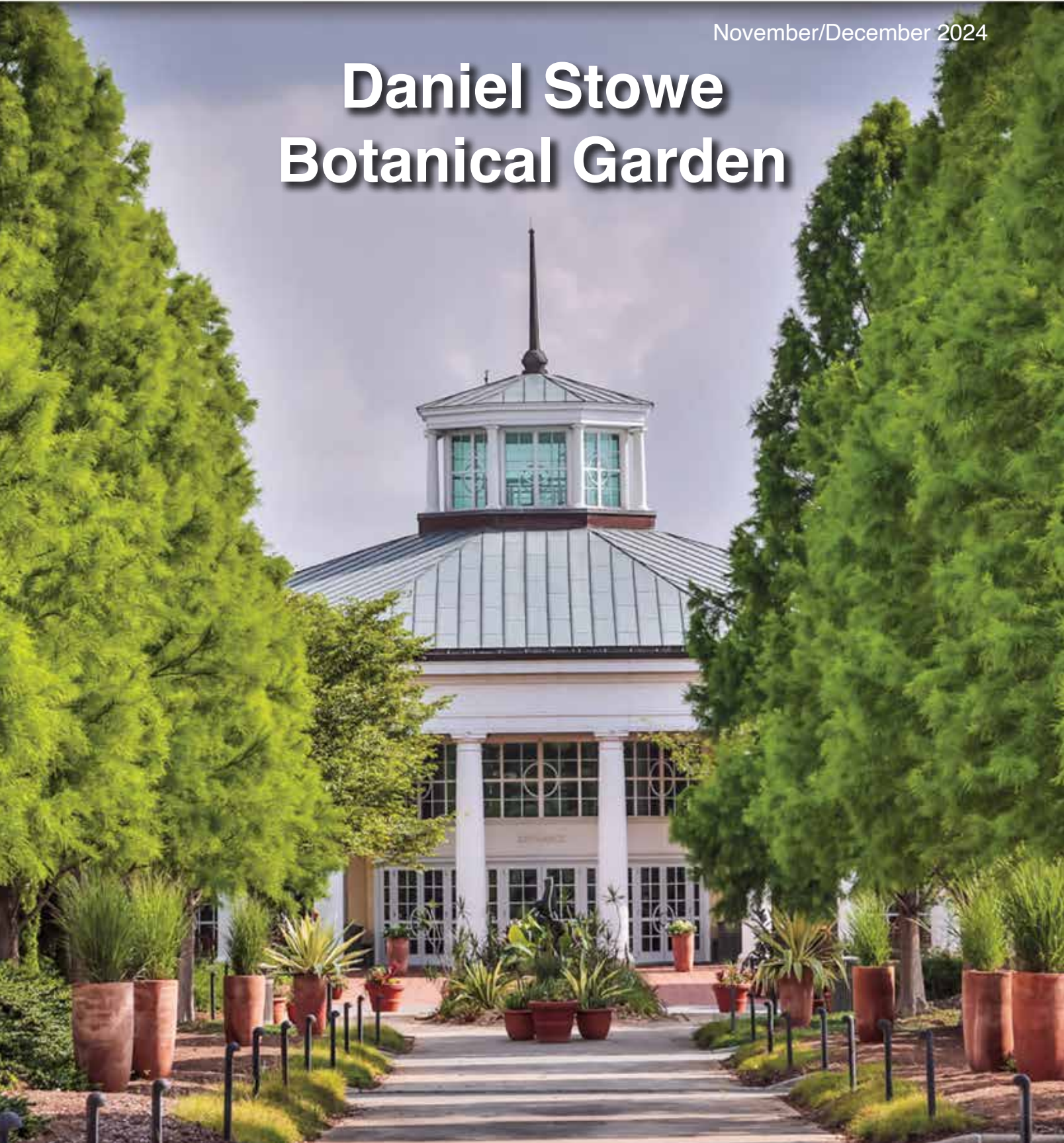


# *Gaston Lifestyles*

MAGAZINE

November/December 2024

## **Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden**







**A thriving Gaston County is representative of the positive energy and growth in the greater Charlotte region. Each day, people and businesses throughout the county take advantage of opportunities to chart their course for prosperity.**

**As the voice of business in Gaston County, the GBA is at the center of this activity, working diligently to drive business success and economic growth.**

## Strategic Priorities

### *Influence The Business Environment*

to enrich Gaston's diversification, overall reputation and regional position

### *Drive Business Success*

by identifying and addressing critical business needs with innovative, impactful, and inclusive strategies

### *Enhance Workforce Capacity*

through the development and retention of local talent to encourage and sustain Gaston's long-term economic vitality



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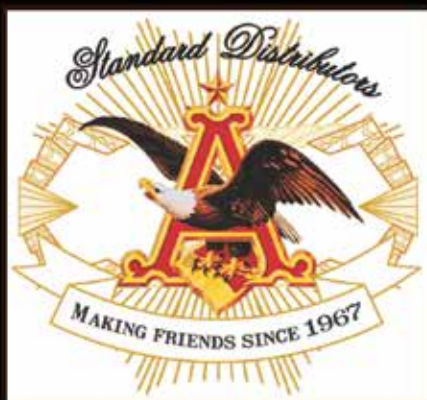
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# CONTENTS

# CONTENTS

November/December 2024

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Volume 13 - Issue 6



## 3 Publisher's Note



**4 Cover Story**  
Daniel Stowe  
Botanical Garden

**8 Business Center**  
Placemaking in Gaston County

**10 Finance**  
October 5th Was My  
40th Birthday

**12 Fashion**  
Tis the Season for Style

**14 Hollywood Obsessed**  
Chatting With Actor  
Nicholas Hammond

**16 Entertainment**  
"House of Olufunké"

**17 Photo Gallery**

**18 People on the Move**

**20 Community**  
YMCA's Impact on Hurricane  
Helene Relief

**22 Community**  
United Way of Gaston County  
Steps in to Support

**24 Pet Corner**  
Disaster Preparedness



**25 Eats & Treats**  
Fondant Sweet  
Potatoes

**26 Those who Serve**  
LOT Carolinas Serves  
Children in Foster Care

**27 Health**  
Coping After a Disaster

**28 Technology**  
Climate Change Solutions

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Creech Computer Consulting, Inc.

**Published By**  
P.O. Box 550666 • Gastonia, NC 28055-0666

## Gaston Lifestyles is distributed through direct mailing and these major outlets

### Gaston County US Post Office's

Harris Teeter  
3350 Robinwood Rd  
Gastonia, NC 28056

Harris Teeter  
905 S. Point Rd  
Belmont, NC 28012

Covenant Village  
1351 Robinwood Road  
Gastonia, NC 28054

Warlick YMCA  
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Gastonia, NC 28054

Sammy's  
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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

## Community Support for Health and Well Being

*Disaster Recovery, Healthcare and Mental Wellness*

By Deborah Ally, publisher, *Gaston Lifestyles* magazine

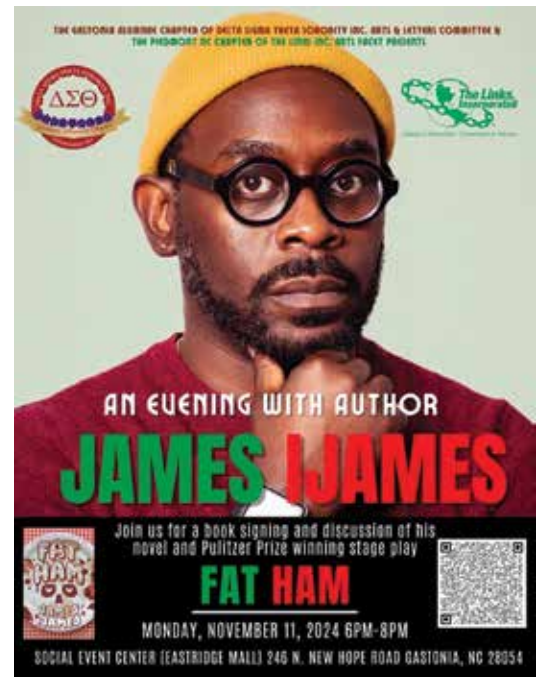


Deborah Ally

Late September Western NC experienced the wrath of Hurricane Helene and it will take some time to recover. In the aftermath our families, friends, churches, businesses and nonprofit organizations did what we do best and lent a helping hand and continue to do so. Our writers Megan Baksh and Peter Rowan give advice on mental wellness and caring for your pets during and post disaster and the YMCA and United Way of Gaston County give examples of doing their best to bring support to those in need.

Mental health awareness was presented at the GBA Professional Women's Luncheon featuring Sylvia Hatchell, former head coach of the Lady Tar Heels. Her insight on helping us tackle challenges, staying motivated and reaching our goals were all winning strategies she used with her players.

And congratulations to CaroMonth Health on the successful launch of the new hospital in Belmont. Their evening of celebration was a wonderful night including a special guest appearance by the nine-time Grammy Award winner and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame recipient, Sheryl Crow. My favorite song of hers: *All I Wanna Do Is Have Some Fun* and that night fun was had by all. **GL**



### GBA PWA luncheon



PWA Leadership with Sylvia



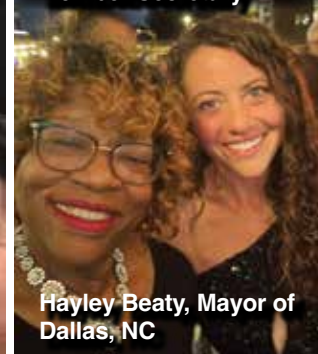
Sylvia and Deborah

### CaroMont Health gala

Rep. John Torbett and State Senator Ted Alexander along with spouses and friends joined Rev. Dr. Pearl Burris-Floyd at the CRMC Belmont Gala!



Rev. Dr. Pearl Burris-Floyd CRMC Board Member/Secretary



Hayley Beaty, Mayor of Dallas, NC



Chris Peek, President & CEO of CaroMont Health



Sheryl Crow







# Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

## *The Natural Beauty of the Carolinas*

By Caitlin Conner

Photographs by Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

In 1991, a retired textile executive from Belmont, NC had a vision. Lifelong outdoorsman and gardener Daniel Stowe noticed how quickly the rapidly growing area was overtaken by construction and property development and wanted to ensure the natural beauty of the place he called home remained intact. To do so, he reserved 380 acres of forests, prairies, and meadows right off the shores of Lake Wylie, not only beginning the foundation for stunning gardens, breathtaking exhibits, and floral attractions, but gifting the greater Charlotte region a space where anyone can explore the great outdoors and the natural beauty of the Carolinas in the way that speaks to them.

### Planting Their Roots

On October 9, 1999, Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden opened its doors to the public for the first time, including eight gardens, 12 fountains, and a 13,500 square-foot Visitor Pavilion topped by an awe-inspiring 100-year-old-stained glass dome. These features are just as beautiful today, but over the past 25 years, the garden has continued growing, just as Stowe and his wife, Alene, envisioned.

In 2008, the William H. Williamson, III, Orchid Conservatory opened at DSBG, giving visitors the chance to take in the colorful sights and fragrant smells of orchids and tropical plants from around the world. Contained in this 8,000-square-foot glass house are a waterfall, cocoa tree, vanilla orchid, and other lush greenery that takes the visitor to an island paradise.

In 2014, the Lost Hollow Kimbrell Children's Garden became a sanctuary for children of all ages to experience the magic of nature. From wild forest play spaces to hidden fairy homes, Lost Hollow is a place for imaginations to run free and for children to explore the whimsical excitement of outdoor spaces.

DSBG has also established a reputation in the community for its highly anticipated annual events, namely our Holidays at the Garden exhibit

that runs from late November to late December each year. The Horticulture team works hard to bring a holiday light spectacular to life, combining the twinkle of thousands of lights with the Garden's natural beauty.

According to Jason Bonham, the Garden's Director of Horticulture, prepping for Holidays at the Garden began in the summer heat: "The monumental task of installing our Holiday Light actually began in August, believe it or not!" Both plants and light displays are designed all in house by our talented team of horticulturists."

Add with warm beverages, food trucks, crackling firepits, visits with Santa, and plenty of holiday cheer you have a bonified winter wonderland—it's no wonder that the Garden sees upwards of 20,000 visitors during the holiday season. The 2024 Holidays at the Garden begin November 29 and run through December 29. Tickets are on sale now at [dsbg.org/holiday/](https://dsbg.org/holiday/)!

Even with all these exciting additions over the last two decades, DSBG has no plans to slow down. In 2024, the team at DSBG looks back to Daniel Stowe's original vision as they plan for the future.



# COVER STORY

“We hope everyone will feel welcome and inspired when they visit, whether they are an avid gardener, a novice green thumb, or simply a lover of the outdoors,” says John Searby, CEO and Executive Director at DSBG.

## More Than a Garden

Daniel Stowe set out to create a space for everyone in 1999, and this spirit of inclusivity has driven DSBG’s growth in recent years. Beyond the formal garden, visitors can explore nearly seven miles of trails, including a two-mile section on the shores of Lake Wylie. Trails that start in the Garden also connect to the Catawba Thread Trail, a regional network of connected greenways that spans 15 counties across two states through over 300 miles of trails. Hikers, runners, bikers, and wildlife lovers alike can explore this natural marvel to their heart’s content.

For folks who want to enjoy a more leisurely stroll, two pond loops less than 0.5 miles each present a casual, crushed gravel path that still provide stunning views, the gentle sounds of wildlife, and maybe even a spotting of the Great Blue Heron that calls DSBG home.

Another recent addition to DSBG is a 0.3 acre dog park built into the outskirts of the woodlands that provides a unique forest setting for folks to enjoy the views with their furry friends. The community can access trails and dog park at DSBG for free, making it an accessible way for all to get out and explore.

At the heart of these opportunities for attainable outdoor adventure is the Trailhead Store. The Trailhead Store opened

in early 2024 as a coffee shop, serving Nightswim coffee along with beer, wine, and eclectic bites. The rustic log cabin nestles perfectly next to the dog park and in the backdrop of the Pond Loop Trails, featuring a screened-in porch perfect for book club meetings, working remotely, or catching up with friends (dogs are welcome on the porch, too!). The chic upstairs provides a quiet room for curling up with a book or studying, and log chairs and benches outside around firepits present a serene space for enjoying a drink. Paired with regularly scheduled live music on the porch, the Trailhead Store gives folks a spot to sit back, relax, and enjoy nature. Just like the trails, visitors do not need to pay Garden admission to access the Trailhead Store.

## A Path for Everyone

On top of providing free and low-cost ways to get out in nature, DSBG also focuses on building a sense of belonging and pride to a community who loves the outdoors. At the heart of this community are our members.

Private Events Manager Monica Doolan was a member of the Garden long before she was an employee. She says about her experience: “One of the truest sentiments regarding Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden is this: it is a garden for all seasons. I have found joy, beauty, and discovery throughout my ten years as a member and now even more so as an employee!”

Becoming a member at DSBG provides multiple benefits, including unlimited access to the Garden spaces, half-priced admission for guests, and admissions and discounts to 360+ other botanical gardens within the American Horticulture Society umbrella, discounts at the Garden Store and on Garden classes and workshops, previews of exciting exhibits, and more.

Many Garden members also choose to join another crucial group at DSBG: volunteers. As a non-profit organization, DSBG is excited to have a strong roster of robust volunteers who are proud community ambassadors of the Garden and aid in nearly every aspect of keeping the Garden operating.

“Volunteers play a key role in preserving this natural space as well as providing unforgettable experiences to all guests. These community members help our staff with everything from gardening, special events, education, outreach, mailings, habitat care and more and they change throughout the year. Most activities for volunteers do not require prior knowledge or training as the day-of lead provides quick and easy instructions on-site. We are so very grateful for these folks who volunteer their time to make a greater positive impact for our region,” says Volunteer Manager Vanessa Covington.

Outdoor recreation/fitness is another DSBG community that has shown staggering growth over the past few years. The





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## Becoming a member at DSBG provides multiple benefits, including unlimited access to the Garden spaces, half-priced admission for guests, and admissions and discounts to 360+ other botanical gardens within the American Horticulture Society umbrella.

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Bright Lights 5k and one-mile races have built a dedicated group that has expanded rapidly year-to-year. With the tongue-in-cheek encouragement to “ditch the Turkey Trot”, this race takes place the night before Thanksgiving instead of the morning of. Race participants also receive free admission to the Garden and have the chance to preview the Holidays at the Garden exhibits before they open to the public. Due to the immense popularity of this race, DSBG has added to their race series, including a spring Zoom and Bloom 5k and kids run, a Summer Nights 5k and one-miler, and a fall Jeepers Creepers 5k and 10k (the longest race yet on DSBG property). With regular yoga classes and expanded opportunities for outdoor fitness, DSBG is quickly building a strong fitness-focused community (pun intended).

Eric Smallwood, Director of Outdoor Recreation, adds: “Recreation at the Garden is something fairly new to the property but transformational for guests. With nearly seven miles of trails, two miles of Lake Wylie waterfront, the dog park, and the Trailhead Store, people can now experience the Stowe property at their own pace. Leaning into our full property has allowed us to create new programs like paddling camps, races, outdoor cooking classes, forest bathing, and story time hikes.”

DSBG often refers to being a “garden for all seasons”, and that includes the seasons of life. With opportunities for adults of all ages to build community bonds, there are also myriad ways for kids to get involved and foster a love of nature and protecting and preserving the great outdoors. From youth explorer workshops to regular story times to a comprehensive expansion plan for the Lost Hollow Children’s Garden, kids at DSBG are always encouraged to jump around, get their hands dirty, ask questions, and grow a little closer to the wild world that surrounds them.

### Growing Stronger

As leadership at DSBG makes plans to continue growing and evolving, their plan is simple: gain guidance from the man who started it all.

“As we look forward to the next 25 years, we return to Dan’s vision to inspire a love of nature and its beauty through unforgettable outdoor experiences,” says Searby.

And it’s really that easy. Keeping Daniel Stowe’s original plan at the forefront, the Board of Directors at DSBG developed a strategic masterplan to use their 380 acres to their full potential. How?

“By thoughtfully developing sustainable new gardens, trails, and educational experiences,” says Searby. “We are excited to help all visitors discover their path to nature.”

So, if you decide to spend a day at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, you’ll absolutely see folks of all ages walking through the sprawling scenic gardens taking in the breathtaking florals, greenery, and sparkling fountains. You might also see a retiree volunteer leading a tour or our Private Events team setting up for a stunning wedding or a group of kids making magic in Lost Hollow. You could see a local run club hitting the trails or a family going on a walk around the Pond Loop or dog parents romping around the dog park with their pups. You might enjoy some live music or pack a picnic on the lawn or catch one of their breathtaking seasonal exhibits. No matter what day or time of year you visit, one thing is always guaranteed: there’s something for everyone at DSBG. **GL**



## Placemaking in Gaston County

*The Impact to the Economy*

By Madison Boles

Photographs Courtesy Gaston Business Association



**P**lacemaking, the process of designing public spaces to promote social interaction and community well-being, is emerging as a critical driver of economic growth in communities across the country. In Gaston County, this community-focused approach to development is playing a significant role in shaping the future of our local economy. As the Gaston Business Association (GBA), we recognize that placemaking not only enhances the livability of our cities and towns but also serves as a catalyst for business growth and long-term economic prosperity.

Recently, the GBA hosted a breakfast event centered on the transformative power of placemaking. The event brought together experts in urban design, economic development, and regional planning to discuss how thoughtful community development can unlock new opportunities for local businesses and boost the economic vitality of our county.

At the breakfast event, Terry Shook, a Gastonia native and renowned leader in urban design and placemaking, shared his vision for the future of Gastonia and how strategic placemaking can drive significant economic benefits. Drawing on his extensive experience in revitalizing urban areas like

Charlotte's South End and Greenville, SC, Shook emphasized that well-designed spaces create environments where businesses can thrive.

"Placemaking is about creating a sense of place that fosters both community and commerce," Shook explained. "It's the thoughtful integration of public spaces, commercial areas, and residential neighborhoods that makes cities more attractive to investors and businesses alike."

Shook's design philosophy focuses on leveraging municipalities' unique characteristics and histories to create downtown areas that draw people in, encouraging them to live, work, and spend money in the city. This kind of community-centric approach has already shown success in other regions and promises to have the same impact in Gastonia, where new businesses are springing up, local retailers are seeing increased foot traffic, and property values are on the rise.

Stuart Proffitt, representing the Urban Land Institute, brought a regional perspective to the discussion, further reinforcing the idea that placemaking is a powerful tool for enhancing economic vitality.

"Across the region, we're seeing placemaking initiatives



David Day



Terry Shook



that prioritize walkability, green spaces, and mixed-use developments lead to higher property values, increased business investment, and more vibrant communities,” Proffitt said. “Our goal is to support cities and towns in realizing their full potential through these strategies.”

Proffitt’s remarks resonated with many local leaders in attendance, particularly those from smaller municipalities looking for ways to jumpstart their economies.

One shining example of placemaking at work in Gaston County is Cherryville. David Day, Cherryville’s Downtown Economic Development Director, shared exciting updates on the city’s ongoing efforts to upgrade its downtown. Cherryville has embraced placemaking as a core element of its growth strategy, with Day outlining how the city’s master planning efforts are laying the groundwork for long-term economic expansion.

“Cherryville’s vision for the future involves transforming our downtown into a place where people want to spend time—whether that’s dining, shopping, or attending community events,” Day said. “By focusing on placemaking, we’re creating an environment where businesses can succeed, and families feel proud to live.”

Cherryville’s investments in public spaces and infrastructure improvements are already attracting new businesses to the area, and the city’s commitment to a comprehensive master plan ensures that this growth is sustainable over the long term.

Placemaking enhances economic performance by boosting property values, increasing retail sales, attracting new business investments, and creating jobs. Walkable, vibrant areas also draw tourists, further driving local economic growth. Thoughtfully designed public spaces make communities more desirable for both residents and businesses, fueling long-term prosperity.

The GBA is committed to supporting placemaking initiatives throughout the county. By fostering partnerships between local governments, businesses, and community organizations, we aim to create vibrant, thriving cities and towns where businesses can grow, and residents can enjoy a high quality of life.

As we look to the future, the GBA will continue to champion placemaking as a key strategy for economic development. Whether through downtown revitalization projects in Gastonia, ongoing upgrades in other municipalities, or regional initiatives, placemaking holds the potential to reshape Gaston County’s economy for the better.

We invite business owners, developers, and community leaders to join us in this effort, working together to build a brighter future for Gaston County—one thoughtfully designed public space at a time. **GI**

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Celebrating 30 Years of Service

## October 5th Was My 40th Birthday

*10 Lessons That I've Learned*

By Ryan Schrift, Managing Director of R.J. Schrift Private Asset Management



Ryan Schrift

I am a proud millennial but have valued the insights of the generations which have surrounded me my entire life. Being the youngest of six siblings gave me the experiences of “Generation X” while being raised by the “Silent Generation.” I was fortunate to come home when the streetlights came on while at the same time getting access to a computer in my early teens and chatting on AOL Instant Messenger. I don’t remember any participation trophies but many of my friends began getting cell phones in high school. (My Nokia came 2<sup>nd</sup> semester freshman year in college) I still remember getting a Blackberry, the one with the rollerball, when I started my career as a Financial Advisor in 2007. I feel like my life has been a balance of contrasting influences and all for the better.

This Birthday has struck me the most. I have reflected over the past few months and thinking forward I wanted to share 10 lessons with all of you. The lessons I’ve learned come from both the practical and the aspirational, both the everyday struggles and the moments of inspiration.

1. Life is not a steady climb but a series of highs and lows. The peaks are moments of success, joy, and accomplishment, while the valleys are those times of struggle, doubt, and hardship. What I’ve come to appreciate is that the valleys are just as important as the



peaks, if not more so. It’s in the valleys where growth happens. The low points teach resilience, patience, and the importance of perspective. If you only ever lived on the peak, you wouldn’t appreciate it as much. The view from the top is only meaningful because you know how hard the climb was to get there.

2. One book that influenced me deeply in my 20s was *212 Degrees* by Sam Parker and Mac Anderson. The book’s message is simple yet profound: at 211 degrees, water is hot; at 212 degrees, it boils. That one extra degree makes all the difference. This idea of pushing just a little bit harder to achieve greatness has stuck with me. It’s easy to settle for “good enough,” but the real magic happens when you go the extra mile. It’s in that extra degree of effort where transformation occurs, whether in personal growth, relationships, or work. The lesson here is about striving to reach just a little higher, to push beyond what you think you’re capable of.
3. As I’ve aged, I’ve also learned the importance of surrounding myself with great people. The saying goes, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with,” and I believe there’s a lot of truth in that. Great people lift you up, inspire you, and hold you accountable. They challenge you to be better, to grow, and to dream bigger than you might on your own. Having a support system that encourages growth rather than holding you back is crucial. Life is too short to spend with people who drain your energy or keep you stagnant.
4. One of the biggest life lessons I’ve learned is the value of delayed gratification, especially when it comes to finances. Learning to save, invest, and think long-term about money has paid off in ways I didn’t fully understand when I was younger. Delaying that impulse purchase, waiting for the right opportunity,





or putting away a little extra each month may not seem glamorous, but over time it builds security, peace of mind, and freedom. The discipline of delayed gratification translates directly to financial success and stability.


5. I've always been a dreamer. As we get older, it's easy to become more practical, to let go of those big dreams in favor of what seems realistic. But I've learned that dreaming big is crucial to staying motivated and excited about life. Even if the dream evolves or changes over time, holding onto that sense of possibility keeps the fire alive.
6. One small thing that has made a surprisingly big difference in my life is the simple act of smiling at strangers in places like the grocery store. It may seem trivial, but a smile can brighten someone's day, and it often comes back to you in unexpected ways. It's a reminder of how little acts of kindness create ripple effects. Try it.
7. Another lesson I've learned is that giving often pays back in multiples. Whether it's giving time, resources, or kindness, the more you give, the more seems to come back



THOUGHTS  
FROM  
THE VAULT

to you. It's not about expecting anything in return, but I've found that generosity creates positive energy that finds its way back to you in different forms.

8. One of the most important lessons I've embraced is falling in love with the journey, not just the outcome. So often we chase goals, thinking that once we achieve them, we'll be happy. But the reality is that the journey is where life happens. The small moments, the daily challenges, and the incremental progress are what shape us. If we can find joy in the process, the outcome becomes a bonus.
9. I've come to understand the importance of knowing my limitations. There's a certain freedom in recognizing that I can't do everything, that there are some things beyond my control. Knowing when to push and when to rest, when to seek help, and when to say no, is invaluable. It's not about giving up but about recognizing that balance is key to long-term success and happiness.
10. Finally, I recall a keynote speaker telling me that most people overestimate what they can do in a year and underestimate what they can do in a decade. This is true and I now have 4 decades of experience.

As I turn 40, I feel a sense of gratitude for the lessons learned and excitement for what's still to come. The journey is far from over, and I'm ready for the next peak—or valley. 



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## Tis the Season for Style

*Top Accessories to Elevate Your Holiday Look*

By Felicia Bittle, Certified Image & Style Consultant, FABstyles, LLC  
Photographs Courtesy of Felicia Bittle



Felicia Bittle

**A**s the holiday season approaches, it's time to elevate your wardrobe with must-have accessories that offer both style and versatility. Accessories are the finishing touch that can make or break an outfit, and they should never be overlooked. For both women and men, the right accessories can transform an outfit from simple to standout. Here's a guide to the top accessories that will be trending for Holiday 2024:

### For Women:

1. **Statement Belts** the statement belts is making a bold return, cinching in everything from oversized blazers to elegant dresses. Look for belts with metallic accents, ornate buckles, and textures like croc-embossed leather. A wide belt over a holiday coat or dress is a perfect way to add structure and flair to any outfit.



2. **Chunky Gold Jewelry** Gold jewelry, particularly in oversized and geometric designs, is a trend that keeps growing. Chunky gold necklaces, bracelets, and hoop earrings will be a go-to this season. These pieces add instant luxury and sophistication to both casual and formal looks.



3. **Velvet Clutches** A velvet clutch in rich jewel tones like emerald green, burgundy, or sapphire blue is the perfect festive touch. Velvet not only adds texture but also complements the season's luxurious feel. Choose designs with embellishments like crystals or pearls for added glamour.



4. **Leather Gloves** A pair of elegant leather gloves with a modern twist, such as two-tone designs or gloves with fur-trimmed cuffs, is a must-have. Whether you're dressing up for a winter evening or adding sophistication to your everyday look, gloves are both practical and stylish for the season.



5. **Headbands and Hair Accessories** Oversized and jeweled headbands continue to be a statement accessory. Perfect for holiday parties, these pieces can be adorned with pearls, crystals, or sequins to add sparkle to any festive ensemble.



### For Men:

1. **Luxe Scarves** A well-made scarf is an essential winter accessory for men, especially those in cashmere or wool. Opt for neutral shades like gray, navy, or charcoal for a timeless appeal, or go bold with rich patterns like tartan or houndstooth for a more statement look.



**I encourage YOU to see accessories not as afterthoughts, but as essential tools for enhancing your style.**





2. **SmartWatches** the Smart Watch remains a top accessory for men, blending tech and style effortlessly. This season, opt for models with sleek designs and versatile strap options, such as leather or metal, to easily transition from work to evening events.

3. **Leather Weekender Bags**

A stylish weekender bag in premium leather is perfect for holiday travel and adds an instant upgrade to any man's wardrobe. Whether it's for a quick getaway or to carry essentials to work, these bags are both functional and elegant.



4. **Cufflinks and Tie Clips**

While these may seem like small details, the right cufflinks and tie clips can make a big impression. For the holiday season, look for designs with festive motifs, metallic finishes, or subtle engravings that make them stand out.



5. **Wool Fedoras and Beanies**

**Hats** these hats are making a resurgence for men, with both wool fedoras and beanies leading the charge. A structured fedora can add refinement to a winter outfit, while a well-fitted beanie in neutral tones is a stylish casual choice for colder weather.



As you prepare for Holiday 2024, these accessories will not only help you stay on trend but also add personal flair to your wardrobe. I encourage YOU to see accessories not as afterthoughts, but as essential tools for enhancing your style. Every outfit becomes more interesting, more personal, and more complete with the right finishing touches! Whether you're shopping for yourself or for gifts, investing in these key pieces will ensure you look and feel your best throughout the festive season. **GL**



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## Chatting With Actor Nicholas Hammond

*On The Enduring Legacy of "The Sound of Music"*

By Tony Miros

Photographs Courtesy of Tony Miros & Art Streiber for Vanity Fair



Tony Miros

**E**very holiday season families gather around their TV's to watch one of the most beloved family-favorite movie musicals of all time "The Sound of Music"!

Based on the 1959 Broadway show, with original songs by Rodgers and Hammerstein, the Twentieth Century Fox Oscar®-winning film shot in glorious technicolor, starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer, premiered on March 2, 1965. Since then, generations of adults and children have enjoyed watching (and singing along with) this timeless story of the fun-loving governess Maria and the family von Trapp who sing memorable songs like "My Favorite Things", "Do-Re-Mi", and "The Lonely Goatherd" while trying to escape from the Nazi threat in their beloved Austria.

Child actor, Nicholas Hammond was 13 years old when he acquired global fame as 'Friedrick Von Trapp' (the elder of the two boys) in the 20th Century Fox film, "The Sound of Music". Chosen by director Robert Wise from over 450 hopefuls, he had previously he made his acting debut in the Broadway play "The Compliant Lover" in 1961, playing alongside legendary British actor Michael Redgrave, made his movie debut in the



Nicholas Hammond

1963 cult classic film "Lord of the Flies", starred as Peter Parker on "The Amazing Spider-Man" television series from 1977 to 1979 and recently portrayed American actor and director Sam Wanamaker in the Quentin Tarantino film "Once Upon A Time In Hollywood". But it is playing 'Frederic' in "The Sound of Music" that he's most remembered for.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Nicholas – who is 74 years old, living in Sydney, Australia – about the iconic film, his role as Friedrich von Trapp, Julie Andrews, and his continued connection to his "Sound of Music" "siblings."

### Tony Miros: How did The Sound of Music come to your life?

**Nicholas Hammond:** I just auditioned along with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands of other kids. And...for whatever reason, I think because I wasn't a trained singer, I wasn't a trained dancer. And yet (director) Robert Wise, fortunately for me, was much more interested in having seven children who were believable as real kids. He didn't want to audition any child who had done the stage musical, because he said they're already of what the role is, what the show is, and it's gonna be very hard work to get them out of that. He wanted kids who you just actually believe were real and who you could believe were Christopher Plummer's children and you could believe would be the sort of kids that would totally fall in love with Maria and want her as their stepmother. And for some reason, I was the first one who he chose, I was the first.

### How did you get the role of Frederic Von Trapp?

**NH:** I auditioned in New York, you know, first for the casting director and then, you know, and then for the producers and then finally Mr. Wise. And then, you know, they did a screen test and I got it. And then they flew me out to LA. And at about the same time, they had just cast Angela Cartwright. So Angela and I, ironically, we were the only two kids who kind of were already pretty experienced child actors,



The cast of "The Sound of Music"



Angela, of course, from having done “The Danny Thomas Show” and “Make Room for Daddy” and things like that. And I’d done what I’d done.

The other five, they kind of got them to fit around the two of us. And most of them hadn’t really worked. A couple of them, I think, had done a commercial or two. Kimmy, Kim Karath, who played ‘Gretl’. She’d made a couple of movies. She’d been on a couple of movies as a very, very little child, like two, three years old. And so she knew what a film set was, but the others, no, the others hadn’t. And the others didn’t work particularly, they loved being in the movie, but none of them really stayed in it. They found other pursuits.

### **I read that Robert Wise wanted you to get your hair blonder because you were brunette.**

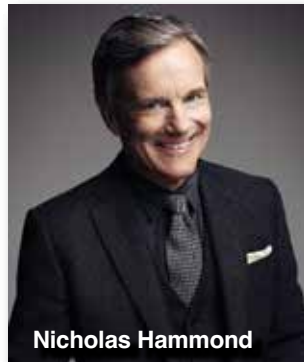
**NH:** Yeah, that’s right. And, um, unfortunately he only decided that the night before. We started filming. Uh, yeah, the first shot, the first scene we filmed, uh, the thunderstorm scene where Julie sings my favorite things. And we rehearsed it that day and with just my own natural brown hair. And at the end of the day, he said, you know, I don’t think we’ve got enough blondes in this family. So because at that point, I think only Heather (Menzies) was blonde and Kimmy (Karath). And he said, I think we need a blonde boy. And he pointed to me and Maggie Donovan, who was the head of the hair department, you know, took me to the hairdressers and she got out the bottle of dye that she used on Marilyn Monroe and just dumped it all over my head.

### **You guys filmed all the interiors here in Los Angeles, right? And then you flew to Salzburg.**

**NH:** That’s right. We sort of split it up where, we did all the rehearsals, we did all of the choreography, we did all the pre-records of the songs for the album. That all happened before we ever even started filming. And so all of that happened while we were at Fox, you know, the studio on Pico Boulevard that’s still there, even though it’s not called Fox anymore. But all those buildings are still there that we worked in. I’ve walked around there recently and, you know, the bungalows where we practiced our songs and the you know, with the orchestra, it’s all there. And then we filmed for maybe about six weeks, interiors in the house. Then we went to Salzburg for three months. We filmed all of the exteriors in Salzburg.

### **What was Julie Andrews like?**

**NH:** She was unknown to the public and to the crew.



The only person on the set that the crew recognized as a star was Eleanor Parker. They all knew that Eleanor Parker was a movie star. But Christopher they’d never heard of, Julie they’d never heard of, and obviously us kids they’d never heard of. Obviously once (Mary) Poppins came out, then Julie’s profile sort of exploded. And then with our movie, she became a superstar. She was wonderful. She was absolutely wonderful. And she was great with us kids. She had endless patience. She had endless kind of tolerance and worked hard at winning us over and having us all be completely relaxed around her. And we just adored her. And that...was important for the film that that come across that we adored her. She’s genuinely an extremely nice person.

She was like that off screen as well. You know, she would tell us jokes. She would teach us songs. She taught us all “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” And we thought she’d invented that because we’d never heard of Mary Poppins either. So, you know, we just thought she was like this magical, wonderful person. I kind of still do actually. I still feel that way with her.

### **You have remained close friends with your Sound of Music siblings, who together you wrote a fabulous book called “The Sound of Music Family Scrapbook” about your experiences filming the treasured movie musical.**

**NH:** Yes, you’re quite right. Sadly, of course, Heather (Menzies) and Charmé (Carr) have passed away. But I am still very, very close to Angela (Cartwright) and Debbie (Turner) and Kim (Karath) and Dwayne (Chase). And we’ve been friends for a lifetime. And I think we always will be. I mean, those women are my sisters. You know, there’s no two ways about it. I’ve known them longer than I’ve virtually known almost anybody. And so we’re tied at the hip, whether we want to be or not. And of course we know each other’s spouses and we know each other’s children. And you know, so it is, it’s a total family network.

Which is probably why when you’re watching this classic holiday film you feel that warm and fuzzy sensation whenever you’re surrounded by your loved one. Wishing you and yours a happy holiday season from the heart of Hollywood!

If you’d like to listen to my complete two-part podcast interview with Nicholas Hammond (episodes 45 & 46) look for “Hollywood Obsessed” on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, iHeart Radio, Pandora, or wherever you find your favorite podcasts. Or visit: <https://www.hollywoodobsessedthepodcast.com/> 

## “House of Olufunké”

*A Sentiment that Reflects the Care and Cultural Pride*

**By Staff Writer**

**Photographs courtesy Angela O. Onafowora**



Angela O.  
Onafowora

**E**nhanche Your Holiday Home with African inspired décor from Ilé Olufunké. The holidays are a time for celebration, warmth, and creating memorable moments with family and friends. This year, why not bring something new and culturally rich to your holiday décor? Consider adding African and African-inspired pieces from local artisan Angela Onafowora, founder of Ilé Olufunké (pronounced ee-lay o-loo-foon-kay). Based in Belmont, Ilé Olufunké specializes in handcrafted African home décor items sourced from across the continent. Along with handmade items that Angela makes such as lampshades, table linen, curtains, rugs, holiday items and more, each piece is meticulously made. She also carries organic shea butter that is handmade in small batches.

### The Meaning Behind the Name

Ilé Olufunké, which translates to “House of Olufunké” in the Yoruba language of Nigeria, holds a special significance. Olufunké means “God’s gift to cherish,” a sentiment that reflects the care and cultural pride infused into every piece. Angela’s mission is to create décor that not only beautifies homes but also brings meaning and connection to the rich traditions of Africa. Her business is a regular at the Belmont Farmer’s Market, is online at [www.iléolufunké.com](http://www.iléolufunké.com), and

she also has a permanent location inside the Southern Lion department store at Carolina Place Mall in Pineville, offering a wide range of handcrafted treasures.

### Bringing African Artistry to Your Holiday Décor

When it comes to holiday décor, many of us default to the familiar- twinkling lights, evergreen wreaths, and ornaments in the festive hues. While these traditional elements bring charm, adding African-inspired pieces can transform your home into something even more special. African décor is known for its vibrant colors, bold patterns, and handcrafted details that evoke warmth and individuality.

Angela’s collection includes stunning woven baskets, hand carved wooden tableware and utensils, elegant horn items, art, and textiles that complement any holiday theme. Imagine decorating your table with a beautifully woven basket as a centerpiece, filled with ornaments or festive fruits. Or consider your floral display in an exotic horn vase or wooden wall art over the mantel to add a unique, global touch to your living room. The use of African textiles like Ankara or Mudcloth as throws or table runners will instantly enhance the holiday spirit while connecting you to rich cultural traditions adding a luxurious feel to your space. The holiday collection includes ornaments, garland, wreaths, tree skirts, stockings and kitchen sets.

### Handmade with Love and Tradition

Each piece from Ilé Olufunké is not only decorative but also tells a story. The handmade nature of her work means that no two pieces are exactly alike, making your holiday décor as unique as your family gatherings. Her organic shea butter, handmade in small batches is also a hit and can be found in both locations (locally and at Southern Lion).

Whether you’re looking for bold, colorful accents to enliven your space or more subtle, earthy tones to create a serene holiday atmosphere, Ilé Olufunké has something to offer. Each piece is a reminder of the beauty of African artistry and the care that goes into handcrafting décor that will be cherished for years to come.

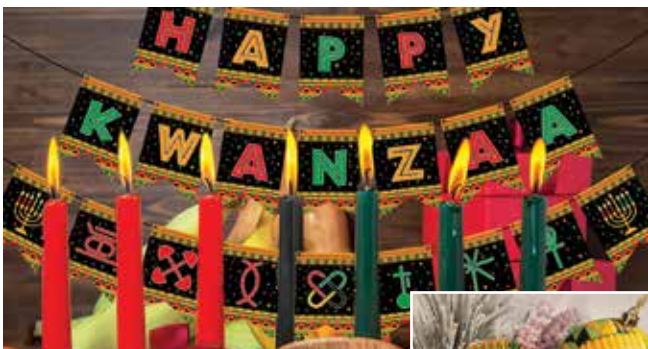
Happy Holidays! **GL**





# PHOTO GALLERY

## Holiday Celebration Ideas





# 50

# YEAR ANNIVERSARY

## PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



### Poffie Girls, a beloved bridal boutique in Gastonia, NC,

...is proudly celebrating 50 years of helping brides find their dream gowns. Founded in 1974 by Syble Latta, Poffie Girls began as a small, woman-owned business with a passion for personalized service and exceptional style. Today, Syble remains an integral part of the boutique's heart, while her daughter Pam Nixon has taken over as CEO, continuing the family legacy of warmth and professionalism.



Over the past five decades, Poffie Girls has become a staple in the community, known for its unparalleled dress collection and commitment to making each bride feel beautiful. In addition to wedding gowns, Poffie Girls carries a stunning selection of mother-of-the-bride and groom dresses, and gowns for prom, parties, pageants, and homecoming. Their wide range of styles and personalized consultations ensure every customer finds the perfect look for their special occasion.



Their dedication to service and excellence has earned them numerous accolades, including Charlotte's Best Bridal Shop in 2022, 2023 and 2024, as well as the Best Bridal Boutique of Gaston County for many consecutive years. Poffie Girls has truly become a destination for brides and clients seeking an unforgettable dress-shopping experience, and its success is a testament to the passion and hard work of Syble and Pam.



Syble Latta and daughter Pam Nixon



As they celebrate 50 years in business, Poffie Girls looks forward to many more decades of making dreams come true, all while remaining rooted in the same values that have carried them through half a century. **GL**





# 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

## PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Natalie Tindol with father Earl Tindol\*

### Tindol Ford Subaru ROUSH

...is proudly celebrating its 50th anniversary in Gastonia with unparalleled enthusiasm and community spirit! To mark this significant milestone, we are committed to supporting 50 non-profits, participating in 50 local events, and thrilled to engage 50 employees in these efforts, empowering them to take an active role in philanthropic endeavors.



This milestone is a testament to our enduring legacy, built on friendship, trust, quality, and community engagement. Over the past five decades, Tindol has evolved, innovated, and adapted to meet the needs of our valued customers and neighbors. Earl Tindol started this legacy in 1974 and his daughter is continuing their commitment to superior service and community involvement. As we look forward to the future, we remain dedicated to fostering a positive impact and nurturing the bonds that have made Gastonia our cherished home. Cheers to 50 years of success, service, and shared prosperity, with many more to come! [GL](#)

\*Time Dealer of the Year national awards ceremony, NC winner 2020 Natalie and NC winner 1982 Earl, as well as regional finalists in both years.





## YMCA's Impact on Hurricane Helene Relief

*Mission in Action*

By Sharon Padgett, CEO Gaston County Family YMCA  
Photographs Courtesy of Gaston County Family YMCA



In the wake of Hurricane Helene, the YMCA's commitment to community has never been more evident. With deep roots across North Carolina, our Ys are leading critical relief efforts in the areas hardest hit by the storm. Although some YMCA facilities and staff have faced damage themselves, the Y remains a steadfast presence in supporting our communities through these challenging times.

### The Y's Response on the Ground

From providing shelter for emergency workers to collecting and transporting essential supplies, YMCAs throughout the state have mobilized swiftly to help those in need. As Sharon Padgett, CEO of Gaston County Family YMCA, shared, "The emotional trauma, mental health challenges, and physical toll of this disaster will leave lasting scars. But the YMCA is here for the long haul, committed to healing mind, body, and





spirit. Though our neighbors are shaken, they are not broken. Together, we will rebuild stronger.”

Key YMCA leaders, including Sharon Padgett, Trey Oakley (CEO of YMCA of Avery County), and Melissa Bailey Logan (President & CEO of Blue Ridge Assembly), have been working tirelessly on the ground, coordinating real-time relief efforts. In just the past few weeks, donations from YMCA members and community partners have led to six large box truck deliveries of vital supplies to affected regions, including Blue Ridge Assembly, YMCA of Western North Carolina, and Williams YMCA of Avery County.

### Ongoing Needs and Support

While immediate needs like food and emergency supplies have been met, the communities in the mountains still face significant challenges as winter approaches. Avery County, in particular, has shifted focus to gathering cold-weather essentials such as blankets, sleeping bags, and warm clothing. Additionally, personal protective equipment (PPE) is crucial, given the hazardous conditions caused by contaminated water and debris.

The Williams YMCA of Avery County, which had transitioned from regular operations to a relief center, is reopening soon to continue providing vital support to those affected by the hurricane and the looming winter conditions. Similarly, the YMCA of Western North Carolina is offering shelter and support services while working to repair damaged branches.

### Statewide YMCA Support


Across the state, 16 YMCAs have united to provide shelter, donations, and essential services. These Ys, including Rowan-Cabarrus YMCA, Cleveland County Family YMCA, and YMCA of Greater Charlotte, have shown incredible solidarity in their efforts to support hurricane relief.

While much has been done, the road to recovery is long. As Paul Vest, President & CEO of YMCA of Western North Carolina, emphasized, “Our communities need ongoing support, especially as winter approaches. The Y is not just here for today—we’re here for the long-term recovery.”

### How You Can Help

The YMCA remains committed to helping rebuild and restore communities. Donations are still being collected at Gaston County Family YMCA branches, and you can also support the relief efforts by visiting [YMCA’s Hurricane Helene Relief Fund](<https://www.ymca.org>).

To learn more about local relief efforts, visit [gastonymca.org/hurricane](https://www.gastonymca.org/hurricane)

Together, we are stronger. Together, we rebuild. 



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## United Way of Gaston County Steps in to Support

*Hurricane Helene Relief Efforts*



**By United Way of Gaston County**  
**Photographs Courtesy of United Way of Gaston County**

“It takes all of us, united in purpose, to lift up our community, especially in the face of an unexpected disaster.” These words ring true as Gaston County continues to respond to the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene. When disaster struck, the United Way of Gaston County was among the first to step up, embodying its commitment to go the “extra degree” in serving our community.

Hurricane Helene left a path of destruction across 25 counties in western North Carolina, including parts of Gaston County. In the days leading up to the storm, the United Way of Gaston County immediately engaged with key community partners to assess the potential needs. According to Andrea Stephens, President of the United Way of Gaston County, their response was swift. “We were in constant communication with the Red Cross, our vital partner, to identify how we could best support the affected areas.”

The Red Cross requested that the United Way serve as a collection hub for essential supplies to aid residents in the western North Carolina mountains, which were hardest hit by the hurricane. “We sprung into action,” Stephens said. The United Way coordinated the collection of critical items such as

bottled water, paper towels, toilet paper, prepackaged food, and other necessities. These supplies were then transitioned to the impacted areas with help from local law enforcement, who were deployed for search-and-rescue operations and cleanup efforts.

The United Way’s response didn’t stop there. The organization was contacted by its colleagues at the United Way of Catawba County to address another pressing need. A nursing home in the High Country had to be evacuated and relocated to Hickory, and urgent supplies were needed for the displaced residents. Thanks to a long-standing partnership with GSM Services, the United Way was able to deliver much-needed items, including gowns, clothing, soap, adult diapers, and toiletries. “This is a perfect example of GSM Services’ commitment to the community,” Stephens shared. “Their support as a corporate partner allowed us to mobilize quickly and meet this urgent need.”

In the aftermath of the storm, the United Way of Gaston County exemplified its mission—uniting the community to care for one another. “I cannot think of a better example of seeing our mission in action,” Stephens remarked. “We came together to help some of the most vulnerable in our state. Our partners, both corporate and community-based, were instrumental in making it happen.”






The United Way's work is far from over. Many partners continue to assist in the recovery efforts, ensuring that supplies and aid reach those who need it most. Stephens noted the contributions of people like Lee Lankford, Steven Long and Joel Long, local heroes who provided supplies, a truck and driver to ensure supplies were delivered promptly. "If you see Lee, Steven or Joel, please thank them!" she urged. "Their generosity and willingness to step in made a world of difference."

Beyond the organizational efforts, local residents also stepped up. One such example is Lena Hyman, a Gaston County resident who had been planning to take a vacation at the time of the storm. Moved by the devastation, Hyman chose to donate her vacation money to purchase essential items like food and toiletries for families affected by the storm. "I love the mountains of North Carolina," Hyman shared, "The people there are like family to me."

Hurricane Helene's impact may have been unexpected, but the community's response has been extraordinary. The United Way of Gaston County, alongside its many dedicated partners and residents, continues to lead the charge in ensuring help reaches everyone affected by the disaster.

To learn more about the United Way of Gaston County and discover how you can become involved through donation of funds and resources, visit their website at [www.unitedwaygaston.org](http://www.unitedwaygaston.org). You can also follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. We are located at 200 East Franklin Boulevard, Gastonia and can be reached at 704.864.4554 ext 106. For additional information

Contact: Andrea Stephens, President  
 United Way of Gaston County  
[astephens@unitedwaygaston.org](mailto:astephens@unitedwaygaston.org)  
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## Disaster Preparedness

*How to Best Prep Your Pets in Case of an Emergency*

**By Dr. Peter Rowan, DVM, TotalBond Veterinary Hospitals  
New Hope Veterinary Hospital - Partner  
Totalbond at Forestbrook - Associate doctor**



Dr. Peter Rowan

**H**appy Holidays! I simply cannot believe another year has already come and gone. As we enter this holiday season, I want everyone to give their friends, family, and pets a giant hug. After the horrifying damage from Hurricane Helene this fall, I want to take this time to discuss being prepared for natural disasters and how to best prep your pets in case of an emergency.

The first step is having an on-hand-at-all-times disaster kit that is in an easy to grab and go location. This kit should include the essentials. The CDC has a great website describing these essentials here's a summary below.

To begin, photocopy and print off medical records including rabies information, microchip ID, heartworm test results, and registration information/proof of ownership. This way if your pet needs to cross state borders or be admitted to a temporary shelter, you can prove your pet is safe to do so. These paper documents should be placed in a water proof envelope for protection. If your pet gets lost or separated from you, it can be useful to include a recent photo in the package as well.


You should have 2 weeks of food, water, medications, and 1 month of flea/tick/heartworm prevention set aside. Food and water can be heavy so pack enough that can easily be carried and ration accordingly. In addition, if your pet eats canned food, make sure to pack a manual can opener. If your pet is on medications that need to be added to the kit, your veterinarian can assist with getting an extra supply together for you. Finally, if space allows, pack some cleaning supplies, a small litterbox (if needed), leashes, toys, a first aid kit, and a towel. These miscellaneous items can help accommodate your pet if you need to seek shelter away from your home. If you are not home when the disaster occurs, alert local authorities or neighbors to retrieve your pets and grab the disaster kit too.

The next step is to know about and be ready for evacuation. This also includes being able to seek out safe shelter areas in certain situations. Practice evacuations (like a school fire drill) on a semi-annual basis. By practicing, we can decrease the stress placed on our furry family members. Decreasing stress can be important to avoid pets reacting poorly in an

emergency situation (I.e. running away). If you need to find shelter to house you and your pets, you can use the website [bringfido.com](http://bringfido.com) which has a list of pet friendly hotels. If you are in an evacuation center with other pets, please limit interactions between yourself or your pets with other families' pets. Disease, parasite transmission, and fights are at high risk to occur in these situations. If you or your pet are bitten, contact authorities immediately and exchange information on rabies as soon as possible.

In some disasters, evacuation is not available and you have to shelter in place at home. Different strategies exist to keep you safe depending on what natural disaster is set to occur. For example, get to high ground that is safe and sturdy for flooding. For earthquakes and tornadoes, you should instead gather in a low location with no windows and minimal objects in the room. Limit outdoor access if conditions are dangerous. Your disaster kit can be utilized whether at home or if evacuated so use as needed depending on the scenario you find yourself in. Remember to stay calm to the best of your ability. Your pets can detect stress which can cause additional problems as mentioned above.

In these emergent situations, don't forget your exotics and small mammals (i.e. bunnies) as well. For example, lizards are cold-blooded and rely on outside heat sources to keep them warm. In the event of a power outage due to a blizzard, these animals can freeze since unable to control their body temperature. Do your best to keep them warm- using warm rooms in your home, battery operated heat lamps, warm water, etc. For the small creatures (and even cats!), you should have safe travel carriers ready to go. Practice getting them into these travel carriers multiple times a year to reduce stress.

No one is ever truly ready for a disaster but you and your pets can take one step in the right direction. When in doubt, get your local veterinarian involved if you have questions or concerns about your preparation. Our hearts go out to western NC and all those you were recently impacted by hurricane Helene. If you are interested in disaster relief efforts for the veterinary community, please see the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association's website (<https://ncvma.org/disaster-relief-information/>). 



## Fondant Sweet Potatoes

*Comforting and Flavorful Side Dish*

By **Melissa Latin, Charlotte Fashion Plate**

Photo by **Melissa Latin, Charlotte Fashion Plate**



Melissa Latin

Impress your guests this holiday season with this unique twist on a classic sweet potato casserole. This easy-to-follow, Fondant Sweet Potatoes with Toasted Marshmallows and Maple Butter Walnuts recipe transforms humble sweet potatoes into a

mouthwatering dish that balances the sweetness of marshmallows with the savory richness of a maple butter walnut glaze. Perfect for Thanksgiving or any special occasion, this comforting and flavorful side dish will have everyone asking for seconds.



### Ingredients

- 3 large sweet potatoes (orange in color)
  - 4 tablespoons butter, plus
  - 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
  - 1 teaspoon black pepper
  - 2 tablespoons olive oil
  - 3 sprigs fresh thyme
  - 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
  - 5 to 6 jumbo marshmallows, sliced in half or thirds
- For the Maple Butter Walnuts:**
- 2 tablespoons butter
  - 3/4 cup maple syrup
  - 1/2 cup chopped walnuts

### Preparation

1. Heat oven to 400°.
2. Peel the sweet potatoes.
3. Cut into even, cylindrical pieces.
4. Heat up a cast iron pan with four tablespoons of butter, olive oil and thyme and/or rosemary.
5. Allow the thyme to infuse the butter/oil for just a few minutes.
6. Remove and reserve the thyme.
7. Place the sweet potatoes in the pan.
8. Season with kosher salt and black pepper.
9. Heat the broth in a stock pot.
10. Brown both sides of the sweet potatoes.
11. Remove the potatoes onto a platter as they brown.
12. Once all the potatoes have browned and been removed from the pan, clean the pan.
13. Add back the potatoes and thyme to the clean pan.
14. Pour in the hot stock (stock should just cover the potatoes about halfway).
15. Top each sweet potato with a tiny pat of butter.
16. Roast in the oven for about 15 minutes, or until all of the liquid is absorbed.
17. In a separate pan, heat to medium-high all of the ingredients for the maple butter walnuts.
18. Cook until the mixture starts to thicken.
19. Remove the potatoes from the oven.
20. Top each potato with a slice of marshmallow.
21. Broil until the marshmallow turns golden brown (this will happen quickly).
22. Plate individual portions of the fondant sweet potatoes.
23. Drizzle with the maple butter walnuts.
24. Garnish with fresh thyme (optional).



## LOT Carolinas Serves Children in Foster Care

*Susanna Kavanaugh Tells Us All About This Worthy Cause*

By Thomas Lark



Imagine being a child and in the worst situation of your young life.

Maybe you've been abused by both of your parents. Maybe drugs are involved; maybe alcohol as well. Or maybe your parents have died.

For countless many such children, foster care ends up being their best option. In Gaston County and indeed across the state, Least of These Carolinas makes the difference for children involved in the foster care system.

We recently spoke with Susanna Kavanaugh, the executive director of Least of These Carolinas (also known as LOT Carolinas or LOTC), and she told us more. Kavanaugh has been at the helm of this remarkable organization for the past 11 years, ever since she and Michelle Buchanan founded it back in 2013.

"We were foster parents," Kavanaugh revealed, "and recognized the enormous need for more foster parents and more support for children in care." She added that LOT Carolinas helps children in foster care to develop their self-worth.

"We do this in a variety of ways," she said, citing just a few examples, such as "replacing the black trash bags that their belongings were packed in when they left their homes with large duffel bags with their names embroidered on them. We fill each bag with things they want and things they need.

"We have a special camp in the summer called 'Bridge Camp,' just for children in foster/kinship care," she continued. "Every program is designed to help these children feel seen, heard and loved. You can see more of our programs on our Website at [www.lotcarolinas.com](http://www.lotcarolinas.com)."

Kavanaugh observed that Least of These Carolinas helps to provide dignity to children in the foster care system. Education is a key component of this mission.

"LOTC continues to use our platform to educate the public on foster care and its needs," she said. "We host events, speak at community and church events and more."

Statewide, Least of These Carolinas serves thousands of children, often serving the same child several times in a year.

Kavanaugh also spoke further about the Bags of Hope program, which operates on a request basis. There's a turnaround time of one to two weeks, depending on where

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**"At Least of These Carolinas, we believe in the power of kindness and generosity to make a difference."**

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the child is located.

"A Bag of Hope is a duffel bag for a child in foster or kinship care," she explained. "When the children come into care, we are given their first names and lists of items they need or want. Each bag is specifically designed for that particular child and is packed with care, including a special note from one of our volunteers and an age-appropriate Bible. Our goal is to get these bags ready within a week of the request."

And with Christmas approaching, Kavanaugh also cited the organization's efforts unique to this special time of year.

"At Least of These Carolinas, we believe in the power of kindness and generosity to make a difference," she said. "Each holiday season, we invite the community to join us in creating unforgettable moments for children in foster care. All the children create unique wish lists, ensuring that their gifts are tailored to their wishes and needs. Sponsors within our community adopt these lists and shop for individual children. Sponsors have the incredible opportunity to bring joy, warmth and hope to those who need it most."

Kavanaugh encouraged the public to get involved with this worthy cause.

"We will need a lot of sponsors," she emphasized.

The group's Website has a specific link that potential sponsors will want to check out. Be sure to see [www.lotcarolinas.com/programs-services/12-hours-of-christmas](http://www.lotcarolinas.com/programs-services/12-hours-of-christmas).

"Sign up to volunteer here!" Kavanaugh encouraged.

She further noted that caring people can donate and make a difference, just by letting their fingers do the walking across their computer keyboards.

"Check our social media every Wednesday, which is our 'Wish List Wednesday,'" she said. "Our greatest needs are on that list, and items can be shipped directly to us! Our social media handle is @lotcarolinas. Or you can donate through our Website!" **GL**



## Coping After a Disaster

*Strategies for Moving Forward*

By Megan Baksh



Megan Baksh

**A**s communities throughout Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia continue to rally together, rebuilding their lives after the severe devastation caused by hurricanes Helene and Milton, many may be wondering how to cope with traumatic stress and the aftermath of major disasters. Although everyone reacts differently to trauma, it's natural to feel overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, or grief-stricken. These feelings may change over time, but it is important to keep track of your emotions and to seek professional help if necessary; prioritizing your emotional health and maintaining a self-care routine is essential for long-term healing. In the event of a disaster, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend the following steps for adult individuals to cope:

**Nurture your body** – It may be difficult, but try to sustain a healthy diet. If there are limited food options available, do the best you can. Choose non-perishable foods that are high in energy, fiber, and protein. Canned foods, dried fruits and nuts, whole-grain cereals, fresh fruits and vegetables, peanut butter and hummus are all good options.

**Stay connected** – Check in with friends, family members, colleagues and neighbors, and discuss your experiences and concerns. Building a relationship with those around you can provide a sense of community and belonging, which can reduce feelings of isolation. Sharing information about resources, support services, and updates is also crucial after a disaster.

**Take breaks** – Allow yourself a few moments during the day to unwind and focus on taking deep breaths. A regular meditation practice can help you process traumatic events and can significantly lower your stress levels. If you're able, try doing activities that bring you joy as well.

**Keep informed but avoid overexposure to the news** – Constantly watching the news or scrolling through social media can make you anxious and cause you to become even more stressed. Look for updates from officials, but be sure to take breaks. Also, remember that there may be rumors being spread during a disaster, especially on social media. Check your sources carefully, and rely on information from your

local government authorities.

**Seek help if necessary** – For anyone experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters, immediate crisis counseling is available through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline, at 1-800-985-5990.

How adults respond to trauma affects how children and adolescents react to trauma. Caregivers and family members can create a safe and supportive space for children and adolescents by practicing healthy coping mechanisms themselves. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) advises adults to allow children and adolescents to feel sad or cry freely. Having them draw, write, or talk about the event can be very therapeutic for them as well. Pay attention to strong emotions and any changes in their behavior or speech, and get in touch with a healthcare provider if the following symptoms last longer than a week: flashbacks, rapid heart rate, becoming easily startled, emotionally numb or depressed.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) offers a free app called Help Kids Cope, which provides valuable information for parents on how to best support their child after a disaster. The app is free to download on Google and Apple app stores. [GL](#)



## Climate Change Solutions

*How Geographic Information Helps*

By Corey Creech, Creech Computer Consulting, Inc.  
Photographs Courtesy of Creech Computer Consulting, Inc.



Corey Creech

It is a known fact that global warming causes more intense hurricanes, wildfires, and colder winters. Global warming is caused by the increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere due to human activities like burning fossil fuels, deforestation, industrial processes which trap heat from the sun. In other words, this is the greenhouse affect.

Geographic information systems (GIS) allow researchers to gather geospatial data to make decisions. Many businesses use GIS to store geospatial data which is data associated with a particular location to make decisions. For example, Amazon was considering moving its headquarters to Charlotte, NC. Some of the geospatial data that was considered was building cost and the number of computer technology professionals in the area.

Amazon is famous for the products that they deliver. They also have a huge Amazon Cloud platform called AWS. The platform is used by businesses all over the world to replace company networks, servers, routers, other expensive hardware with AWS (Amazon Web Services) solutions. With AWS, there is no need for a company to maintain critical network infrastructure onsite.

GIS allows analyst to store data about different locations such as how many computer professionals live in the area,

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**By tying together temperature change, the number of hurricanes, and severity, we can prove that global warming is the cause of more violent hurricanes.**


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cost of land, the cost to build, and roads with high traffic. By visualizing this information on a map, it's easy for Amazon to find the best place to move their headquarters to.

GIS uses remote devices to do gather real time data through sensors and field agents using devices to collect data. GIS starts with a map of a location. GIS teams use layers to add data. For example, a map layer may include active hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, and wildfire perimeter lines. The following GIS map layer shows more than 150 years of category 4 and 5 hurricanes from 1851 to 2016.

As you can see, hurricanes paths and severity can be tracked each year. We can also track temperatures before, and during a hurricane. By tying together temperature change, the number of hurricanes, and severity, we can prove that global warming is the cause of more violent hurricanes.

Greenhouse gas is created through the burning of fossil fuels which includes gas, coal, and oil. By using GIS maps with a greenhouse gas emission layer, we can identify areas around the world that need alternative energy sources.

In conclusion, world leaders and GIS analyst can save our planet from some of these disasters through the use of geographic information systems. 







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