



winners by Jane Bouterse
finalists by Shawn Edmonds

Here they are.... You voted and the results are in!

It's a difficult task, but we were up for the job at hand: find the most beautiful women in Texarkana, both inside and out. But we needed your help—so we asked you for nominations, threw in a few nominations of our own, and you voted on the winners. Excellent work.

The votes are in! You have made your choices! With over 8,000 votes cast, we know you were excited about the wonderful women you voted on -- and you will see what a fabulous job you did!

So, get your reading cap on and find out why these women were voted the Top 5 in three age categories. I hope you enjoy their stories.

And be thinking about what Handsome Man you would like to nominate for next year's contest -- the 20 Most Handsome Men in the Ark-La-Tex!



An Alphabet Soup to Live By... *Natalie Nichols*

Winner | Category 1 | Ages 21-35

The letters “N” and “P” play a vital role in the life of this Winner of the Beautiful Women Category One--Ages 21-35. Her name is Natalie Nichols, and this petite wife, mother, student and explorer is a powerhouse of New ideas and energy. Her 4'11 1/2", 100 pound frame stands tall as she talks about her husband, Chet, an Air Force veteran and RRAD employee. Natalie, a Benton, Louisiana, resident at the time and Chet in Corpus Christi met on Match.com. Her description spoke as plainly as she could, something like: *“I have two kids. I'm a packaged deal. If you're not interested in that, don't contact me.”* He did establish contact, and the first time he met the kids, Natalie's youngest son got sick and threw up on him. *“He helped me clean it up.”* The surprise is still evident in Natalie's voice. *“I knew right then--he was a keeper.”*

Chet and Natalie, a Houston native reared in Point Blank, Texas, were married in Texarkana, the home of his family, and began the odyssey, thanks to the Department of Veterans Affairs, that comprised their first years of marriage. Mackenzie Lewis Reagan and Zackary Nathaniel Reagan were joined by Benjamin Blake (B B retains the sound of Bebe, Chet's mom and Texarkana leader) and Etta Kathryn Nichols. The children now 15, 10, 4, and 3 have been named thoughtfully. According to Natalie, their names sound presidential, and for this new student of political science the potential for such an accomplishment is real.

Politics and competition have become constants in Natalie's life. She now attends Texas A & M University, Texarkana, and is studying political science. *“I never voted before in my life until the last Presidential Election,”* she explains. Coming from a small town, Natalie had become convinced that the existence of the Electoral College meant no one's vote ever really counted, and almost 30 years had to pass before she changed her mind. Sarah Palin's speech at the 2008 Republican Presidential Convention convinced her. *“When I heard her speak at the Convention, I thought ‘She is a woman, a wife and a mother, and she and I share the same values. I didn't know women like that existed.’”* From that moment on, Natalie has assumed a more active role in learning and participating in the political processes. *“Growing up in small town America, I was accustomed to hearing people [dismiss things] as ‘That's*

just politics.’” Natalie's objections to that dismissal went unaddressed until Palin's speech. Finally, she heard the conservative ideals in which she believed expressed by a woman on a national platform: Frugality in personal and government expenditures; Opposition to abortion; Support of a strong national defense, and common sense decisions from an open and honest government, i.e. no back-door deals.

Since that time, she has “dived in head first.” Natalie has become a student not only in the classroom but also on the web. She and Chet have created www.politicalintegritynow.com “as a way to communicate political news, commentaries, and political analysis, from a conservative perspective, to the general public.” Her conservative views are shared by other women in the Smart Girl Politics group she coordinates for Texas District 4. Her website www.texarkanatea.ning.com provides information for Texarkana's TEA party participants as well as the newly formed Bowie County Patriots. Her leadership in all of these projects has proved invaluable. Now she is expanding her political participation by filing as a Conservative *“Republican to run for Bowie County Clerk in the November 2 general election.”* The “Ps” of Presidential, Palin, Politics and Participation certainly influence her thoughts and actions.

In addition to politics, Natalie Nichols dedicates substantial energies to her family. Although she and Chet take part in the Volunteers in Preschool (VIP) program at their church (First Baptist, Moores Lane), their most effective influence might well be in the examples they provide for their children. Natalie acknowledges she is not someone afraid of admitting her mistakes, and she illustrates that point by admitting her early examples were poor. Growing up, Natalie was

a gifted student and a headstrong teenager. When her parents decided that she and her boyfriend needed to be separated, Natalie was devastated. How could she possibly be worth much of anything without him? Their response, to show how responsible they were, was for Natalie to get pregnant. One month shy of her 18th birthday she gave birth to Mackenzie Lewis. What followed was staying at home and a high school graduation via correspondence, a marriage, another child, Zackary, and a divorce. Natalie admits that her choices have helped her find the right path in her life, albeit challenging. *“But I do look for every opportunity to help other girls see that life can be a whole lot easier if we have all of our ducks in a row before we take on such an adult responsibility.”*

With that goal in mind, when Natalie and her family lived in Boise, Idaho (a favorite place) she and Chet allowed their two younger children to participate in “The Baby Borrowers,” an NBC reality series in which teen couples who think they are ready for marriage and parenting responsibilities volunteer to literally “grow up overnight”. For three days they care for babies (6-11 months old), then toddlers, sassy pre-teens/ “tweens” and a family pet arrive next, followed by teenagers and concluding with a senior citizen, some in need of health care. Throughout the process, the volunteer couples are carefully monitored by a host of support personnel, including mental health professionals, so none of the subjects are ever in harm's way. The show's creators have observed that “Tested by the everyday ups



and downs of taking care of others and maintaining a relationship, most of the teens find themselves looking at all of their relationships and notions of parenthood in a new light."

Natalie notes that, even though she was criticized for allowing her children to participate, she has been encouraged by the number of teenagers, boys and girls, whose lives have been affected by the program. "Many of [the girls] were so wrapped up in what their boyfriends thought of them, that they were making choices that they wouldn't ordinarily make, and weren't happy with themselves." One year after the show was filmed, Natalie attended a reunion of the show's participants only to discover that none of the show's couples were together any longer. At least they had some idea of what was ahead for them based on their choices, Natalie concedes, and given some perspective they can be better prepared for the "speed bumps and pot holes in the road ahead...[making the choice to get pregnant] doesn't mean that we can't get ahead, it just means we have to slow down and drive very carefully.... This was the experience of a lifetime, and I would do it over again in a heartbeat." In spite of being vilified in the press for allowing her children to participate, Natalie was grateful. Her choices here were consistent with her personal philosophy, "As long as I know [the reasons for my decisions], I don't care what anyone else thinks."

For Natalie Nichols the opportunity

to be able to say "I am you, and I've gone down the road you're thinking of going down," and to help the girls understand that they can have self-esteem on their own was invaluable. The admission of her mistakes has provided her a **Persistent, Purposeful** direction to benefit the lives of many young people.

Persistence and Purpose are second nature to Natalie along with the **Pursuit of Perfection**. Once she makes up her mind, the decision is made. The next question is how to implement her choices. **Passion** and the desire for **Perfection** are the engines which drive her. "I don't really believe in impossible." But possessing a strong character can also be a double-edged sword, which Natalie readily admits. "I don't know everything, but I am not fearful of finding answers. I am one of those people who will go to bed, but there is no sleep for me if I have been asked a question and I don't know the answer. I have to research everything. Being a **Perfectionist** creates a lot of work and stress for me." Going back to school provides a perfect example because nothing but a 100 will do for Natalie, even though she has a 3.85 overall GPA. The results are evident: for the semester she has just completed at Texarkana College she earned a proud place on the **President's List**. "My kids always check on my grades," she laughs. "They expect me to get 100, like I expect to get 100. The most challenging idea for me is accepting the fact that 90 is just as good as 100. I stress out if I get a

low A. My husband says 'No one will ever know.' But I know. I hear younger kids are sometimes happy with a C, but it's just not in me."

Fortunately, Natalie can separate her goals for herself from those she has for her children. **Perfection** has to be their choice. They can easily see the results of its pursuit in so many of Natalie's jobs well done—from the creations of her crafts to her web sites; the anxiety which that same **Perfection** produces is also evident. "I just try to stress to the kids 'Do the best you can do in whatever you do. If the best they can do is 70, and I know that's the best they can do, I can accept that. Before I had kids, my expectations of myself were the same. I had to learn to expect from them their best, not my best.'"

Now Natalie has **Plans** for earning as many degrees as are available locally, then relying on satellite classes to go as far as she can go. Her **Passions** for her family, **Public Service** and education seem enough to occupy her time, but there is still more. At some point, she does need to "get away" from the many demands on her time, energies and intellect.

Lake Wright Patman and its adjoining campgrounds provide her just the local opportunities to **Play**, which she enjoys. However, she remembers another place. Her green eyes dance with delight almost as though she is standing at the trailhead feeling the wind, smelling the earth and looking as far as she can see down the

Top 5 Finalists | Category 1 | Ages 21-35

Amber Lawrence hopes she is passing on the love for volunteerism to others much like her father passed it on to her.

"My father ... is a very giving and encouraging man. I feel that through my community service that I am hopefully giving the encouragement to help someone succeed," says Amber.

Amber has been active in the Texarkana volunteer community for several years. She recently served on Texarkana's Race for the Cure committee. It was at a planning meeting that Amber had her "Aha moment." Amber heard a breast cancer survivor's story about the impact the Race for the Cure had on this woman's life and Amber realized that her role in this event was a vital one.

"A survivor shared her courageous story and [she told] how on the day of the race, the sea of pink gave her the strength and

encouragement she needed to help her in the fight," says Amber. "It was then that I thought 'Wow,' in some small way I am helping to make these women stronger," she adds.

Amber also loves participating in the Junior League of Texarkana's 'Shoes for the Soul.' The Junior League partners with Payless Shoes to provide new shoes for children at the beginning of the school year.

"... [T]he Junior League 'Shoes for the Soul' project is one of my favorites because we focus on women and children... The children are thrilled to have the shoes for their school year," says Amber.

Amber thinks that everyone can serve and there is a great benefit for all those involved.

"I feel that serving and volunteering is more than community service. It is about serving anyone that needs a helping hand... Giving always feels better than receiving," says Amber. "The [volunteer] experiences make me want to do more for the community," she adds.



Heather Beach loves the feeling of being able to help people, whether in a big event such as Texarkana's Race for the Cure or in a smaller setting like the Randy Sams' Outreach Shelter.

"... [W]hen I see an opportunity to help out or support a good cause, I do everything I can to [do so]," says Heather.

Heather has experienced a real "Aha moment" through her work at Randy Sams'. She is amazed at how the Texarkana community rallies to donate food and to serve to help its citizens. Heather also enjoys interacting with the people she is serving.

"The people [at Randy Sams'] are so grateful that you can help and it is great being able to find out about them and their lives... I enjoy being a part of that," says Heather.

Heather also loves working with the Susan G. Komen



shadowed trail which loses itself in the big mountains, so accessible when they lived in Boise. Hiking the mountain trails became one of her family's favorite activities, and most of the hikes began at their campsite. [No wonder she was willing to transfer her entire family to Idaho.] The Nichols Family enjoys camping out which provides a wonderful opportunity to reconnect—listening to the quiet and talking to each other, not to mention the camp food fare. "I bait my own hook," she adds, as she notes how popular fishing is with her family. A campout on Lake Wright Patman certainly provides plenty of opportunity for baiting her own hook and catching her own fish, but wonder how she feels about cleaning her own catch? Considering Natalie's willingness to tackle whatever problems are thrown her way, I'm betting she gets the cleaning done before the other fisherpersons have sorted their catch.

Play is serious for her, and the results of her efforts are evident in her prim, attractive frame. Natalie and Chet lift weights about five nights a week. Now Chet is 6 feet tall and 200+ pounds. Since he selects the weights that Natalie lifts, she tends to look around the gym for an average sized guy and determines what weights he is using. "Then I tell my hubby, 'Give me that weight.' I gauge my success," Natalie grins, "by how well I do with the guy's weights (*competitive spirit?*). If I see a girl in the gym, I look at the weights she is using, too, because that is the weight that I will be sure not to use. I'll wear

pink, but I won't lift it."

Pink is a color Natalie wears attractively, but she depends on her husband's assistance in choosing her wardrobe. Because of her small size, finding clothing which she can wear requires both **patience** and **perseverance**. Chet appears to muster enough of that for both of them. "I just take *him with me when I go shopping because I usually have to take back what I bring home.*" Natalie admits. She does, however, have sewing skills which come in handy in taking the tucks and placing the pins. Like so many of her projects, this is just another exercise in finding a way to get the job done and practicing **Patience**—both truly useful tools in achieving her goals.

And...Natalie's goals are substantial and challenging. She knows the **Pride** of making successful choices:

In her family: "My husband, Chet is the most loving and caring person I have ever met....He truly makes me want to be a better person and I can't thank him enough for that positive influence on my life, and the lives of our children."

In the classroom: Out of every class in which she is enrolled she picks a student she can ask "What did you do?" while learning the meaning of *learning* and being hungry for more.

In public service: She notes how disinterest in government was ingrained in her in high school. Even on the college campus she encountered an instructor who said, "I would never go into public service. I don't

know why those people do that." She is angered but sees clearly the importance of **Passion** for what you are doing.

In becoming involved: Web sites, Blogs, interest groups, twittering, voting, church, exercising leadership—She can **Participate** in all of them and strive to make the world a better place for today and tomorrow.

Discoveries and responsibilities... None of which can be handled without **Prayer**. Natalie writes, "I do not regret the choices that I made, because fortunately God has a plan for all of us, and the mistakes that I made have helped me find the right path in life...There is a reason for everything, and we have to have our blinders off and see what plan He has in store for us... God doesn't give us more than we can handle. That doesn't mean that we won't face many struggles, but those hard times are building blocks that ultimately make us better people."

Natalie Nichols is, indeed, a Beautiful Woman. Her life exemplifies how to live not only for her children but for all of those with whom she comes in contact. The "Ps" in her life: **Pride**, **Passion**, **Perseverance**, **Public Spirit**, **Perfection**, and, yes, **Pain** and **Prayer** can be guideposts for all of us.

Her favorite quotation: "If not you, Who? If not now, When?" ~Unknown

There is no doubting the **Why?** of her choice.

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Foundation during Texarkana's Race for the Cure. She loves the interaction with the other women and families who volunteer for this "great cause."

"It brings a warm feeling to your heart when you can take part in something this big with your community," says Heather.

Heather also values being able to see the difference her individual service and that of the Texarkana community makes in the lives of breast cancer patients, survivors and their families.

"To see the survivors able to participate shows the impact fundraisers like Race for the Cure have on these diseases," says Heather.

Because Heather has participated in a variety of community service activities – both large and small – she hopes to inspire others. She encourages everyone to get involved in volunteerism in some way.

"I feel every person can make a difference, big or small; the impact would not be the same without them," says Heather.

Stacy James Mayo started competing in pageants as a teenager because she wanted to sing. She soon realized that competing in the Miss America system was about much more than her talent.

Miss America encourages "community service, giving back, making a difference..." Stacy was hooked. As Miss Texas 2001, Stacy championed Alzheimer's Awareness. It was

through promoting this platform that she experienced her "Aha Moment" about serving others.

"I will always remember a moment as Miss Texas when speaking on Alzheimer's disease. A second grade girl told me her grandmother had this disease and couldn't remember her name," she says.

Stacy took time to visit with this little girl and assured her that her grandmother still loved her. "[K]nowing that I helped this little girl through the moment is a joy," Stacy says.

Stacy turned that moment into a call to lifelong service in the Texarkana community and throughout Texas. She and her husband, Ben, co-chaired the 2010 Texarkana Heart Ball. Their efforts helped raise over \$85,000 for the American Heart Association. She also helped produce a video with Bryan Jefferies on the impact of heart disease.

"It was one of the most humbling and rewarding experiences I've had regarding my community service efforts," says Stacy.

Stacy hasn't forgotten her first love, the vehicle that started her on the journey to serve – singing. She loves to sing at events like the Heart Ball and for the Alzheimer's Association.

"I can choose a themed song to make an impact," says Stacy. Stacy sums up her journey from a teenager who just wanted to sing to a woman who loves to serve her community like this, "I love volunteering... it's using my gifts God has given me in a positive way... It brings people together in a world where there's a lot of apathy and a lack of compassion."

Everyone has a story, but not everyone chooses to use that story to

benefit others. **Tracy Lilly** actively seeks to use her story to help the struggling people she encounters almost daily.

"I want to know my story has inspired people and [to show] that people inspire me everyday to be a better person that I was the day before," says Tracy.

Tracy has struggled with an eating disorder and depression so she understands what the devastating results of these two disorders can be. She feels that those who suffer from these mental illnesses "need to be treated with the utmost prospect."

Tracy is an encourager to others who share her experiences. Her "Aha moment" came when she encountered a woman who had become hopeless. Tracy had shared her battle story in ALT Magazine, so the woman contacted her.

"One afternoon I got an email from someone I had never met. [A]fter a few days of emailing back and forth, she told me things that only I would understand," says Tracy.

The woman was suicidal, but because of her conversations with Tracy and Tracy's willingness to listen and support this stranger during a dark time that "she's still here." Tracy and this onetime stranger are still in contact. Tracy credits this newfound friend for creating an "Aha moment" in her life.

Not all Tracy's volunteer time is so intense. She loves working in the VIP program at First





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Baptist Church. This program oversees the church's nursery program.

"It's just fun and a little bit of your time goes a long way... for parents who wouldn't be able to attend church without childcare," says Tracy.

Tracy uses her service at First Baptist to show that everyone can make a difference through volunteerism. Whether it is childcare at a local church, listening to those who need an ear or starting a specific program, everyone's service is important to the Texarkana community.

"You can give your ideas [for service projects] to people at your church to start a program or you can just use your telephone – call someone you think might be struggling... and ask them if you might pray with them....," says Tracy. "Just do what you know you can. Every little bit helps and it's returned to you tenfold."

Tracy does encourage people to see out someone to talk to about depression or an eating disorder. Tracy tells people to "please consult a professional," but she also urges people to just talk to someone who will listen.

"I have made it my life's mission to protect people against the devastating results of eating disorders," says Tracy.

Tracy also reminds readers... "you and you alone are worth living the life God has intended for you."



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Gone to Guatemala...

Rae Shelia Thigpen

Winner | Category 2 | Ages 36-50

"If I can help somebody as I pass along,
then my living shall not be in vain."

A wish...a choice...an action.

For Rae Shelia Thigpen, the ALT Beautiful Woman Winner in Category 2, Ages 36-50, the desire to "help somebody" has been her lifelong motivation. That desire prompted this Jackson, Mississippi, native to enroll in the science program at Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi. This baby girl in a family of five children—one sister and three brothers—preferred staying near home, so she left Tougaloo after two years to enroll in Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi. Tougaloo had helped her define what she wanted to do with her life; Mississippi College had a nursing program. For Rae Shelia Thigpen, becoming a nurse provided her the opportunity to make her wish her reality, so she chose to make the change and earn her nursing degree. In 1982, that dream came true. She graduated from Mississippi College with her BS in Nursing. Immediately, Rae began working at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Her first charge was on the medical surgical floor, but she was there only three months before transferring to the operating room. She had the talent and the desire to be in the middle of the action—the operating room; therefore, she made the move.

As she talks about her choices, Rae's arms slice the air from side to side. With palms upright and fingers moving, one quickly understands that this lady would be hard put to communicate without the motion of her entire body to assist her. Her body language is determined and enthusiastic; her firm, clear voice reinforces her commitment with a kind of calm confidence. Rae Shelia Thigpen is a presence. Her six foot frame commands attention when she walks into the room, yet her words are preceded by her easy smile and outstretched hand. No one can doubt that she has arrived, and she knows what she is "about." Understandably, her nickname "The Boss" has been logical to apply, yet her apparent knowledge and dedication act as reassurance that "all is well." Rae is here now. Methodically, she proceeds to get the job done.

No doubt these traits endeared her to those decision-makers at the University of Mississippi Medical Center when they moved her so quickly to the Operating Room. Her speech slows a bit as she pauses for a remembering sigh. "OR is a

challenge every day," she recalls. "It is one thing to move from lab animals to the human body (she spreads her hands as though in awe of what she has experienced). *The Operating Room is one of those things that you know instantly is a good fit or 'no way I can do this. I got the chance to go to the OR after nursing school, and I found my niche.'*" Indeed, the fit must have been a perfect one, as Rae soon became the Operating Room's Nursing Educator. Although she relished the job she was doing...somehow she wanted and needed more!

One of Rae's nursing friends had been recruited to move to Dallas, Texas—a long way from Mississippi, but she encouraged Rae to contact her recruiter. The move worked. The recruiter found a job for Rae at St. Michael Hospital in Texarkana, Arkansas. Rae's first reaction? "Where is this hospital? St. Michael? Texarkana? Where is that?" Rae's mom, Luvera Thigpen, a social worker who liked to keep her "chickens" together, observed, "Rae, you're not going there. You've always been a homebody." This time, however, Rae surprised her. Two friends and Rae located Texarkana on the map and made the trip to St. Michael for Rae's interview. "Almost before I got back home," Rae laughs (her hands move upward as she shrugs her shoulders), "I got the call to come back." She did, and with St. Michael in Texarkana (exactly 278 miles from Jackson, MS) she found both an answer to her calling and a constantly changing career. In 1990, Rae Thigpen was appointed Assistant Director of Surgery and

in 1992 was named Director of Surgery and Anesthesia Services for the Christus St. Michael Health System. During her 20+ years in Texarkana, she has been a vital part of many changes: St. Michael became part of the Christus System; the hospital moved (almost overwhelming to conceive much less assist in co-ordinating) from Texarkana, AR to its substantial campus off I-30 in Texarkana, TX, and she has yet another new job. Currently, Rae is the Regional Compliance Officer for Christus St. Michael. "I make sure," she explains, "that the hospital is in compliance with federal, state, and local laws as they relate to running a hospital." Every day she reaffirms the appropriateness of "The Boss."

The title, however, has been transferred to the hospital's environment. It was earned in a totally different locale where Rae Thigpen realizes—for eight days every year-- the opportunity to pair her wish with lots of action. The location is Guatemala; the theater is the operating room; the patients are those whose needs are great and largely unmet. But—backwards to the beginning---

In 1996, Rae Thigpen was approached by Dr. Tim Trone who knew she had moved from the old hospital to the new. Her organizational and nursing skills were sorely needed by a medical missionary team from First Baptist Church, Moores Lane. The composition of the team varied from year to year, but their mission never changed—for eight days to deliver health care to those who had none, and Guatemala was the chosen country. Rae had to ask a few questions rather than say an immediate "No." "I am horribly afraid of bugs, so my first question





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was *'What about the bugs?'* Rae was assured mosquito nets would be necessary; otherwise, the bugs were not an issue. The more aware of the medical services needed, the more determined she became to go—just for one year, though. Although she had never flown out of the country, she decided to give it a try. From the beginning her job was to set up the surgical suite. *"I was so naïve. I thought all I would have to do would be to clean up the hospital's operating room."* Getting to that suite in San Raymundo, Guatemala, became the initial challenge. Rae just prayed, *"God, I don't know what I'm doing here, but I know you do."* Landing in Guatemala was frightening; however negotiating narrow, steep mountain roads, required continued conversation, *"Lord, if I die, they won't even find my body."*

The real surprise came when the team arrived at their site. *"When I got to the clinic,"* Rae explains, still with shades of shock in her voice as her hands begin to replicate their original busyness, *"the [surgical] room was filled with desks and filing cabinets. The windows in the building were wide open with flies and bugs flying in and out, and chickens and other animals moved from room to room. All I could do was pray, 'God, it's time for you to show up.'"* Rae wasn't waiting, however. Immediately, she began taking everything out and going from room to room. Others watching her soon joined in the moving. *"The local people were great!"*

Moving her hands above her head,

Rae explains, *"We hung the lights in the OR. Someone laid down on the table so we could get the OR lights centered."* After two days, believe it or not, the operating room was ready for a busy and long six days of use. Generally, according to Rae, each day about 10-12 general surgeries and gynecological procedures are performed. From the beginning—a MUST for Rae has been that the team's Guatemalan patients *"will be treated the same way we treat people at home, and the team members have respected that. If someone goes into the OR without shoe covers or masks, the surgeons will say, 'Rae doesn't want you in there like that.'"*

"Why blame it on me?" Rae's hands are raised as though they are asking the question of the surgeons. *"You don't want them in there like that either....a smile, a pause and a nodding head....I'm kinda' a stickler about that."* Although her job assignments for most of her nursing career have been administrative, Rae Thigpen remembers well the lessons of her earliest days in nursing and is fearless about demanding not only the strictest medical measures but also respect for and sensitivity to the patients the team attends. With justifiable pride she notes that for the past 13 years and in spite of limited resources, the medical team *"has never had a patient infected and never lost a patient because of what we did."* The respect she feels for the patients served is evident as she talks about how thrilling it is when they sometimes

return—now healthy—to visit with the team and, once again, express their thanks. *"These are a resilient people. They speak Spanish, and they don't know us. Many of them are separated from their families by long distances and sometimes by treatment. They have to trust us. There is a language, however, that doesn't need words. Our patients can see it in our eyes and feel it in our touch. They do trust us."* There is no doubting in the tone of her voice and in the erectness she assumes that Rae is well aware of the responsibility of that trust and considers it a gift to be nurtured and cherished. She also understands that trust is an important component in the healing process, so she seeks—in every way she knows—to build upon that choice. *"I just do what I'm trained to do,"* Rae says. Her usually strong voice now softer. *"They call me 'The Boss,'"* and she laughs comfortably.

The number of those who have been helped as a result of Rae Thigpen's poor math is significant. Her original commitment to the medical mission was for one year only, but the summer of 2010 will be her fourteenth year to make the trip to Guatemala. Many things have changed since that first hair-raising trip. When the trips began, volunteers had to stay in the homes of locals, as no other accommodations were available. Now, dorms have been constructed. Women and men enjoy separate but equal areas which include 50 single beds and 4 facilities. There is also an area to house couples. Bugs are

Top 5 Finalists | Category 2 | Ages 36-50

One of the biggest natural disasters in recent history, Hurricane Katrina, inspired **Jane Portis** to begin a donation drive that would change people's lives.

"Meeting and working with the [Hurricane Katrina] evacuees inspired me to organize, through my church, a furniture and household goods collection..." says Jane.

Inspiration for this project was sparked when Jane had a chance encounter with a man who had been evacuated from his New Orleans home via helicopter. Jane was delivering a lamp for the man's bedroom to a local housing project when she saw him sitting on his donated mattress with all his worldly belongings, the contents of his wallet, spread out in front of him.

"Water logged pictures of his nieces and nephews, a Social Security card that looked more like pulp for paper and three one dollar bills—these three things were all that remained of 57 years of his life," says Jane.

Meeting this man and

other evacuees like him fueled Jane's love for "organizing acute responses to emergencies." She loves to pull "the troops" together in Texarkana and to communicate to them what needs to be done.

"I may not be financially situated to give a lot of money to every non-profit in town... but I most certainly will give the best of my time and energy to help come up with a solution to aid the problem at hand," says Jane.

While Hurricane Katrina gave Jane one specific call to service, she had her "Aha moment." While attending law school, Jane worked as a Death Habeas Paralegal at the Federal Defender of Arkansas. It was a wallet sized school picture of a small boy who had gone on to become a death row inmate that caught her heart.

Jane says that the little boy looked like most six year olds with "two front teeth smiling from a face that was two small for them." After delving deeper into his record,

Jane realized that this man on death row had probably just needed someone who could have influenced him early on in his life.

"...I knew I was working at the wrong end of this man's life," says Jane. "It was then and there that I knew I needed to be involved with kids before they were at the end of their line of appeals, awaiting lethal injections," she adds.

Over the years, Jane translated this defining moment into serving the students of Texarkana's First Presbyterian Church. She realizes her participation in community service, whether with disaster victims or local students is part of the "village" it takes to accomplish tasks.

"You don't have to be able to 'do it all' to be helpful in... meeting community needs... each person's role is unique and important to the project," says Jane.

Keely Bledsoe has seen the love for volunteerism touch her whole family — beginning with her husband Mark, who inspired Keely to



still a problem but better managed. Some materials and equipment can be left behind in a newly built hospital suite, a replica of the original, and is available for use by other groups. A new advance team now cleans up the area before the medical team's arrival and takes the clinic to more remote areas so that those who cannot be helped by the medical services available can be spared the arduous journey and disappointment. A little store has been created, and patients are given tickets to purchase whatever they want. *"This works a lot better than just giving things to those who show up."*

In 2008, all of this almost ended for Rae Thigpen. *"For a couple of years, I almost couldn't go,"* she explains, *"so I thought about getting off. I'm getting older, and these 10-12 hour days seem harder every year."* Those long days usually begin with a 6 a.m. devotional followed by the preparations necessary to have a patient on the table by 7:30 a.m. When the surgeries for the day are finally done, the team has to pull the cases, make assignments, and gather the supplies for the next day's schedule. Often weariness prevents sleep from coming easily, or sleep may be interrupted, usually by a "C" section that must be done immediately. *"I remember the first time. I thought I was dreaming,"* Rae recalls. *"I heard my name being whispered, 'Rae, Rae.' I jumped out of bed and dressed. The patient was already in pre-op. It was 20 minutes from table to baby."* That has to be some kind of record based

on the conditions they were under. *"Now,"* she admits, *"I can't imagine not going. What would I do with myself?"* She pauses for a moment, stirs slightly and rests her hands. *"I always get more than I give,"* she reflects. *"They keep me grounded. I always hoped that helping would be like this."*

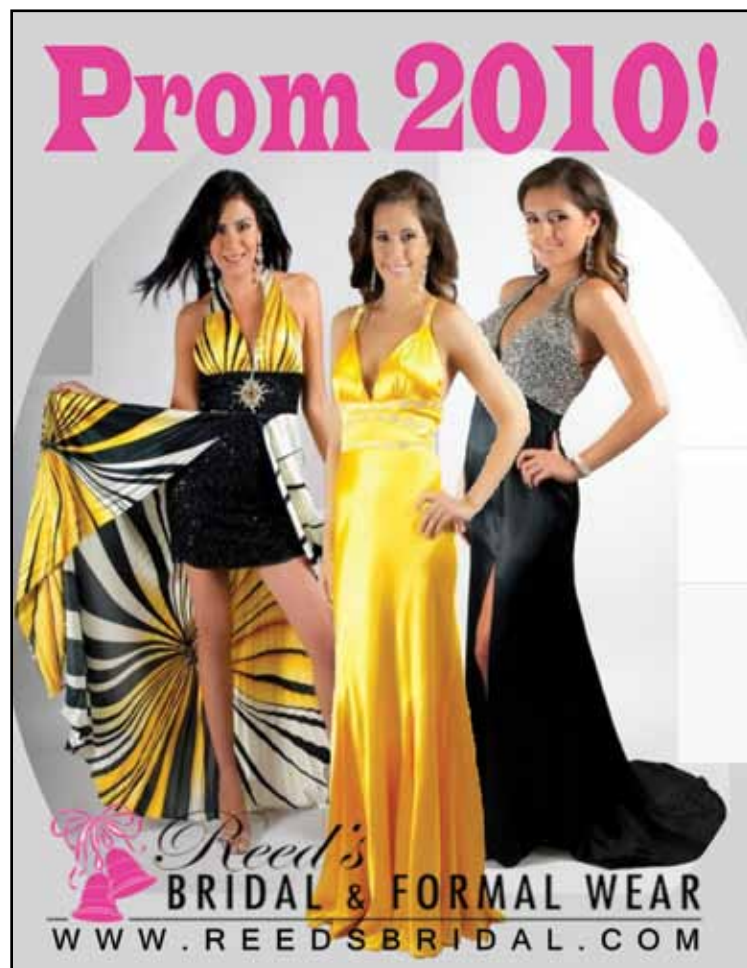
Fortunate is the appropriate word for describing Rae's contributions with the medical missionary team. **Fortunate** is also the word for Christus St. Michael Health System to use when acknowledging Rae Shelia Thigpen's role in its operation. Certainly **Fortunate** is Rae's word for describing her employer who has supported both her educational and mission endeavors. *"Chris Karam [President/CEO] is such a benevolent man. I'm just privileged to work for Christus St. Michael,"* she unhesitatingly declares. Texarkana is also **Fortunate** to benefit from her leadership in our community. Two other areas of her life deserve the same **Fortunate**. One is as the daughter of Luvera Thigpen, the woman Rae most admires. This Mississippi mom reared all her children to work hard and take pride in their work. She continues to be a supportive guide for Rae, who shares her spiritual and emotional strength. *"She is a woman who has always been able to get things done,"* Rae explains. The daughter seems to have learned well from her mom's example. The two visit every Thursday—*"That's her time—sometimes, though I just want to talk to her, so I call her again."*

Another **Fortunate** for Rae is all of

her children. Although she has no biological children, *"I am a godmother with lots of children all over Jackson, Mississippi, and the Texarkana area. My rule is, 'If you tell me something I think your parents need to know, you're going to tell 'em or I'm going to tell 'em.' They [her children] trust me, and I appreciate their trust."* During a recent Watch Night, Rae took the opportunity to thank the parents of "her" children for sharing them so generously with her. Her children occupy an important place in her life, as she in theirs, so they continue to share her home as often as possible. *"I am 'junk woman,'"* Rae admits. *"I don't cook, so they get all the pizza and hamburgers and 'junk' they can enjoy."*

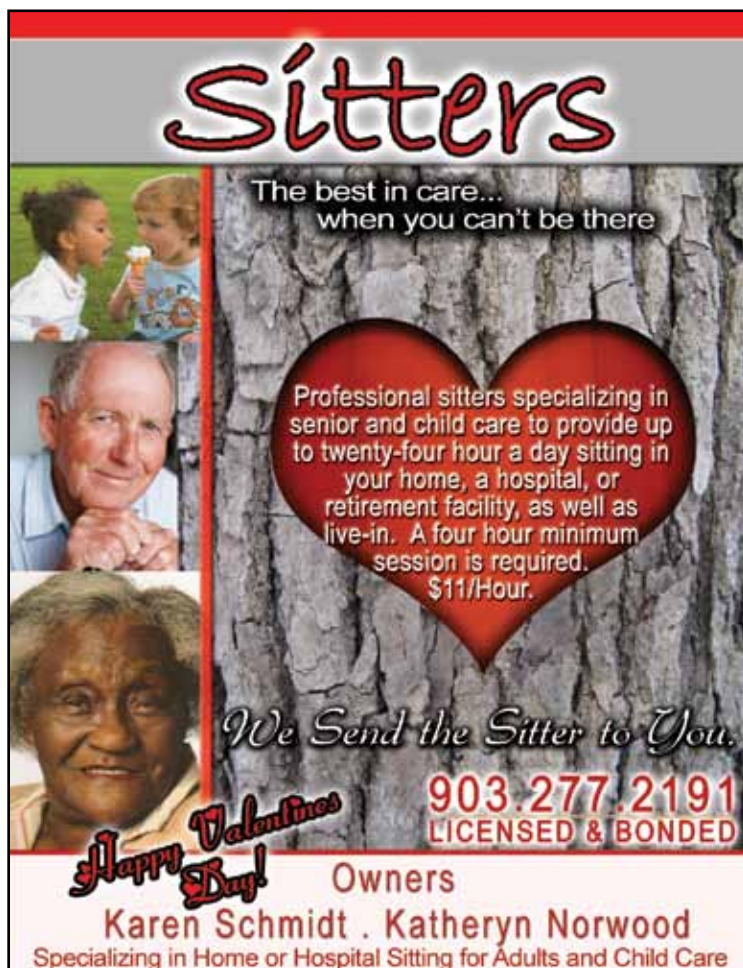
Obviously, *junk* to describe food is the only occasion that word can be used appropriately when speaking of Rae Shelia Thigpen. Miss Rae, as she is called out of genuine respect, provides an excellent example of one who has made the choices to achieve her wishes. Her skills in the operating room are unquestioned; her management talents proven every day, her concern for people apparent in both her public and private lives, and her ability to listen and understand demonstrated all over the globe. Her love for the Lord—although she admits her voice eliminates the option of praising Him by singing—is evident in every choice she makes. ALT is proud to salute her as a truly Beautiful Woman.

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begin serving the Texarkana community.

"When we first met, [Mark] was involved in so many different and worthy organizations that I was not even aware we had in this great city," says Keely.

It was Mark's example that made Keely realize that she could make a difference by serving the community where she was born and raised.

"How neat it is to give back to the community you grew up in..." says Keely.

Keely now serves as the example for her own children and has gotten them involved in service, too. Her "Aha moment" came two years ago when her daughter Blaire, then seven, participated in her first volunteer activity. The Bledsoe's served at "Miracle on 15th Street" at Williams Memorial United Methodist Church.

"I took my daughter Blaire... because I wanted her to see the real meaning of volunteering... and of Christmas," says Keely.

This Christmas outreach provided dinner, fellowship and presents to needy members of the Texarkana community. It was Blaire's interaction with a little girl and her reaction to the little girl's joy when she received a new bed comforter that reiterated to Keely the importance of community to service to all those involved.

"This was the best Christmas present I had ever received and the best volunteering experience I ever had," says Keely.

While Keely has enjoyed many of her volunteer experiences, she truly values those times spent with the children she serves at Williams. She spends every Sunday night teaching, making crafts and playing with a large group

of Williams' four and five year olds who attend Alive at Five.

"I would have to say that helping with the youth at Williams is my most enjoyable [time]... because I am helping my church, the future of my church and at the same time I am still learning and refreshing my knowledge of the Bible," says Keely.

Serving in the Texarkana community comes naturally to **LeAnne Wright**. She is part of a family that has volunteered at Wadley Hospital, at the local church office, at local charity events and that has given their time and resources to assist many of Texarkana's needy.

"Serving and helping others has been part of my life as long as I can remember... it is just what I do," says LeAnne.

While LeAnne can't remember a time when she and her family weren't involved in community service, it was her involvement in Texarkana's Race for the Cure that gave her one of her biggest "Aha moments." This moment came when LeAnne was contacted by a local woman who knew of her involvement with the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The woman needed assistance in getting a mammogram for an uninsured relative who was at a high risk for breast cancer.

"Her family had a history of breast cancer... she became worried... I worked with her on how to qualify and receive the services she needed," says LeAnne.

LeAnne later found out from her "newly found friend" that this procedure probably saved this woman's life. The doctors did find cancer and were able to treat it because of the

assistance LeAnne had provided in getting a mammogram.

"If her cancer had not been detected early, there is a large chance that the outcome might not have been as positive," says LeAnne.

LeAnne's work at Texas A&M-Texarkana led her to have another "Aha moment." LeAnne ran into a friend from high school, who was just finishing her college degree. Through this conversation, LeAnne found out that the woman has worked several jobs, but was able to quit one and finish her degree more quickly because of scholarship she received. The friend tearfully shared her story with LeAnne and told her, "... you do not understand how much this university has give me and what a difference scholarships make to people." LeAnne's heart was once again touched by someone she had been able to serve.

"... [N]eedless to say... [my friend] wasn't the only one with tears at that point," says LeAnne.

LeAnne's parents and grandparents instilled the importance of volunteerism into her. She hopes to pass the drive to help the citizens of Texarkana on to others. LeAnne wants to encourage others to find the "passion and inner peace" she feels when she serves her community.

"I believe the best way to encourage others [to serve] is to 'lead by example.' Finding what you are passionate about is the first step," says LeAnne.

Like many in the Texarkana community, **Tracy Spradlin** is no stranger to charity events, but a Thanksgiving project this year really opened her eyes to the impact these volunteer activities can have on the individuals



being served.

"The true impact these charitable donations of money and time have did not really open my eyes until we sat down to dinner that day," says Tracy.

The Thanksgiving meal at Watersprings Ranch was Tracy's "Aha moment." The dinner, sponsored by the Texarkana Board of Realtors, came at one of the busiest times of the year for Tracy. She says the timing couldn't have seemed worse. It was the interaction with the children who live at Watersprings Ranch that made the difference for Tracy.

"The children gave a presentation that brought tears to my eyes and the stories behind some of their lives were so heartbreaking," says Tracy. "It made me realize just how much our support for Watersprings Ranch meant to these children," she adds.

Tracy says that her blessings came that day in the form of "hugs and smiles" mixed with "heartfelt thank you's" from the kids at Watersprings Ranch.

Although Tracy has given a lot to the community through her work with the Texarkana Board of Realtors, the Four States Fair Calf Scramble and other 4H and FFA projects, it was this experience at Water Springs Ranch and one that was even more personal that have allowed her to see the difference individual volunteer efforts can make.

Tracy lost her father from Leukemia five years ago. During his devastating illness, Tracy was amazed at the level of compassion she felt from her father's caregivers – especially those who were volunteers. Tracy was inspired.

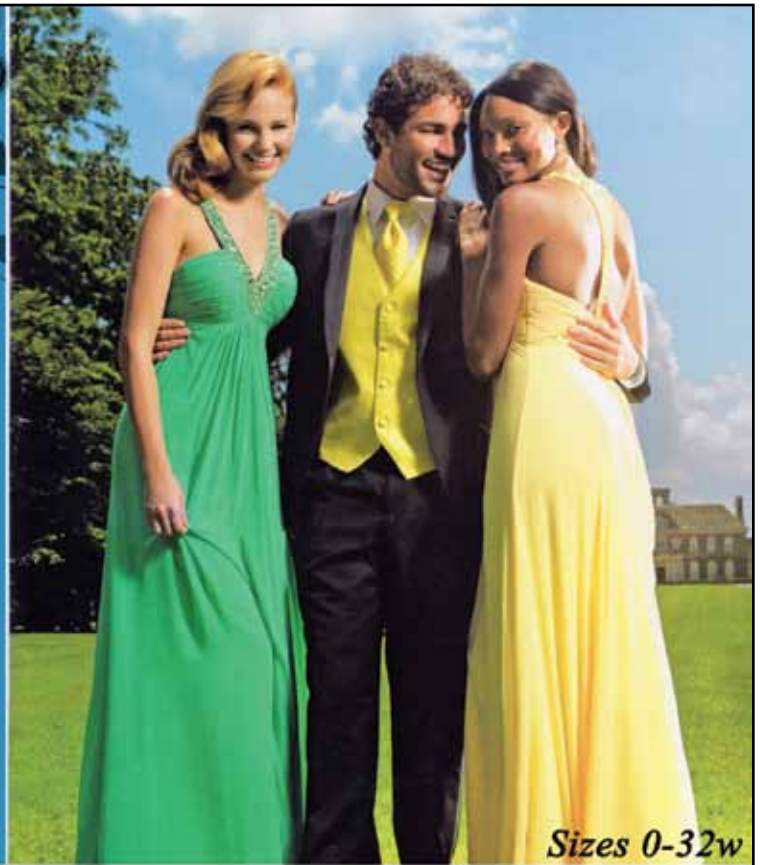
"It was such an inspiration to watch others give back such a priceless gift to their community..." says Tracy.

Tracy goes on to say, "Sharing the feeling of reward is always great; however, nothing makes a stronger impression [than letting volunteers] see firsthand how serving the community touches so many lives."

Because of her personal experiences on the giving and receiving ends of community service, Tracy would like to "encourage everyone to be involved in their community by volunteering services or supporting some of the charitable causes in the [Texarkana] area."

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The Lady of Bangles and Beads...

Beatty Palmer

Winner | Category 3 | Ages 51+

Aging? Well, yes. But more. We are in a constant state of change. From the cradle to the grave there is an absolute guarantee: There will always be new wrinkles in our old skin. We are going through revision and are usually unaware of it until we get on the scales, look in the mirror, or attend a reunion. Aging would not be so bad if you didn't have to get old to do it.

~James R. Spruce

How wisely the Reverend Spruce speaks, but his words assume new meaning when applied to Elizabeth Beatty Morris Palmer. Beatty is the ALT Beautiful Woman Winner in Category 3, Ages 51+. She comfortably fits into this category as her age is 51+40, and for all of her life she has been making significant changes.

Beatty was born at 1917 Hazel Street in Texarkana, Texas, on February 22, 1919. She and her family lived in several locations in Texarkana until, when she was 4 years old, they moved to Rose Hill where they stayed. She got her start at reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic at Whitaker School then graduated to a much larger Rose Hill School. The school was later named Grim after William Grim who donated the land for the school and the park which Grim Stadium occupied. The principal was H. L. Lamb who had a daughter named Nanny Marjorie—a name which convinced a young Beatty that if she ever had a little girl, she would keep her name simple. Whitaker and Grim Schools have long ago disappeared along with the wonderful Mr. Lamb and Nanny Marjorie. Grim Stadium has undergone several remodelings since the original wooden bleachers and has now been renamed Tiger Stadium. What was once a park where Grim School students played has now become a parking lot for TISD buses while Grim School itself has been removed for the TISD Bus Barn. For many, today's terrain is all they know, but for Beatty the area is sadly changed.

The residential area known as Rose Hill has also been altered. Modest homes with neat yards and neighbors who stood in their yards to visit or rushed to provide assistance when it was needed have now largely disappeared. In fact, Beatty remembers the professional croquet court the neighborhood sponsored at the end of

her Rose Hill street. Neighbors—adults and children—would congregate at the court each evening to visit and play. The court was well lighted, since everyone in the neighborhood pitched in to pay the light bill. In fact, it was here in 1936 that Beatty met John Palmer who was living with his sister and brother-in-law and working at North American Tank Car Company. She was only 16 at the time of their meeting, so they had to wait two years for her high school graduation before they could marry. Their marriage lasted 40 years until John's death, and they had one daughter who is named Ann. Only the memories remain.

But to know Beatty Palmer is not to look at a catalogue of events or mourn losses. She has been busy all of her life and keeping up with her is not only exhausting but almost impossible. Her story is in the people whose lives she has touched as a woman of great faith and a "life-affirming optimist." At the age of 27, she joined the First Church of the Nazarene, and with that choice, she enlarged both her life and the life of the church she loves. With her first Sunday School class she acquired a "brood" of her own. The 13-16 year olds who comprised the class felt free to make themselves at home in her home, so they were there after school almost every day. On Sunday afternoons they were there playing ball or silly games. Her kitchen was always busy, as she cooked for them and provided them a "place to be together." "I always thought about John, 'What a wonderful husband who is willing to come home to a house full of kids—every day.'" Like so many—then and now—the kids knew Beatty loved them, and they happily returned that love.

Beatty's consistent description of her life is short. "My life is so blessed," she will say. Indeed it is. Two years after John Palmer's death, Ann and her husband were building a new house, and Beatty had just applied the finishing touches to her home. Finally, she had it just the way she wanted it, but her neighborhood was changing. Ann's husband suggested that the new game room be converted into a room for Beatty; Ann agreed, so Beatty sold her house and moved in with Ann. That was more than 30 years ago now. Beatty and her daughter share a unique relationship. They are truly best friends, and Ann vehemently declares, "We would not have had it any other way." In fact, Ann admits, "I guess that I'm extremely spoiled. She loves to cook and keep house and do laundry. (I tell her she just does that because no one else can please her.) She has done all of that while I worked, but I never had to worry because I always knew there was someone here when my kids came home."

"There was always someone there..." and that someone has usually been Beatty. "She is the most giving person I know," recalls her admiring niece Judy Gibson.

Judy remembers the story of how Beatty, during World War II, volunteered to keep three little ones for an entire week. Ann was 7 months old and joined by her cousins ages 4 months, and 10 months, and a 7 year old. Remember this was before the days of disposable diapers and instant formula. Judy shakes her head as she elaborates on the story but concludes by looking admiringly at Beatty, "Giving, always giving." Beatty's response, "We did well. It helped me grow."

Growing is something she has done a lot during her lifetime. Like Auntie Mame, Beatty Palmer has opened lots



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of new windows. She went to the Miller County Jail when a member of her Sunday School class (this time a couples class) was jailed for manslaughter. *"I'd never been in anything like that,"* Beatty solemnly recalls. Nonetheless, she determined what was needed and found someone to put up the bond required for the class member to be freed. Then there was the 2 a.m. phone call one Sunday morning. When Beatty answered the phone, all she could hear was an almost whispered, *"Come get me! Come get me!"* Still Beatty recognized the voice. *"Where are you?"*

"I'm here in front of this liquor store," so Beatty called a friend and together they rescued the young woman who was also a member of Beatty's Sunday School Class. The girl was writhing in pain, but Beatty's young woman companion knelt and placed her hand on the girl's shoulder. By the time "Heavenly Father" had been spoken, the caller became calm.

Repeatedly, Beatty has comforted those in mourning, like the young man whose three year old son was riding in the open back of his pickup and was killed when he fell out. Or even Ann when Beatty's dad was burned to death in a truck accident and her mother badly injured. A former pastor, Tim Gates, describes Beatty as a "prayer warrior" who assisted his wife and him when they were having trouble with one of their children. She has known tragedy and heartache, which she acknowledges, but her

faith has pulled her through.

Perhaps her continued renewal explains her few wrinkles—new or old. Beatty Palmer is immaculately groomed—not a white hair out of its stylish place; make-up and eye shadow obviously and attractively applied; fingernails perfectly manicured—purple this week to match her purple, silk pant suit; a large dinner ring on one hand sparkles as it catches the light, her shining purple earrings almost touch her shoulders, and thin, silver bracelets encircling one arm reach toward her elbow. Beatty laughs, *"An 8 year old asked me one time, 'Aunt Beatty, why do you wear so much make-up?'"*

"Honey, it's just to hide the wrinkles. My motto is 'If it's not gaudy, don't give it to me.'" [Red is her favorite color.] No doubt Beatty is more likely to create the kind of wrinkles she prefers than to leave the task to her birthdays. Beatty and Ann usually shop together. *"I don't want to dress like an old person."* Ann says Beatty constantly reminds her she wants all the bangles and beads she can get, so Ann defers to Beatty's selecting most of her own clothes. Yet the most important component of Beatty's life remains her faith.

Next to her faith, the most remarkable trait of Beatty Palmer is her laughter—not a shy giggle but a robust roll that announces her presence. In fact, she admits that she has been told more than once by the members of her church, *"Beatty,*

I didn't see you last night, but I heard you."

"I read somewhere," Beatty adds, *"that laughter is the gift of God. I'm thankful that I was born with a happy attitude. The three of us—my mom and dad and me—laughed a lot, and I learned to laugh at myself at an early age."* Beatty and her daughter Ann have always shared that gift. *"When Ann and I are sitting on the same bench in church, and we both get tickled, the bench shakes. It's hard to stop it."* Ann adds, *"We can laugh at almost anything, at any time, sometimes even when it doesn't seem appropriate."*

Beatty has even used laughter as a way of reaching out to help. Several years ago, her niece Judy was suffering from polymyalgia rheumatic (PMR). *"She hurt all the time,"* Beatty explains, *"was depressed and couldn't do anything. I would try to get her out, but she just didn't want to move. I heard somewhere that everyone needed a belly laugh every day, so I asked Judy who could make her laugh. She told me Carol Burnett."*

That was all the therapy required. Judy ordered Carol Burnett's DVDs and started on the road to recovery. Once again, Beatty Palmer had reached out to help. *"We nag each other when we're not doing just right,"* Judy confesses. But Judy is also a "Go-to" gal for Beatty. In 2000, Judy routinely answered her ringing phone to hear Beatty's saying, *"We have to go to California."* Judy froze. Beatty had always said *"If God*

Top 5 Finalists | Category 3 | Ages 51+

Joyce Wilson lives by Booker T. Washington's adage, "If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." She seeks to lift up those around her through her service to the Texarkana community.

"The fact is, we all need help," says Joyce. "...when we understand that then [we] can get into the habit of serving others."

Joyce does not serve alone in her family. Much of her drive to serve is fueled by the example that her husband, Taft, has set when he volunteers. Joyce says she has watched Taft donate his time and energy to many worthy causes.

"He serves others because he genuinely wants to. It is natural for him to say 'what can I do to help,'" says Joyce.

Joyce has had several "Aha moments" in

her years as a community volunteer. One that she recalls vividly is one that impacted her life for several years. She and Taft helped take care of a church friend who was facing life in a nursing home after he was diagnosed with cancer. Joyce, with support from Taft, took on the responsibility of this sick man and his wife. When they told the woman that they were going to take care of both she and her husband, the feeling that swept over Joyce was "overwhelming." Joyce and Taft stayed with this couple for nine months before the friend passed away.

"We are still reaping the benefits in our hearts to know that we gave up our own personal life to serve someone and not expect anything in return," says Joyce.

One of Joyce's favorite service activities is the Martin Luther King "Acts

of Kindness" project. This project serves the senior citizens in the community by gathering personal items and making gift baskets to deliver.

"There [is] unspeakable joy that comes over [me] to see the expressions that some of [the seniors] show when they open the door," says Joyce. "Serving others in itself is a powerful opportunity to life someone's spirits..." she adds.

Joyce serves because of the joy she feels, but she says that real reason she feels called to volunteer is because she is "loving and serving others because it pleases God." She seeks to "serve with a cheerful heart."

"It is true that if we love and serve others, we not only fulfill the second greatest commandment, but we obey the greatest commandment of loving our Lord with our heart and soul," says Joyce. "It is not about me, but about the individual who needs the help."

Margarite "Skeet"

Jolley's inspiration to serve those in her community is a direct result of her Christian



wanted me to fly, he would have given me wings," and driving—just the two of them—was frightening. But a relative was ill, and Beatty had to go. Even without wings, she and Judy booked their flight. Today Beatty laughs as she remembers, "I felt like saying to those passengers as I got on the plane, 'Ya'll are gonna' be all right 'cause I'm here, and the Lord takes care of me.'" Another new highway!

Beatty is also fun. It just may be that her years allow her a little advantage in that department. For example, former First Church pastor Tim Gates recalls the Senior Adult Dinner he and his wife were attending only two months after their arrival. Somehow during the dinner conversation, Reverend Gates mentions that his wife is the only one allowed to kiss him. "Well, I'll give you a kiss," Beatty declares...and then she does. Gates remembers that getting his wife's permission for that kiss was no problem at all, and the memory of the event brings smiles to both of them.

Smiles are what Beatty Palmer is all about. She has sneaked upon many who were, by all accounts, too doubtful to render them. You see, Beatty has yet another life. She went to work when Ann was eight years old. Her jobs were varied—office manager, accountant, bookkeeper, "jack of all trades." With each employer, Beatty made no secret of her faith, but she simply made her beliefs known when she had the opportunity. One of her office workers once almost scared her

out of her skin when she asked, "Beatty, how do you know this is all true?" The question provided Beatty the opportunity to review and renew her faith, and today both the questioner and her husband are ministers. Work has been important to Beatty, as it has provided her resources—yes— but more importantly additional ways to be involved with people. Even now she laughs, as she reflects, "When John was stricken by his heart attack, he cautioned, 'Babe, don't quit. I want you to support me in the manner to which I am accustomed.'" She never let him down.

A real advantage of Beatty Palmer's jobs was that she was forced to "Open new windows." She was not going to learn computers on one job—she was too old, but she did. In 2000, she "retired" at 81 only because her boss had a stroke and closed his office, but she was well prepared. Today, she communicates comfortably with both her grandchildren and her great grandchildren—while she wins the games they enjoy playing. Even now she and a 16 year old share Beatty's bedroom with no problems at all—a 91 year old and a 16 year old sharing the same room and happy...Mind boggling!

For Beatty Palmer, "It's been fun. Ninety-one years is a long time." During her 90th birthday party, ram-rodded by another of her adopted daughters, Debbie McDaniel Lavender, over 200 people were seated in the Family Center of the Nazarene Church. The event was SRO, as so many had come

to pay tribute to this resilient lady whose ministry has been in her caring, cooking, listening and laughing. Her daughter describes her as an Encourager. "Mother's outlook is that everything is going to be all right. If money will fix the problem, you don't have a problem." Pastor Chris Sutherland describes her as a "Thinker. She is not trapped in yesterday; universally loved and respected across the spectrum of the church." While Tim Gates, now in Florida, describes her as "somebody vibrant and full of life who wants to bring joy to all those around her. She is a lady of character and class—full of life."

Truly, Beatty Palmer, is a lady who cares for young and old alike. She is a giver of her life, laughter and love and makes the world a happier, healthier place in which to be. How fortunate are those who know her (she's had to work to forgive only one person in her entire life). "Aging? Well, yes." She provides us every day the example of how attitude and choices— living her faith, opening new windows, traveling new highways, and caring for others—triumph over wrinkles to create a successful life—all 91 years!

Congratulations!

Spruce, James R. LORD OF THE VALLEY. Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1993.

faith, which her parents nurtured in her during her childhood.

"My family had a country grocery store and always gave food and supplies to those who were unable to pay," says Skeet. "The kindness I saw from them as I grew up stayed with me throughout my life," she adds.

Skeet has translated the lessons that her parents taught into a lifetime commitment to service. Much of the work she does is with the Shepherd's Shop at Hooks First United Methodist Church. When Skeet moved to Hooks and joined the church, she immediately looked for service opportunities. The Shepherd's Shop serves a two-fold purpose by providing what Skeet calls as a "great blessing" to the church while meeting needs in the community.

"We see many bad situations and feel so blessed when we are able to help out," says Skeet.

The Shepherd's Shop donates money and goods it raises through its sale of cookbooks and other goods to many large organizations such as Arkansas Children's Hospital, St. Jude's and the Methodist Children's Home. It also works to serve church members and those who are hurting in some way.

"Through the Shepherd's Shop we are able to minister to those who encounter





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problems in their lives and see how uplifting this has been for them, and all of this has been a very rewarding experience," says Skeet.

Skeet is always looking for those around her who have a need and she then seeks to meet this need. Her "Aha moment" came when she was able to assist a church friend who had to move into assisted living. Skeet has become one of the man's caretakers and she enjoys supporting him.

"He shows so much happiness when we attend the events and pay him a visit. I think that would top my list for making a difference in someone's life," says Skeet.

Skeet's love for people and service takes top priority in her life and she hope that this "joy and pleasure" will shine through to others. Skeet also hopes to continue to serve as long as there are needs to be met.

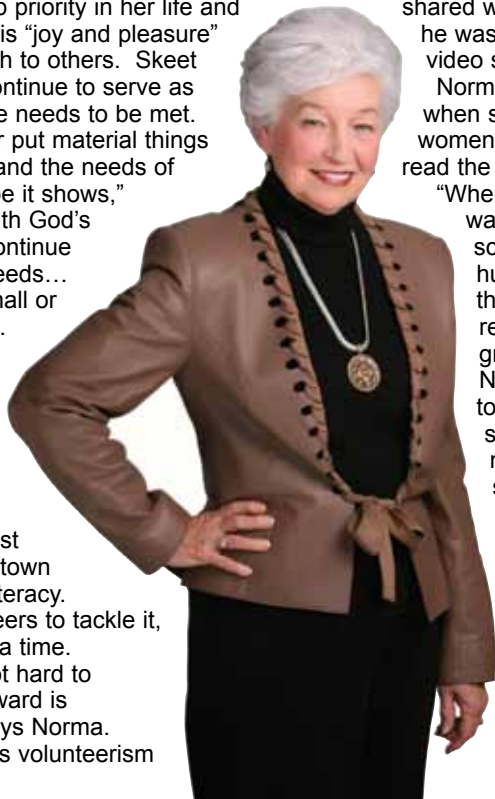
"I never put material things before my God and the needs of others and I hope it shows," says Skeet. "With God's help I hope to continue to see [these] needs... whether it be small or large," she adds.

Norma Harrison

loves to spread the word about one of the biggest problems in our town and country - illiteracy. She also volunteers to tackle it, once student at a time.

"It is not hard to tutor and the reward is tremendous," says Norma.

Norma's volunteerism



and her love for mentoring others began her senior year in high school. Norma and a friend received special permission from the Conifer Girl Scout Council to lead a Girl Scout troop.

"At the time there was no adult available and we felt we could not let 15 little girls be disappointed," says Norma.

Norma credits this experience and stint at Girl Scout camp as the catalysts that sparked her love for serving others.

As an adult, Norma found her true passion in service through teaching people to read. She initially began tutoring adults. Norma realized that she was making a true difference when a young man she tutored shared with her that for the first time he was able to read titles at the video store.

Norma had another "Aha moment" when she tutored three older women who wanted to learn to read the Bible.

"When for the first time each was able to read the scriptures they had hungered to read... there was much rejoicing in our little group of four," says Norma. That had to be one of the sweetest of all 'Aha moments' for me," she adds.

Norma has shifted her focus over the last several years, but she is still passionate about literacy. These days Norma concentrates on helping students who are having difficulties

in elementary school. She wants to catch them before it is too late.

"...[I]t occurred to me that maybe by tutoring kids who had difficulties in the lower grades, we could prevent their getting into adulthood without reading skills," says Norma.

While Norma has seen the direct results of her efforts as a volunteer tutor, she feels that she is the one who receives an even greater benefit.

"It's rewarding to see the lights dawn in [student's] eyes and the beautiful smiles when they begin to read more proficiently," says Norma.

Norma feels that people want to volunteer; they just need to be shown a need and a way to fulfill

it. Norma sums up her experience when she says, "It is not at all hard to tutor and the reward is tremendous."

Volunteerism has always been a family affair for **Theresa Poff**. She has been serving the Texarkana community with her family since childhood.

"Some of my best memories of my father are the times we spent together when he served as president of our church council and I was the youth representative," says Theresa.

Theresa enjoyed watching her father as he "organized ... outreach projects." Even her mother and her



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siblings participated in various projects.

"Working with [my father], my mom and siblings on a weekly basis on community service set a course for my life," says Theresa.

Theresa's passion to serve others and her "AHA Moment" as a church youth representative has carried over into her adult life – even into her career as an occupational therapist. Theresa's career choice was validated early on when she helped one of her first patients to become independent after an injury.

"That was such a joyous moment to share with [my patient], and it confirmed that my vocational path was right for me," Theresa says.

Theresa also continues to volunteer. She participates in Bible study, collects items for soldiers in Iraq and serves meals at Randy Sams Shelter with a

woman's group from her church. Theresa feels that people often just need and invitation to participate or a strong example to help get them involved in community service.

"Many people want volunteer more than they do, but they feel so much more comfortable initially when they are with a friend or a group," says Theresa.

While Theresa's earliest influence to serve was her father, she has also been inspired by another man in her life – her husband, Frank Poff.

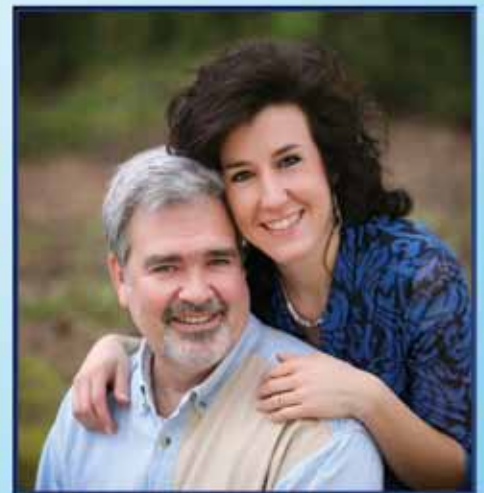
"[Frank] truly lives a life of service and I am constantly amazed at how much her gives back to our local community," says Theresa.



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