



20 to watch in 10

An advertising supplement to the Three Rivers Edition • January 31, 2010 • Section SS





Nominate Your ‘20 to Watch in 2011’

In this special section, ‘20 to Watch in 2011,’ the Three Rivers Edition will highlight 20 people who are making our communities better places — people whose contributions to business, government, the arts, social services, their schools and other endeavors deserve special recognition. They will be people to watch, not just in 2011, but in years to come.

Know someone who has done these things?
Tell us who we should consider:

Name: _____ Age: _____

Hometown: _____ Contact #: _____

Occupation or organization: _____

Reason for nomination: _____

Nominated by: _____ Contact #: _____

Please fax nomination to Eliza Gano at 501-378-3500, e-mail to egano@arkansasonline.com or mail to
ATTN: Promotions Department, 20 to Watch, 121 E. Capitol Ave., P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, AR 72203.
Nominations must be submitted by Friday, Oct. 1.

Three Rivers Edition

20 to watch in 10

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About the Section

They are the up-and-comers of your communities. Perhaps you've heard of their efforts, perhaps you haven't. But we believe the stars of our "Twenty to Watch in 2010" are still rising, and we expect great things from them in the future.

Our staff chose the 20 featured in this section based on nominations from community leaders, chambers of commerce, churches and everyday folks who could see that these people are making their communities better places to live.

The selections were taken from the areas we cover, namely Cleburne, Independence, Izard, Jackson, North Pulaski, West Lonoke, Stone, Sharp and White counties.

We placed no age restrictions on our selections, as we believe people of all ages can make an impact on the world around them, and it's never too late to be a rising star.

Many of these people are the future leaders of the Three Rivers area, and we are proud to say we saw their potential before it was fully realized.

We are already accepting nominations for next year's "Twenty to Watch" section. If you would like to nominate someone, e-mail Eliza Gano, section coordinator, at egano@arkansasonline.com.

We hope you enjoy reading about the great things these special people are doing and that their stories will inspire you to do great things as well.



Front row, left to right: Rayanne Story, Jason Marzewski, Riley Hoffer; Erin Golden; Second row, left to right: Crystal Johnson, Stephanie Bradford, Jon-Michael Poff, Shann Nobles, Anna Westman; Third row, left to right: Daniel Gray, Daniel Torres, Chase Dugger, Davy Carter, James Kee; Top row, left to right: Jerrod Williams, Charlie Oliver, Doyle Fowler, John Staley, Antionette Mitchell. Not pictured: Melissa Ritter



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Stephanie Bradford | Augusta

Researcher plays vital role in community

By Lauren James
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Stephanie Bradford is helping shape the lives of local youth, all while she plays an integral part in educational programs for the residents of Woodruff County.

Bradford, as county extension agent for Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Arkansas Division of the Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service in Augusta, conducts research based on educational programs in Woodruff County. These six areas include food and nutrition; health and aging; resource management; marriage, parenting and family life; and 4-H and Extension Homemaker clubs.

"If I can make a difference in just one person's life every day, then I have accomplished a lot," she said.

Bradford runs successful Strong Women, 4-H and Extension Homemaker programs in the county.

Strong Women, a strength-training program designed for mid-life to older women, offers a 12-week session. The program, partnered with the Cooperative Extension Service Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, focuses on promoting a healthy lifestyle by teaching exercise and

nutrition. In the past two years, Bradford has had six to eight sessions of Strong Women, and she has two groups of 20 participants awaiting the next session, she said.

Bradford is also actively involved in 4-H, through which she strives to offer research-based, experiential learning for youth. The organization provides a day camp in the summer, after-school programs and opportunities for youth to participate in county, district and state competitions.

In the future, Bradford would like to see a self-sustaining 4-H program that will last.

"This is a great program for our youth because it offers them a chance to be the best and do the best that they can," she said.

Bradford said that she hopes to continue the success of the Strong Women program and that her Extension Homemakers club will grow and remain strong.

In the next two to three years, Bradford hopes to continue her education and earn a master's degree and become staff chair within the Extension Service upon the retirement of her boss.

"This is a very fulfilling service-oriented occupation," she said. "I have gained a lot of knowledge, self-confidence and self-worth while working in this field."

One thing not many people know about you:
I went tandem skydiving my senior year of college.

One word to describe you: Compassionate

As a child you said, "When I grow up, I want to be a ...": Teacher

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Crystal Johnson
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Jon-Michael Poff
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John Staley | Austin

Police chief honored to wear uniform

By Jeanni Brosius
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

As a child, Austin Police Chief John W. Staley knew he wanted to be in law enforcement. He said he always wanted to be the cop when he and his friends played cops and robbers because he knew the robber didn't get the best end of the deal. He isn't playing anymore.

Staley said that he was playing basketball in his driveway almost 10 years ago when Austin Police Chief Woody McEuen pulled up and said, "I heard you wanted to be in the police."

Taking a position as a part-time auxiliary officer, which is a volunteer position, Staley learned what it is like to wear that uniform. Earning top scores on his exams and placing in the top of his class at the police academy didn't ensure that Staley would get a job; however, he eventually got a full-time paid position in the department.

Since then, Staley has worked as a school resource officer and a crisis negotiator for the Jacksonville Police Department. He played a key part in a shootout in Jacksonville during a five-hour standoff with an armed man in a residential area.

"Every time I'd say something, he'd shoot at us," Staley said. "The guy was intoxicated and off his meds."

In early 2009, Staley went back to where it all began: the Austin Police Department. But this time, Staley replaced McEuen as chief. Becoming police chief before the age of 30 makes Staley one of the youngest police chiefs in Arkansas.

Staley's goal is for the department to be community oriented and for him to get out, shake hands with people and let them know what the Police Department is doing. He also said the workload has doubled.

"It's not that we have more crime — we're just fishing it out," Staley said. "We're digging for it. ... We are a safe community, and we don't want the drugs in here."

"If you're out there patrolling, it leaves people guessing where you're going to be next."

With aspirations of becoming the Lonoke County sheriff some day, Staley said, "It's home, and it falls back to home. It's an honor to be in law enforcement."

Staley said police officers often have to accept a lot of displaced anger from people. He also believes a true leader should never have to lead.

"[Members of the department are] the ones doing all the work; I just catch the spotlight sometimes," Staley said.

First job: I worked at my dad's gas station when I was between 13 and 16 years old. My nephew, who is about two years younger, and I would pump gas for ladies and elderly people.

Biggest influence: My mother, Joe Staley

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Crystal Johnson | Batesville

Director primed to nurture county's potential

By Jeanni Brosius
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Crystal Johnson is an energetic spoke in the wheel that is moving Independence County forward. What was supposed to be a temporary move from Fayetteville in 2003 for Johnson and her family turned into a permanent situation.

"After living in Batesville a few months, I fell in love with the area and knew it was the place we wanted to live and raise our family," said Johnson, who is the new director of the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Johnson replaced a director who left on not-so-good terms, and she is working to get the Chamber, the city and the county back on track.

"I knew it may be a bumpy road when I accepted the position. However, the overwhelming community support and the direction from the chamber board of directors made my transition into the new position almost seamless," Johnson said. "The Arkansas State Chamber has also been very insightful in helping me with organization of our Chamber."

This year, the chamber will form tourism, education, governmental relations, health services and membership com-

mittees. These committees link the chamber and the community by setting goals and creating plans to increase the overall economic environment of Independence County.

Although Johnson has a background in sales and marketing, she said she believes she is the worst sales person in the world but could talk people into just about anything.

"My background is in sales and marketing, so when the position at the Chamber became available, I knew it was the perfect job for me," Johnson said. "Independence County sells itself. I thought to myself, 'What an easy task it would be to help recruit new business and promote our community.' With the White River, beautiful scenery, a great school and health system, how could anyone disagree?"

Johnson credits a lot of the forward motion of Batesville, Independence County and the Chamber to the leaders.

"Our community is fortunate to have so many progressive elected officials and community leaders," she said. "The community is currently working together on several different projects to move Independence County forward. We have the potential to make significant changes and improvements to Batesville and Independence County. It is exciting to be able to play a part in the development."

Biggest influence: My husband. Damon's work with the public gave me the inspiration to become more involved in our community.

Favorite TV show: Anything on the Food Network

Congratulations Crystal Johnson and all the 20 To Watch for 2010.



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Jon-Michael Poff | Batesville

College freshmen continues active role

By Hannah Burney
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

At 18, Jon-Michael Poff has no fear of taking the reins as a leader. The Lyon College freshman has a string of organizations on his résumé that would make even seasoned volunteers dizzy.

"I enjoy filling a leadership role. It's just part of who I am. I feel that home is where you are shaped, and I have been lucky enough to have a mom and dad who truly care and have showed me that you can make a difference by being involved," Poff said.

The Batesville native graduated as valedictorian from Batesville High School in 2008 and served as Student Council president. He has continued to be involved in college. He serves as freshman representative to the Student Government Association; as student representative to the Lyon College High Learning Commission Self-Study, which deals with seeking reaccreditation; and is a student ambassador. He is also involved with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Poff said he is most proud of his involvement with the Arkansas Youth Suicide Task Force, which uses a gatekeeper system to educate everyone involved in education,

from students to principals, about suicide prevention.

"There is a theory that talking about suicide will only make it more widespread, and that is completely false. ... We realize that knowledge is the key to the prevention of suicide, and that is our goal — to educate everyone, all the way down to the student level, to watch out not only for themselves but their peers," he said.

Poff was also integral in improving lighting on Lyon's campus. After attending a Student Government Association retreat at Lyon, he learned from other upperclassmen about some areas of campus they felt were not adequately lit for students who had to walk to their dorms after dark.

"One night me and some other SGA members walked around campus at about 8 o'clock and took a map and highlighted areas where students may not feel comfortable walking back to their dorms after dark," he said.

Poff is pursuing an English degree and is interested in seeking a career in journalism or possibly law or politics. Poff has already had the opportunity to write for *Edutopia*, a California educational magazine.

"I hope to either write for a magazine or possibly be involved with television news. It's so hard for me to narrow what I'm going to do because I enjoy it so much," he said.

One thing you want to accomplish in life, but haven't yet: Run for a political office. Even if I don't run, I think it's a good aspiration to have. I'd like to be involved in the political field somehow.

Most proud of: Graduating as valedictorian of my class

HER SPECIALTY: pharmacy practice

RAYANNE STORY, PharmD., *assistant professor of pharmacy*

As president-elect for the Arkansas Association of Health-System Pharmacists, **Rayanne Story** is at the forefront of pharmaceutical care in Arkansas. Each day she steps into the classroom at Harding University's College of Pharmacy, bringing with her more than 20 years of professional and teaching experience. With an undeniable commitment to students, Story serves as faculty adviser for the Student Society of Health-System Pharmacists on campus. She also stays active in the community by working as a pharmacist volunteer with Christian Health Ministry of White County.

Harding's College of Pharmacy welcomed its first students in August 2008 and currently enrolls 118 students. The program was advanced to candidate accreditation status by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education in June 2009 and is one of only two pharmacy colleges in Arkansas.





Chase Dugger | Beebe

Leader eyes growth for Republican Party

By Hannah Burney
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

When it comes to political differences, Chase Dugger, executive director of the Republican Party of Arkansas, sees no reason why Democrats and Republicans can't be friends.

"I think it's important to be able to form relationships with people within the party and with Democrats, as well, and to get the job done in a manner that doesn't attack either side. It's OK to disagree on issues, then go out to dinner together afterward. We can still be friends," Dugger said.

Dugger, 26, took his position as executive director of the state Republican Party in September. He was a large part of state Rep. Jonathan Dismang's campaign. Though both are from Beebe, Dismang said that until he decided to run for office, he didn't know Dugger very well.

"[Dugger] was hired with the party about the same time I decided to run, and I pretty much owe my success to him," Dismang said. "He is one of the hardest workers and has great ideas. He has a great thought process and works based on common sense. He's just an impressive

guy, and I enjoy being around him."

Dismang added that Dugger is dedicated to working toward the growth of the party.

"A lot of people say that, but he really means it. If there's one word to describe him, it's dependable. He always means what he says, and I see him being a significant part of the Republican Party of Arkansas. I think he'll be instrumental in its growth over the next few years," Dismang said.

Dugger said he began to take an interest in the Republican Party in high school. He was involved with the Young Republicans at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro and had a large part in reorganizing the group. The first major election he helped campaign for was the re-election of former President George W. Bush in 2004, and Dugger was elected as state chairman for the College Republicans in April 2004.

Dugger said he encourages college students to take an interest in politics now because it will impact their future in a variety of ways.

As far as future goals, Dugger's focus is simple — the growth of the state Republican Party.

"I just hope to continue to grow the party and find a good candidate that will work for the state," he said.

First job: Working at McDonald's

As a child you said, "When I grow up, I want to be a ...": Pig farmer

Favorite TV show: *Scrubs*

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Davy Carter | Cabot

Legislator ready to serve constituents

By Jeff LeMaster
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Look across the political landscape in America, and it's easy to see that many politicians have backgrounds in either law or finance.

Davy Carter has both.

The 34-year-old state representative for District 48 is one of the rising talents within the Republican party in Arkansas. Carter is a native of Marianna, where he returned to work in banking after attending Arkansas State University-Jonesboro and a short stint in Memphis, Tenn. While working in his hometown, he got an itch to go to law school.

"I remember my mother said it was a great idea," Carter said. "My dad said, 'That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard.' I said, 'Well, I was on the fence, but now I'm definitely going.'"

Carter had moved closer to the center of the state to take a job at what was then Community Bank in Cabot. He left the banking industry briefly to attend law school at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, after which he went back to work for Community Bank (now Centennial Bank). It's a place that has allowed him to utilize his broad range of skills, as he is the bank's executive vice president, general

counsel and chief lending officer covering Mountain View, Searcy, Heber Springs, Beebe, Jacksonville and Cabot.

"Today, I feel very blessed to work for Centennial Bank and have this opportunity. It's good people I work with," Carter said.

A few years ago, Carter got another itch that needed scratching.

"I would sit around and fuss a lot and complain [about politics]," he said. "I just feel like more people need to get involved. ... I wanted to get involved and make a difference."

Carter, with the encouragement of friends and family, decided to run for state representative to replace Susan Schulte, who was leaving office because of term limits.

Carter won easily and got his first taste of the state Legislature in the 2009 session. He said his No. 1 priority as an elected official is to serve the financial interests of his constituency.

"We talk about different things we believe in from a core standpoint," he said, "and those are all very important, but the reality is, at a state level it's about managing money."

"I'd like to be known as someone who tries to spend taxpayers' money wisely, especially in today's economic environment."

One thing you want to accomplish in life, but haven't yet: Own a barbecue joint

Biggest fear: Flying!

Favorite quote: "There is no such thing as a free lunch."

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Family: Mom; Daddy; five dogs, Bella, Jasmine, Lily, Coco and Max; and one cat, Kitty

Birthplace: Knoxville, Tenn.

Hidden talents: I can cook. I'm better at baking. I like to bake cookies. Peanut butter cookies are my favorite.

Favorite TV show: *Heroes*

One thing you want to accomplish in life but haven't yet: I want to be on Broadway some day. My favorite Broadway play is *Hairspray*.

Most proud of: My U.S. Green Building Industry Council Youth Leadership Award — all the work we've done this past year is finally getting recognized.

Favorite quote: "Hate stirs up dissension, but love conquers all wrongs." — Proverbs 10:12



Riley Hoffer | Cabot

Teen promotes green message

By Eliza Gano
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Riley Hoffer had plenty to celebrate for her 13th birthday. One month after becoming a teenager in October, the seventh-grader from Cabot was one of five youth given a U.S. Green Building Council Youth Leadership Award for 2009. She was also named November Teen of the Month by Pottery Barn Teen.

Hoffer was recognized for her work through CG Kidz, a nonprofit she founded when she was 11. Through the business' Web site, **Cgkidz.com**, she is an eco entrepreneur reaching an audience she can easily relate to — other kids.

"Kids listen to other kids, and that's one of the reasons why I did this," she said.

She became Earth conscious when her parents, Danelle and Joe Hoffer, started Cynergreen, a company focused on manufacturing and supplying products with a low impact on the planet. Through Cynergreen, their daughter learned how plastic bottles don't get recycled and how they are made from oil.

"Plastic is really harmful to your body with all the BPA and oil, so I needed to get that out there," the teen said. "As

kids, we really need to do something about our future so we don't end up living in a landfill."

With her parents' help, Hoffer started her Web site, which she manages, blogs on and uses to share tips on the three R's: Recycle, Reduce and Reuse.

As an ambassador for CG Kidz, Hoffer has taken her message to schools throughout the country, holding interactive assemblies, where she talks about recycling, why plastic bottles shouldn't be used and about just being positive.

Hoffer also designed an eco-friendly stainless-steel water bottle named Riley. She also serves as the face of the Arkansas Earth Day Kids Foundation for 2010.

In April, she'll head to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., for a Youth Speaks event to represent kids across the country and share her environmental message. She and her class are also planning a Party with a Purpose to coincide with Arkansas Earth Day.

Hoffer would like to do more in 2010 — have more interaction with the U.S. Green Building Council, give more talks at schools and, hopefully, win more awards.

"That would be pretty cool," she said.

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Shann Nobles | Cabot

Theater director plays many roles

By Nancy Elizabeth Dement
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

With a passion for theater and her hometown, Shann Nobles is making a difference, one play at a time.

Nobles, 46, executive director of the Cabot Community Theatre, plays a crucial role in keeping the theater running smoothly. The day-to-day tasks such as taking reservations, answering phone calls and writing press releases all fall on Nobles' shoulders. In addition, she performs in and directs many of the productions.

But she doesn't dwell on herself. She is quick to give credit to others.

"If it weren't for [Priscilla] and Bob, we couldn't do what we're doing," she said.

Priscilla and Bob Morris and artistic director Brian Wolters formed the Cabot Community Theatre in 2006. Nobles became a board member shortly thereafter.

"We all have a passion for the arts and for theater, and we just all really felt like Cabot is ready for this. This is something that Cabot needs," said Nobles, a Cabot native.

The small group got to work on building a community theater that would benefit the town.

"We just rolled up our sleeves and said, 'We're going to make this happen,'" Nobles said.

A graduate of Ouachita Baptist College, Nobles majored in communications and minored in theater. She has always loved theater, she said.

In 2005, Nobles was diagnosed with ovarian cancer; she is now in remission. Her parents died a year and a half apart, beginning in 2007. Her involvement in the theater has helped her cope with the pain and loss, she said.

"I just love performing. When I get up on stage, no matter what [role], anything that's going on around you just goes away," she said. "I can just be someone else for a while. ... It's just a fun getaway."

Nobles also finds joy in working with the children involved in the theater. She helped lead the Kids Acting Up program last summer.

Nobles directed last December's production of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. It had the theater's largest cast yet, at 30 actors, the majority of which were children.

On the show's final night, a young boy — one of the actors — ran and gave her a hug.

"He looked at me and said, 'Can we do more plays?'" she said. "It was all worth it to help a kid find what he is good at and what he really likes."

One thing you learned in kindergarten that you have carried on throughout your life:

How to share, which was a little difficult for me at the time since I was an only child

One word to describe you: Multifaceted

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Erin Golden | Heber Springs

Beauty queen focuses on giving back

By Staci Miller
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Heber Springs native Erin Golden is proof that it takes more than a pretty face to win a beauty pageant.

As the reigning Miss International, Golden travels all over the United States to promote her platform, Go Red for Women.

"They keep me running," she said. "Just about every weekend, I'm going to do something for the American Heart Association or the International System."

Golden chose her platform after a close family member was affected by heart disease. Golden has participated in Heart Walks, Go Red Luncheons and Heart Balls to increase awareness of heart disease as the No. 1 killer of women.

Another personal experience with a family member led Golden to get involved with Hospice.

"As I got a little deeper, I realized the financial means that aren't available to Hospice," she said.

Not only is she a volunteer and advocate

for the organization, but Golden is also the fundraising director for Hospice Area 10.

"I just want to help give back some of what they have given to me," she said.

Golden was interested in pageants at a young age but didn't realize their full potential until she was older.

"Along the way, you realize what they are really about," she said. "I saw the doors that it opened and the opportunities that it puts in front of you, and that is where my inspiration came from."

To fully dedicate herself to her title, Golden took a year off school during her reign. However, when she hands her crown off in July, she plans to make finishing school her No. 1 focus.

Golden plans to enter the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in the fall and finish a degree in political science. She would like to pursue a future lobbying for the American Heart Association in her home state.

"I've had the opportunity to travel all over the place," she said. "It's exciting to see new places, but after a few days, I'm ready to come back to Arkansas. This is my home. This is where I want to reside."

As a child you said, "When I grow up, I want to be a ...": Rock star. Later in life, I realized that I can't carry a tune in a bucket, and my dreams of being the lead singer for Heart were shattered.

One thing not many people know about you: That I'm an aspiring marksman.



Melissa Ritter | Heber Springs

Coordinator ushers in self-sufficiency

By Lauren James
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Melissa Ritter is helping local residents get back on their feet.

Ritter, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program employment and training coordinator for White and Cleburne counties at Arkansas State University-Beebe, enjoys helping others become self-sufficient.

In her position, she assists clients who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits with finding employment or completing their education.

Along with her daily responsibilities, she is actively involved in the Single Parent Scholarship Fund of Cleburne County.

"The mission of the Single Parent Scholarship Fund is to enable single parents to attain self-sufficiency through post-secondary education," she said.

Ritter said the scholarship board helps recipients, as long as they meet the criteria, until they graduate with a four-year degree.

She helps the scholarship board with its fundraising efforts and hopes to raise

enough money to help more single parents obtain an education.

"It is our hope that we will be able to provide more financial assistance to single parents, as well as increase the number of applicants we can assist," she said.

Outside of work, Ritter is an active member of the Business and Professional Women organization, whose goal is to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. The Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution stating that civil rights may not be based on the basis of one's sex.

Ritter was named the Top Arkansas BPW Young Careerist of 2008 and competed in the nationals, where she placed in the top five. She is also involved in fundraising for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. She holds the Relay for Life close to her heart because her father is a cancer survivor.

She also takes part in the Searcy Leadership Institute, a nine-month, eight-full-day program offered through the Searcy Chamber of Commerce that teaches leadership skills.

"I am learning what makes someone a good leader, and I hope I can use that knowledge in my future endeavors," she said.

One thing you want to accomplish in life, but haven't yet: Serve in my community, serve my state in some capacity — politics

Favorite quote: "It's not what you've got, it's what you use that makes a difference."



Daniel Gray | Jacksonville

Realtor continues family tradition of service

By Karen Laskey
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

For Daniel Gray of Jacksonville, community service is a family tradition.

Gray is a licensed Realtor with Bart Gray Realty Co. in Jacksonville, his family's business. Daniel Gray started helping out in the company when he was 12 years old and is now general manager.

"I like to kid around that I was bred for this job," he said.

Gray's grandfather Bart Gray Sr. started the company in 1948. His grandfather's motto for the company — "There are no strangers here. Just friends we have not met" — is still in use today.

The company handles property management and residential sales, Gray said.

"A landlord has opportunities to help people through crises," he said, "such as fires and to help people when they're in need the most — to be able to provide them with shelter. Those are the greatest rewards. We've been blessed and try to help people."

Gray met his wife, Amy, when she worked at Bart Gray Realty. The couple married in 1997.

"She's the best thing that ever happened to me," Gray said.

The Grays' sons — Ethan, 7, and Seth, 4 — play baseball, and their father coaches.

Gray also takes an active role in improving education in Jacksonville. He got involved with the Jacksonville World Class Education Organization in 2007. He said the group's original goals were to get Jacksonville its own school district and to improve the schools immediately by working with teachers and students to do "anything we could to help them," Gray said.

Gray said an independent district for Jacksonville would mean local control, as well as a smaller district with more focus on the schools in Jacksonville.

"Teachers would have better support, better resources and a greater opportunity for student improvement," he said.

Gray's family also has a history of being involved with Little Rock Air Force Base, and he is a member of the Little Rock Air Force Base Community Council.

"It is a real honor to be involved with the Community Council. It's a good way to honor the people who serve in the Air Force and an opportunity to give back any way I can and express gratitude to them for their service," he said.

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One thing not many people know about you:

I love to play in
a pile of autumn leaves.

One word to describe you:

Encourager

One thing you want to accomplish in life, but haven't yet:

To become a "best seller"
author and a motivational speaker

Biggest fear:

That there are not
enough people to help others

Favorite quote:

"The only place
that success comes before work is
in the dictionary."

One thing you learned in kindergarten that you have carried on throughout your life:

There was not a kindergarten
in my community. First grade taught
me to share with others, the same
as my great-grandfather, who
donated land for our school.



Antionette Mitchell | Jacksonville

Finding joy in motivating others

By Jeanni Brosius
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Antionette Mitchell believes in seesaws, swings and playing in a pile of autumn leaves. She also believes that things happen for a purpose, and those things mold who a person becomes.

Mitchell, who has worked for the Arkansas Department of Human Services for 31 years, gives much of her free time to encourage women.

"Since 1999, I've worked with the (Women and Children First) home to empower women so they know who they are and have confidence," Mitchell said. "Motivation is what I'm all about. I work with women who have lost their way and are having a hard time."

She calls it a ministry; however, she also said it's ordinary life. She helps these women get out of tough situations, lends support and helps to lift them up, and she does it without mentioning the Bible, but with the foundation of biblical principals.

Through her church, Full Council Metro Church in North Little Rock, Mitchell began having lunch with women who needed a support system. Mitchell said these women may have lost a job, lost

a loved one or simply be suffering from empty-nest syndrome; whatever the reason, they may need a little boost in their lives. Mitchell freely gives that support in an encouraging and caring way, which she said she learned from the foundation that has been laid for her. Mitchell was raised by her grandparents.

"It was harmony I was brought up in," Mitchell said. "My grandparents taught me to know who I am, and I could get along with everyone. I was taught the morals and values that impact my job."

As a compliance officer and civil-rights employee-relations coordinator, Mitchell deals with grievances and mediation every day.

Mitchell thought she wanted to grow up to be a singer. Although she still sings in the shower and at the occasional conference, she is now setting her sights on speaking and authoring.

With hopes of one day traveling the world as a motivational speaker, Mitchell believes she knows the ingredients for how to make it through life, and she plans to put those ingredients in what she hopes is a best-selling book.

"Swinging is not just for kids," Mitchell said with a laugh as her inner child peeked out.

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Charlie Oliver | Jacksonville

Answering the call to serve a greater cause

By Eliza Gano
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Charlie Oliver isn't afraid to flex his change muscle.

The call to serve comrades, community and country isn't for everyone, but Oliver is ready to take up that call.

At 26, he's switching career paths and joining the U.S. Army.

"I had to challenge myself, and now seemed the right time to do it," Oliver said. "I will be very happy and proud to wear a uniform that says U.S. Army."

Two family members were also in the armed forces. A grandfather, James Roland Oliver, served as a Marine during World War II. An uncle, Stanley Gordon Oliver, served in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

Charlie Oliver, a Jacksonville native, started working for First Arkansas Bank & Trust in Jacksonville in August 2006 during his senior year at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro. He graduated in April 2007.

After being with the bank for 1 1/2 years, he was promoted to business-development officer. In this position, he was responsible for cultivating new business relation-

ships and being a public presence for the bank within the community.

From ribbon cuttings for new businesses to taking part in the Chamber of Commerce, "I would help in whatever way I could to help the bank grow and help Jacksonville grow in a positive way," he said.

Oliver's final days with the bank saw him working as lead customer-service representative.

"I know that I'm stepping out there, but I know I have the support of my entire family," he said.

He comes from a family that has called Jacksonville home for more than 30 years. His parents own businesses in Jacksonville — his father, Joe, runs Ark Construction, while his mother, Sherry, operates Oliver's Antiques.

"I was raised to have a lot of drive and a strong work ethic," he said.

Oliver plans to leave in February for Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga., where he will go through training to become a commissioned officer. After OCS, he'd like to end up at either Fort Lewis, Wash., or Fort Bragg, N.C., then be deployed to Afghanistan.

"I am nervous and scared, but that's not going to slow me down," he said.

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Doyle Fowler | McCrory

Former mayor dedicated to hometown

By Staci Miller
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

When Doyle Fowler and his wife, Margaret Ann, both natives of McCrory, moved to Indiana for his career, they never dreamed they would move back to their hometown.

After a career as a supervisor at International Harvester Co. in Indianapolis, Fowler and his wife relocated to Little Rock. It wasn't long before they moved back to McCrory to be close to family.

"Because of my love for this city and having grown up here, I want to make it a wonderful and safe place to live," Fowler said.

Shortly after moving back, the Fowlers purchased the old Ken Movie Theater and completely restored it. The intention was to purchase the landmark and donate it to the city, but at the time, the city wasn't interested. So the Fowlers took on the project themselves.

"We wanted to have entertainment that would draw people into McCrory, as well as provide entertainment for local people," Fowler said.

The theater now operates as the Ken Performing

Arts Center.

"I want the Ken Performing Arts Center to become a place that will be a destination point for people to come from all over the country to see performances," Fowler said.

Fowler and his wife developed Turning Point Ministries, a faith-based ministry to help those who abuse drugs and alcohol.

His passion for positive change also motivated Fowler to pursue politics. Fowler was mayor of McCrory from 2003 to 2007. During his time in office, Fowler helped to start a recycling program and beautify the town.

"I have the concept that if you start cleaning up your place, everyone around is going to want to clean up theirs," he said.

The city became part of Tree City USA, was named Volunteer Community of the Year and received a community award from Keep Arkansas Beautiful, Fowler said.

Although Fowler plans to run for mayor again this year, his dedication to McCrory will remain unchanged whether or not he is elected.

"We need to bring in more jobs to McCrory," he said. "We are working to make the town much more marketable."

First job: Shining shoes at Alex Barber Shop in McCrory for 25 cents a pair

One thing you want to accomplish in life, but haven't yet: The one thing I would like to accomplish but haven't yet is to put McCrory on the map as a shining star in the Delta.



Anna Westman | Newport

Educator believes in power of learning

By Christy L. Smith
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

It's little wonder that Anna Westman of Jonesboro became an educator. Her mother and brother were teachers who now serve as principals. Her father sat on the school board for almost 20 years.

"My parents have been a big influence on my life," Westman said. "They believe in the power of education."

That belief rubbed off on Westman, who not only teaches English, literature and Spanish in the classroom at Arkansas State University-Newport, but also serves as a volunteer teacher at McPherson Correctional Facility near Newport.

"I do believe that education can be life changing. It empowers people," she said. "It means a lot to me to go there (McPherson) and at least offer these classes so that these students can make a difference in their lives."

This assistant professor of English/foreign language was named 2009 Outstanding Faculty Member at ASU-Newport. The nomination and voting processes are anonymous, so Westman doesn't know who nominated her for the honor. She just knows how grateful she is.

"I felt surprised and honored that my students and

other faculty members had recognized the work I had put in," she said.

Westman grew up in Landskrona, Sweden, the younger of two siblings. Early on, she learned Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. When she entered school, she began learning English, German and Spanish.

Her interest in the United States was piqued when her brother went to Minnesota as a high school exchange student. Then, when she was 12, her family hosted an American exchange student. Westman followed in her brother's footsteps and came to the United States as a high school exchange student. She lived in Enid, Okla.

An opportunity to return to the United States presented itself while Westman was in college.

In Sweden, young people are very interested in traveling, so it's difficult to get study-abroad scholarships, Westman said. She was one of 600 students selected and was sent to Arkansas State University-Jonesboro, where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Westman said the most common question people ask her is how she came to be in Arkansas.

"I keep telling them that I've been to worse places," she said, laughing. "I would not live here and stay here for 10 years if I did not like it."

Birthplace: Landskrona, Sweden

Hidden talents: I know almost all the words in Swedish and English to nearly every Abba song.

Favorite quote: "Be the change you want to see in the world." — Mahatma Gandhi



Jerrod Williams | Pangburn

Educator 'blessed to be here'

By Karen Laskey
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

In his second year as superintendent of the Pangburn School District, Jerrod Williams is optimistic about the district's future but doesn't take all the credit for its accomplishments.

"I love being able to see the whole picture in trying to lead the district into the 21st century," Williams said. "That job cannot be accomplished without an outstanding administrative team and a very supportive board of education."

He said the Pangburn district is planning 10 years into the future. Williams quoted the school district's motto: "Pangburn 2020: Every child. Every day. Looking at the year 2020 with 20-20 vision."

Williams taught in the Cabot School District from 1999 to 2007 and was an administrator in the England, Ark., School District from 2006 to 2008 — one year as an elementary assistant principal and one as principal. He was director of transportation for both years.

He said he was influenced by his father, Kieth Williams, who was a superintendent for 15 years for the Cross County and Beebe school districts.

During Williams' tenure as Pangburn

superintendent, the district has enhanced its Gifted and Talented programs, promoting the philosophy that "a child is gifted all day every day."

The district also added a sophomore seminar to get students ready for college and PSAT and ACT prep classes. When students took the PSAT in November, scores on the test improved drastically. With improved preparation for college and higher test scores, the students will have a wider choice of colleges and have more doors open to them, Williams said.

The district has a new vocational program and is in the midst of a huge building program. With a new middle school and a performing arts center already completed, the district broke ground for its new high school and arena on Dec. 22, he said.

Williams' wife, Brandi, also is involved in the district. She is a volunteer wrestling coach and was a basketball statistician last year, he said.

"We have a new child" — Baylor Marie, 10 months old, Williams said.

"It's pretty much just school," Jerrod said of his family's life. "The town is very supportive of not only the school — the center of the town — but also of us as a family, having a new baby. We're just very blessed to be here."

Birthplace: Searcy

Biggest influence: My grandparents and my father, who was a superintendent and administrator for years

First job: Weekend chicken cook at the C Store on Race Street in Searcy. I also worked on the family farm since I was 7 or 8, driving a tractor, putting in rice gates and doing whatever the hired hands didn't want to do.

As a child you said, "When I grow up, I want to be a ...": Fireman and a country music singer

Hidden talents: I love to work outside, and I love to landscape.

Favorite TV show: CSI: Miami

One thing not many people know about you: I'm really kind of quiet and shy.

One word to describe you: Committed

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James Kee | Searcy

Football player looks to lead by example

By Eliza Gano
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Harding University football player James Kee admits his role as an offensive lineman for the Bisons might be an under-the-radar position, but he's earned some big name recognition.

Kee, 21, was named to the ESPN the Magazine College Division Academic All-District 6 Football Team in November. The district is composed of NCAA II, NCAA III, NAIA and NJCAA institutions in Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.

The sophomore biochemistry and molecular biology major has earned senior-level credit hours and has a 3.86 grade-point average. He is Harding football's 28th Academic All-District honoree since 1996. In 2008, he was named to the Gulf South Conference Academic Honor Roll.

The Searcy native knows being a football player carries certain responsibilities.

"I'll be a junior next year, and I hope to mature into that role as a leader," Kee said. "I'm more of a quiet leader, but I want to lead by example. I want other guys to see my hard work."

The schedule he keeps during the season — nine

hours on the field and 1 1/2 hours in the weight room — conditions him to work hard for his team, go to practice every day and improve himself.

"Those things definitely transfer over into the classroom," he said.

After college, Kee plans to become a doctor and is looking at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock or the University of Memphis.

With his medical degree, he'd also like to take part in short-term medical mission trips overseas. He remembers his two-week spring-break class trip to Kenya when he was a senior at Harding Academy in Searcy.

"I got to see people being very happy and joyful, but living in very bad conditions compared to us," he said. "The people I met truly trusted their lives to God, not on themselves, like we as Americans are taught to do."

Kee's parents, Donald and Carolyn Kee, taught him to do his best and give his best to God.

Kee would like to repeat his freshman-year GPA of 4.0, but "if I get a B here and there, I wouldn't worry about it. If I work my hardest, I'll still feel good about it," he said. "I want to grow closer to God. My football goals are to win the conference championship and compete for a national championship and continue to get better in everything."

Hidden talents: Wiggling both ears, at separate times

One thing you learned in kindergarten that you have carried on throughout your life: Always think before you say something or do something. Think about consequences.

PEOPLE TO WATCH IN 2010

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Rayanne Story | Searcy

One thing not many people know about you: I was an Arkansas Tech University Wonderboy cheerleader.

Favorite quote: "Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't."
— Margaret Thatcher

Prescribing new concepts for health care

By Staci Miller
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

In the fall of 2008, Harding University accepted the first class in its new College of Pharmacy. Rayanne Story left a career in health-system pharmacy to help make sure these students would be on the right track to become successful pharmacists.

"I've worked with a lot of good pharmacists through the years, and I am very proud of our profession," she said. "I decided it was time to give back. I want to help mold the next generation of pharmacists."

Story, a native of Bentonville who holds a doctorate in pharmacy from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Pharmacy, originally thought she would end up in retail pharmacy.

"When I graduated in 1988, the only job I could find in northwest Arkansas was in a hospital," she said. "I tried to cross back over to retail but realized a hospital is where I feel like I need to be instead."

Story moved to Searcy in 2007 and worked for White County Medical Center before accepting a position as an assistant professor at Harding's College of Pharmacy. Story coordinates the Pharmacy Management course and serves

as an adviser for the Student Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

She was also inducted as president-elect of the Arkansas Association of Health-System Pharmacists, a state organization that promotes pharmaceutical care as an essential part of health care systems. As president, Story hopes to use her platform to promote the importance of having a pharmacist in hospital emergency rooms.

"Having a pharmacist in the ER is kind of a new concept," she said. "Twenty years ago it wasn't a big deal, but now there are so many drugs, and we have recognized interactions and complications that we didn't know about."

Story maintains a clinical practice site in the White County Medical Center ER.

Story also holds another important title: mom. Of all her accomplishments, she is most proud of her daughters, Sarah, Rachel and Emily.

When she has the time, Story volunteers at Christian Health Ministries, a free clinic in Searcy. In the past, she went on medical mission trips to Guyana, South America and Honduras.

"It was a great opportunity," she said. "I don't think you realize how lucky you are until you go over there."

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Daniel Torres | Searcy

First job: I started working at the age of 10 after school at a Laundromat washing people's clothing by the pound.

Most proud of: I am extremely proud of my three wonderful daughters. They are my joy and my pride.

Spreading ministry to Mexico, local inmates

By Jeanni Brosius
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

As a kid, Daniel Torres wanted to grow up to be a superhero. Although he doesn't don a superhero cape, there are many who consider him a hero. Torres risks his life to help people have better lives.

A minimum of four times each year, sometimes more, Torres heads out to the crime-ridden area of Juárez, Mexico. Most people who live in Juárez have very little food, adequate shelter or safe water.

The Puerto Rican-born Torres was raised in New York City after his parents divorced when he was 10. He came to Arkansas after he joined the Air Force in 1975, but he has lived in Searcy for the past 20 years.

"The Lord drives me; if it were just me, I wouldn't go," Torres said about going to an area that has had thousands of murders, many of which were beheadings by the Mexican drug cartels. He believes God has asked him to go to Juárez. "People tell me I'm absolutely crazy. I always thought, 'I would go anywhere, Lord, except for Mexico.' He has a sense of humor," he said.

Torres believes that one day he will live in Juárez, but for

now, he either leads a group or visits alone, then returns to Searcy to make preparations for his next trip.

Most of the costs comes out of his own pocket, but Torres said he isn't worried about the cost or the dangers. Many of the mission trips to Juárez are planned through International Family Missions out of Colorado, but some trips Torres takes on his own.

Torres said about the people who travel to Juárez with him, "People actually appreciate the country we live in more; we take so much for granted."

One of the regular stops on his trips to Mexico is Casa de Refugio, a refuge for young women who have been sold into prostitution, many of whom are addicted to drugs. Each January, Torres and a few others visit the refuge with armloads of Christmas gifts.

"Those girls are so close to me, and they call me Uncle Daniel," Torres said. "It's like going back and seeing family."

In addition to the Juárez trips, Torres also conducts a jail ministry in which he visits the White County Jail in Searcy.

Torres is also an active member of Aglow International, a worldwide ministry. And he travels to churches and conferences to perform his one-man drama that he wrote, produces and acts in himself.



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From the bank with many people worth watching, we congratulate Davy for being among the select few to be honored by the *Democrat-Gazette*.



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Jason Marzewski | Searcy

Author inspired by real-life

By Staci Miller
SPECIAL SECTIONS WRITER

Although Searcy author Jason Marzewski describes himself as a 6-year-old boy trapped in a 32-year-old body, his actions prove that he is wise beyond his years.

For the past 10 years, Marzewski has been working in graphic design and advertising. He has had work displayed in multiple publications, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Sports Illustrated*, *US News and World Report*, *Country Living* and *Cowboys and Indians*.

In addition to working for the Arkansas State University-Beebe system, he also operates his own design company, JAM Designs.

Last February, Marzewski released his first book, *Toad Meets His Forever Friend*. The educational story has children leaping into literacy as they go on a learning adventure with characters Personal Toad and Chicken.

"I wanted to create something to entertain kids and help better educate them without them knowing it," Marzewski said.

The characters in the book are in-

spired by Marzewski and his wife of nine years, Tisha.

"They are our alter egos. ... I'm the toad, and she is the chicken," he said.

Toad Meets His Forever Friend teaches children an important lesson about thinking before speaking. The book also helps them grow their vocabularies with underlined words defined in a supplemental dictionary that comes with the book.

When he decided to publish the book, Marzewski found another way he could help children.

"There are a lot of kids out there who don't have a good upbringing or don't have a good home," he said.

Marzewski donates a percentage from the sale of every copy of his book to Searcy Children's Homes Inc.

"I wish I could charge \$1 million per book and have 100 percent of that go to the children's home," he said. "They have a tremendous impact on the lives of hundreds of kids. They do a phenomenal job."

Marzewski has started writing a second Toad and Chicken book and plans to create several more.

"God has given me a whole heart and head full of stories, so I'm hoping to have a whole series," he said.

Family: Parents, Jane and Dave Marzewski of Jonesboro; wife, Tisha Marzewski of Searcy; "children,"

Gallant the golden retriever, Zorro the border collie, Teddi the Lab/chow mix, and Dainty and Rambunctious, the two cats

Birthplace: Danville, Pa.

First job: When I was 14, I illustrated the book *Revenge of the Chicken Chokers* for Chris Munos and made \$300 — I was thrilled!

Favorite TV show: *Transformers*, from the '80s; and *War of the Worlds*, from the '80s

Favorite color: Bright Rally Red, the color of my Camaro

One thing you learned in kindergarten that you have carried on throughout your life: Beware of people who have to tell you how good, honest or reliable they are.

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Honoree Luncheon

Friday, Jan. 15
Harding University, Searcy

PHOTOS BY MISTY BROWN



Horace Mitchell and his wife, Antionette Mitchell, greet new guests as they arrive at the luncheon. Antionette is a 20 to Watch honoree from Jacksonville.



20 to Watch honoree Crystal Johnson, from left, Damon Johnson and Sloane Mares, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette director of niche publications, visit prior to the luncheon.



Danelle Hoffer, from left, 20 to Watch honoree Riley Hoffer of Cabot and Tisha Marzewski look at the Three Rivers Edition 20 to Watch in 2009 section.



Three Rivers Edition editor Jeff LeMaster begins the award presentation to honor the 20 individuals selected for the 20 to Watch in 2010 section.



The luncheon recognizing the 20 to Watch recipients was held at the American Heritage Conference Center at Harding University in Searcy.



Three Rivers advertising account executive Billy Roberts, from left, Jon-Michael Poff, Sheila Poff and Crystal Johnson chat after the awards presentation. Jon-Michael Poff and Johnson are both honorees from Batesville.



20 to Watch honorees Chase Dugger of Beebe and Davy Carter of Cabot listen respectfully during the awards presentation.



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