

SPIRIT OF ROWAN

PROGRESS 2021

NEXT GENERATIONS

*Sixteen locals
under 40 who
are aiming high*

A special publication of the
Salisbury Post

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There's no doubt about it: This last year has been difficult. And it got even more difficult for the F&M Bank family, with the recent passing of Paul Fisher. But one thing we know for sure is that things will get better. Because they always do. As we celebrate Mr. Paul's life, we reflect on the legacy the Fisher family has created for the communities F&M Bank serves.

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Reasons to be optimistic

Pandemics tend to spoil even the best-laid plans. That was certainly the case with last year's Spirit of Rowan publication — an annual special section aimed at highlighting the people and places in Salisbury and Rowan County. It's inserted with a Sunday edition of the Post in March and usually requires that the final product be sent to the printer two weeks before it runs in print.

So, as we made finishing touches and prepared to send it to the printer in March 2020, we grew worried when things started to get canceled en masse. Schools were closed for at least two weeks.

If events were not canceled, they were postponed. For multiple days in a row, we ran a list of closings, postponements and cancellations.

It was hard enough to keep up with the daily news cycle. What were we going to do about a publication the newsroom and advertising staff worked for months to put together?

The solution was to send it to the printer as a sign there was still plenty to be optimistic about in our community after the pandemic subsided.

More than ever, this year's publication proves there are reasons to be optimistic about the next generations of young people in

Salisbury who are dreaming big and leading positive efforts toward change. It's not intended to be comprehensive. There are hundreds about whom the Post staff could have written for this year's Spirit of Rowan. But we hope this serves as a good sampling of the many people who are doing good work in Salisbury and Rowan County.

In Granite Quarry, Drew Harwood is leading his family's business to new heights and embracing the truth there's value to hometown customer service.

In Rowan-Salisbury Schools, Nicole Buckner and Dominique Bates are leading children along a

path to a bright future.

Realtor Karla Foster is hard at work launching a realty business and selling families and couples on the good idea of living in Salisbury and Rowan County.

Mahogany Koontz is setting her sights on a future that includes work on social issues and activism after successfully organizing people around the need for change last year.

Shaneesa Smith is helping to build the future of Salisbury's police force. Ryan Stowe is growing his criminal defense law practice.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the Salisbury Post's Spirit of Rowan publication.



Salisbury Post Editor Josh Bergeron

ROWAN AT A GLANCE

Population

(2019 U.S. Census estimates)

- **Rowan County:** 142,088
- **Salisbury:** 33,988
- **Kannapolis:** 50,841
- **China Grove:** 4,213
- **Spencer:** 3,241
- **Landis:** 3,127
- **Granite Quarry:** 2,994
- **Rockwell:** 2,147
- **East Spencer:** 1,549
- **Cleveland:** 881
- **Faith:** 801

Gender, race and ethnicity

(U.S. Census estimates)

- **Men in Rowan County:** 69,730
- **Women in Rowan County:** 71,532
- **White alone, not Hispanic or Latino:** 71.7%
- **Hispanic or Latino:** 9.2%
- **Black or African-American alone:** 16.8%
- **American Indian and Alaska native:** 0.6%
- **Asian alone:** 1.3%
- **Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander:** 0.1%
- **Two or more races:** 1.7%

People

- **Births in Rowan County:** 1,593 (2018)
- **Deaths in Rowan County:** 1,663 (2018)

Land and water

- **Total acres of land:** 327,141
- **Land area is square miles:** 511.37
- **Population per square mile:** 270.7
- **Total acres of farmland:** 121,145 acres
- **Water surface of High Rock Lake:** 15,180 acres (Rowan and Davidson)
- **Shoreline total:** 365 miles (Rowan and Davidson)

Business and economy

- **New commercial building permits in 2020:** 39
- **New residential building permits in 2020:** 619
- **Median household income:** \$48,667
- **Per capita income in past 12 months:** \$25,117
- **Persons in poverty:** 16.3%
- **Total employer establishments in 2017:** 2,630
- **Total annual payroll of all employer establishments:** \$1.96 billion

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Bates steers students down the right path



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Buckner ignites passion at Koontz



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Lee is working toward a stronger community



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Boutique owner 'couldn't imagine doing anything else'



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Ruf never tires of promoting local businesses



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Smith worked his way from teaching to administration



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Officer Smith proud to be 'someone they can go to'



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Helping his hometown

Stowe is only Black defense attorney in Salisbury



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Wallace-Williams fights for the underdog'



On the cover: Salisbury High School junior Ali Khatib grew up performing in the Norvell Children's Theatre in Salisbury, starting in local productions at age 8. Photo by Jon C. Lakey.

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Right career

Dominique Bates steers students toward path that works for them

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Dominique Bates is a Salisbury native who attended all the North Rowan schools growing up before he went off to start his undergraduate career.

Bates, 36, started at UNC Charlotte and spent a year there before transferring to Winston-Salem State University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in management information systems.

Bates' title with Rowan-Salisbury Schools is associate director of career and technical education (CTE) and director of work-based learning and community partnerships.

Summarizing what he does, Bates said the bulk of his work is ensuring all of the district's students have a plan to be either enrolled, enlisted or employed when they graduate from high school.

The other main piece of his job is helping students get internships, apprenticeships and exposing them to careers they may want to pursue. Bates said exposing students to opportunities and making them aware of what they could do is key to their success and have a plan when they graduate high school.

"For a lot of people my age, there was only one plan: go to college," Bates said. "Get a degree, get a job. Well, there's a lot more options out there we're trying to expose our students to."

Bates said what is best is individual to each student — whether that is an apprenticeship, military service or a career that requires a four-year degree — the district wants to help them understand how to get where they are going.

Another impact of the work is showing students what they do not want to do. If a student is interested in health care but figures out through exposure the medical field



Salisbury Post file photos

Dominique Bates is CTE career development coordinator for Rowan-Salisbury Schools.



Dominique Bates ties the shoe of his nephew Elijah Bates in the hallway at Elizabeth Hanford Dole Elementary school in 2012.

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1763-1764	William Massey	1858-1865	W.A. Walton
1764-1767	Francis Locke	1865-1866	Solomon Kluttz
1767-1768	Griffith Rutherford	1867-1872	W.A. Walton
1768-1769	Andrew Allison	1872-1880	C. F Waggoner
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1774-1777	James Kerr	1908-1914	J.H. McKenzie
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1779-1779	Samuel Hughey	1930-1931	W. Locke McKenzie
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1808-1813	Edward Chambers		
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1814-1818	Alexander Frohock		
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1820-1824	Samuel Jones		
1824-1826	Charles Fisher		
1826-1828	Isaac D. Jones		
1828-1837	Fielding Slater		



Sheriff Kevin L. Auten

is not for them, that saves the student from spending money on the wrong education. More importantly, it saves them from investing time and effort in a field that will not suit them.

Bates said the goal of what he does is to help students follow their passions so they can find their purpose in life. His own story is one of taking stepping stones that lead him to where he is now.

"I took the long route," Bates said.

Bates managed a cellphone kiosk while he attended Winston-Salem State and planned to work in IT after graduating.

He started working at RJ Reynolds after he graduated. The money was good, but his heart was not in it.

He was fixing devices and troubleshooting issues, but he missed the human interaction he thrived on.

"Long story short, I ended up quitting that job," Bates said.

He became a district manager for the Radio Shack kiosks he had continued to work

for part time while he held down the IT job, but Radio Shack's financial woes were increasing and that job disappeared.

He worked a few temporary staffing agency jobs and eventually moved back to Salisbury for a job in a leasing department. He started volunteering in schools and was a volunteer coach at North Rowan Middle School. Terrence Snider, the assistant principal at the school at the time, told Bates he needed to work in education.

Snider later became principal at Knox Middle school and offered Bates a position as a business teacher at the school. Fast forward a few years, and another administrator saw something else in him and helped Bates advance to a career development coordinator position at Salisbury High School. The work was similar to what he does now.

"This is perfect for me," Bates said.

Bates said he has been molded along the way by other people who have turned him into who he is today, though he expects he still has some stepping stones ahead of him.



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Photos by Wayne Hinshaw, for the Salisbury Post

Principal Nicole Buckner sits in a first grade class of the Accelerate Rowan Lab School at Koontz Elementary. Teacher Savannah Everhart is on the right.

Impacting students

Principal Nicole Buckner ignites passion at Koontz Elementary

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Nicole Buckner did not arrive in North Carolina until she went to college.

She was born in Atlanta and grew up in Conyers, Georgia. She landed in North Carolina to play lacrosse and study at St. Andrews University.

"I loved it," Buckner said. "It is a very small, quaint private school."

Buckner, 31, graduated with an elementary education degree and later earned an administration add-on from Queens University of Charlotte.

When she finished her undergraduate degree, she went on to become a third-grade teacher in Laurinburg and stu-



Principal Nicole Buckner speaks with Jordi Romano, director of the Accelerate Rowan Lab School at Koontz.

dent-taught briefly before moving back to Conyers to teach there for a couple years.

In 2015, Buckner got her first district-level job with another system. In 2016, she got her first true administrative job with Rowan-Salisbury Schools, shortly after her daughter was born. She was made principal at Koontz Elementary School in 2019.

She decided to get into education because she loved making an impact on and advocating for kids is her passion.

She did not have an education background growing up. Her parents are both engineers, but she gained a passion for service through Girl Scouts. She loved working with children as a camp counselor and working with them on community projects.

When she started college, she was interested in working with older kids, but working with elementary-age kids as an undergraduate gave her an appreciation for molding kids in that age group.

She became a teacher who worked to train others, even students who were finishing undergraduate degrees.



Buckner talks with students in a third grade class.

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"My favorite thing is impacting people and serving them," Buckner said.

She feels service that benefits children is her calling and is watching Koontz become a passionate place.

"It's a whole community of this growth and passion and love of learning," Buckner said. "That's what motivates me every day."

The hope is students are coming to school to learn more than information and that they are also learning interpersonal skills, how to cope with emotions, build relationships and experience a nurturing and safe place.

The school always wants to lay a groundwork for students to peak their interests so they can start thinking about what they want to do with their lives. Buckner said students are motivated to learn when they see connections between what they are learning, their passions and real life.

"In elementary school they're not really sure what they want to be when they grow up," Buckner said. "But our hope is we can find a passion or ignite a fire in them."

Working with new teachers led her to administration, and now Koontz is becoming a lab school to develop new teachers.

The school has a new position for the lab, which is being funded through a major federal grant RSS was awarded to accelerate its renewal programs. Buckner said taking on the lab school model is more thrilling than intimidating.

"I think it's a game changer," Buckner said, adding the program could change the level of readiness of first-year

teachers by getting soon-to-be-minted educators in the school full time before they have their own classrooms.



Buckner listens to associate teacher in training Abby Hin-son in a third-grade class.

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Koontz Elementary Principal Nicole Buckner is in the center back with master teacher Angel Millspaugh-Stables. On the left is lab school director Jordi Romano in the Accelerate Rowan Lab School at a Koontz third grade classroom with associate teacher in training Abby Hinson, with back to camera reading a book.



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Photos by Wayne Hinshaw, for the Salisbury Post

Karla Foster at New Pointe Realty on North Main Street.

Personal connection

Karla Foster bolsters her real estate agency by building relationships

BY BEN STANSELL
ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

Karla Foster graduated from Appalachian State in 2009, but the most important education she received came after.

For as long as she can remember, Foster,

33, has been fascinated by crime. She's always loved murder mystery shows. As a high school intern with the Salisbury Post, she found herself more interested in listening to the police scanner than writing stories.

When she graduated from North Rowan in 2005 and went to college, she already knew her course of study — criminal justice. After four years of learning about the

legal system and going on police ride-alongs, Foster was ready to pursue a career path in law enforcement or government.

But Foster graduated during a recession. So, instead of working in criminal justice, she found herself at East Coast Wings.

"At one point, almost our entire staff at East Coast Wings had four-year degrees," Foster said. "It was humbling, but you

worked hard."

Foster credits the two years she worked at East Coast Wings with teaching her the skills she uses now as one of Salisbury's up-and-coming Realtors.

"I always say that prepared me most for what I do today," Foster said. "It allowed me to be nimble and keep things on a schedule."

Being flexible and structured helped Fos-

ter find success with her flourishing real estate business, New Pointe Realty.

Selling houses wasn't in the cards when Foster graduated from college, but after several years of working at East Coast Wings, with Rowan County Youth Services and as a state-wide organizer for a presidential campaign, Foster decided to earn her real estate license.

At first, Foster thought that a job in real estate would springboard her political career. Now, she's not even sure being an elected official is in her future.

"I wanted to find something I would really enjoy, and now I'm not even sure I'd want to do politics," Foster said. "I found something that I can't even sleep at night most nights because I'm so excited to get back to work."

For the first five years of her career as a real estate agent, Foster worked for Century 21. That experience, she said, was critical to her growth in the industry.

Wanting to forge a path of her own, Foster left Century 21 and formed New Pointe Realty in 2019. In the two years since Foster started her own agency, she worked to establish a reputation for herself as a Realtor who forms personal relationships with her clients.

"You can choose to be transactional or you can be relational," Foster said. "Transactional might make you more money quickly, but relational will build a book of business that sustains you for your career. I wasn't the person who opened the door, I was the person who held their hand and made it OK when it didn't feel OK."

Foster recently hired a second employee and has been taking advantage of the recent housing boom.

"I did well my first year and I had a killer year last year," Foster said.



When she's not selling real estate, Foster is engaging with the community by serving with a number of organizations, including the Rowan Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, East Spencer Housing Authority and the Rowan County Plan-

ning Board, among others.

Being busy, Foster said, is always better.

"It equips me to be the most knowledgeable I can possibly be to help my clients," Foster said. "I love it."



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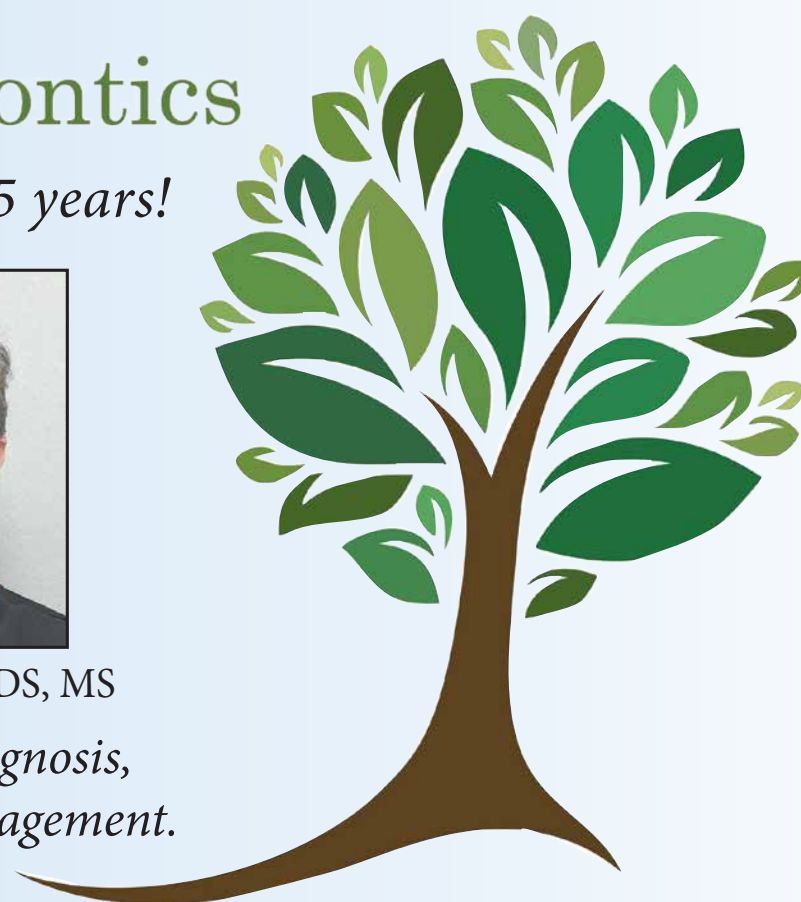


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Salisbury Post file photo

From left: Millbridge Elementary Principal Jordan Baker, David Freeze and Alyssa Harris at the site of a new running track at the school in 2017.

Community well-being

Alyssa Harris finds her dream job at Rowan Health Department

BY JOSH BERGERON

josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com

If Nina Oliver could have cloned Alyssa Harris before moving on from the Rowan County Health Department, she would have. Maybe a few times.

“She’s certainly an excellent public health advocate,” said Oliver, the county’s former health director. “She understands the needs of today but also focuses on building for the future. And she is very good at what she does. ... She’s an excellent addition to the health department.”

Likewise, Krista Woolly, executive director of the Community Care Clinic, says Harris is “professional, pleasant and very knowledgeable about all things public health.”

“She loves her community and is proud to be a Rowan County native,” Woolly said. “I am super proud of her and know that she has an exciting future ahead of her.”

So, it made sense when the Rowan County Board of Health elevated Harris to the interim health director position when Oliver moved on to a new job in Carteret County.

Before taking on the interim director job, Harris, 31, worked as community health manager, executive director of Health Row-

an and a public health educator for the department. She’s also worked for the Cabarrus Health Alliance. Harris says working in public health is her dream job.

“I am one of those very rare, very blessed people who get to do what I want to do everyday,” she said prior to being named interim director.

She received a bachelor’s degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master’s in health promotion, education and behavior from the University of South Carolina. She wasn’t born in Rowan County, but she got here as quick as possible. Born on a Navy base in Charleston, South

Carolina, she lived in Connecticut before her dad retired from the military and the family moved to Rockwell.

She attended Erwin Middle School and was among the first classes to graduate from Gray Stone Day School.

She went into college with her focus set on becoming a doctor, but she encountered a hurdle in the fact that she wasn’t fond of dealing with blood.

So, she shifted elsewhere in the medical field, graduating with a degree in psychology and scoring a research job in Columbia, South Carolina, where close friend Erin Howard was working on a graduate degree

at the University of South Carolina.

Before she also attended the University of South Carolina for a graduate degree, her research job worked on projects that involved connecting diseases to diets. After Harris landed in Cabarrus County and worked on projects that involved the Healthy Cabarrus organization, people in Rowan County started asking about starting a similar program for Rowan. And Harris carved out time in her schedule to lead the project.

Today, dealing with COVID-19 takes up just about all of her time — from logistics of vaccinations to helping communicate information. She still remembers the first few months of the virus vividly, including when she was sitting in a management class and Cabarrus County announced its first case.

“Life as we know it was about to stop,” Harris said.

Looking back, she was surprised that masks became a political battle and wishes that Rowan County commissioners had taken a bigger stand in support of mask-wearing.

Harris and her husband, Phillip, live in the Faith area and attend St. John’s Lutheran Church. COVID-19 has changed so much about activities people enjoy, but Harris said she and her husband enjoy fishing, spending time on the lake with friends and exploring good places to eat. She also likes hiking, yoga, baking and swing dancing. Lately, though, she spends a lot of time decompressing from busy work days and binge-watching TV shows with her husband.



Salisbury Post file photo

Alyssa Harris, left, speaks with Krista Woolly of the Community Care Clinic in 2016.



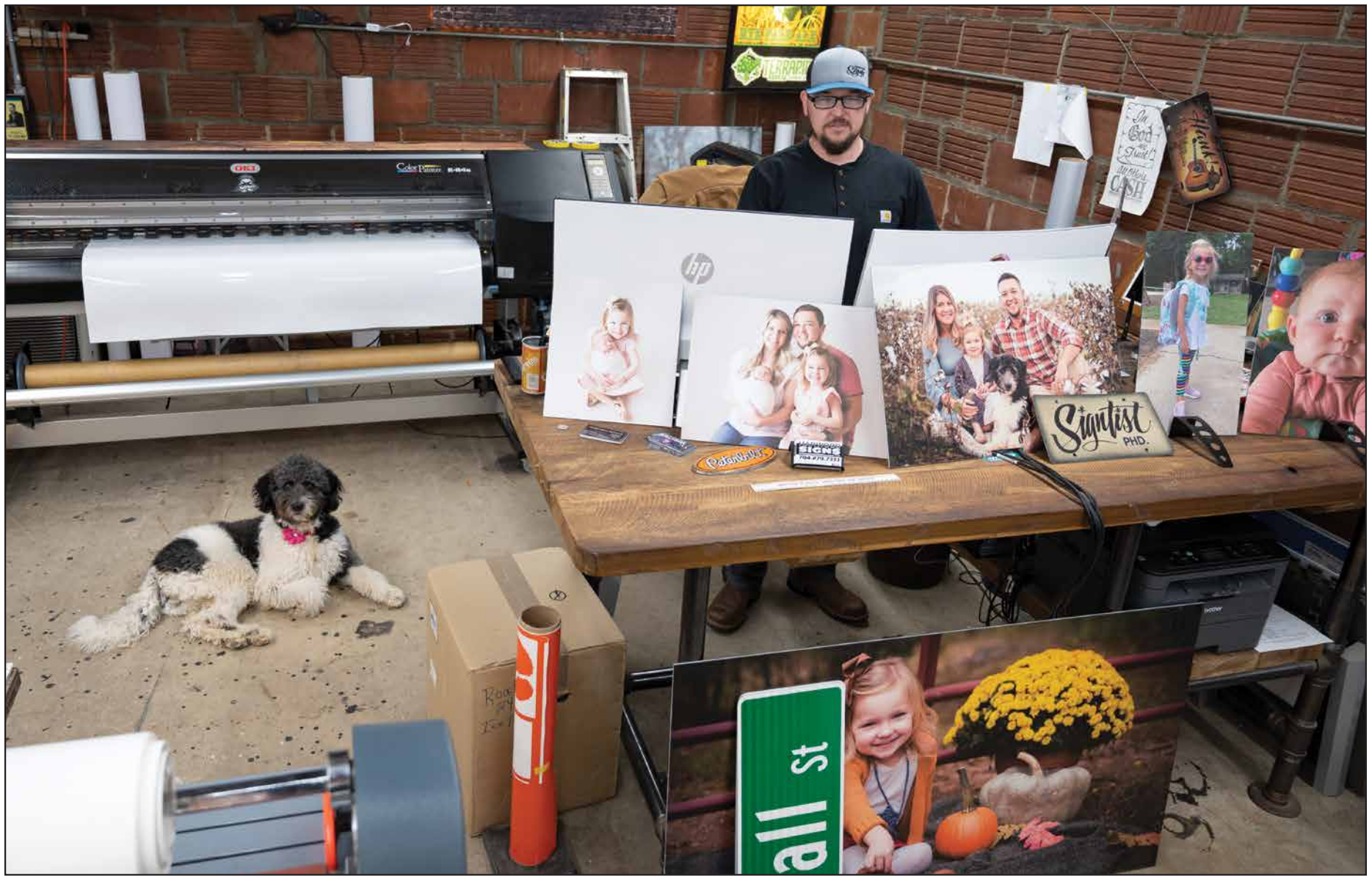
Salisbury Post file photo

Harris was the second county health department staff member to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 23.



Photo by Josh Bergeron, Salisbury Post

Harris writes down information for a person participating in one of the Rowan County Health Department’s drive-thru vaccination clinics.



Photos by Josh Bergeron, Salisbury Post

Drew Harwood works in his Granite Quarry shop as his dog, Ivey, relaxes on the floor nearby.

Signs of the times

Drew Harwood's work can be found across Rowan County

BY JOSH BERGERON
josh.bergeron@salisburypost.com

Harwood Signs got its start in a downtown Salisbury basement on South Main Street in 1954, but Drew Harwood is taking the family business to new heights decades later.

Drew, 36, owns and operates the business

on Depot Street in Granite Quarry. On a February day, customers were first greeted by a large cutout of Bernie Sanders in a pose that became a viral meme earlier this year — sitting in a chair with mittens and a brown coat on at the presidential inauguration. There's also a cutout of Harwood's uncle waving, with the printing so realistic that it might be mistaken for a real person. Besides the friendly faces of Drew and other

workers at the business, there's also his dog, Ivey, who's eager to receive some attention.

Things are much different now than when the business opened in the basement of a theater on South Main Street. Then, Boyd Harwood was doing things entirely by hand. Today, the business uses high-tech printers to make everything from stickers and yard signs to car decals. At Harwood Signs, they're particularly proud of a new

large, flat-bed printer with ink cartridges as big as 2 liter bottles. Chances are, Drew says, he can make any idea a reality if it involves graphic design, advertising or marketing.

When the Granite Quarry Fire Department needed a sign to celebrate its status as the smallest department in the state with a No. 1 ISO rating, it turned to Harwood Signs. A toddler-sized No. 1 with the fire department's logo now sits somewhere in

Raleigh after state officials liked it so much they brought it to the capital city with them. The business proudly posted pictures of Rowan County's state legislators posing with the sign and an image of the sign in the State Fire Marshal's Office.

Their handiwork can also be found on the sign for Christo's restaurant in Salisbury, the town of Landis' boardroom, on the side of law enforcement vehicles and etched into glass in a memorial in Salisbury's newest fire station for Justin Monroe and Victor Isler — two firefighters who died while battling a 2008 fire at Salisbury Millworks.

Drew talks fondly about the business and the ability to run a business where he grew up. The small town environment is A-OK with him and that's where he's stayed. In particular, he doesn't envy the traffic in larger cities. He's got kids now. So, he can't wake up, shower, grab some clothes and head to work, but the commute is short enough.

"If I'm away for a few days, I'm ready to get back," he said. "I've not really had any ambitious to travel anywhere far away."

Besides growing up in eastern Rowan County, he was also always around the shop and has never truly known anything other than the family business. Drew has worked jobs here and there for others after

hours. "But as far as punching a time clock or logging my hours, I've never really worked for anybody else," he said.

Today, the business has grown so much that jobs usually need to be scheduled a month or more out. Drew brought on Justin Overcash, who previously worked at a competing company and took significant chunk of business with him.

"The clients he dealt with have followed him and he's brought a whole other business here," Drew said.

He looks at the future and worries about customers who might choose an impersonal experience on the internet rather than the customer service-oriented experience he strives for.

It's important for Drew to provide a one-on-one experience.

"It's nice to be able to come in and put your hands on what you ordered," he said. "If something goes wrong, you want a person you can talk to. ... Satisfying the customers is the ultimate goal."

Running a business means work doesn't always stop at 5 p.m., but in his free time Harwood enjoys being with friends and family. He hunts and fishes occasionally and lives in the eastern Rowan area with wife Abby and two daughters. He attends St. James Lutheran Church in Rockwell.



Ivey takes a turn in Harwood's chair at Harwood Signs in Granite Quarry.

Drive to succeed

Salisbury High junior Ali Khatib has passion for education reform

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Ali Khatib has a long road ahead of him.

The soon-to-be-17-year-old Salisbury High School junior is in the stage a lot of active and creative teenagers find themselves in, exploring interests and figuring out what is next, between graphic design, filmmaking and music. He describes himself as the creative type.

He likes acting, too, and has been in more than a dozen productions, including work by Piedmont Players. In a normal year, he would be playing sports. He enjoys soccer, tennis, swimming and running cross country.

"I'm definitely at this stage in my life where I have my hands in a lot of pots," Khatib said.

Khatib has another interest that is a bit unusual for a high schooler: education reform. Khatib was part of former Rowan-Salisbury Schools Superintendent Lynn Moody's student advisory council and he sees the problems in American education.

"I definitely think that, currently, our mindset around education is one size fits all," Khatib said, adding the accepted idea in education is one method will work for everyone when that does not match reality.

Khatib said each student has strengths and weaknesses, things they need to develop to reach a comprehensive sense of themselves. He also thinks contemporary education focuses on academics but often fails to reach students with useful areas of study such as financial literacy or understanding yourself emotionally.

Khatib said the system works for him. He has never struggled with academics, but he realizes his experience is not shared by all of his classmates and his academic success does not necessarily translate to a good life in the real world.



Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Salisbury High school junior Ali Khatib has an interest in education reform.

Khatib said he thinks it is beneficial to take an empathetic approach to education.

Khatib sees a number of things that can make life more difficult for people. Being born into an impoverished family is one, but belonging to a minority or being a woman can make life more difficult as well.

He has seen the power of prejudice impact his own life as well, belonging to racial and religious minorities. His mother is originally from Morocco and his father is from Egypt. They met after immigrating to the United States.

Khatib feels he has benefited from his background and has been instilled with a strong drive to succeed from his parents, who attended college in their native countries, moved to the U.S. with no support and succeeded. He has tried to adopt the drive he sees in his parents.

He has a rich cultural background through his parents as well. His favorite meals are the classic Moroccan dishes



Ali Khatib grew up performing in local theater at the Norvell Children's Theatre in Salisbury, starting at age 8.



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Ali Khatib's mother is originally from Morocco and his father is from Egypt. He credits his parents for his drive to succeed and work ethic.

cooked up by his mom.

Khatib sees the cultures of his parents as things that have made him generous and hard-working.

Khatib was an all-virtual student last se-

mester and returned to school in-person in January.

His grades were fine, but he did not feel engaged with virtual learning, found it laborious and sees virtual learning as a side effect

of the pandemic that is impacting disadvantaged students.

For him, it was not satisfying intellectually or emotionally. He thinks it will help morale significantly when students are able

to see everyone again and reconnect with friends they have not seen at school for the past year.

His main interest right now is cinematography and documentary filmmaking.



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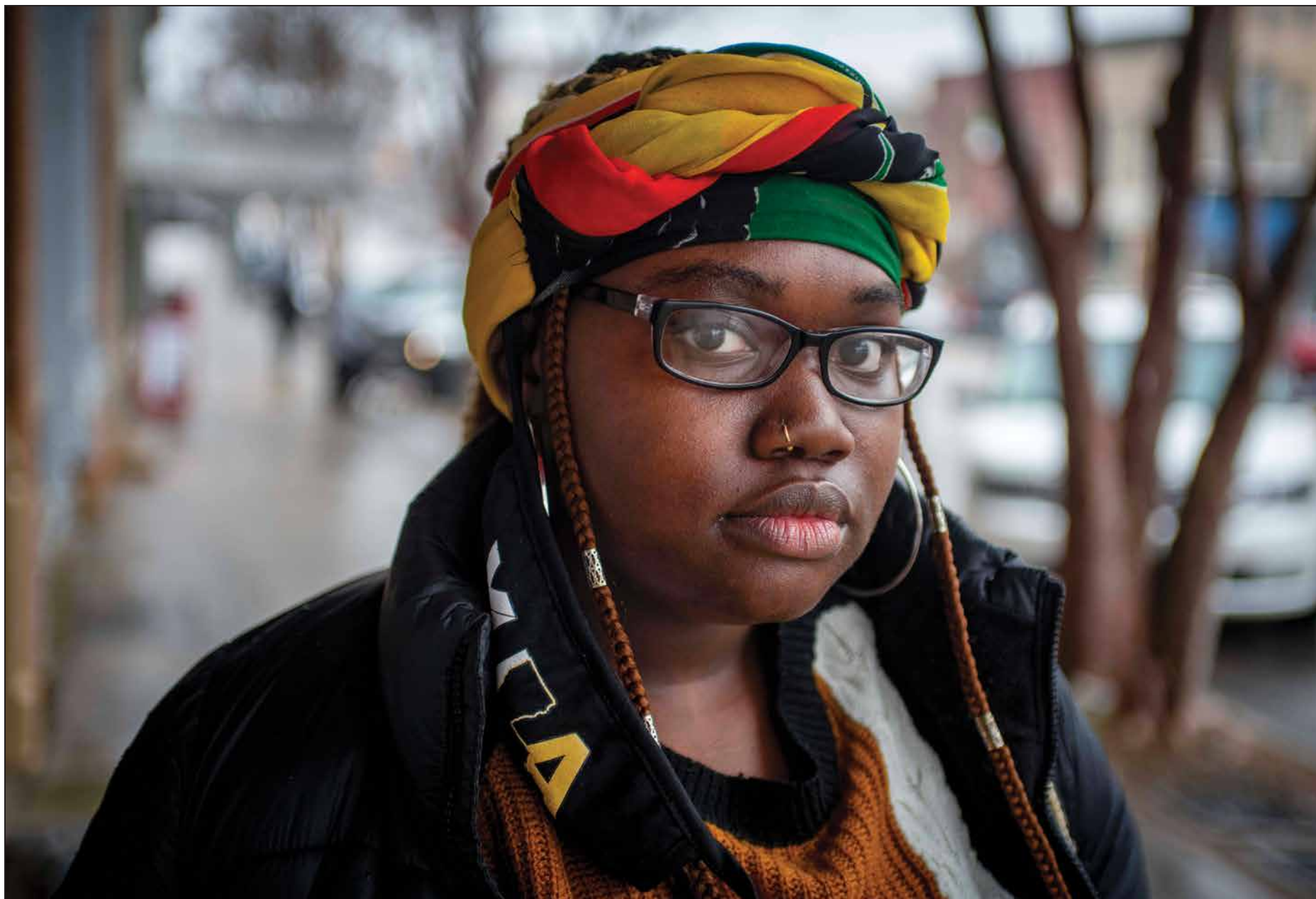
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SOUTHERN STATES



Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

College student Mahogany Koontz reflects on her year as she became active in protest for racial injustices.

Community activism

Mahogany Koontz sets sights on social and political affairs

BY SHAVONNE POTTS

For the Salisbury Post

It was a surreal moment for Salisbury native Mahogany Koontz to walk for the first time in nearly a year in the empty space that once held the Confederate statue known as “Fame.”

Koontz, then 19, helped organize a May 2020 protest in downtown Salisbury following the death of George Floyd, a Minneapo-

lis man who died while being restrained and held in police custody.

His arrest, which was captured on video by onlookers, showed a police officer with his knee pressed against Floyd’s neck for nine minutes.

Floyd died handcuffed and lying face down in the street.

His death sparked widespread protests throughout the U.S., including in small cities and towns such as Salisbury.

Koontz, now 20, is a freshman political

science major at Xavier University and recently reflected on the protest and her future in community and political activism.

In the months before the Salisbury protest and before Floyd’s death, Koontz began to see how other cities and states had already removed Confederate monuments and names from public buildings.

She thought to herself that change had to come to her hometown.

“We were tired. I thought, ‘We’ve got to do something,’” she said.

So Koontz joined other like-minded individuals, including members of Women For Community Justice, Rowan-Salisbury NAACP and local community activist and pastor Anthony Smith to organize early protests that included a mobile protest through downtown Salisbury.

Although Koontz did not organize the mobile protest, it made her realize more work needed to be done.

“Young people stood up and we did it. We really made a change,” she said.



Koontz walks near the intersection of Innes and Church streets in downtown Salisbury. After graduation, Koontz plans to join the Peace Corps, travel the world and then begin her career with the United Nations.

Initially Koontz believed that she was “too young” to organize a protest. She thought, “Why would anyone listen to me?”

She rejected the attitudes and comments of some of the naysayers and decided if change was going to happen then she was going to be a part of creating the change.

When people were critical of her stance on community issues, Koontz said she received encouragement from her mother, Bianca.

Her mother was a buffer for many of those detractors and skeptics who tried to tell the teen what she was doing was futile.

In the wake of the protest she helped organize, others followed.

When the Confederate statue was removed, Koontz admitted she was surprised to see the very thing she stood with other local youth and community leaders to rally

change for actually led to the removal of the monument.


“It really shocked me. I was like, ‘Whoa, I didn’t think that would happen, ever.’ But it did and it stirred up a lot in the community,” Koontz said.

Once the statue was removed, protesters, smaller in number, still lingered.

It was her work with the protests and voter education events that motivated Koontz to pursue political science as a course of study while in college.

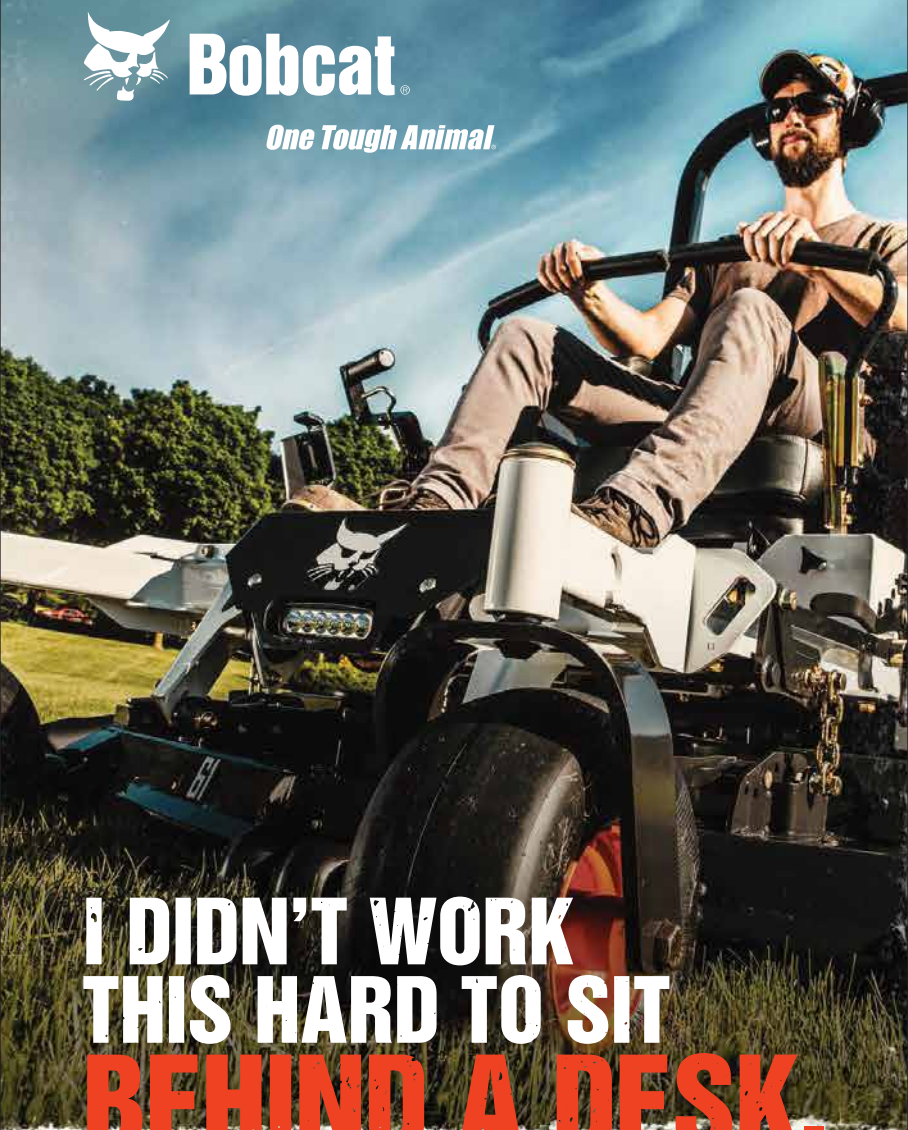
Her mentor, Emily Perry, is a founding member of Rowan Concerned Citizens and she took the teen to voter registration events and other community events.

“I’d never thought little ol’ Mo would be doing this but because of Ms. Emily Perry this is why I’m like this now,” Koontz said.



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Mahogany Koontz is a freshman political science major in college.

Koontz said she's not only learned invaluable lessons from Perry but also pastor Smith and artist and community activist Ash Love.

"Those have been my mentors — the people who I go to for everything," she said.

Smith and Love have grounded her and pushed her toward positive thinking, Koontz said.

"I feel like all the activism I did in the community and working with different people, I just felt like politics is the main thing I want to get into and so now that's what I'm diving into," she said.

Koontz said she's begun working with campus United Nations programs and sees

herself working as a political affairs officer with the global organization upon graduation.

Then Koontz plans to join the Peace Corps, travel the world and begin a career with the United Nations. She also hopes to obtain master's and doctorate degrees in political science. She hopes to go on a tour of the United Nations and start diplomacy work, including travels to England.

Koontz had her first United Nations experience was while on a middle school trip. It intrigued her that there were so few women and made her want to change it.

"I was like, 'We need some women in there to change some things around and I just feel like I'm going to be one of those

women,' " she said.

Her last few months have been filled with school work, preparing for the annual campus event — Spring Fest — and she'll soon begin to volunteer to do political phone banking.

Koontz's next passion project is volunteering. Smith's church, Mission House, hosted a "virtual kickback" where youth members like Koontz spoke about their experiences with last summer's protests.

When she's not organizing community and political events or volunteering at her church, Koontz spends her time reading or watching her two favorite anime series — *Naruto* and *Attack on Titan*.

She also enjoys spending time with her

family, her five cats and three dogs as well as her mentor Linda Hunter, who Koontz calls her second mom.

Hunter, a neighbor, befriended Koontz three years ago when the Koontz family moved into the neighborhood.

"Some people probably look at me as this small, chubby-cheeked kid, but I'm a very open person," she said with a laugh.

Koontz, who is the oldest of nine children, last year was named a recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Service Award.

She's volunteered her time with Rowan Helping Ministries, the Democratic Party and the American Red Cross, as well as served with Next Generation Productions.


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Photos by Wayne Hinshaw, for the Salisbury Post

United Way Executive Director Jenny Lee poses for a picture in her office.

A better Rowan

As United Way executive director, Jenny Lee is working toward a stronger community

BY BEN STANSELL
ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

After two years of nodding off during art history class, Jenny Lee decided that it was time to change her major.

Lee, 33, arrived at the University of

North Carolina at Wilmington in 2007 knowing that she wanted to be as close as possible to the coast, but without any idea of what she wanted to study.

"My first two years were like a lost cause," Lee said.

One day, a friend who Lee worked with at a local restaurant suggested that she consider joining the school's social work pro-

gram. Lee took her advice and enrolled in an introductory social work class taught by Professor Deb Bowen.

Suddenly, Lee didn't struggle to stay awake.

"One day (Bowen) brought in a Food Lion plastic grocery bag and she said, 'This bag right here is, for some people, all that they have,'" Lee said. "She did this activity

with us where we only had a plastic bag to put our possessions in. What would those possessions be? Would they be identification cards, a Bible, some snacks? That was very eye opening for me."

It was the moment when Lee knew that she'd found the right major.

"That class changed my path," Lee said. "I got redirected and kept going down this

path of social work and community efforts.”

Lee went on to earn her bachelor's degree in social work and worked for a home rehabilitation nonprofit while getting her master's degree from East Carolina University. After working as a grant writer for ECU for about a year, Lee returned to her hometown of Salisbury.

“As my children started to get older to where they were school-age, I wanted them to grow up here where I grew up,” Lee said. “My family is here, most of my closest friends are here, so it's something I wanted to do.”

In the summer of 2018, Lee was chosen to take the mantle as executive director of Rowan County United Way. Lee has worked to implement a new community partner impact program that allows the United Way to funnel resources to local organizations that work to fulfill specific community needs such as substance abuse or mental health.

“It was a new way of funding initiatives and providing grants,” Lee said. “We've had some beautiful outcomes.”

Two initiatives that have benefited from the new model, Lee said, are One Love mental health services and Main Street Marketplace, which is growing hydroponic lettuce to improve people's access to healthy food.

More recently, Lee spearheaded efforts to raise about \$1.54 million during the COVID-19 pandemic through an emergency relief fund and the United Way's annual fundraising campaign.

“Even in this moment of despair where 2020 looked nothing like what I thought it would in January, it was inspiring to see how our Rowan County neighbors came out to help each other,” Lee said.

As the pandemic goes on, Lee said the United Way will continue to help the community in any way possible.

After that, her long-term goal is to work to address as many issues in Rowan County as possible.

“As a social worker, if I had it my way, I would work myself out of a job,” Lee said. “I want people to stop needing services because they're self sufficient.”



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Photos by Wayne Hinshaw, for the Salisbury Post

Andy Maben, brewmaster at New Sarum Brewery, poses for a photo inside of the taproom.

The toast of Salisbury

Andy Maben's rise from home brewer to beer master

BY BEN STANSSELL

ben.stanssell@salisburypost.com

The next time a patron at New Sarum Brewery raises a glass of beer, they might want to toast the Carolina Panthers.

Without Charlotte's NFL team, the founder of one of Salisbury's premier breweries might not have come to the Tar Heel state.

Even though Maben, 38, grew up in a household that loved the Buffalo Bills and Pittsburgh Steelers, he switched loyalties to the Panthers when his favorite player, Kevin Greene, signed with the NFL's 29th franchise in the mid 1990s.

"I was like man, I think I'm going to pull for this team," Maben said. "It went against all grains and odds and things of that nature, but I said, 'I think this is what I want to do.'"



New Sarum produces socks and cup holders for beer cans.



Maben started out brewing as a side business for Salty Caper, and now has a much larger brewery and taproom at 109 N. Lee St.

When Maben graduated from high school in Wisconsin and was deciding where to go to college in 2001, the Panthers played a part. Interested in theater arts, Maben applied and was accepted to three drama programs: Catawba College, Texas A&M and SUNY Purchase. While Catawba's intimate, liberal arts program stood out to Maben, so did its proximity to his favorite team.

"(Catawba) really sold me, but it was also a cool thing to be 45 minutes away from Bank of America (stadium)," Maben said.

After graduating from Catawba, Maben stuck around Salisbury and got a job at the Salty Caper. In his spare time, Maben explored an interest he'd harbored since before he could even legally drink — brewing beer. Maben soon kicked his smoking habit in order to save up enough money to invest in home brew equipment.

"I gave up one vice for another, but the second vice was more productive," Maben said. "For me, it made sense to really just go in head first and sacrifice something so that I could learn."

Learn, he did.

Eventually, Maben's brewing hobby be-





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Maben checks a keg of beer.

came a side business for the Salty Caper. For two years, he experimentally brewed beers in a tiny space next to the Salty Caper's main building. The exploratory beers were only sold in the Salty Caper's two locations and at La Cava, a fine dining restaurant in downtown Salisbury.

"We invested a minimal amount of money and the whole reason was to see if it would work," Maben said. "I had 17 beers in the back of my head that I was thinking maybe would work."

The beer did work. The New Sarum brews were a hit at the restaurants. With the support of his business partners, Maben opened up a much larger brewery and taproom at 109 N. Lee St in 2016.

Since then, the brewery has continued to expand and its beers can now be found in grocery stores and bars throughout the region. New Sarum releases more than a dozen special concoctions each year, ranging from a pickle-flavored sour beer to dark, rich porters.

Several years ago, Maben even secured a meeting with Carolina Panthers executives

to discuss about selling his beer in the team's stadium.

"We went to the stadium and we walk down through the back of the stadium and I was like, 'I'm not supposed to be here,'" Maben said. "It really became this cool, interesting and surreal feeling, like this is actually going to happen."

This year, New Sarum developed a beer specifically for Maben's beloved team. Called "Thirst and Goal," the beer was sold to the few patrons allowed in the stadium.

Maben is the man behind the brewery's ascension, but he attributes its success to his entire team, which includes his brother, Johnny.

"I have a great team of business partners that really understand how things should progress," Maben said. "I'm going to reiterate that until the day I die. If I didn't have a great team around me, I wouldn't be sitting here."


Along with continuing to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maben said he wants to keep expanding New Sarum's brand in 2021.

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‘Bright and bold’

AnnaCraig Boutique owner ‘couldn’t imagine doing anything else’

BY NATALIE ANDERSON

natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Upon opening the door to AnnaCraig Boutique in downtown Salisbury, customers are met with a cascade of bright and bold colors and patterns. That’s the signature style and personality of young business owner Drew Myers.

Myers, 29, grew up in Cleveland and graduated from West Rowan High School in 2010. She spent some time working at a salon in Charlotte before making a move back home to open — at just 23 years old — a boutique in downtown Salisbury. Initially, the store was to include both a boutique and a salon, but thanks to social media and word-of-mouth advertising, Myers said the boutique “took off right when we started.”

“I didn’t like the hustle and bustle of Charlotte,” she said. “Salisbury wasn’t so bad after all.”

Myers said she was unsure what to call the store at first. She ultimately decided on “Anna-Craig” as it combines her mother’s name, Leanna, and her father’s name, Craig. Plus, “Anna-Craig” was the name her grandmother wanted for Myers before she was born.

When the pandemic arrived last March, Myers longed for Friday nights when downtown Salisbury was bustling with locals and tourists. But the pandemic provided the opportunity to expand the boutique’s online business, which continues to boom. Now, the boutique is selling just as much as it was before the pandemic.

Myers said she appreciates the small-town feel and all the community support that rests in Salisbury.

After opening in 2014, Myers ventured to Mooresville to open a location there. But that store was recently closed because online sales have taken over. Additionally, it was harder to connect with residents in the way AnnaCraig Boutique has in Salisbury.

Most of Myers’ days are filled with talking to vendors and answering emails. But she also works a lot of random hours to get things done when others aren’t there. She’s not used to slowing down.

When she’s not working, Myers enjoys hang-



Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Drew Myers operates the Anna Craig Boutique in downtown Salisbury.



Anna Craig Boutique draws shoppers looking for trendy clothing and accessories.

ing out with family, friends and her two dogs, Rigley and Marlon. She loves being on the water.

Myers appreciates the vibe that's been cultivated with new restaurants cropping up downtown and within the local community. Looking ahead years from now, she wants to see more downtown growth, including more entertainment for young people.

Her message to other young entrepreneurs? "Just go with it."

"Things will fall into place," Myers said. "Dream big. That's basically what I did. It might have sounded crazy, but I look back now and I'm glad I was."

In terms of other career aspirations, sometimes it's best "to stick to what you know."

"I think I'll stick with AnnaCraig Boutique and continuing to grow the online business," Myers said. "I couldn't imagine doing anything else."





Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Mollie Ruf, who works for Miller Davis, formerly was part of Rowan County Tourism and Downtown Salisbury Inc. Ruf had a hand in the downtown banners and farmers market pavilion on Railwalk in Salisbury.

Marketing master

A familiar face to many, Mollie Ruf never tires of promoting local businesses

BY BEN STANSELL
ben.stansell@salisburypost.com

In search of a new car, Mollie Ruf went to a Jeep dealership in Concord. It was a Sunday afternoon in 2014 and she didn't even know the dealership was open. But when Ruf started peering into a black Wrangler, a salesperson appeared.

The Wrangler looked like any other, except the large body of a white dragon snaked from passenger door to hood and the inside was covered in serpentine accents.

"I think they were having trouble selling it, so I was like, 'Well, I don't know it's got all this dragon stuff on it,' " Ruf said. "I secretly liked it, but played it down and they threw in all this free stuff."

Ruf drove the special-edition Jeep off the lot and has been cruising around Salisbury in it ever since.

People have come to recognize her for her unique car, but she's also well-known for her work with Rowan County Tourism, Downtown Salisbury, Inc. and most recently as digital services director for Miller Davis marketing agency. An ardent supporter of

local brands, Ruf has worked in those positions to promote countless businesses and organizations in Rowan County.

"There's no anonymity for me in Rowan County," Ruf said.

She wouldn't have it any other way.

Driving a dragon Jeep and working in marketing is not what Ruf would have imagined for herself when she was a shy, musically inclined kid growing up in suburban Kansas City.

While she wasn't afraid to take the stage to belt out operatic notes, Ruf found herself petrified at large family gatherings. Over-

coming her inherent shyness, Ruf said, was a years-long process. In an effort to break out of her shell, Ruf left Kansas City after high school to attend Florida Southern College. Having spent years training as an opera singer, she majored in voice performance her first semester at FSC.

Suddenly, she had a change of heart.

"I had this thing that I was always on the path to do, but it just didn't feel right," Ruf said.

Through conversations with her mom, Ruf decided that a career in public relations might suit her best. She switched her major

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Ruf spent years training as an opera singer.

and never looked back.

After graduating in 2009, Ruf followed her now husband J.R. Kessler to Salisbury, where he was carving out a path for himself in motor racing. Unable to find a local marketing job during the economic recession, Ruf worked jobs in Charlotte and Statesville for several years. She was eventually hired by Rowan County Tourism Director James Meacham to serve in a dual role for both Downtown Salisbury, Inc. and the Rowan County Tourism.

Ruf earned a reputation as an “event jedi” for the countless events she hosted in downtown Salisbury and built relationships with business owners and stakeholders at the heart of town.

She carried those relationships with her when she was hired at Miller Davis marketing agency in 2016.

“I met a lot of great people all over Rowan County during my time with

Downtown Salisbury and the Tourism Development Authority and it has helped me grow and drive business to Miller Davis because people knew my work ethic,” Ruf said. “They could count on me to get the job done and do it right. That’s something I really pride myself in.”

Ruf has continued to take on more responsibility at Miller Davis and currently oversees a digital services team of six employees who help market local organizations and businesses like the N.C. Transportation Museum and Patterson Farm.

She’s been especially busy during the COVID-19 pandemic as businesses have scrambled to establish or expand their online presence.

“It’s been full throttle,” Ruf said. “Businesses who never cared about their website before or even had a website, now all of the sudden that’s a non-negotiable. You have to have a digital presence.”

One of her proudest accomplishments, Ruf said, was working with Rowan County Tourism last year to help create business resource kits for companies struggling through the pandemic.

Ruf, who models her work ethic after her father, hopes to spend her career at Miller Davis helping the local companies she passionately supports.

“I never get bored here,” Ruf said. “There’s always something new to work on and always something new to promote.”

A self-described “workaholic,” Ruf’s dragon Jeep can be seen in the parking lot across from Miller Davis well after business hours.

When she’s not working for Miller Davis, Ruf, 34, is helping organize the Rowan Young Professionals Group to support other people like her who are seeking to advance their careers in Rowan County.



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Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Maria Sarceno founded an organization 'El Ángel que viene del cielo,' which translates to 'the angel that comes from heaven' to help underprivileged children in Guatemala.

‘Led by God’

Maria Elena Sarceno gives back to Guatemalan children, pays tribute to immigrant women

BY NATALIE ANDERSON

natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Author, activist and nonprofit founder Maria Elena Sarceno said she felt led by God to help others in need.

The Guatemalan native, 36, graduated from Colegio San Martín de Porres, which is located in Dolores, El Petén, Guatemala. There, she obtained a degree to become an auxiliary nurse. Through the connection of friends, Sarceno said, she moved to Salisbury in 2006.

And though no easy feat, since then, she has written a book paying tribute to immigrant women like herself, and

has put Salisbury on the map in Guatemala with the establishment of a nonprofit organization.

In 2012, Sarceno established a nonprofit organization aimed at helping underprivileged children in Guatemala. “El Ángel que viene del cielo,” which translates to “The angel that came from heaven,” aims to provide school supplies, health services and training sessions to the impoverished.

The organization, she said, allows generous people who care about the welfare of others to offer opportunities in areas of extreme poverty, like Guatemala. To date, she estimates, the nonprofit has touched 400 children and 100 adults.

Though Guatemala has the richest economy in Central

America, more than 60% of its population lives in poverty and nearly half of the children there face malnutrition, according to the World Bank.

“(My nonprofit) means a lot. It is my mission here on Earth,” Sarceno said. “I am very happy when I see the angelic faces of children.”

Most importantly, she said, is “working with the heart and humility.”

In 2018, Sarceno published a book titled, “Una mujer moldeando su destino,” which translates in English to “A woman shaping her destiny.”

Sarceno said the book draws its inspiration from Latin women who, “with effort and great courage, bring dreams



'God placed in my heart, even in dreams, the need to help those most in need,' Sarceno said. 'At first, I didn't know how to do it, but with the help of God and a lot of effort, little-by-little the doors were opened.'

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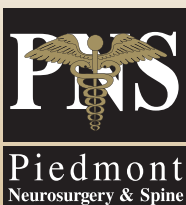
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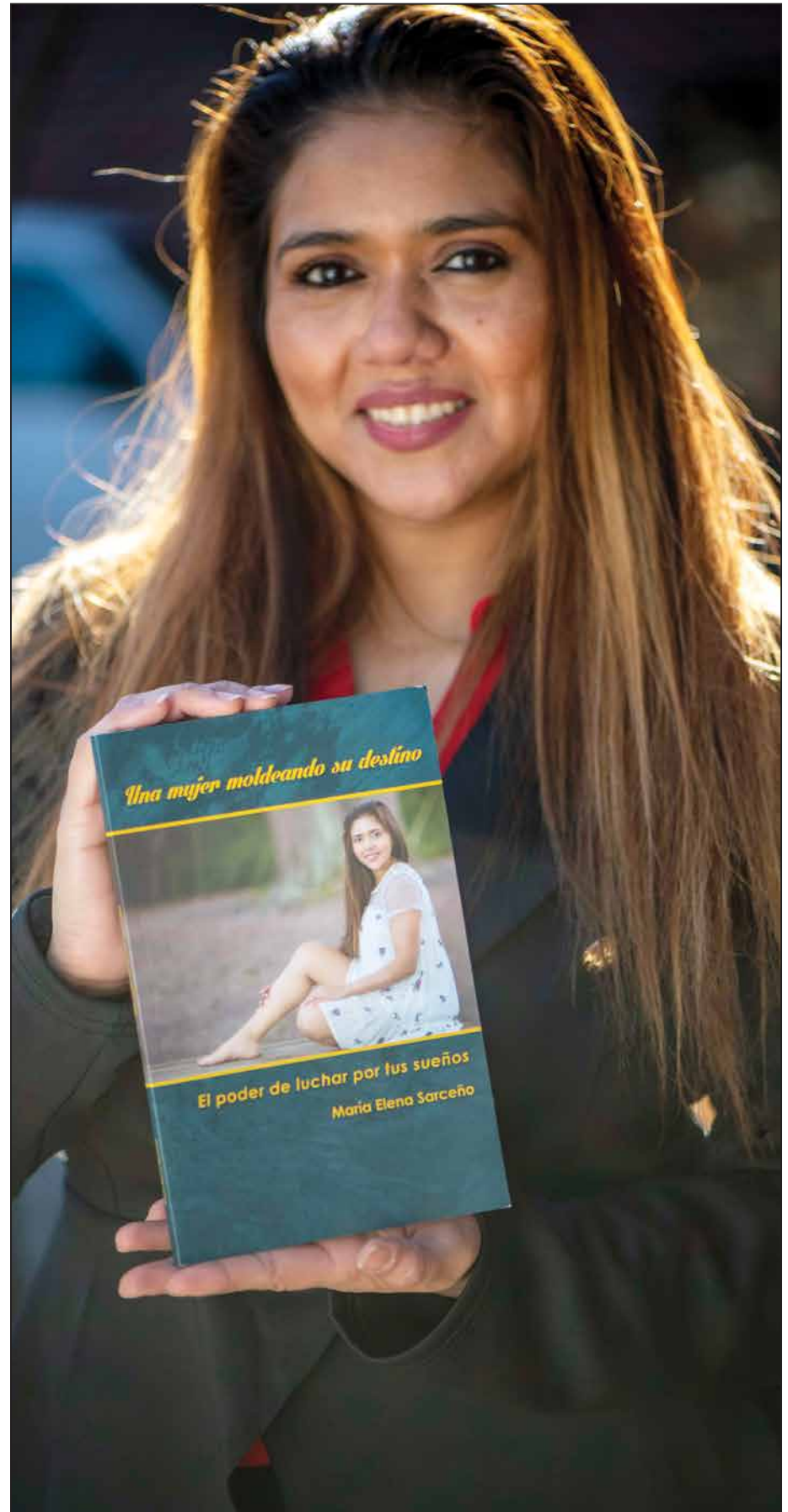
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In 2018, Sarceño published a book titled, 'Una mujer moldeando su destino,' which translates in English to 'A woman shaping her destiny.'

that at first seemed unattainable to reality.”

“Through this book, you will meet a brave woman full of faith, who trusts in her abilities and in the tools that God has made available to me throughout my life,” she said. “This work is also a tribute to immigrant women. I have the greatest respect for them because, like them, I too had to fight a thousand adversities to build a decent life for myself in the United States and offer my children a better future.”

It’s an easy read with just 10 chapters and 106 pages. The book has four editions, and Sarceno plans to release an English version one day. Proceeds from book sales are put into Sarceno’s nonprofit organization. The book costs \$20 and can be purchased online at angelquevienedelcielo.org.

Sarceno credits Salisbury with being a “quiet community full of opportunities,” with many generous people. Looking ahead, she aspires for both public and private institutions to improve their Spanish communication channels, particularly with information about COVID-19, education, health and business creation.

“The Latino community is very entrepreneurial, and we just want one chance,” she said. “Salisbury could achieve even more growth if it allows the Spanish-speaking community to have access to information in their language.”

In Sarceno’s spare time, she enjoys posing for the camera, reading, going to the gym and dancing at home. She also has two children, Helen Melany, 16, and Raymond Steve, 11.

Her message to her children? “Never say you can’t.”

“God placed in my heart, even in dreams, the need to help those most in need,” Sarceno said. “At first, I didn’t know how to do it, but with the help of God and a lot of effort, little-by-little the doors were opened.”



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Career in education

Andrew Smith worked his way from teaching to administration

BY CARL BLANKENSHIP

carl.blankenship@salisburypost.com

Andrew Smith went to China Grove-area schools, graduated from South Rowan High School and went on to earn his bachelor's degree and a master's from Wake Forest University.

He later went on to earn a master's certificate and his doctorate in educational leadership from Johns Hopkins University.

Smith, 34, began his education career teaching at East Rowan High School. He taught biology and forensics. At the time, he was interested in integrating technology with education and wanted to work his way up in administration.

When Lynn Moody became superintendent of Rowan-Salisbury Schools in 2013, he applied for an executive director of technology position with the district. At 26, he was interested but did not really expect to get the job.

He was surprised when he made it through the first and second round of interviews, but then Moody pulled him aside to tell him the position did not seem to fit him. She wanted him on her team. He later became director of innovation for the district. A few years later, his title was changed and he was promoted to assistant superintendent of transformation during the summer of 2020.

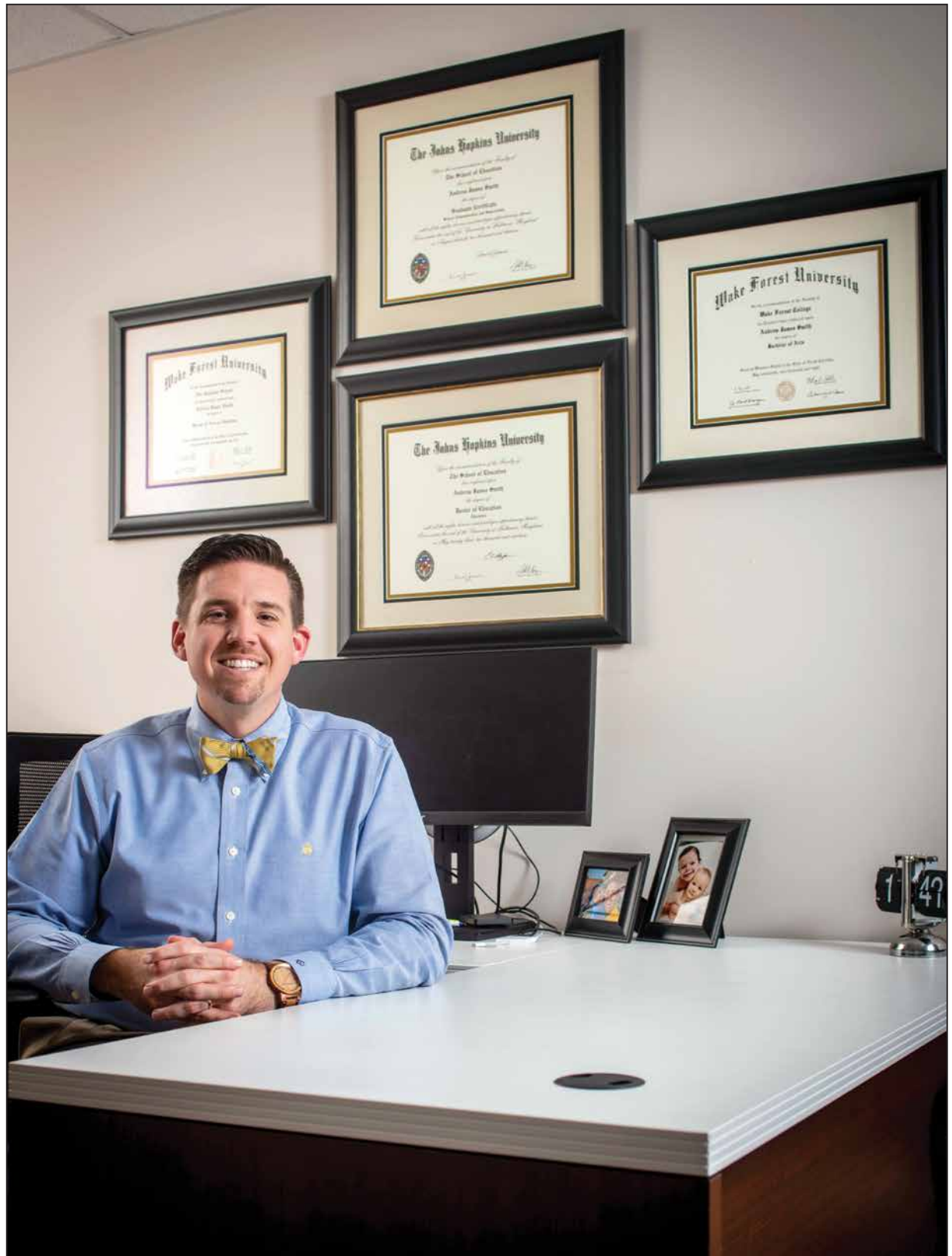
In high school, Smith wanted to be a doctor, but one of his high school mentors told him she thought he would be a teacher. He doubted her. Sitting in an organic chemistry class at Wake Forest, he remembers thinking he could explain something being outlined by the professor better.

"That's kind of a weird thought," Smith said.

He called that teacher from high school after that day and asked her more about teaching. He became particularly interested in high school students.

He laid out his career trajectory in a notebook. He planned to be a teacher for five years, become an assistant principal, a principal, director, assistant superintendent and so on until he reached the U.S. Department of Education.

He realized later, like many bright college students who go on a career path with strict goals, that life is not



Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Andrew Smith, Rowan-Salisbury School System's assistant superintendent of transformation, started his teaching career at East Rowan High School before making the move to administration.

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Smith, right, has a meeting with Superintendent Tony Watlington in the superintendent's office.

so linear or easy to plan.

"If you follow paths like that, you miss all kinds of opportunities," Smith said. "Honestly, if I just followed the path I set out for myself when I was a master's student at Wake in '09, I would not be where I am today."

Smith said he never thought he would be in such a position and that plan he made has been in the trash for a while now.

Smith lived in Winston-Salem for a time, but moved back to Landis to enroll his own kids in RSS, which he thinks is important.

He loves policy and wants to head toward the political arena later in life so he can implement policy that would have a broad impact on the country's education system, but those aspirations are far off. His third child is on the way and he is concerned with trying to support the new superintendent as well as make the district's renewal status a success.

Smith also loves to teach, and found the relationship to his students to be the most important part of that.



Smith in recent years got his private pilot's license.

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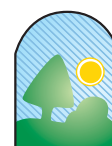
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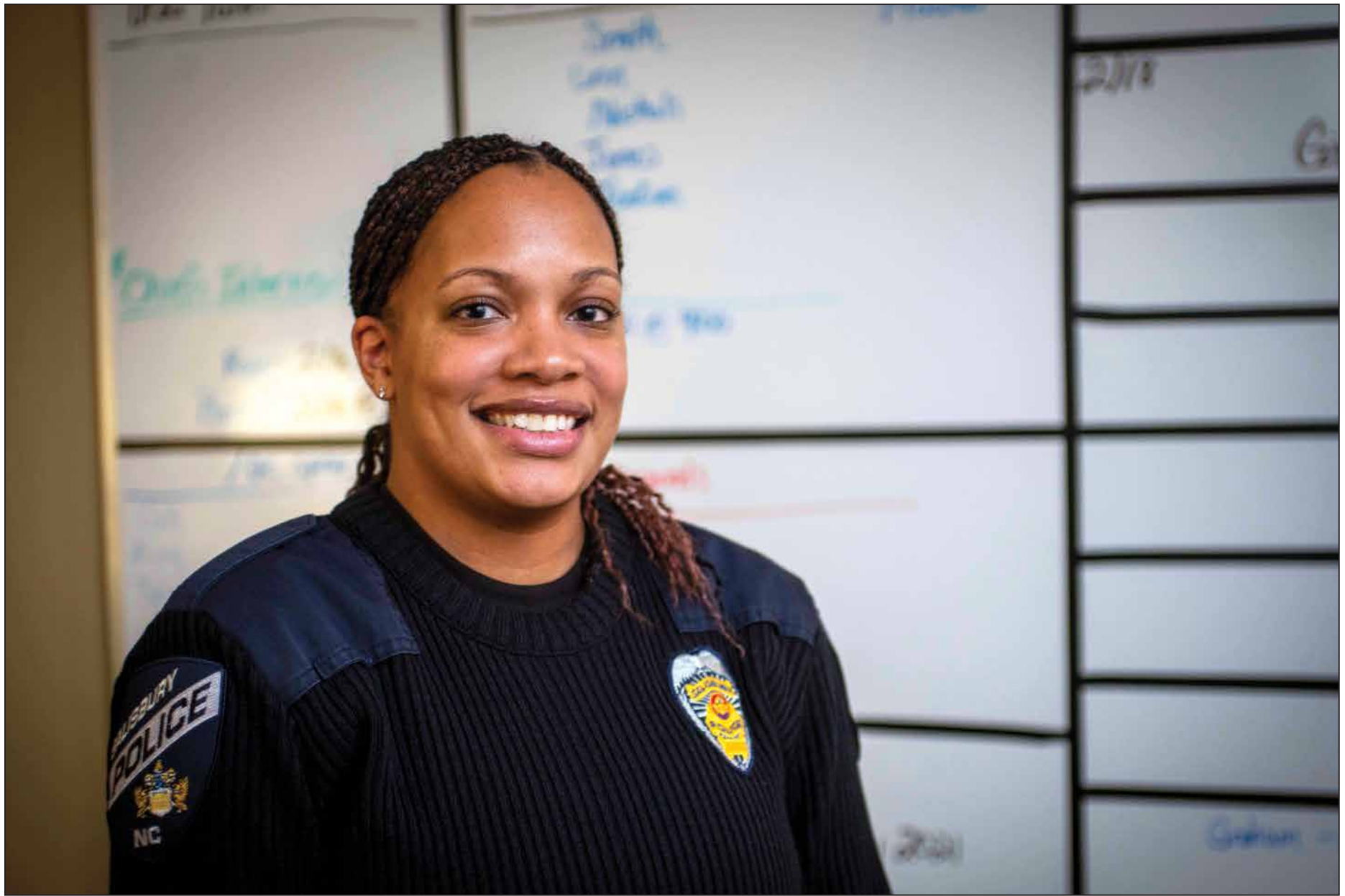
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Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Salisbury Police recruitment officer Shaneesha Smith is instrumental in bringing in new officers to the department.

Face of the department

Salisbury Police recruiter officer Shaneesha Smith proud to be ‘someone they can go to’

BY NATALIE ANDERSON

natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

Proudly serving as the face of the Salisbury Police Department, officer Shaneesha Smith is likely the first interaction for those looking to get their foot in the door in a law enforcement career.

As the daughter of parents who served in the military, Smith, 34, grew up in Charlotte but also moved around often. Though she always had an interest in serving in law enforcement, she officially entered the field only two years ago.

She spent a year and a half working at the Cabarrus

County Jail before moving to Salisbury in 2018. She was a patrol officer before switching gears to lead recruiting for the Salisbury Police Department in May.

As the recruitment manager, Smith often serves as the first face people see when considering a career with the Salisbury Police Department. As the main point of contact until hired, Smith arranges potential candidates' written tests, polygraph interview, oral panel interview and the chief's interview.

"You get to meet a lot of people and you get to see firsthand why they really want to apply here," she said. "By the time I see them with the chief's interview, I know pretty much all about them."

Leading recruiting efforts for the department allows Smith to spend weekends with her three 13-year-old triplet daughters named Bianca, Brittany and Brianna. Smith also has a twin sister who lives with her and Smith's daughters in Rockwell. Smith and her daughters enjoy spending time outdoors, hiking, swimming and paddle-boarding.

In September 2019, Smith was recognized for going above and beyond to help a stranded woman with no money or way to travel. Smith contacted a domestic violence shelter, but it was unable to admit the woman. So, she paid for a hotel room for the woman out-of-pocket. Smith said she saw the woman the following day walking to the bus station to

travel to a shelter that was able to place her.

“I was scheduled to be off work that night, but I couldn’t sleep that night knowing she needed help,” Smith said. “I thought, ‘What if that was my family member? Or what if that was me?’”

Many people are aware a career in law enforcement can be challenging, but it was particularly difficult as a Black woman working the field throughout the summer of 2020, which was defined by nationwide racial justice and police brutality protests following the death of George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis who died after an officer kept his knee on Floyd’s neck for nearly 10 minutes. A slew of protests in Salisbury quickly focused on the “Fame” Confederate monument and its perch downtown.

Gunshots were fired into the air near the monument on May 31 amidst local Black Lives Matter protests.

The following night, police officers used tear gas to disperse a crowd that became unruly after mistaking one of two men standing on the steps of St. John’s Lutheran Church for the man charged with firing gunshots the previous day.

Smith said that time was hard for her as both those protesting and those who support the “Back the Blue” movement expected her



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Because of the pandemic, recruiting has had to adapt to the challenges. Smith makes constant changes to her dry erase board as a recruit completes a task and moves through the hiring process.

to take their side.

"For me, I was able to balance it because I had to do a job," she said. "I had children who went to school and had questions. Right is right, and what's wrong is wrong. I always guarantee that I didn't take this position to go against the oath I took."

In the previous two years, Salisbury Police Chief Jerry Stokes has credited the community with a record-low crime rate, with even fewer crimes reported throughout 2020. Smith said additional hires, more patrolling and community relations events that cultivate trust and discussion are factors to commend for the reduced crime.

"People got to know us and see that every interaction with us isn't that you're going to jail," Smith said.

Smith credits the department with being representative of Salisbury's diversity. She added that diversity and reduced crime both build trust in the community.

Smith said her children, and other children, serve as her motivation for keeping on despite the challenges.

"I do it for the kids. I do it for all the other kids who look up to me or I became friends with," Smith said. "I want them to know they always have someone they can go to. You can grow up and be who you want to be. You can choose your own life."

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Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Ryan Stowe, a 2009 Salisbury High graduate and criminal defense attorney, poses in the room for Superior Court at the Rowan County Courthouse.

Helping his hometown

Ryan Stowe, the only Black criminal defense attorney in Salisbury, is growing his law practice

BY PARIS GOODNIGHT

paris.goodnight@salisburypost.com

Ryan Stowe's original plan of getting into politics didn't work out the way he thought it might, but he quickly pivoted into a more promising occupation.

He's now the principal attorney at Stowe Law Firm, PLLC on Kerr Street. The Salisbury High School graduate is practicing law in his hometown, a first-generation Rowan County attorney focusing on criminal defense, including such issues as traffic violations and DWIs.

He said he hasn't been involved in a murder case or more serious felony offenses yet, but he's ready should one come along.

Stowe said he gets the same question other defense attorneys get: "How could you defend these bad people?"

He said it's more of a question of balance.

"It's not the sum of your entire life if you do one bad thing," he said.

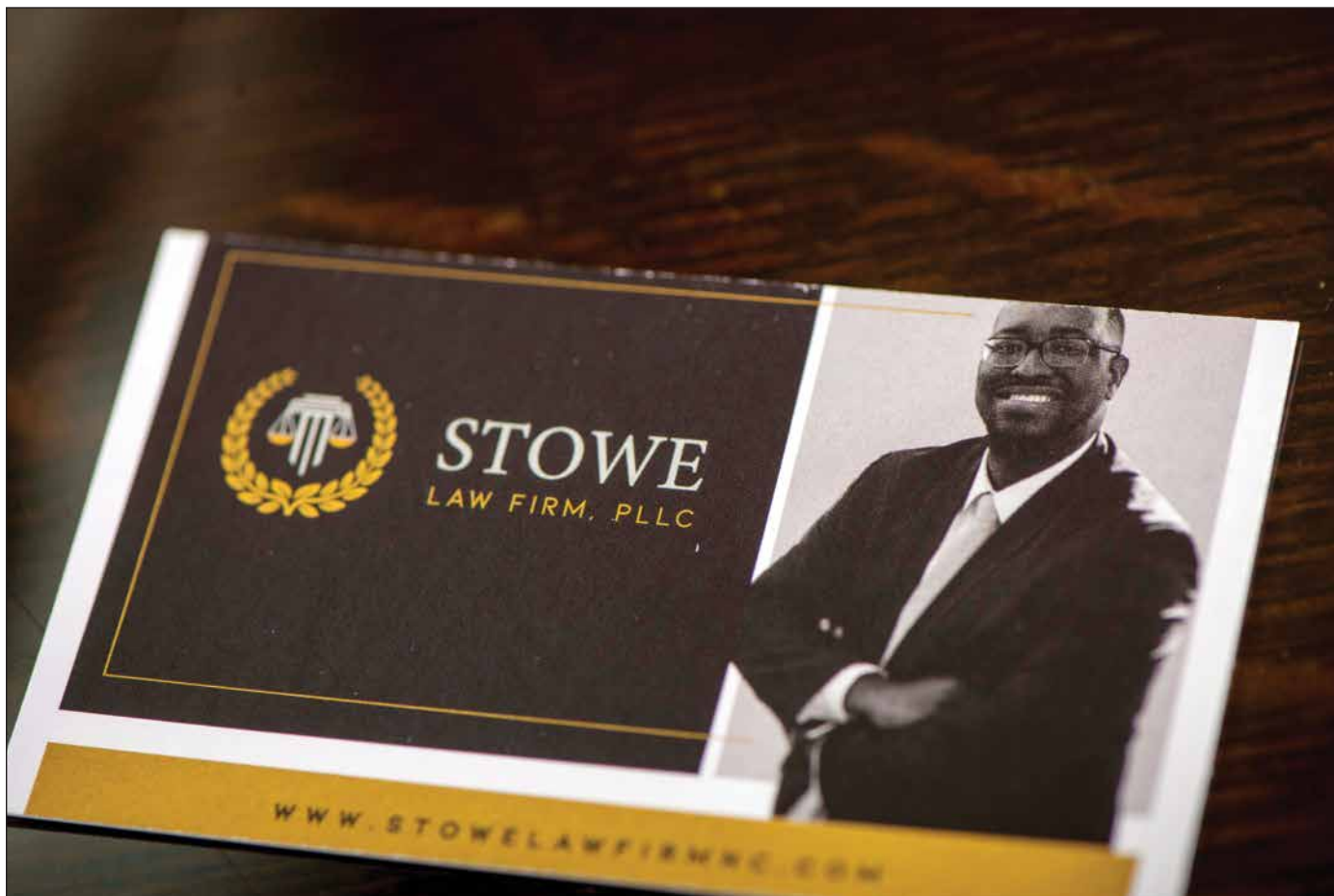
And he wants to try to help people move forward. "It's usually the worst mistake of their lives, or a lapse in judgment," he said.

Of course, COVID-19 has compounded the problem for many since court cases were put on hold. So if you were charged with a crime last year, the outcome has been delayed much longer than in other times.

"It's kind of sad," he said. "Pending cases for some means your life is on hold."

That's the kind of problems he'd like to solve as court activity slowly resumes.

When he first went off to North Carolina Central University, a historically Black institution in Durham, he didn't have such ideas. But at some point he changed his mind from going into politics to continuing to get his law degree there after completing his undergraduate degree. He also changed his mind in high school from spending more time on the Hornets football team. Stowe played one year, his junior year, but decided he wasn't going to get a college scholarship on the



football field so decided to put his energies and time elsewhere. He did play in the band for two years.

At N.C. Central, he served as senior class president, was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and was a Centennial Scholar, which is an academic program set up for men. In law school, he was president of the Phi Delta Phi legal fraternity in his third year.

He opened his firm in 2017 and moved into the criminal defense focus by random chance when a friend was charged with a low-level offense, "but he forced me to take the case," Stowe said.

Stowe said he originally came back to Salisbury instead of trying a larger city because he wanted to help the people he knew and grew up with. "Unfortunately, I'm the

only Black criminal defense attorney in town," he said.

He points out that Black attorneys only make up 4.4% of the nation's total. And many smaller, rural areas have no Black attorneys since lawyers often choose bigger metropolitan areas for their practices.

Stowe, who recently turned 30, has been listed on the National Trial Lawyer 40 under 40 list. He is a member of Rotary Club, Beta Nu Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. and the N.C. Pro Bono Honor Society.

Both of his parents still live in Salisbury — mom Sondra Teamer and dad Daniel Stowe. He's also engaged to be married to another Salisbury High School graduate, Jatara Propst.

His website includes an FAQ section and his blog, which offers details on questions such as what happens when you refuse a breathalyzer? His answer: North Carolina has very strict laws when it comes to driving while impaired and DWI refusals. As a driver on North Carolina roads, you need to be aware of some of the laws that guide road usage so you can know your rights. North Carolina has an "implied consent" law. This law requires that all drivers who are arrested for DWI submit to chemical testing IE breathalyzers. This testing determines the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) or level of drugs in their blood.

You can find more details about Stowe and see complete answers to such questions at stowelawfirmnc.com,

Making an impact

Whitney Wallace-Williams fueled by 'innate desire to fight for the underdog'

BY NATALIE ANDERSON

natalie.anderson@salisburypost.com

From her work with a decades-old law firm and downtown leadership positions to her family's generous financial contributions to charity and the newly established cancer center, local attorney Whitney Wallace-Williams draws her inspiration from her innate desire to help people.

Wallace-Williams, 39, spent a decade away from home, which included her time at UNC-Chapel Hill, where she obtained a sociology degree in 2004, and Wake Forest University School of Law. She spent a year in Austin, Texas, and even spent some time in France. While in Austin, Wallace-Williams worked at a consumer advocacy organization fighting on behalf of wronged customers.

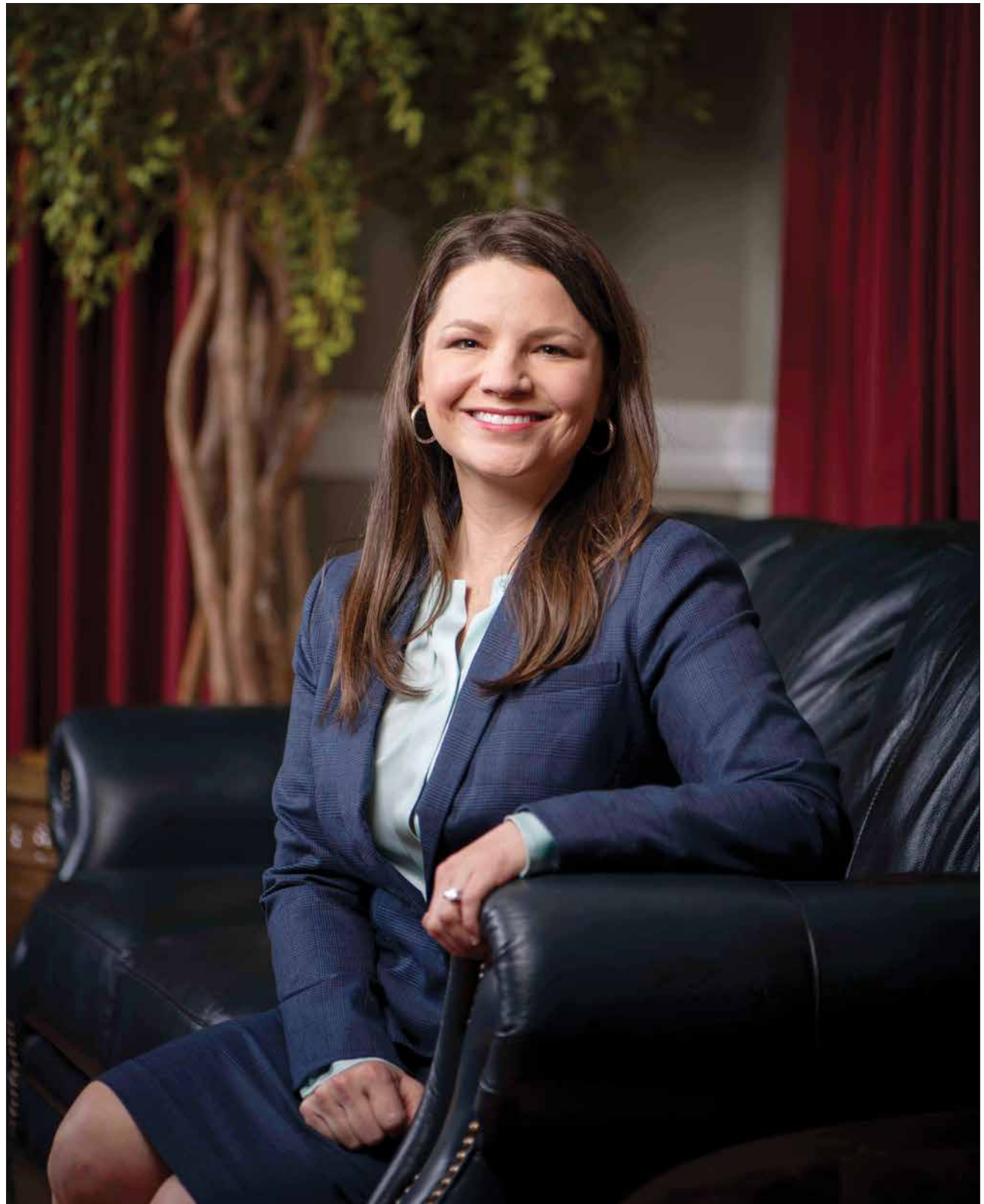
But she attributes her loyalty to Salisbury, where both sides of her family reside, as the reason she returned and joined the Wallace & Graham law firm in 2008. The firm, founded in 1981 by her mother, Mona Lisa Wallace, addresses litigation across the globe, ranging from worker's compensation issues to civil cases.

"I grew to realize that Salisbury has everything I need in order to live a fulfilling life: close family connections, the best friends I could ever ask for, a challenging and rewarding career that helps others and a community that I love and feel passionate about," she said.

Recently, Wallace-Williams joined her mother and Bill Graham by becoming a junior partner at the firm. Her most recent cases have been related to worker's compensation and civil litigation. Some of Wallace-Williams' cases have made their way to the North Carolina Industrial Commission, in addition to briefs and arguments made in the North Carolina Court of Appeals and Supreme Court.

Though Wallace-Williams questioned in college which career path would allow her to help people — with personality tests suggesting she be a social worker — joining her parents with a career in law seemed like the natural fit.

"I have an innate desire to fight for the underdog," Wallace-Williams said. "It's a natural fit for me because I'm allowed to naturally do what I'm inclined to anyway."



Photos by Jon C. Lakey, for the Salisbury Post

Whitney Wallace-Williams is a partner in the Salisbury-based Wallace and Graham law firm started by Mona Lisa Wallace in 1981.



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Wallace-Williams said there are too many cases and clients to name who, over the years, have made a special impact. But gestures such as breakfast and lunch deliveries to the firm, surprise homemade gifts and hugs from clients serve as rewarding reminders of the lives she's been able to touch. Additionally, Wallace-Williams said she enjoys being able to tell her clients to relax and allow her to "do all the worrying and hard work for them."

She's the mother to Annie, 7, and Ella, 4, and wife to Brannon Williams, a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran from Georgia. The running joke in her household, she said, is that her only hobby is community activism. That's evident with the many hats she wears.

In addition to her work at the firm, Wallace-Williams has also dedicated her time to various local boards and commissions. She's been a prominent figure on the Downtown Salisbury Inc. Board since 2015, the Empire Hotel Redevelopment Task Force, the Economic Development Committee and an ongoing downtown beautification project called "Paint the Pavement."

In addition to their work at the firm, the Wallace and Graham family have contributed funds to the ongoing Bell Tower Green Park project and had a new cancer center

with Novant Health named in their honor due to a substantial donation. The Wallace Cancer Center is a 32,000-square-foot-facility that now allows Novant to serve patients locally rather than referring patients to other locations for certain cancer-related treatments.

And with the "Wallace & Graham Gives" program that started in 2020, the family has since provided tens of thousands of dollars to local businesses, frontline workers, local families and the homeless population due to the impact of the pandemic. One arm of the program also provides annually a total of \$15,000 in scholarships to six Rowan County high school seniors.

Though the contributions have made a lasting impact on the community, Wallace-Williams said volunteering has given her much in return, including both personal and professional growth. Her favorite part of volunteering is the building of friendships and relationship along the way. Wallace-Williams said she loves the passion among residents of Salisbury, and she's inspired to serve by her belief in the city.

"I love the intimacy and camaraderie we share living in a small community," she said. "There are opportunities to make a difference here if someone chooses."



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