrs. Dublin, playing Boggle when class was over with Mrs. Harper, taking pictures during extra curricular activities for Mrs. Jamison, holding Eddie the Lizard in Mrs. Dunning's class, or eating the treats that Mrs. Crain spoiled us with each week while she enjoyed her Diet Coke."

"MCE is HOME! The fact that I get to invest in the lives of the students that live in the community that I grew up in is such a gift," says Freeze. "I have taught here for five years and the past two years I have gotten to teach second grade in the classroom where I spent my second grade year with Mrs. Rains."

**Taylor Pipenhagen- Class of 2018  
Fifth Grade Teacher**

Being back at MCE for Pipenhagen is easy for her to explain, "It feels like home and I have a lot of respect for the community and the people I work with."

"I am passionate about my role in forming future world changers," says Pipenhagen.

"My biggest mentor was my P.E. coach of the time, Justin Crumpley," recalls Pipenhagen

"All the late nights setting up for homecoming week and getting out of class to cook food," was some of Pipenhagen's favorite memories of her time at MCE.



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# PILLAR IN HEALTH

## Dr. Leonid Shunyakov

Interview and photos by Quincy Young



### Give hope, save lives, beat cancer

In 2005, Dr. Leonid Shunyakov came to the Central Care Cancer Center in Bolivar to begin working as an oncologist/hematologist. He is a well-known healthcare professional in the community, having served many Polk County patients. He is involved in Central Care Cancer Center's fundraising events, which he says are always a lot of fun.

Beyond his family at the cancer center, Dr. Leo has five children, including a daughter who is finishing medical school in Kansas City. His parents are electrical engineers, and he has a son who is majoring in engineering at Missouri S&T in Rolla. He has had many years of medical training and experience and has been recognized by 417 Magazine for several years as the number one oncologist/hematologist in Bolivar.

Dr. Leo says two qualities that an oncologist/hematologist must possess are knowledge and kindness.

### The BH-FP visited with Dr. Shunyakov's about his work in the medical field.

#### What made you want to become an oncologist/hematologist?

We have many patients with advanced cancers.

#### What does your work entail?

Helping people at the time of their

greatest need. Working with like-minded professionals to alleviate suffering, give hope and beat cancer.

#### Are there any department(s) or entities you work closely with?

We work with our wonderful surgical team, pathologist, radiologists, and many

other professionals of Bolivar, Missouri.

#### What is your prior education and experience in the healthcare field?

I did my initial training at Urals medical academy for 6 years, 3 years of internal med, 3 years of hem/onc at university of Rochester.

#### What do you love about working at Central Care Cancer Center?

I love working with our wonderful team. Every person wants to help, wants to be kind to our patients who come to us at the greatest time of need in their life.

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Keeping up with a busy schedule with patients, Dr. Leo also finds time to sign documents, view or attend meetings, and work closely with other departments.

**What is one of the most challenging things about your job?**

That we cannot win all of the battles.

**How do you deal with the pressures and stressors of the job?**

With the help of Jennifer and McKenna, my Oncology Assistants, wonderful nurses and all other members of the team. We all try to be attentive to each other and support each other. Also, raking leaves 😊

**What qualities do you need to possess in order to be in oncology/hematology?**

Knowledge and kindness

**What are some of the important things to remember about treating patients who have cancer?**

That we need to stay on top of not just cancer treatments, but also nutrition, other medical issues and remember to treat the whole patient and not just one disease.

**Are there any common misconceptions about your line of work?**

That most patients with cancer suffer and die. In reality, most patients live, and suffering is greatly helped or eliminated with the help of your cancer team.

**Cancer is a difficult subject for many, especially when it hits close to home. Why did you choose to serve the people of Bolivar?**

It's a joy to work with a wonderful team of people at the Cancer Center. To be kind. Also, our community is like an extended family to me. Every patient is special, and it's a joy to help someone to make cancer disappear.

**Do you have a good story or special memory from your job? Or a patient that stood out to you in some way?**

I always remember some of our patients, with completely hopeless advanced cancer of the lung, breast, colon, liver, pancreas who are alive many years after first coming to see us.

**Who are some of the healthcare professionals who you have enjoyed working with?**

We are very fortunate to have top notch professionals in our community and not just good doctors with skills and knowledge, like someone like Dr. Wolf or Dr. Bartgis who genuinely love their job, their patients and their team, and getting things done no matter time, place, or obstacles.

I want to say that I am very fortunate to work with Dr. Penelope Harris, wonderful experience working at KU and prior to that in the military. Also, it is a great pleasure working with Dr. Edwin Watts, Radiation Oncologist, with a good sense of humor and very knowledgeable.

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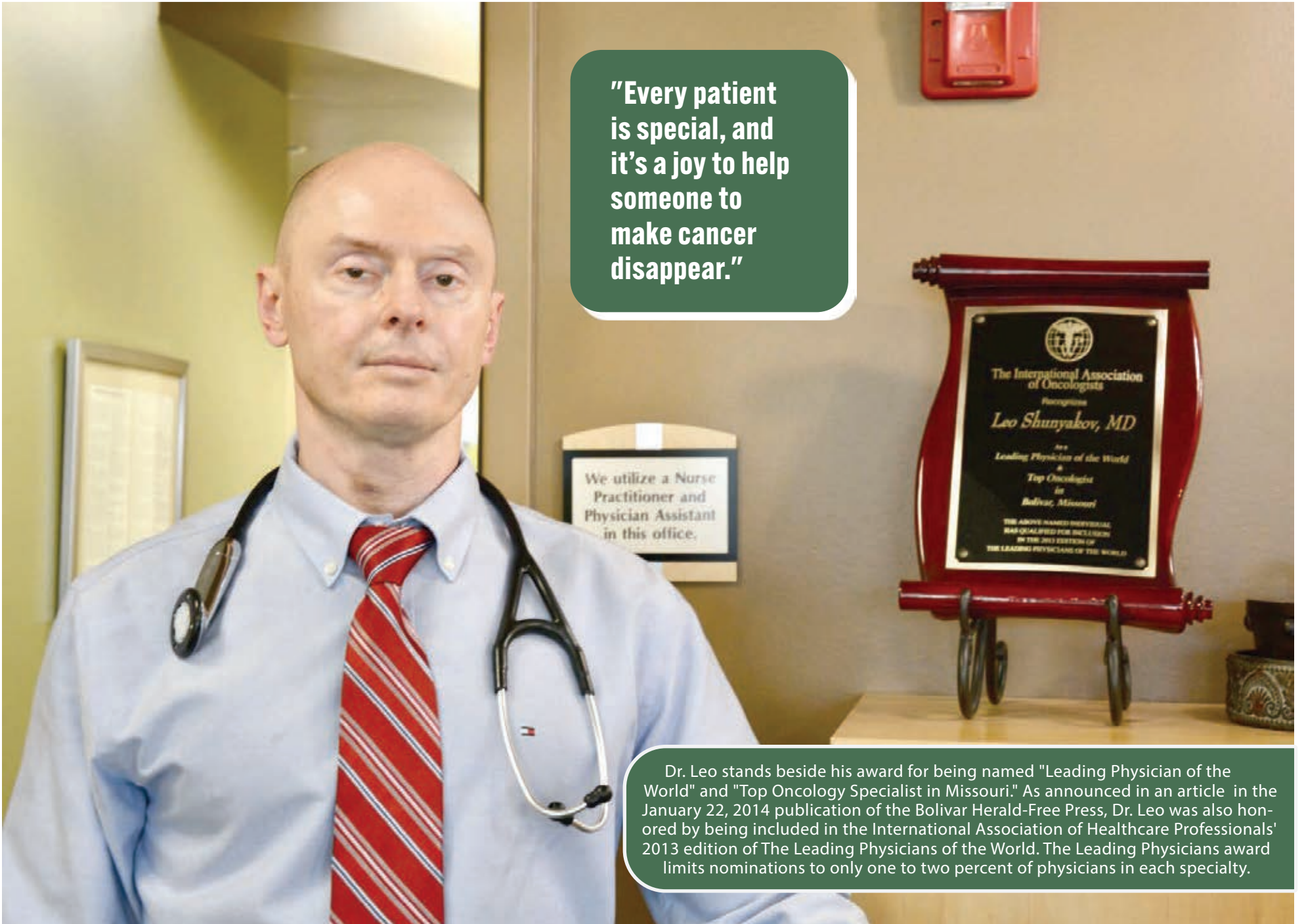
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"Every patient is special, and it's a joy to help someone to make cancer disappear."

Dr. Leo stands beside his award for being named "Leading Physician of the World" and "Top Oncology Specialist in Missouri." As announced in an article in the January 22, 2014 publication of the Bolivar Herald-Free Press, Dr. Leo was also honored by being included in the International Association of Healthcare Professionals' 2013 edition of The Leading Physicians of the World. The Leading Physicians award limits nominations to only one to two percent of physicians in each specialty.

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# PILLAR IN AGRICULTURE

## Bill Bob Kallenbach

Interview and photos by Quincy Young

### 4-H, Fairs, and Farming

From his activity in the Kiwanis to his time as a public servant in the County Clerk's Office, among his many other roles, Bill Bob Kallenbach has been known far and wide throughout Polk County and the surrounding area.

Perhaps some of his greatest accomplishments, however, have arguably been in the agricultural community, as one of the leaders of the Polk County Youth Fair and Junior Livestock Show and his influence among Polk County 4-H.



Bill Bob Kallenbach made a name for himself in Polk County as county clerk, along with his years of participation in the agricultural community.

### The BH-FP visited with Kallenbach to reflect on his time with 4-H.

#### Getting started in 4-H

Back in 1941, Bill Bob's family came to Polk County, where his father began serving as an agent for the local extension center and held that role for 22 years. In this role, his father served as a supervisor of all 4-H clubs in the county and offered farming and economic programs through the extension office.

"Right after World War II, people were very receptive to different types of helps being offered, because they wanted to get back on the farm and get things rolling. And it really was a very opportune time for the extension to do some positive things,"

Bill Bob says. "It was the most opportune time to make it effective. That doesn't take anything from [my dad's] ability and what he did, but, I'm telling you, people absolutely were really receptive to the help that the extension gave them."

He also says that, at the time, there were about 34 4-H clubs in Polk County, many that had a tie to the nearby rural schools in the county. A number of the clubs were named synchronously with the schools' names, and the teacher of those rural schools might even be the community leader of the 4-H club.

"It was really a great thing, and it involved a lot of people. I remember once

going to the Recognition Night down at the Christian church, and there were 800 4-H club members down there," he says, recalling that there was scarcely enough room for everyone in the building.

Bill Bob remembers tagging alongside his dad to 4-H club meetings at local schools at a time when electricity was just coming to the rural schools. His dad would take pictures of the 4-H kids with their projects and develop them into slides. A few months later, he would bring the slides to the schools, and people from all over the county would come to see them.

"The school houses would be so full, people would be standing outside looking

through the windows. I was the one that was running the projector," Bill Bob recalls. "I was meeting people then. And all those kids, I'd see them at 4-H camp. I used to have a good time at 4-H camp."

Through 4-H, Bill Bob has created many fond memories of learning from his peers and working with local youth.

#### Youth Fair and Livestock Show

The Polk County Youth Fair and Junior Livestock Show takes place annually in mid-June, and ever since the start of the

See **KALLENBACH**, Page 14

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Nick Seiner of Bolivar Rotary Club delivers a donation to Bill Bob Kallenbach for the Polk County Junior Livestock Show in March 2019. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/ROTARY CLUB OF BOLIVAR

## KALLENBACH

Continued from Page 13

fair, Bill Bob has attended the event almost every year, missing only two years — in 1962 and 1963 when he was in the service.

This year marks the 76th year of the fair. Bill Bob still helps organize the fair, serving as the treasurer of the Youth Fair board. As treasurer, he contributes his time by helping raise money to operate the livestock show.

“Over the years, this has been a really great thing for the agricultural youth here in our county. And it’s not only in our county. This thing is now open to all youth anyplace who want to come here,” Bill Bob states. “That’s a good thing, because we have 4-H club leaders that work in Dallas County, Hickory County, Polk County, and they all work together. And there’s other kids from other counties that can come here.”

In the beginning years of the fair, the event was sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. The organization raised the money to make the show a success, and eventually, community participation in the fair grew over time. And as Bill Bob says, “the more people involved, the better fair you’re going to have.”

For 33 years, Bill Bob has been an active member in Kiwanis, saying that there currently is only one other person who has been in the local club longer than he has.

Now, the fair and livestock show has been passed on to interested parties and individuals in the community, primarily those in the business and agribusiness sectors. However, Bill Bob says the Kiwanis still contribute to the fair by sponsoring the kids games, and the fair continues to maintain a very good amount of participation among area youth.

Bill Bob’s responsibilities as a member of the board are to plan and organize the fair, determine the classes and competition brackets, and perform or oversee the maintenance of fairgrounds.

“I worked at the county commission to get them to lease to our association the acreage on the Polk County farm that we have developed into our fairgrounds. I was instrumental in getting that to happen, and we’ve worked to develop that,” Bill Bob explains. “We’ve got the Youth Activities Building...on the fairgrounds that’s used 130 times a year. And five different structures on there, and we’re still building, trying to find out about making an improvement to our arena.”

A recently-organized community event called Missouri Beef Days has also brought about participation in local agricultural activities, using the Polk County Fairgrounds for Beef Days activities.

When scheduling the fair, Bill Bob notes that it’s also important to also keep in mind other activities in southwestern Missouri that may take attention away from the event in Polk County.

“It’s coordinated with fairs in the area. Once you get out

of sync on those things, it’s pretty hard to give everybody a chance to go to the different fairs. And we really need to synchronize it that way, so we can have more participation. We don’t want to be in competition with another county fair during ours,” he says.

### Farming and hobbies

Describing himself as always having been “tied to the soil,” Bill Bob lived much of his life as a farmer. He would work the hay fields and would even sell dairy cattle.

Aside from his farm life, he had a hobby of raising and selling bird dogs. His friends would go hunting with him and ended up arranging a side gig, where they would find certain types of trained dogs, and Bill Bob would resell them, clarifying that he did not train the dogs himself.

“It takes two years to train them, so you can’t do any great big volume, because it takes too much work to have them where they are marketable,” he says.

Although he never made a big profit from the bird dogs, it was a hobby that paid for itself. He enjoyed it enough that he continued to keep up with the hobby for over 50 years. Through the help of the other hunters, he sold 1,500 dogs, and he hasn’t been without a dog at his place for 40 years.

Bill Bob loved to hunt, as it was a hobby that worked well with his schedule during his time working in county government. During his 20-year career as Polk County Clerk, he would farm and hunt after work hours, saying that his friends would often help him around the farm so they would all have time to hunt later in the day.

Over the years, Bill Bob has witnessed many changes in the 4-H program and in the agriculture industry, and while he does still have a hay farm, he is taking life more slowly now, moving closer to town and passing along his knowledge to further the agricultural education of the area youth.

“Polk County is a great place to live. Great people here. And if you have something going on from a community point of view, you can show the people that there’s a need, they’ll respond to it,” he says.

Even as he gained influence in agriculture and county government, he remains humble by remembering that he “never did this by himself.” There were always people to encourage and support him through it all, and he continues to be grateful to his family, friends, and neighbors in Polk County.

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--Bill Bob Kallenbach

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Some ads in Bolivar Herald-Free Press publications from 1970 give a candidate profile for Bill Bob's county clerk election campaign. FILE PHOTOS



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