

# ALBEMARLE

Community Magazine

Winter 2019



Christmas in...  
Downtown  
ALBEMARLE



ELVIS  
Night  
AT THE BLUE BAY



PROFILE:  
Dr. Jeff James  
SCS Superintendent



**PUBLISHER**  
Roger Watson

**EDITOR**  
BJ Drye

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**  
Angelo Baio  
Sylvia Hoffmire  
Chris Miller

**ADVERTISING STAFF**  
Ally Ward  
Kier James-Little  
Sherry Nance

**DISTRIBUTION**  
Deborah Holt

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should be sent to:  
Stanly News & Press  
PO Box 488  
Albemarle, NC 28002  
or emailed to [bj.drye@stanlynewspress.com](mailto:bj.drye@stanlynewspress.com)

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Ally Ward (704) 754-4237 or  
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#### About the Cover

Albemarle's downtown Christmas celebration is one of the most popular events of the holiday season.

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Profile: Dr. Jeff James  
Stanly County Schools  
Superintendent



By Angelo Baio  
Contributor



When Betty Bazemore walks through the streets in Albemarle wearing her jacket with the name of Elvis Presley emblazoned on it, she is sure to get some looks and engage in an occasional conversation about the King.

Elvis died more than 40 years ago. Yet his avid fan base continues to adore him. For some fans it was less outwardly expressed, but they aren't shy about wearing insignia clothing. As it were for Bazemore, she proudly wore an Elvis jacket while shopping that became the green light for a welcomed conversation.

Bazemore, an Oakboro resident, is one of the more subdued fans. On first impressions, she's a soft-spoken woman, but behind the quiet demeanor is a fierce Elvis fan. Give her a microphone and she will show a fiery desire to keep his legend alive. When asked how long she has been a fan, she expresses her devotion with her eyes softly closed, her head raised and turned in a quasi-spiritual connection when she replies "forever."

"I became immediately fascinated as a 6-year-old child when he appeared as a guest on the "Ed Sullivan show," she said.

Watching television was a family affair back then. Bazemore just happened to be watching alongside her mother, who was the original family Elvis fan. As time moved on and her fandom blossomed she collected

memorabilia, records, attended conventions and joined clubs.

When asked to relate the most poignant Elvis-related moments of her life she said she has two. The first was relayed to her by her mother but became one of hers to cherish.

Back in 1964 her mother Mary waitressed at the Athens Restaurant of Charlotte. As Betty recalls the story, a group of men came into the restaurant wanting the private dining room in the back. As luck would have it, Mary waited on those very tables. As the men sat Mary immediately recognized Elvis in the group but fought to show any emotion.

Pointing a question directly at Elvis she said, "Now honey, what do you want?" Elvis silently looked up at her appearing astounded that she didn't recognize him. She recognized her ruse worked and contrarily followed up with, "I know who you are."

That charming but brief moment of humility for Elvis earned her mom a \$5 tip, one that she gave away to another waitress knowing once her little girls at home found out, they would want it and probably fight over it.

Betty's second moment came with a visit to the Elvis

home and final resting place at the Graceland mansion in Memphis, Tenn. Immediately upon entering the grounds beyond the front gate and walking down the long path towards the home she felt a spiritual presence.

"It was like he was there," she said.

Although this happened years ago, when speaking of it today she is still moved by it.

About 15 years ago while living in Charlotte she joined an Elvis fan club out of Monroe where she eventually became the club's vice president. During that time, she bought that "famous" Elvis jacket that she wore on shopping trips to Albemarle.



Graceland in  
Memphis, Tennessee





Unfortunately, the Monroe fan club disbanded but like they say, when one door closes another door opens. About 11 years ago those fans Betty meet in Albemarle, along with the friends she made at the Monroe club, became her first members of her very own club, but this time based in Albemarle.

The first meeting of the Albemarle fan club was held in a small spot set aside at Ryan's Steak House. The turnout was welcomed but so unexpectedly large it outgrew the available space before it even started. Betty was forced to search for a bigger venue. That brought her to the Blue Bay Restaurant and manager Brenda Steele. Right at the onset Brenda was all-in for the idea and the new location was up and running.

The idea behind the group is simple, gather with friends old and new to reminisce and break bread while watching Elvis tribute artists (as they call them today)



Wayne Brockwell



and other singers of various types of music, no rules just have fun. The concept caught on and eventually they outgrew the original corner of the restaurant and had to be moved two more times until they took over the largest conference room that can hold more than 100 people. Word is they usually have 80 to 100 folks piled up just clamoring to hear the artists and share a meal but in fact the group is more 200 strong.

Brenda is elated that they are there, as is waitress Kristen who adores when the local senior centers brings their residents over to enjoy a night of food and song.

"It just warms your heart," Kristen says.

One question that comes to mind is where in the world would someone find an Elvis tribute artist to entertain the members? For Betty, that's easy. She has been attending conventions and clubs since she was 7 and has met quite a few, but she holds two artists dear to her heart who more often than not attend each meeting.

Enter stage right, Wayne Brockwell, the longest living tribute artist at age 74.

Wayne was raised in a foster home. At about the age of 8 he heard Elvis for the first time on the radio. Back then most people carried a portable radio.

"I had a radio and a cassette player so I can sing along and record," he said. "The first time I sang in front of a crowd was in grade school and folks complimented me on how much I actually sounded like him. My first time professionally was about 1960 and it's just something that stuck with me over the years. I perform mostly for private groups and also the Levine Cancer Institute of Charlotte. When Elvis passed away my career really took off with impersonation, there is something about his music that just got me and has got me for more than 55 years now. I was impersonating Elvis before it was even neat."

Second up to sing was Roy Gaddy, an artist who hails from Kershaw, S.C. Roy drives more than an hour and 45 minutes just to attend the meetings. But not as far as others who come from Virginia. What Roy loves most about Elvis is his persona.

"The way he was around people, and he never changed, and he was always wanting to love people. He had a natural love for people," he said. "My mom was a fan of Elvis and around 14 when my mom passed away, I started playing the guitar to country, gospel and his songs."

Roy used to sit on an empty school bus during lunch to practice all the time with the eventual goal of getting into a band. His history teacher overheard him playing and was so impressed that instead of scolding him for being in the wrong place during lunch she praised his performance and encouraged him to enter the school Fifties Day talent show. Performing Elvis' music has brought a lot of joy to Roy's life, but his most memorable moment was years back when his preacher Lynn Hill asked him to perform for his mother-in-law who was dying and suffered from Parkinson's disease. The family felt she would not make it much longer and in celebration of her upcoming birthday they wanted Roy to perform for an old fan.

"I drove more than an hour to get to their home and when I walked in there I saw this lady in her 90s all twisted, knotted up



Brenda Steele - Manager of the Blue Bay



Rodger Bennett and Daughter Laura

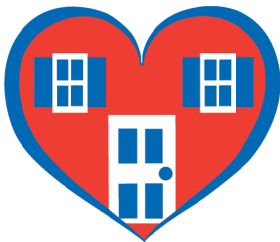


Roy Gaddy

in a wheelchair unable to move her arms and legs and wasn't able to speak," he said. "The first song I thought of was, 'He Touched Me'. As soon as I got to the first verse, she stuck up her left arm and her leg, something the family

hadn't seen her do in years. The whole family was hooting and hollering and touched that they could give her some comfort. That stuck with me for a long time."

The Friends of Elvis Fan Club of Albemarle meets every second Tuesday of the month at the Blue Bay Restaurant. For more information you can call Betty directly at 704-426-0796.



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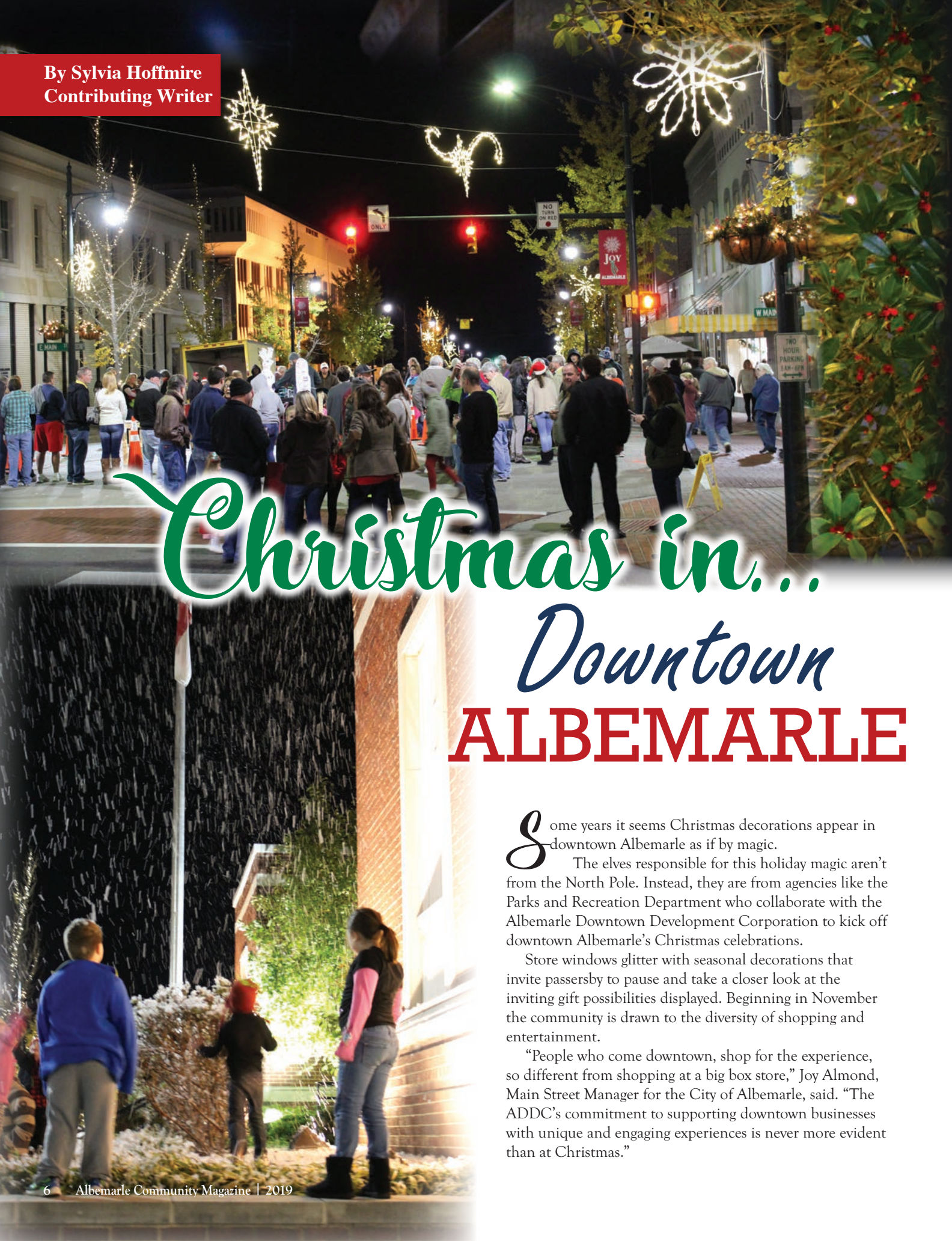
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By Sylvia Hoffmire  
Contributing Writer



# Christmas in... Downtown ALBEMARLE

Some years it seems Christmas decorations appear in downtown Albemarle as if by magic.

The elves responsible for this holiday magic aren't from the North Pole. Instead, they are from agencies like the Parks and Recreation Department who collaborate with the Albemarle Downtown Development Corporation to kick off downtown Albemarle's Christmas celebrations.

Store windows glitter with seasonal decorations that invite passersby to pause and take a closer look at the inviting gift possibilities displayed. Beginning in November the community is drawn to the diversity of shopping and entertainment.

"People who come downtown, shop for the experience, so different from shopping at a big box store," Joy Almond, Main Street Manager for the City of Albemarle, said. "The ADDC's commitment to supporting downtown businesses with unique and engaging experiences is never more evident than at Christmas."





Albemarle Downtown Development Corp. begins the season's celebrations with the Downtown Christmas Open House on Nov. 22 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Business's will stay open later to accommodate shoppers while Santa Claus listens to children's wish lists in the Courthouse Square Park. Also included in the celebration will be an ice sculpture demonstration, food trucks, live performances, and other fun family activities. On Nov. 30, Small Business Saturday, continues the festive spirit at 10 a.m. with a special drawing for a gift basket that will enhance the lucky winner's enjoyment of the season.

Members of the community have enjoyed the Tour of Homes initiated a number of years ago. This year, the event is scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 8 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Advance tickets are \$12 and \$15 on the day of the tour. Tickets are available at several

downtown businesses. This event is one of several fundraisers supporting beautification projects in downtown Albemarle. The list of homes featured in this year's tour has not been released yet, but Almond suggests "keeping a close eye on ADDC's Social Media platforms which include Facebook and Instagram for hints over the coming weeks.

The annual Christmas parade begins at 10:30 a.m. Saturday Dec. 14. A true community representation rolls through the downtown as vehicles from the police department,

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# Christmas Downtown EVENTS

## CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

Friday, November 22th  
5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Shopping • Live Ice Carving • Meet Santa,  
Outdoor Movie • Street Entertainment  
Face Painting • Food Trucks & Beer Garden

## SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

November 30th starts 10:00 a.m.

## TOUR OF HOMES

Saturday, December 8th  
2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARADE

Saturday, December 14th  
starts 10:30 a.m.



fire department, EMS, rescue squad and other agencies roll through the streets with sirens announcing the celebration. Community groups, businesses and other organizations will also display their decorative floats. The parade will end as tradition calls for with Santa waving from his elaborate float.

Woven throughout these events is the ADDC's Pop-Up Shop and Customer Service Center for free gift wrap that began Nov. 9 and continues through Dec. 21. With a proof of purchase, gifts will be wrapped no matter how big or how small—think

flat screen TVs to tiny jewelry boxes. The Pop-Up Shop will be located in a retail space across from Off The Square restaurant. In addition to room for customer service, the space will house eight vendors who will have a wide range of hand-made products such as candles, needlework and more for sale.

The spirit that supports Albemarle's Downtown at Christmas, supports the spirit of community throughout the year with multiple opportunities for the public to interact, to enjoy and to support the local economy.

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# Dr. Jeff James

## Stanly County School Superintendent

By Chris Miller  
Staff Writer

Stanly County School Superintendent Dr. Jeff James has donned many hats throughout his life — superintendent, principal and textile supervisor, to name a few. But he has something in common with many children who sit in Stanly County classrooms every day... He was once a struggling student.

### A ROUGH START TO SCHOOL

Born in Iredell County, James struggled in elementary school.

"I didn't have a great experience," he said. "I had a lot of anxiety issues in first and second grade."

He missed several days of school in first grade due to anxiety. James said he didn't connect with his teacher.

"My struggle early on was no relationship building" with teachers, James said.

He thought his teachers didn't like him because they never tried to form connections with him.

Due to his parents working more than one job, James, the youngest of five children, was raised by his older sister, Linda Taylor.

"She took care of me and raised me," he said. He also thinks some of his early problems in school were associated with separation anxiety from his sister.

"He was a very quiet child," Taylor said.

Because of their 16-year age gap, she viewed him more as her child than her brother.

Taylor also helped raise her three other younger siblings.

"He's still my son," she said. "He's my baby."

Taylor said she always felt a sense of protection towards her youngest sibling.

"I did not like other children saying other things to him," she said.

In third grade, James discovered his love for reading — especially Western books involving cowboys and the folk hero Wild Bill Hickok. His Sunday School teacher, who was a first-grade teacher at another school, also contributed to his new love of reading.

Even with his passion for reading, the loneliness and anxiety continued, especially when riding the bus.

"Getting on the bus as a first grader with eighth graders, it was a little bit intimidating," James said.

What helped alleviate some of his fears was meeting a friend who also rode the bus.

"I saw a young man get on the bus, Michael Burch, and I truly didn't recognize the color of his skin," James said of his black

friend. "All I saw was the fear in his eyes that I had as a young kid getting on the bus," James said.

With both kids being smaller than most of the other students, "we quickly became friends." James would even purchase an extra milk at lunch to give to Burch.

"I had a strong bond with Michael and the other kids on the bus just because we were small kids on the bus with eighth graders," he said.

His whole elementary school experience — and his life — changed when he got to fifth grade.

All it takes is one special teacher

His fifth-grade teacher Ms. Allen had a profound impact on his life because she took an interest in him, he said.

"I think she epitomized a teacher trying to build relationships" with students, he said. She would play softball with the kids and let James run the bases whenever she hit the ball.

After watching James struggle with math, Allen told him he could do better, and she would work with him.





Even though James said he wasn't a bad student, Allen's words resonated with him and he realized he was not performing at his full potential.

"Until then, I probably didn't put a lot of effort into homework," he said.

But by the end of the year, James had

become an Academically Gifted student in English and math.

"Kids don't care about what you know," James said. "They just want to know that you care."

Even after he left her class, she would continuously check on him.

"I think she was truly genuine," he said.

James said if there was any teacher that changed the trajectory of his educational life, it was Allen.

"If it hadn't been for my fifth-grade teacher, I wouldn't be sitting here today (as superintendent)," he said.

"When I was a teacher, I tried to use those qualities (of relationship-building) that Ms. Allen had," he said.

### 'UNQUENCHABLE THIRST'

Another defining moment occurred when James met with his guidance counselor during his junior year. He was at the school half a day and working the rest of the day at textile company United Merchants and Manufacturers in Statesville.

"Well, Jeff, it's apparent that you're working textiles and you've not taken a second language. You're not college material and you'll be a factory worker the rest of your life," James said the counselor told him. "I'm not wasting my time on trying to build a plan for you outside of going to work."

James said the exchange greatly impacted him.

His interaction formed his opinion about how teachers and staff should operate with students.

"Our roles as adults should be to



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From left, Superintendent Dr. Jeff James, Emily Shaw (2019 Stanly County Schools Principal of the Year) and her sons, Carter and Carson Shaw, along with SCS's Vicki Calvert. (Photo by Charles Curcio)



encourage children and students in every way possible to be successful," he said.

Once he left the counselor's office, he was at a crossroads. Would the counselor's words turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy or would he change the trajectory of his life?

Though James was not planning on going to college, "his words angered me to the point that I was going to prove him wrong."

After he graduated in the top 10 in his class, James received his Associate of Arts degree at Mitchell Community College and his Bachelor of Arts in business administration from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

James now has seven degrees decorating his office walls.

"My wife asked me one day, after my third or fourth degree, she said, 'It's like you have this unquenchable thirst to continue to get degrees...can you help me understand this?' " James said.

He told her it is because of his high school guidance counselor "who had a profound

impact, negatively" on his life.

The experience taught James to not "let people pour negativity into your life to the point that it changes your trajectory."

Even as superintendent many decades later, James still has his struggles.

Like his older sister Linda, he suffers from a mild form of dyslexia, though he has never been formally diagnosed. He said he mainly has to re-read things to make sure he comprehends.

"I transpose certain words and for me, these words are exactly what my brain says they are, for example, 'form' and 'from,'" he wrote in an email. "My brain knows the correct use, but I more often than not flip them."

The problem has become more apparent as he has risen in the education ranks and has had to write more.

For emails, he uses the speech recognition software Dragon Naturally Speaking, which types what he says.

James offered up some advice to Stanly County's students..

"God has a purpose for every individual," he said. "Fulfill your purpose. Use your talent."



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