

Unsung Heroes

A Salute to Our Volunteers

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Saving lives Raising awareness **those in**
 Building new **need**
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Special section in the Nov. 6

The Galena Gazette



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Rotarians, from left, Janet Eggleston, Warren Doran, Gail Gabbert, Greg Herbst and Helen Kilgore helped with crowd control for the 2016 Galena Area Chamber of Commerce Halloween Parade. Right photo: Larry Cording leads the wiener dog parade at the Galena Lions Club's Oktoberfest celebration. Below, Jack Einsweiler volunteered at an entrance at the Galena Country Fair. Community events require the dedicated efforts of an army of people. *Galena Gazette photos*

Volunteers

They bind us to our communities

If you asked 10 people to share why this northwest region of Illinois is so dynamic, you'd receive 10 different answers. Yes, there's beauty. There's history. But that doesn't get at the basis of it all.

Our hunch is that there is one word at the heart of each answer: volunteer.

Area residents make giving of their time, talent and treasure part of their lifestyle in order to build community while growing and maintaining not-for-profit organizations. These folks help and guide young people in the classroom, youth organizations or sports; comfort and help those as an EMT or through a food pantry; or who celebrate the arts or preserve and conservation of the land.

Think what this community would be like with no Oktoberfest, Galena Country Fair or Galena Halloween Parade. Volunteers make all of these activities—and more—possible.

Volunteers deserve to be celebrated and honored. They are true heroes. They are the glue that binds us to each other and our communities.

In this special magazine, *Unsung Heroes*, we celebrate volunteers by sharing the stories of seven area residents: Frances Rivoire, Randy Degenhardt, Bryan and Jenni Ackerman, Ruth Foley, Britnea Toot and Micah Ransom. Through their vision and passion, they are community builders—each in his or her own way.

The vision of *Unsung Heroes* is shared by others. We are grateful for premier sponsorship provided by Jo-Carroll Energy. The cooperative has a wide footprint of activity in Jo Daviess County and through its work sees the impact of volunteers. The pages of this magazine are also filled with messages from businesses and not-for-profits, all of whom see the need to honor volunteers.

We hope that as you make your way through this

magazine you take a bit of time and reflect upon your role in your community. Are there ways you can make a difference by giving of yourself for the Galena Center for the Arts, ARC, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Elks, historical society, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, your church or some other organization? Think of your friends who give of themselves and then thank them.

You might also pass along to us the names of volunteers who deserve special recognition. We want to highlight their work in the pages of *The Galena Gazette* or in a future *Unsung Heroes* magazine. It's our goal to add this to our lineup of special fall projects, rotating it with the ever-popular *Salute to Veterans*.

The mantra of Highland Community College's Servant Leadership Program is "to change the world, you must touch the world." Through dedicated efforts, Frances, Randy, Brian, Jenni, Ruth, Britnea and Micah touch the world. So, too, do all the other volunteers who help make our lives better, safer and more secure.

by P. Carter Newton, publisher
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Love of service

Micah Ransom, 20, makes big impact

by Brandon Beblke
bbeblke@galgazette.com

ELIZABETH—Some think that volunteering is something that has been lost in the next generation of young adults, that generation seems unwilling to take the time to give back to their communities because of too many other commitments.

Micah Ransom, Elizabeth, proves those people wrong.

“I have just always loved public service and getting involved in the community,” said Ransom.

At 20, Ransom has already been an integral part of Elizabeth as well as the law enforcement community throughout Jo Daviess County.

He began his volunteering because of an interest he had when he was young watching ambulances and fire trucks leaving the station.

“Ever since I was little, I wanted to be a police officer,” said Ransom. “When I was little, I remember hearing the siren and running down to the fire station and watch the trucks pull out. That is how I first got introduced into it.

“Anything emergency services related I was always all about, so growing up you are so eager and the fire department was just the first thing that I was able to participate and learn in.”

Ransom, at 15 in 2014, started with the Cadet program with Elizabeth Fire. The Cadet program is a junior explorer program that introduces interested youth to the concepts and programs that the fire department offers. Before the cadet program, the fire department let Ransom come to trainings because of his love of public service.

When Ransom turned 16, he began helping out with the ambulance service as well. The involvement with the ambulance began because of his experience with the fire department.

He was able to experience some ride-alongs with the Elizabeth EMS.

“I always liked EMS and the medical side of things,” said Ransom. “I try to go where I am needed most.”

In Illinois, at 16, individuals can get a pro-

visional emergency medical responder (EMR) license. Ransom took the class, paid for with the help of Elizabeth EMS, and passed.

He was a provisional EMR and was able to go on calls and get some experience.

In 2017, his senior year, for the first couple months on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-10 p.m., Ransom drove to Highland Community College to take courses to get his EMT license.

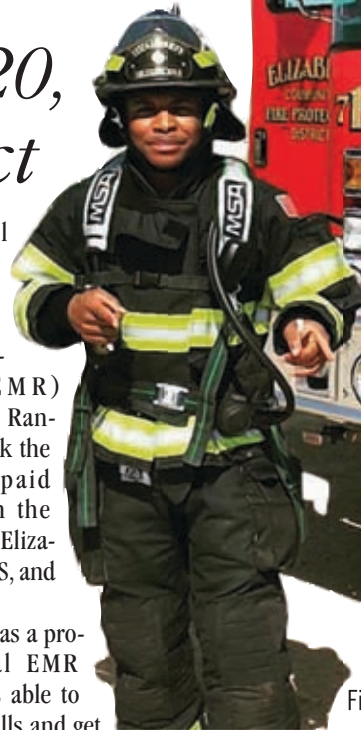
“Elizabeth Ambulance has a program where if you give time to them, they will help pay for the courses needed to be qualified,” said Ransom.

The state requires a diploma before taking a state test, so as soon as he graduated, Ransom passed the test and became an official EMT. He has been an EMT with Elizabeth ever since.

“The best part about being an EMT is going out knowing that you are able to save someone or make someone’s situation a lot better,” said Ransom. “We have a variety of different calls.”

“I have been out in public and people have come up to me to thank me for transporting their loved one and comment on how nice we were to them. Stuff like that makes your day,” said Ransom.

He is still a member of Elizabeth Fire and is also on Galena’s EMT roster as well, beginning in February. Ransom still attends Highland Community College for general studies and is unsure of what the future holds after he receives his associate’s degree. One role that Ransom might



Firefighter Micah Ransom

look into in the future is becoming a law enforcement officer.

The reason for being placed on Galena’s roster is due to a recent employment opportunity that came his way, as a dispatcher for Jo Daviess County.

“A lot of things came out of being a cadet with Elizabeth Fire, and that was one of them,” said Ransom. “Fire and EMS, we rely on dispatch. They are the ones that send us calls and information so we can do our job, so when I started with the fire and EMS, that was the first time I talked to dispatch. I always thought dispatch was cool.”

Ransom began by completing “sit-ins” with dispatchers. He thought it would be something interesting to do to continue to learn about law enforcement. In March 2017, his senior year, Ransom was hired part-time as a dispatcher. In July 2018, went full-time.

“I enjoy calls where I can help someone,” said Ransom. “Sometimes it’s just someone needing somebody to lend an ear to get them through their situation. I really enjoy the job. I enjoy helping other people and this is a great way to do that.”

When there are calls in the Galena Territory, and if they are short, Ransom helps out if an extra person is needed. Also, he is nearby if he



Micah Ransom stands with then Rep. Brian Stewart during an event. Ransom has become active in local politics. *Contributed photos*

happens to be getting off of work when the page comes out.

“There were a couple times when I paged out a call right as I was getting out,” said Ransom. “Then I can just run up there and get on the call. I joined them so I can help them out when I am in town or in the area or even if they are in Scales Mound, I can meet them there.”

Ransom also volunteers in a few other roles, one of which is as a director for Northwest Illinois Economic Development.

Then-executive director Lisa McCarthy approached Ransom and proposed the opportunity after he talked to her about some of the groups to which he belongs.

“She thought it would be nice to have someone from Generation-Z to be on the board and to give a different perspective,” said Ransom. “I went to the next board meeting and got appointed as a board member.”

Ransom has always been interested in politics and public administration and thought that the opportunity to serve on the board and to learn about economic development was a great opportunity.

“Bringing jobs here and keeping jobs here is really important, and that ties directly into EMS,” said Ransom. “If we don’t have people out here with good paying jobs, then we won’t have people who will be able to volunteer.”

Ransom has also worked for a year with Apple Canyon Lake Security and worked EMS there.

He also volunteers as a precinct comitteeeman for the Jo Daviess County Republican Central Committee. This last year, he was able to attend the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, D.C., where he was listed as one of the 20 rising stars. From 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., each day, he met elected officials and learned outreach. He has also helped on campaigns in the past for Andrew Chesney and



Above: Micah Ransom helps out during a snowstorm in 2015. Below: He has been a member of Elizabeth Ambulance since 2015 when he turned 16.



Jeanne Ives.

Ransom is a member of Galena Bible Church and volunteers his time there as well.

“You get a lot of life experience learning and volunteering,” said Ransom. “You get a different perspective on life. You are more thankful. I come back from some calls and you think my day really wasn’t as big of a deal when others are dealing with bigger things.”

“I love giving back to the community that has been really great to me.”

Quotes

“I first met Micah when he was about 13 years old. He would show up on his bike either at the fire station or the ambulance building as we were returning from a call. He would just stay across the street and watch as the trucks and ambulances were put away. After a while, he would come over and we would visit and he would help wash the ambulances.

“When he was old enough, he joined our fire department Cadet program. Then he took an Emergency Medical Responder (First Responder) class, followed shortly after by an EMT Class.

“Even now—college student, full-time 911 dispatcher and a lot of overtime—he still makes time to work on both Elizabeth EMS and Elizabeth fire. He is always kind, always a smile.

“He is just an outstanding young man. We are all very proud of him for all that he does.”

—Dan Schleicher, coordinator, Elizabeth EMS

“He has a drive to be a public servant, even as a young child. I can see him going far with whatever career he decides on. He is one motivated young man.”

—Kevin Turner, Jo Daviess County Sheriff

“He is part of the future of our community; a local grad, involved in EMS, economic development with NWILED, community volunteer. He is one of the best of the best. Proud to teach him and honored to work alongside of him to better our community and our county.

—Mike Dittmar, Elizabeth village president



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Midwest Medical *Auxiliary Foundation*



Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation salutes our volunteers,
all 250 of them, for volunteering their valuable time
to keep our community a beautiful and healthy place
for people and wildlife!



Thank you.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of our Historical Society, allowing us to supplement a small staff to accomplish a variety of crucial tasks.

In 2018 the Society received **4,250** volunteer hours; we are on track to exceed that by 15% in 2019.

From collection inventory to social media ambassadors, docents to blacksmiths, museum volunteers make vital contributions to Society programming. The Historical Society applauds volunteers for providing support at our events and at the museum as they continue to enhance our visitors' experiences through their talents and skills.

The **Guardians of History**, our Society's friends group, was recently organized to provide a foundational gateway for our volunteers. To learn more about the Guardians or volunteer opportunities, call 815.777.9129.

GALENA-JO DAVIESS COUNTY
 HISTORICAL SOCIETY

19Vol-Galena History Museum



Frances Rivoire shows off the victory sign in front of the Potosi Rolling Bar. Despite heavy rain at this year's Oktoberfest, the bar still did a brisk business. *Galena Gazette photo*

A life of value

Frances Rivoire pushes herself 'into work where there is a need'

Quotes

"Frances took over a leadership position from the beginning when she joined forces with the Potosi Brewery Foundation. She developed an organized system to grow the annual banquet fundraiser, one of our largest fundraisers of the year. After several years under her leadership we were able to consistently reach the \$100,000 income mark on a regular basis. Because of the detailed notes and template she created as the banquet developed, we were able to continue to reach that income marker even after she stepped aside."

-Gary David, Potosi Brewery Foundation board member

"Frances Rivoire is a passionate volunteer who brings her talent and experience to her many historical society roles: board member, chair of the capital campaign steering committee, and event planning. Her enthusiasm, determination and energy are boundless. She is a fearless and inspiring leader. The Society is thrilled to have her expertise during a time of critical growth for our organization."

-Nancy Breed, executive director of the Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society:

by P. Carter Newton, publisher
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Frances Rivoire has a nickname, "Sparky." When she participates in a prescribed burn for the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF), she's the one to start the small fires. She's even completed her second level of certification for prescribed burns.

This is a nickname that describes her volunteer work. She's a human dynamo of energy who sparks interest and good work all around her.

Rivoire might also have another nickname: The Juggler. That's due to her deep involvement with raising money for the Galena Food Pantry and serving on the board of directors of the Potosi Foundation, JDCF and the Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society.

To succeed with all of these efforts requires tremendous time commitment, organization and passion. Although she juggles all of this, she admits that she can't juggle balls in the air. It all creates "a complicated picture," she says.

Rivoire's commitment to volunteering, to helping others, is deeply rooted in her family.

She calls her father "a Renaissance man." He was "entrepreneurial" and was "interested in things outside of work."

Her mother was trained as a gym teacher. She

volunteered at Rivoire's high school, Bryn Mawr, in Baltimore, Md., and at Planned Parenthood.

At Rivoire's school and in her childhood home, there was never a discussion about volunteering nor was there a conscious decision made to volunteer.

"We did it. It was a pattern. If you had time, you did it," Rivoire says. "There is value to do something for others in need."

It was the normal course of the school experience to take an afternoon off from school and volunteer in a local nursing home.

That's how volunteering became a pattern in Rivoire's life and part of her behavior.

"Life without volunteering would make me feel selfish," she continues. "I might feel happy pursuing my own projects, but I would feel guilty, because I was doing things for myself."

"I try to push myself into work where there is a need."

"Push" is the operative word. Because when you see Rivoire work, you get a sense of her drive and passion. You get a sense that this woman is highly skilled in the art of selling. You see it in her approach.

As she shares a story about her first job shortly after graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with an English degree and minors in anthropol-

ogy and fine arts, she talks about this “push.”

Rivoire landed a job as a customer service manager at a motion picture film lab in Washington D.C. In front of the building were parking spaces, four of which were reserved for others in the organization.

“None of them was mine,” she recalls.

One of those parking spaces was reserved for the sales manager. He was driving a Cadillac.

“I’m driving an old Ford,” she adds. “He (the sales manager) goes out and gets a contract. He’s then out of it.

“The customer sees me and yells at me (if something goes wrong). I thought I could do the same job, but better.”

It took some convincing her employer. She had no experience. She finally sold her employer on the idea and began moving into sales. It was the start of her career.

Eventually Rivoire moved to Chicago and began selling for a subsidiary of IBM. She had the opportunity to be trained under the IBM model.

“I use these basic skills to this day,” she admits.

Most of Rivoire’s sales career involved selling software for large and small companies. She liked selling software, because with it one could sell the benefits of the software.

Selling computers or computer hardware was a more technical job, she adds.

And it is in this conversation, she begins using the word “collaboration.”

The sales process may start with seeing a potential customer who is skeptical. The goal through the sales process is to convert that potential customer into a customer who says, “I need your product.”

This is a customer who feels comfortable calling after the sale is made and asks for advice. This is what Rivoire calls “collaboration,” the development of a mutually beneficial relationship.

Rivoire continued her sales career after she and her husband, Bob, moved to their home on Clark Lane in The Galena Territory in 2007.

She’d spent her entire life surrounded by family and close friends, whether in Baltimore, Washington D.C. or Chicago.

Here, she didn’t know anyone and thought, “Gee, this is kind of depressing. What am I going to do about the holidays?”

Instead of being depressed, she looked for an opportunity: helping people or organizations with needs. She helped both when she decided to assist the Galena Food Pantry.

That collaboration evolved into the Winter Hunger Half Marathon held the day after Thanksgiving in The Galena Territory. She organized 11 of these fun run/walk/bike events and now says she’s retired from that activity.

Although she worked full-time until 2010, Rivoire had time for Galena Territory and Grace Episcopal Church activities, especially with Grace’s arts council. Once retired, she sought another “need.”

By then, she’d met former Galenian Gary David through the arts council. He introduced her to the Potosi Foundation and cut a deal.

David needed someone with a special skill set. He offered to build a wooden mantle over her fireplace if she gave the Potosi Foundation 12 hours of her time.

“Gary knew that I was involved in some really big bike rides,” Rivoire notes and chuckles, “Gary says that’s the most expensive mantel ever made!”

Rivoire helped with the bike ride and through the years has raised over \$1 million for the Potosi Foundation. She’s served on the board for nine years and is currently its secretary.

The Potosi Foundation is responsible for the restoration of the Potosi Brewery and the operation of the brewery.

“This is an overwhelming challenge of making it (the brewery) work,” she states.

One can tell that she relishes the challenge.

Next came the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF). Judith Wehrle asked Rivoire to join the board in 2010 and then immediately asked her to be president. She had no experience, but accepted the challenge.

She saw an opportunity for collaboration and asked the question, “How can both foundations work together in beneficial ways?”

Serving on both boards was a perfect blend, she adds. “It’s gratifying to see how collaboration helps both parties.”

More than that, she believes in JDCF’s work and mission providing opportunities for people to do good by preserving land and heritage.

It is through her JDCF work that Rivoire met Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society Executive Director Nancy Breed. Both served on the JDCF board. Rivoire saw the society’s need, raising money for a new museum, and thought she had the skill sets to help.

She set out to do just that and in time was offered a seat on the society’s board of directors.

For the last couple of years, Rivoire has put considerable effort into helping the historical society create a capital campaign to raise over \$8 million for the new facility on Bouthillier Street next to the Stillman Mansion.

“I feel we’re bringing something good to Galena,” she says. “It can be the jewel in the crown of the city, not the downfall. It can give Galena a quantum leap up.”

Rivoire is also thinking of collaboration between the historical society and the Potosi Foundation. There’s that word again.



When Frances Rivoire participates in a prescribed burn for the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, her usual assignment is ignition. Because of that, she’s earned the nickname Sparky. *Contributed photos*



Dave Fritz, Potosi Foundation board member and Frances present awards at the Potosi Brewery.

Serving on three distinctly different boards and giving the time necessary to do a good job with each does create some juggling, because there are also activities involving family, friends and life.

But in the end, for Rivoire, it’s about making an impact on others and providing that spark to instill that effort in others.

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19Vol-Highland



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who work to give back
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**Thank
you.**



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**Tammy's
piggly wiggly**



Galena VFW

**To all of the volunteers
who work to better the
community, we say**

THANK YOU!



**Galena Elks Club
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**Galena ARC annual
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Volunteering

It's a time valued tradition

Volunteering is a time-honored and valued tradition in the United States, even before the colonies declared their independence.

On Dec. 9, 1736, Benjamin Franklin co-founded the Union Fire Co., in Philadelphia, the first volunteer fire department to protect an entire community. The company operated until 1843.

It also appears that our Revolutionary War was of such importance that many of our militias included volunteers. That's called "having skin in the game."

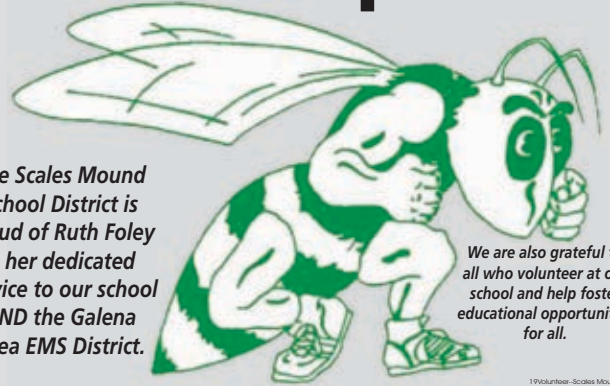
What impressed Alexis de Tocqueville, the French political scientist, whose book, "Democracy in America," has been used in colleges and universities for decades, was particularly fascinated, in 1831-32, with the American penchant to form associations—professional, social, civic and political—all of which were intended to support the social good.

In 1840, he wrote, "In the United States, as soon as several inhabitants have taken an opinion or an idea they wish to promote in society, they seek each other out and unite together once they have made contact. From that moment, they are no longer isolated but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded."

From time to time, the United States Bureau of Statistics studies volunteerism in the United States. For the federal fiscal year ending September 2015, the bureau notes:

- 24.9 percent of citizens volunteered during the year.
- More women than men volunteer: 27.8 percent versus 21.8 percent.
- Volunteer rates by age group: 16-24, 21.8; 25-34, 22.3; 35-44, 28.9; 45-54, 28; 55-64, 25.1; 65 and over, 23.5.

Hornet pride



The Scales Mound School District is proud of Ruth Foley & her dedicated service to our school AND the Galena Area EMS District.

We are also grateful to all who volunteer at our school and help foster educational opportunities for all.

© Volunteer-Scales Mound School

Congratulations to Ruth Foley for proudly representing Galena Area Emergency Medical Services as an

"Unsung Hero: A Salute to Volunteers"



29 years of service to our community and still saving lives
We are all proud of you, Ruth!

Galena EMS is always looking for community-minded people to serve with us as we continue to provide quality service to our constituents in Galena, Menominee-Dunleith, Scales Mound and The Galena Territory area.

For information, please call 815-777-3575 or email galenaEMS@gmail.com

19Vol-Galena EMS

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JO DAVIESS COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY



Ruth Foley, left, participates in a mass casualty training exercise with the Galena Emergency Medical Services and other agencies at the Palace Campground in October 2015. *Galena Gazette file photo*

Giving back

Ruth Foley: 'You find time to do the things you want to do'

by Brandon Beblke
bbeblke@galgazette.com

Ruth Foley is known around the area as someone who gives back to her communities of Galena and Scales Mound. Foley is the embodiment of a volunteer.

"I always believed that the more you give to the community, the more the community gives back," said Foley.

EMT

Twenty-nine years ago, Foley began as an EMT for Galena Area EMS. She first got interested in being an EMT after seeing an ad in the paper and saw that a class was starting and that they needed EMTs in Galena. Foley signed up and took classes for three months.

"All of a sudden this letter comes, and it told me that I passed," said Foley.

Two days later she received a phone call from the coordinator to come up and meet with her and to begin filling out paperwork. She began responding to calls and meeting the crew at the scene when she lived in rural Galena.

In 1993, when she moved to Galena, Foley got on the crew.

The next year, Foley took a class for the intermediate class. Twice a week she would travel to Elizabeth for the course. She once again passed the test and continued to go on calls, but this

Quotes

"Ruth unselfishly gives her time and heart to our community. I am proud to have her as part of our staff." - Dr. Bill Caron, superintendent Scales Mound School

"Ruth is not just here to say she is a Galena EMS member. She stays actively engaged in the service and currently serves as the EMS association president. Over the years, the board of directors would have struggled without her knowledge and documentation in this area. First Responders can make a difference between life and death." -Bill Bingham, coordinator, Galena EMS

time was able to perform advanced skills that she wasn't able to previously.

Since that time she has continued to move up the seniority list and has been a valued member to Galena EMS.

"The most rewarding time is when you see someone at the worst point of their life, and you see them a month later on the street and they are so thankful," said Foley. "That's the payback of this job."

Foley said that even when she is involved in calls where they lose someone, the families still take the time to thank her and other EMTs.

"The thanks we receive is worth every dime you could earn on a job," said Foley. "They appreciate you for what you did."

She said that volunteering at the EMT garage is different from other areas that she has volunteered because she never knows when she will be needed; there is no set time.

Foley still remembers the day that Eagle Ridge Inn caught fire. She remembers going out at 6 p.m. on the call and that she went to serve firefighters some pizza to thank them. She got home at 4:30 a.m., slept for an hour, and went to work.

She is grateful for all the support that the EMTs receive from the community. One moment that came to mind was a weekend when the crew ran 17 calls. She recalls going downtown for breakfast and as soon as the EMTs sat down the pagers went off again.

As they got up, the lady at the counter told them that they had them covered and would have hot food ready for them when they returned. When they came back, the food was ready and the lady said that their meal was being covered.

She said another nice thing about volunteering as an EMT is the camaraderie that is built between the crew members.

Unlike other organizations that meet once a week or once a month, she feels that the connection that forms among EMTs is what makes the organization so special.

Relay for Life

Foley's volunteering isn't limited to one organization. Foley was also instrumental in the success of the Jo Daviess County Relay for Life, which was held annually in June, raising money for cancer research.

In 1992, she was in her first years as an EMT. During a training, Boni Wittenbrink asked if Foley wanted to be involved with Relay for Life.

Eventually, Foley went to her first Relay meeting and that began her volunteer association with the Relay for Life, which lasted for about 12 years.

The first year she was associated, there was a small group of six to eight that were on the organizing committee.

That year, Wittenbrink asked Foley the amount that Foley thought they would raise because the bank night was coming up the following night. She thought that they would raise \$15,000. He didn't believe Foley, but before that year's event they had \$17,000. From then on, Foley was the person who would set the goals and estimate how much would be raised.

"I found it really interesting because in Relay you were dealing with the whole county, you worked with people from the rural area but were also dealing with people retiring out of Chicago," said Foley.

Every year she was a member, the group seemed to raise \$10,000 more than the previous year.

"The committee didn't raise the money, even though we got the praise," said Foley. "It was because of the team captains. The reason it was so successful was because the committee never stopped realizing that it was because of the team captains. We just organized it."

Foley mentioned that a lot of the success was because of the committee's willingness to think outside the box.

"Any organization that is raising funds will be successful if they think outside the box," said Foley. "You can't get stale because then people won't come back."

Foley said they had a lot of fun planning with the committee.

"When you volunteer, you get to have fun and you get to see people in a different position," said Foley. "That committee was fun because everyone had their own expertise."

Galena Country Fair

Foley, in more recent years, was asked by Ron Doser to fill his shoes on the Galena Country Fair board. She has been working with the organization since that point.

"What Country Fair has given over the 40 years to the community is remarkable. It isn't just one large donor; it is everyone contributing when they donate at the gate," said Foley. "It amazes me how it comes together every year, and the time that everyone puts in to making it a success."

"When we started the Relay someone made the comment that 'Wow, you have made enough money to almost be like Country Fair,'" said Foley. "I said but one thing that we got going for us is that everyone has a common cause. With Country Fair, a lot of the people who donate won't utilize the donations or grants. They are just there to do it for the community and that is always nice."

Foley said that the fair committee reminds her a lot of the Relay because it is fun and everyone has an area of expertise.

League of Women Voters

The Wittenbrinks also got Foley involved in the League of Women Voters of Jo Daviess County. She was a member of the League for about 10 years.

She said that she had a lot of fun with the League of Women Voters because of how much she learned while serving with the organization.

"I loved the forums that they gave," said Foley.

The discussions and structure of the organization was different than other groups of which she has been a part but she enjoyed the educational aspect of the group.

One of the projects that she worked on was the county's comprehensive plan.

Boards and councils

When Gary Bartell became mayor of Galena, Bartell asked Foley to be on the planning commission for the city. Prior to serving on the commission, she served as a township assessor. She was on the planning commission until she moved to Scales Mound.

Foley was on the planning commission when many of the new developments were starting to come into Galena. Walmart, Cobblestone Crossing and a few failed Horseshoe Mound developments were all part of some of the decisions that she made.

"It was interesting because you could go through the comprehensive plan and see if it fit," said Foley. "Mr. Bartell wanted us to look at the parks in the city and to have a plan for them." When they started looking at Rec Park, Lester Johnson and Tom Golden put together maps of Rec Park that she took home to come up with ideas. She set the plans on the coffee table in the living room, and with my mom, came up with three different options.

She took them back to the meeting where she realized few of the other members did the "homework." They then took the three plans to pick and choose. Her plans would come to life a few years later.

When Foley moved to Scales Mound, she started working on the village's planning commission and eventually began serving on the board of trustees for the village.

The board of trustees is a little bit different because of the decisions that she had to make.

"I have always said that Scales Mound is a



hidden treasure. Until people find out what the hidden treasure is in Scales Mound, they will never know what it is like to live in a small town," said Foley.

Volunteering

Foley said that an important aspect of volunteering is the willingness of employers to allow their employees to volunteer.

"I think it does a lot for their business," said Foley. "It is another means of advertising for their business."

Foley said that for EMTs it is a big plus for small communities to have businesses that allow their employees to serve. She said that it shows that those employers are involved in the community.

When she first started working at Scales Mound School, Foley also volunteered as a coach. She currently serves as a timekeeper for basketball and volleyball games.

Foley is also a eucharistic minister at Holy Trinity Catholic Church and counts the money monthly.

"I can't say that anything that I have gotten into, I didn't really like doing," said Foley. "You meet so many interesting people and you learn so much when you volunteer. You learn teamwork, you learn how to problem solve, and you deal with people of various age groups and that makes it interesting."

"Volunteering is what makes a small town unique," said Foley. "People are there because they want to be there and to help the community. You find the time to do the things you want to do."

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1993 City of East Dubuque

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Hometown conviction

Randy Degenhardt says you don't get anything done sitting at home

by P. Carter Newton, publisher
cnewton@galgazette.com

Randy Degenhardt says it in a matter-of-fact way: "You can't do anything if you're sitting at home."

It's a reflection of his life that includes a work ethic that bores through his soul. When you hear his life story the word "work" comes up frequently.

But it's his passion for East Dubuque that is omnipresent. He says it over and over again, "I care what happens to this town."

You see determination in his eyes and you hear that determination in his voice.

East Dubuque is part of his soul and being. His predecessors, farmers, moved to southwest Wisconsin from Germany in 1867 and in 1897 purchased a saloon in East Dubuque.

This is where he grew up and thrived. He wants young families to have that same opportunity.

For over 45 years, Degenhardt has been able to put that passion to work serving on the East Dubuque City Council.

Art Tranel suggested Degenhardt run for an open Ward I council seat. He won. That was in April 1974. He hasn't lost an election since.

He's seen a lot of changes. He's served under 10 different mayors.

He remembers the boom times: three grocery stores, two shoe shops, a feed store, a couple of hardware stores, a lumber yard and factory to go along with the 29 liquor licenses.

"I remember we had several good supper clubs: Circle Lounge, Town House, Esquire and El Rancho," he says. There was even good quality entertainment. The Circle booked comedian George Gobel.

It was at the Town House that Degenhardt landed his first job at 7 years of age scrubbing floors seven days a week. He'd get up early before school to get the job done.

"This place was booming," he said. "On Saturday and Sunday it was wall-to-wall people. And we only had three cops."

About the time Degenhardt joined the council, East Dubuque's economy began to change.

"I don't want to see this city die," he says.



Randy Degenhardt says it over and over again. East Dubuque's new city hall on Sinsinawa Avenue was a "home run." He has served on the East Dubuque City Council for 45 years with one main goal: make East Dubuque a better place to live, work and play. *P. Carter Newton photo*

There's steely determination in his eyes.

Degenhardt remembers his first years on the council. "I was the young guy," he says. "Most of the people (on the council) were old."

Now he's the veteran. "I'll do this to help for as long as I can," he says.

These 45 years have come with highs and lows. There have been contentious meetings facing the wrath of citizens and there have been some home runs.

The biggest of those home runs, in Degenhardt's opinion, is relocating city hall on Main Street one year ago.

He notes, "I had been hoping for years that this could happen. We went through a lot of discussions (of where to relocate). People in town wanted it here."

Installing lights at the East Dubuque football field was also a highlight. He remembers the night the council voted to support the project. One council member left the meeting so as not to be put on the spot with his vote.

He remembers the council "taking a lot of grief" over hiring a city manager. That decision, he says, "was a big help" for the council and the city.



Randy Degenhardt on the day he entered the army, Feb. 14, 1966.



The Degenhardt family. Back from left, sons Eric and Clayton and front, Randy and Laura.



Randy Degenhardt at Ft. Hood in 1967.



One of Randy Degenhardt's passions is fishing



Randy Degenhardt: Wahlert High School graduation, June 6, 1965.

Quotes

"When we moved in the neighborhood, little did I know that I would get to know Randy and his family for the next 28 years. Randy is like the human encyclopedia for the city of East Dubuque. Randy was influential getting me involved in city politics and lo and behold now I'm mayor. Thanks, Randy, in being a true East Dubuquer."

-Kirk VanOstrand, East Dubuque mayor

"In my short time here, Randy has been a tremendous resource for me. His years of service provide an instant source of information that helps to guide me through the numerous projects we are working on. East Dubuque is fortunate to have a public servant like Randy Degenhardt."

-Loras Herrig, East Dubuque city manager

I'll bend over backward for them and make sure they get what they need. I'm a big supporter."

He's also a big supporter of Luke Kovacic, the new police chief.

He notes, "Luke wants to live here and raise a family. I think he will make a difference here."

Through the years, Degenhardt has been involved in the community in other ways. He's assisted police and firefighters search for drowning victims. He's a member of St. Mary's Parish, has served on the local Civil Service Commission and in the 1970s helped law enforcement combat prostitution.

He also cites with pride his 40 years of membership in the East Dubuque Lions Club.

Lately, he's helped the club raise funds to support projects. Through his connections with the Amish community, he's been able to buy hanging baskets and then sell them to area residents. The first year, the club sold 150 baskets. The next year, the club sold 175 baskets in three days.

And, one can't forget about his membership in the American Legion. Military service is a big part of his life.

Although he's good with numbers—Degenhardt can recite important dates in rapid-fire or-

Degenhardt also remembers the council taking a lot of grief over its decision to prohibit adult entertainment or strip clubs.

"It was time for a new image," he said. "And it's been the best for the city."

Through all these years and all these meetings, Degenhardt says he's learned one important lesson: you can't please everyone.

He says, "In a little town you can do 100 things right, but if you do one thing wrong, you can be crucified."

At the council table he says that he's guided by using common sense. That's 90 percent of the job: using common sense.

He says this, because with a city council "sometimes things get blown out of proportion and things become a mess."

Degenhardt also notes that he's learned to be a bit cautious out in the community, because as a council member "people look and watch you." For that reason, he doesn't hang around in taverns.

At times, the votes he's made on the council haven't been popular. He's had people run against him.

He remembers one election when someone put a bag of human waste in his driveway.

"I knew who it was but I couldn't prove it," he notes.

He did let people in his ward know about it and they voted for him.

Degenhardt moved up to his home on Cemetery Hill as a young man with a young family. He made it a point to remove snow from the driveways of his widow neighbors. He never asked for anything in return.

It was a simple act of kindness.

If the public works department staff members are busy on the city's streets after a big snowfall, Degenhardt also removes snow at the fire and police departments.

It's his way of helping them.

As a council member, Degenhardt says he's always interested in helping the fire department.

"If I see the fire department needs something,

der—school was always challenging. He attended Wahlert Catholic High School because it offered industrial arts classes. He graduated June 7, 1965. It was there that he met his future wife, Laura.

Later that month, June 28, to be exact, he landed a job at John Deere Dubuque Works. The following February, Feb. 14, 1966, he was drafted into the army and stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas.

There, he put his work ethic to work. A demolition specialist, he asked to be transferred into the arms room. Two months later when the inspector general came to inspect his arms room, Degenhardt received a rating of 98 out of 100. The other arms rooms failed their inspections.

Within 12 months, he'd been promoted to sergeant and had been given responsibility over all the arms rooms.

He says, "I did my job. I was hell on wheels."

After his service, Degenhardt, who had recently wed, took a trip to the U.S.-Mexico border. They stopped at Ft. Hood where he asked to see his arms room.

The officers inquired why he wanted to do that. When they finally understood who he was, they said, "We've heard about you."

Degenhardt adds, "I was proud to make a lasting memory."

In addition to his community activities, Degenhardt continues with passions he developed as a boy. At the same age he started working at the Town House, he began collecting Native American artifacts and digging into Native American history.

Today, he has over 2,000 arrowheads as well as a collection of axe heads and other tools.

He also likes to hunt deer, turkey and grouse and has an interest in "older guns."

He also has a passion for fishing and especially enjoys fishing for muskies and pan fish near his cabin in northern Wisconsin.

He's also proud of his marriage with Laura of 49 years, as well as his two sons, Clayton, 46, a career military officer, and Eric, 40, who works at John Deere in Dubuque. Degenhardt says he's "always tried to do the right thing."

He also didn't sit at home doing nothing.

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Bryan and Jenni Ackerman portrayed the LeBrons, a former Galena couple, in the 2001 Cemetery Walk. *Contributed photo*

Value added assets

Ackermans: Volunteering makes their time more meaningful

by Hillary Dickerson, editor
hdickerson@galgazette.com

Through their years in the community, Bryan and Jenni Ackerman have found that volunteering makes their time more meaningful. They believe in finding causes to which they add value and causes that ignite their passion. Then they pursue those causes and help to make a difference.

The Ackermans are familiar faces in a number of different organizations from the Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society to the Galena Center for the Arts and the Galena Festival of the Performing Arts.

“We all need to find places where we feel we can be a value-added asset,” said Jenni.

The Ackermans know, though, that they’re not alone. They’re in good company, spending their time and energy with so many others who feel likewise and go above and beyond to keep organizations and community events running smoothly.

“We’re not unusual,” said Bryan. “We’re more the norm.”

Delving into history

The Ackermans bought a home in rural Galena in 1990 and began spending weekends here at that time. Aware of the fascinating history of this area, their first involvement was with the Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society. By the mid-1990s, they were participating in cemetery walks—they’d never acted before—and dressing in period attire with their friends.

When they relocated to Galena permanently from Chicago in 2002, the historical society remained their main focus. They retired young and had a lot of energy to devote to their new community.

Getting involved in the community turned out to be a perfect way to meet new people and forge friendships.

Jenni joined the historical society board, and then when the Old Blacksmith Shop opened,

Bryan got involved as a volunteer.

Continuing with the historical society, Jenni worked with Alice Toebaas, who was then curator, helping with the collection. She really enjoyed the work, and it was in that role that Jenni realized that in volunteering there really needs to be an element of interest so that she feels like she’s contributing.

“You can’t do it all,” said Jenni, noting her focus has now shifted to the Galena Festival of the Performing Arts, which brings a series of free concerts to Galena each July and a holiday concert in December.

Bryan loves blacksmithing, even though he’s found it takes a physical toll on his hands and shoulders. He loves to be able to transport visitors back in time and tell the stories of a past way of life in the living museum space. And through his volunteerism, and the pieces he creates in the forge, Bryan and other volunteer blacksmiths contribute to the bottom line of the museum. The items they create are sold in the gift shops.



Bryan Ackerman regularly volunteers as a blacksmith during the season at the Old Blacksmith Shop on Commerce Street. The Galena-Jo Daviess County Historical Society runs the living history museum. Hillary Dickerson photo

"It's work, but I'm having fun," he said.

Bryan also got involved with the cemetery walk the year it started. His friend, Nancy Wolfe, introduced him to Don Gereau and Daryl Watson. Bryan's first role was as a gravedigger, moving attendees from one cemetery walk location to another. He then became a greeter at the main entrance.

"I have a gift of gab," he laughed.

When Ronn Toebaas, the current director of the cemetery walk, took over several years ago, Bryan started working behind the scenes as well.

The couple also does other special events with the historical society, pulling out their period attire, for activities during Grant's Birthday Weekend and the annual Tour of Historic Homes.

Limit involvement to ensure happiness

One of the struggles the Ackermans have found is that they are so busy volunteering with certain organizations that they don't have time to be involved with other groups they know would be a good fit. And they like to make sure they're still doing other things they love like working their vegetable garden and spending time on their land.

Now serving as president of the Festival of the Performing Arts, Jenni is careful to make the distinction between that board and the volunteering she does with the Galena Center for the Arts.

They are two different organizations.

Jenni's involvement with the Center for the Arts has been since the beginning. She was working as stage manager with Carole Sullivan and performing in "Remembering Old Galena," so when the arts center opened, it was a natural next step. She continues to help as a stage manager, performer, has made appetizers and treats, and helped out as a server at openings. Bryan is a volunteer bartender at opening receptions and occasionally at plays.

Jenni also believes it's important to identify what one loves and what might be missing in life. For example, Jenni loves music, so she joined the Galena United Methodist Community Handbell Choir because she no longer played an instrument at home and missed it. She's found joy with the group, creating music and forming connections with people whose paths she may otherwise not have crossed.

Last words

Volunteering is something that was instilled in Bryan, in particular, at a young age by his parents. In fact, Bryan has never really viewed his efforts as volunteering but instead simply work that has to be done by someone. He gives blood on a regular basis and served as an election judge in Lake County and now here. While that is a paid position, the little pay and long hours—5 a.m. to

Quotes

"Bryan has regularly helped out as a very amiable bartender when we have opening receptions at the Galena Center for the Arts, or occasionally for plays. Jenni has been an enormous help functioning as the stage manager for many of our radio plays. Jenni has made appetizers and treats, and helped out as a server at innumerable openings! They are both so willing to assist, and to do whatever they are assigned in an efficient and positive way."

-Carole Sullivan, executive director of the Galena Center for the Arts

"Bryan and Jenni Ackerman are some of the most civic-minded people I know. Their involvement in the Galena community covers a broad spectrum. Bryan is a voting judge for elections, and Jenni is very instrumental in the music festival that brings wonderful entertainment to Galena each year. Both of them are very involved in the Galena Center for the Arts in many capacities, and both have been dedicated volunteers for the Galena History Museum.

"I have been fortunate to have both Bryan and Jenni assist me with the annual Cemetery Walk for the past 14 years. Jenni has played multiple characters, helped coordinate costumes, and even served as a gravedigger when I was short on volunteers. Bryan has been my right hand, serving as assistant director, stage manager, and props master extraordinaire. He serves as our official greeter at each performance.

"But Bryan and Jenni's commitment goes even deeper. On a personal level, they are always there if I need a ride to a doctor's appointment, have a medical need, or just need someone to talk to. Since my wife's passing, they have provided me an amazing support system. Their friendship and commitment are unparalleled."

-Ronn Toebaas, director, Galena's annual cemetery walk

9 p.m.—certainly isn't why he signs up to assist.

Because this community has so many volunteer opportunities, Bryan noted, there are hundreds of volunteers. There is no way this community would have the vibrant and successful programs without each of those people.

In fact, it's breathtaking, really, to think about what wouldn't happen in Galena without the volunteers, Bryan said.

"Your pay is you feel this reward of being able to contribute something," said Bryan.

There are others, they noted, who are extremely generous with their monetary contributions.

With a professional background as a project manager, Jenni said she has the ability to see what's happening and fill in the gaps.

The Ackermans certainly encourage others to get involved in the community and help in any way possible. Every little bit makes a difference.

"It's a wonderful community," Jenni concluded. "There's something for everyone here."

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Britnea Toot

Following a strong example

Britnea Toot follows parents footsteps as emergency responder; wants to expand community roles

by Hillary Dickerson, editor
bdickerson@galgazette.com

Britnea Toot grew up witnessing firsthand the importance of community service. In fact, it's really all she's ever known. Her mom, Brenda, is a paramedic who works full-time in Mt. Carroll and continues to volunteer for the Elizabeth Ambulance. Her dad, Scott, is police chief in Elizabeth and is chair of the Jo Daviess County Board.

Thinking back to her childhood, Toot remembers both her mom and dad missing holidays with the family because they were called out to serve their community. They were both willing to sacrifice time with their loved one to help others in their time of need.

But when Britnea Toot was approached by her mom and Dan Schleicher, coordinator of the Elizabeth Ambulance, about becoming a volunteer first responder, she had her doubts. They managed, somehow, to talk her into the two nights of classes each week for eight weeks. She was hooked and after finishing the class, joined the Elizabeth Ambulance in 2016.

"After that, I wanted more," said 22-year-old Toot, a 2015 graduate of River Ridge High School, recalling her first trauma call. "I loved helping people at 2 o'clock in the morning on the worst day of their life."

She loved helping the community and followed up her initial class with the EMT Basic class six months later. This class, she said, was more intense. She dedicated two nights a week for four months and then took the national registry test for national certification. She passed and was ready to continue her service.

Toot remained with the Elizabeth Ambulance, where she continues to help out on occasion, until March 2019, when she moved to Stockton and switched services. She's now required to take 12 hours of calls a month, which

is very little compared to the 100 or more hours she worked each month in Elizabeth.

Now with a 21-month-old son, Grayson, Toot is a bit more challenged for time. She tries to take calls when he's sleeping.

"This is a great way for kids to grow up," she Toot, recalling her childhood when she'd go with her mom to continuing education classes and make friends with the children of other responders.

In the year before he was born, she said, she logged 2,000 hours of call time.

"Any of my spare time, that's what I did," she noted.

In a small community, Toot said, emergency responders tend to know about 90 percent of the patients, and in some instances, it's at the worst time of their life.

"You don't think about it because that's our job," she said, noting she goes into motion and does what needs to be done.

She knows, too, that in certain cases, seeing the familiar face of a local volunteer brings comfort to the patients and family.

"They know that they're in good hands and that we care about them," Toot said.

Toot's EMS involvement helped her realize her career path as well.

While she'd always considered nursing, she wasn't sure until volunteering with the ambulance.

"EMS made me want to do it more," she said.

During high school, at age 16, Toot completed her certified nursing assistant (CNA) license through the Jo Daviess-Carroll Career Technical Education Academy. She's now worked for two years full-time at Midwest Medical Center in Galena as a CNA. She floats between the inpatient floor and the emergency room.

"I love the emergency room," said Toot.

Toot is now a student at Highland Community College in Freeport, where she's completing her prerequisite courses for nursing. She started in the spring of 2019 and next fall will join the nursing program. Her goal is to one day be a



Britnea Toot has been a volunteer Emergency First Responder since 2016, starting with Elizabeth Ambulance. Today, she juggles many responsibilities including her job at Midwest Medical Center, her education at Highland Community College, her current EMT volunteer duty at Stockton Ambulance and her role as a mother.

'I loved helping people at 2 o'clock in the morning on the worst day of their life.'

-Britnea Toot

pre-hospital registered nurse—very similar to a paramedic—with Stockton Ambulance.

Now that she's over her initial surprise at enjoying emergency response, she knows she wants to continue in the field.

"Now if I could do it as my full-time job, I absolutely would," she said.

Toot acknowledged that a hospital is a more controlled environment. Now that she's experienced trauma calls, she's found she likes how hectic it can be.

"It's our job to control it," said Toot of the role of the responders.

Toot is well aware she has a lot on her plate in terms of responsibilities.

"Sometimes I just want to cry," she said about juggling work, being a mom, a full-time college student and volunteering.

She encourages others to get involved to lighten the work load among volunteers. If more people stepped up, she said, it would help tremendously.

Toot has heard the excuse that people don't have time, and she certainly understands where they're coming from but has a difficult time accepting it when she looks at her schedule and somehow makes it work.

Although she's perfectly content right now with all she's doing, she'd someday like to be elected to a board and serve her community that way as well.

Now that she has a son of her own, Toot said she prays that one day Grayson will follow in her footsteps and want to serve his community as well. For now she's committed to setting a good example for him as her parents did for her.

Quotes

"I have known Britnea for many years. Her Mom, Brenda, has been on our ambulance since 2003. Britnea took a class and became an Emergency First Responder for us in 2016 and then EMT class and license in 2017. She was very active for us, taking many hours of call time and going on emergency calls. Unfortunately for Elizabeth EMS she has moved to Stockton. But our loss is Stockton's gain!"

-Dan Schleicher, Elizabeth EMS

"Britnea lights up a room when she walks into it with her smile. She goes above and beyond to meet the needs of our patients and visitors. When you meet Britnea, you would never know how many hats this young lady is wearing. She is a great employee, volunteer and most importantly mom. We are so proud of her and look forward to her becoming a nurse and continuing her career at Midwest Medical Center. We were very happy to provide her with a loan/scholarship to continue her education as she exemplifies why we provide education assistance."

-Tracy Bauer, president and CEO, Midwest Medical Center

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