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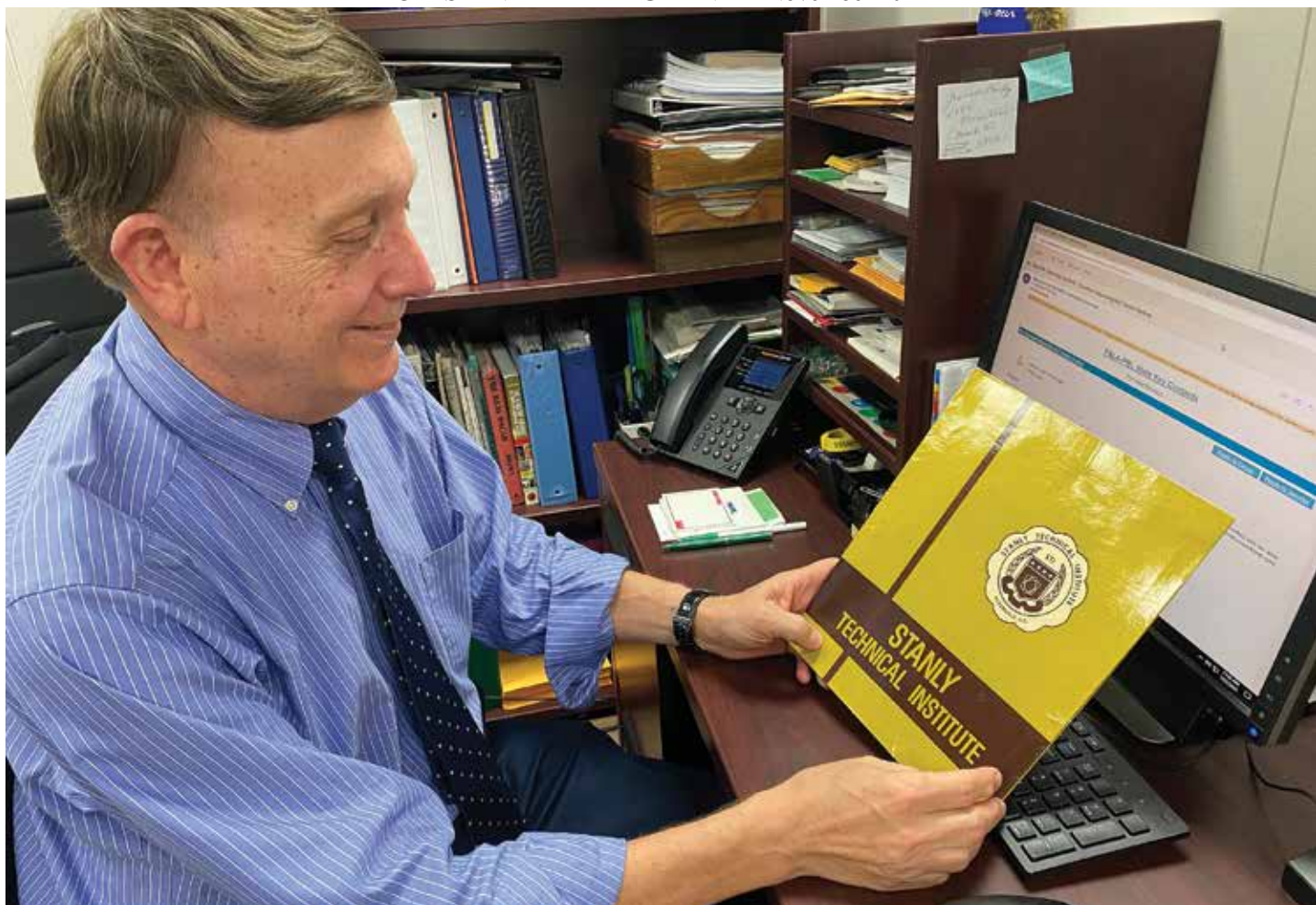
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Dan Hazlett was one of the original eight faculty members of Stanly Technical Institute. Fifty years later, he still teaches part-time at what is now Stanly Community College.

Hazlett was a trailblazer for new college

BY CHRIS MILLER

When wanting to know about the history of Stanly Community College, there are few people more equipped to talk about the subject than Dan Hazlett, the instructor who's been with the college for every year of its existence.

He was one of the original eight faculty members and still teaches part-time.

He was one of the key people, for example, that helped

put up the "SCC Through The Decades" exhibit on display at the Stanly County History Center. Many of the old photographs, newspaper clippings and artifacts detailing the college's earlier years came directly from Hazlett.

"Most organizations cannot boast of dedicated employees with 50 years of continued service, but Stanly Community College is fortunate to have one in Dan Hazlett," said SCC President

Dr. John Enamait. "Since beginning his career with the college in 1971, Dan has been such an integral part of our SCC family."

Though seemingly intertwined with all things related to the college, Hazlett is not originally from Stanly, nor the state for that matter.

Born in West Virginia in 1948, Hazlett graduated from Marshall University, where he received master's degrees in journalism and English. After one year teaching high

school in Virginia, he considered positions at various colleges in the state, but they were offering only nine or 10 months of employment and he wanted year-round.

Dr. Thomas Bishop, who worked at Marshall, was heading to Stanly to serve as Stanly Technical Institute's first dean of faculty. He put the word out around campus about job openings at the new college. Hazlett was intrigued, though he knew very little about North Carolina at

the time. His only memories were during his honeymoon, when he and his wife Sharon drove through the state to get to Myrtle Beach. He thinks they briefly stopped and ate in Norwood, but he is not sure.

What made him decide to take a position was that the STI jobs, unlike the ones in West Virginia, were year-round. So Hazlett took a chance and he and his wife headed to Stanly — expecting full well to be back in his home state in a few years.

“We told our families we’re going to move to North Carolina just for a couple years and then we’ll be back,” he said. “And we never went back.”

He and his wife arrived in the county in August 1972. Not long after, the Hazletts expanded their family with the addition of their son Jason — the first child born to an STI employee.

With only limited teaching experience to fall back on, this was uncharted territory for Hazlett. He often had classes with students his age or older — many of whom had recently returned from Vietnam.

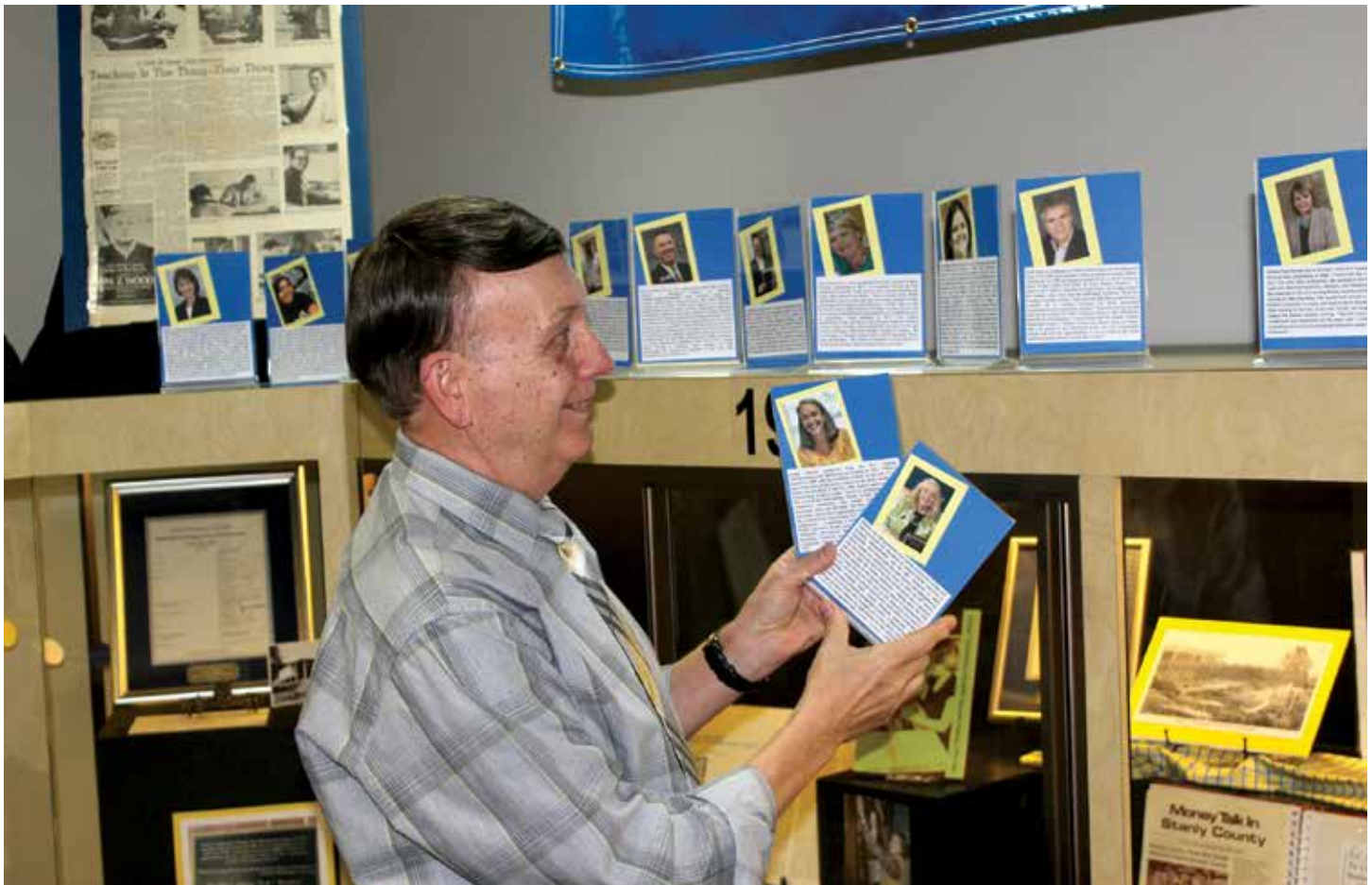
“It was nothing to have a class of 40 students in it, where now we probably don’t have any classes that go over 20,” he said.

Hazlett, who taught basic business English courses, was initially very tough on his students. This was intentional: Since classes were held in an old high school, STI’s first president Dr. Charles Byrd was adamant that “we acted like a college,” Hazlett said. “He said we’ve got to establish from the very beginning that we’re talking serious education here.”

He remembers being called into Bishop’s office one day,



Above, the first color photograph in the SNAP appeared in June 1977 and featured the Patterson Building. At left, Dan Hazlett was the first recipient of a teaching award in 1986, given to the top community college instructor in the state. Photo courtesy of Dan Hazlett.



Dan Hazlett recalls memories of former PBL students.

following a very unusual complaint from one of his classes about his behavior. It read: “Do something about Mr. H. He starts class on time, he keeps us the whole time and he talks about the subject the whole time we’re here.” Bishop congratulated Hazlett and told him to keep up the good work.

Those first few years were especially precarious because the faculty and staff were learning as they went and there was always the worry that not enough students would enroll or funding would dry up.

“We were a struggling young school,” he said. “There was no guarantee those early years that students would come and the community support and

funding would continue. There were so many different angles that had to fall in place to keep things going those first years.”

In the early 1970s, Hazlett said it was quite common for students to arrive to school in the morning after working the night shift at one of the county’s many cotton mills. Hazlett could easily identify these students by the cotton dust in their hair.

“They would say, now don’t start until the cotton heads get here,” Hazlett said with a laugh, noting that between classes the students would go to the restrooms to brush the dust out of their hair.

As someone who has taught thousands of students during his tenure, there have

been some colorful moments that still stand out to Hazlett. One occurred early in his career when his class had to write a paper related to current events.

In an era well before spell-check, one student wrote what Hazlett remembers was a quality, well-researched paper about the relations between the North and South Vietnamese. The paper, though, did feature a large, recurring mistake: The student consistently misspelled “Vietnamese” as “Vitamins.”

Hazlett told the student he was confused how he could do such thorough research and yet still get the names wrong. For the mistake, the student received an A-, Hazlett recalled. To this day, he

chuckles every time he remembers the incident.

After only a few years, the community college had grown so rapidly that classes had to be held all around the area. Hazlett remembers teaching courses at the hospital, Albemarle High School, the basement of First Baptist Church and even the showroom window of a local car dealer (in what is now Five Points).

“You never knew where you were gonna be teaching,” he said.

But the rapid growth was ultimately a good problem to have and it helped pave the way for the building of the current campus on College Drive. Before the college arrived, much of the land along College Drive was used as a

poultry farm.

The very first color photograph that appeared in the *The Stanly News & Press* was in the June 10, 1977 edition and featured an image of what is now the Patterson building.

"Everything was so clean, everything was new," Hazlett said. "It felt like a college."

Hazlett has been approached many times during his career about his interest in making the transition to teaching at a four-year university like Pfeiffer or UNC Charlotte, but he never seriously considered such a move.

"From those beginning years, I saw the value of a community college and what it had to offer," he said.

Hazlett helped SCC gain statewide publicity in 1986 when he was the recipient of the inaugural Excellence in Instruction Award given to the community college instructor of the year. During his speech, he remembers tweaking a quote derived from a famous line in a George Bernard Shaw play as a way of emphasizing the importance of community colleges.

"There's that saying, 'Those who can, do; and those who can't, teach,' and I said, in my mind, it's 'Those who can, teach; and those who can do it the best, teach at a community college,'" he said.

As Stanly Community College has evolved and changed over the years,

Hazlett's presence has remained constant. He retired in 2003, but continues to teach part-time. He also leads the college's Phi Beta Lambda chapter, which has been named a national "Gold Seal Chapter" 18 consecutive years. Several of his SCC students have received state and national awards in PBL competitive events while many local officials, including Albemarle Mayor Pro Tem Martha Sue Hall and Councilman Dexter Townsend, were part of PBL and under his tutelage.

Hall said Hazlett always did his best to elevate his students and place them in the best positions to succeed, especially those in PBL, while he always remained dutifully in the

background.

"He did have a great influence on me and many, many others," Hall said, noting that over the course of the past 50 years, Hazlett has been the "heartbeat" of the college.

As of now, even after 50 years of service, Hazlett has no plans on leaving the school anytime soon. He still enjoys interacting with his students. And the community still greatly appreciates him.

"When you think of Stanly Community College, you can't help but think of Dan Hazlett," Enamait said. "He's one in a million and we're so fortunate to have him as part of the SCC family for our entire 50-year history."



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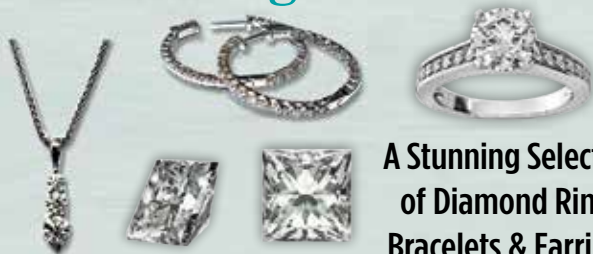
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Nehemiah Project works to help community by partnering with local organizations

BY CHRIS MILLER

Over the past two years, it's pretty likely that most people in Stanly County have heard of the nonprofit Nehemiah Project. The group has seemingly been everywhere in the county, providing key assistance to as many people as possible while also partnering with many nonprofits.

Named after the the historical figure from the Bible who was called by God to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, the group was founded in 2019 by Paul Peters and focuses its efforts on addressing six key issues, or towers, within the county: the homeless, senior citizens, veterans, at-risk kids and abused women, those who suffer from addiction and/or mental health disorders, and those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Originally from Illinois, Peters, 57, always wanted to help people, especially children, in some capacity. After graduating from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's degree in psychology, he worked as a chaplain in New York, where he served and worked with many at-risk kids and young adults. He also served eight years in the U.S. Army Reserves and National Guard.

Peters moved to North Carolina in 1995 to attend Southern Evangelical Seminary in Matthews with the hopes of becoming a missionary. Though that didn't pan out, he was able to open his

own business in 2010, Covenant Case Management Services, which serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across much of the state.

Several years later, Peters traveled to Myrtle Beach, for one of his annual retreats, where he spends a few days alone in a hotel room praying and talking with God for discernment and guidance. This is where the idea for Nehemiah Project, and its six focus areas, was established.

"It really came out of me spending some time with the Lord," he said.

He poured through the Book of Nehemiah, focusing on Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and heal the city. He wanted to create a similar impact in communities across North Carolina.

"I said where do you want us to start and God just said, 'You're starting in Stanly County,'" Peters recalled, noting a big factor was the county's struggles combating the opioid epidemic. Though he was living in Charlotte, he used to work for Monarch in the early 2000s when it was still Arc Services and had an affinity for the area, especially The Goody Shop Cafe.

He knew Stanly would serve as a target-rich area to pilot his organization because it has always been a "relationship-oriented community."

"Anytime you're going to make an impact on somebody's life it has to do with relationships," Peters said. "And once they understand you're



Nehemiah founder Paul Peters helps distribute items.



here to serve them and help them, they're more trusting, they're more open."

Peters established Nehemiah Project Covenant of Love in Stanly County in 2019 with each of the six towers representing issues Peters had encountered throughout his life: He struggled in the past with addiction to alcohol; he's been homeless; his mother was abused by his father as he became an at-risk youth; he's worked with seniors in nursing homes; he's served in the military; and he has plenty of experience working with developmentally-challenged individuals.

"In my life God has carried me through difficult times," Peters said. "In those difficult times my life has been touched, in some capacity, with each of the Nehemiah towers."

Working with other local organizations

Since first establishing its present in Stanly, Nehemiah Project has partnered with more than 30 organizations across the county to provide services to people within the six towers. These include Esther House, Butterfly House, Stanly Community Christian Ministry, The Community Inn, Will's Place, The Bridge to Recovery, American Legion Post 520, GHA Autism Supports and Stanly County Senior Services.

"Nehemiah is about collaborating and working together to serve the community, we're not about competing" with other groups, said Peters, who now lives in the county. "We're taking their dream and partnering with our dream...it's all about working together because

we all have an aspect of serving the community."

Officials from the Nehemiah Project want to be a common bond to bring organizations together.

"We're wanting to be the mortar in the wall...we're wanting to fill the gaps and bring all the nonprofits together," said Jennifer McSwain, interim acting director with the organization, alluding to the overarching metaphor that has guided the nonprofit — the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

In order to make sure each area of focus gets the attention it deserves, there are go-to people for each of the six towers who help devise specific activities and make sure volunteers are in place.

While they have organized a few large-scale activities, including the "Work Hard

Dream Big" events for young kids held at the E.E. Waddell Community Center and the monthly Changing Lives After 5 meetings, many of the organization's initiatives have been small acts of kindness that don't necessarily draw much publicity, such as cleaning apartments for seniors living in the Morrow Chase Apartments, distributing Christmas gifts to kids, building wheelchair ramps for handicapped individuals and mentoring elementary students as part of the Lunch Buddy program.

"Our approach has not been in your face, it's been more behind-the-scenes," similar to the way Jesus conducted himself, Peters said. "We don't want to get the glory, we want God to get the glory."

As if tending to its six

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towers of service was not enough, Nehemiah Project also founded the outdoor consignment store 4 Rivers in downtown Albemarle. Though the group is no longer directly running the shop, the proceeds still directly benefit its many community partners.

The organization also has a care closet at its headquarters, located at 2000 W. Main St. in Albemarle, which provides free clothing, medical equipment and food to individuals in need.

"The community has been great about bringing items in," said Brandi Jordan, a board member and one of Peters' business partners.

By working with various organizations and individuals on key issues, Peters hopes the community will become more open and accepting to people struggling and going through difficult times.

"Not only that they're more compassionate, but that they're showing their compassion through action and volunteering," he said.

All about passion and purpose

Over the past few years, as the Nehemiah Project's

stature expanded within the county, individuals throughout the community have gravitated to the organization, wanting to help. The group has a core of employees, volunteers and a board of directors. Many of these people have become involved with the organization because of Peters and his outgoing personality.

He loves to dress up as a large, hairy Sasquatch, which is the organization's mascot, for community events, especially ones involving young kids. This is because the organization's emphasis on the importance of belief — which Jordan says connects the various towers — easily aligns with the ape-like creature's "Believe in yourself even when no one else does" motto.

Similar to how the cow represents Chick-fil-A, the Sasquatch represents Nehemiah Project, Jordan said.

"He's all about finding people's passion and purpose, whether you work inside the company or outside the company," Jordan said. "That's just his mindset.

"I really feel like Paul wants to leave you better than he found you," she

added.

Even during the first several months of the pandemic last year, when in-person gatherings were largely prohibited, the organization was able to find creative ways to help the public. It made house calls to check in on families and Peters drove around the county delivering care packages comprised of many things including masks, hand sanitizer (that was made in-house), rice and cans of meat and vegetables.

"I was driving around the local community handing off groceries, care kits, diapers," he said. "It was just a way for us to have an outreach."

During the pandemic, Peters and other members also helped renovate parts of the Waddell Center. They added new cabinets and benches for the library along with new desks for the facility's computer lab. Additionally, the group planted flower beds to raise vegetables that will be used in cooking classes at the facility.

It's these types of personalized outreach efforts along with the continued development of relation-

ships that the organization calls its "special sauce."

Nehemiah Project has no plans of slowing down anytime soon. It's got several events scheduled in the coming months, including a Glow Ball golf tournament Nov. 20 at Tillery Tradition Country Club, and the organization is planning to soon expand into Rowan County in a partnership with the county's EMS agency to help those struggling with addiction. The ultimate goal, once the organization is fully developed in Stanly, is to establish the organization across the state, the country and eventually the world, said Peters, who refers to himself as a "big dreamer."

And along every step of the journey, Peters and the others associated with the organization have and will continue to put their faith and trust in God.

"God loves and wouldn't have sent his son to die on the cross if he didn't love us," Peters said. "He wants the community rebuilt because he knows when that happens, people's needs will be met and that's the ultimate goal for us."

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Meet Tommy Whitley of Oakboro. He is pictured here with Crystal Thomas, CNAII, and his wife, Allie. Tommy and Allie have been married for 67 years and have 16 great-grandchildren. They live on a farm in Frog Pond. At this initial admission to hospice, Tommy was unable to engage in his daily activities because of his illness, but with hospice care, he is line-dancing again every week. (Contributed)



Hospice celebrates 40 years of care in Stanly, region

BY CHRIS MILLER

Dealing with sick family members is never easy and can often be fraught with challenges. It's especially hard when trying to make decisions for loved ones battling incurable diseases, who's life expectancy is measured in months, if not weeks, or sometimes even days.

One saving grace for many families in Stanly County over the decades has been Hospice of Stanly & the Uwharrie, a nonprofit organization that has provided quality and compassionate end-of-life care for patients and their loved ones since 1981. With the help of staff and volunteers, many patients have been able to live comfortably in their homes surrounded by their families instead of being hospitalized or placed in long-term care facilities.

The organization, which has served more than 6,600 patients, is celebrating quite the milestone this year: 40 years of service to the community.

"I think it's a tremendous achievement and I think it speaks to the commitment of not only the staff and the board of directors within our agency, but also to the community for their support and the commitment to make sure the agency still exists," said Executive Director Lori

Thayer, who has been with the organization since 2012.

"I'm a big fan of Hospice and what Hospice does and what they mean to the community," added County Commissioner Scott Efird, chairman of the nonprofit's Board of Directors. "The staff, from the executive director to the leadership team to the nurses, they just do a tremendous job in the community."

To put the anniversary in proper historical context, the Stanly News & Press interviewed former and current staff members, along with volunteers and individuals impacted by Hospice, to learn what it has meant to them over all these years.

Providing care and comfort for families

Becki Rice first heard about Hospice of Stanly after one of her friends had a positive experience dealing with the organization.

"We knew absolutely nothing about Hospice at the time my dad got sick," Rice said.

But once her family contacted Hospice about eight years ago, she said her father, Keith Rice, fell in love with the staff and even referred to the girls as "his angels."

The organization also took care of Rice's mother, Hazel, who was in Hospice care for about six weeks before she died at the end of January.

But the decision for a family to acknowledge their loved one has regressed to a point where they need end-of-life care is not easy — and it certainly was hard for Rice and her siblings.

"It was difficult, but we knew in our hearts that it was the right thing to do for our parents," she said.

Both Rice's mom and dad wanted to be at home during their final weeks instead of being placed in a facility.

"Hospice just seemed to be the perfect answer to our prayers," she said.

Rice thinks her parents were able to live longer by being cared for at home compared to if they had to go somewhere else like a long-term care facility.

Hospice staff came multiple times to the house, helping with things like giving her parents a bath, administering medication and helping them walk around. One of the aides even prayed with her father, which he told Rice was "the most beautiful prayer I had ever heard."

Becki Rice's memory bear was created with fabric from her mother's black vest and her father's sports jacket. Photo courtesy of Shields Howard. (Contributed)



Rice remembers the first time hospice aide Alicia McKinnon arrived at the home to give Hazel a bath. Her mom initially protested, but Rice told her to be patient. Afterwards, Rice recalled that her mom was impressed.

“She really knew what she was doing,” she remembers her mom told her. “When is she going to do that again?”

After her mother died, Rice had about three months of bereavement care, where Michael Conners, a bereavement counselor, regularly came out to talk with her and help her process what occurred.

“She was so understanding,” Rice said. “She knew exactly what I was going through.”

An especially touching moment occurred when Conners inquired if Rice had an article of her parent’s clothing she could have. Rice gave Conners her mother’s Christmas vest and her father’s sports jacket. A custom-made teddy bear was then created from the fabric and it sits beside her mother’s favorite chair. It’s one of many so-called memory bears the organization has made for family members to remember their loved ones.

Even more than half a year after her mother died, Rice said Conners still reaches out to her “just to say hello and see how I’m doing.”

As part of the organization’s bereavement program, counselors provide grief support to all family members for at least 13 months after their loved ones have died.



Hospice patient Wayne Burris is joined by nurse Renee Morton. (Contributed)

With all the many moments they have shared together over the years helping with both her parents, Rice views the staff at Hospice of Stanly & the Uwharrie as part of her family.

Pam Holbrook has also been part of the Hospice family for more than 30 years as a volunteer, one of 55 currently helping within the organization. She was inspired to work for the organization after watching Hospice of Anson County care for her father, who was battling pancreatic cancer. Her father was told he had between two to six months to live, but thanks to the care of the staff, her father lived for 18 months.

“I realized how important they were and what a wonderful organization they were,” Holbrook said.

At the time, she lived in Stanly and so as a way to give back, she took training courses to become a hospice

volunteer in the late 1980s. Her responsibilities included visiting families, taking meals to them and taking patients to treatment or to see their doctor, though volunteers no longer provide that specific service, she said.

“I had some wonderful experiences doing that,” said Holbrook, who after more than 30 years of service, including 5,000 hours of volunteering, was honored this past spring with the organization’s Volunteer Lifetime Achievement Honor. “I felt like I received so much more from those patients and their families than I could ever possibly give to them as a volunteer.”

The origins of the organization

Hospice of Stanly County was first incorporated in 1981 after support from both the Stanly County Medical Society and the Stanly County Ministerial Association, according to histori-

cal information provided by Shields Howard, the organization’s marketing director.

An initial meeting, sponsored by the ministerial association, was held in March at the Stanly County Courthouse to gauge community interest in creating a hospice program. About 90 people attended the event. Rev. George H.V. Hunter, minister of First Presbyterian Church in Albemarle, spoke of the importance of establishing a local program to help the terminally ill and their families.

“Folks need to have the opportunity to live fully until they die,” he said, according to a local newspaper article, “and to live at home until then. We’re trying to make it possible for ‘papa’ to die at home without pain and to make it possible for ‘mama’ to have help so ‘papa’ can die at home in his own bed.”

A month later, a hospice steering committee was

formed during a meeting at First Presbyterian Church. Several decisions were made, including that care would be limited to cancer patients and the scope of the organization be focused on caring for residents exclusively in Stanly. Hunter, along with Sue Massey, who worked at Piedmont Area Mental Health Centers, were elected as co-chairpersons of the committee.

By the summer of 1981, an application for a charter as a nonprofit organization was submitted to the state for approval. Bylaws were adopted and a board of directors were appointed, with Massey being elected the first president of Hospice of Stanly County, according to a 1992 SNAP story highlighting the 10-year anniversary of the organization.

The first patients were accepted into the hospice program, which was originally located in the basement of Main Street United Methodist Church, on Nov. 16 1982.

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the organization gradually began to grow and expand its operations. Rachel Goins was executive director from 1988-1994 and during her tenure, Hospice was approved for Medicare and Medicaid certification and the organization broadened its operations to serve people with non-cancer related ailments such as AIDS and Alzheimer's disease.

"Most people believe that hospice care is directly related to cancer and that's not so. It wasn't for us," said Goins, who had previously volunteered her time at hospitals in Stanly and other

areas where she had lived. "We broadened the scope into other terminal illnesses."

Goins helped increase the organization's financial base by requesting funds from the United Way and applying for grants on behalf of patients who did not qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. She also organized a speakers bureau to meet with local citizens and began recruiting people to serve on the board of directors.

The hospice program, which was initially made up almost entirely of volunteers, expanded over the first decade to comprise 14 staff members by 1992, including four nurses, three home health aides, a family support coordinator and a medical director, among others.

Goins calls her time as director "the most rewarding experience in my working career" because she was part of an organization that provided key support for families during some of their toughest moments.

"It just gave you faith and hope to know that you had helped people who at the end needed the services," she said. "It gave me a great deal of inner satisfaction to know that I was a part of that."

After holding offices throughout the county, including in Stanly Memorial Hospital and the health department, the organization moved into a new office at 960 N. First St. in December 1995, where it's been ever since. In 2014, to be more inclusive of its service area, the organization changed its name to Hospice of Stanly

& the Uwharrie.

The organization currently serves people up to an hour away from Stanly County. Though the overwhelming majority of patients are from Stanly, during 2021 the organization has served people in Anson, Montgomery, Rowan and Cabarrus counties.

'We do the Lord's work'

Beth Thomas began her career working as a social worker at Richmond Memorial Hospital for about 10 years before she felt a strong calling to return to her home county and help patients with Hospice of Stanly.

"I was giving 110 percent to their community, but I knew I wanted to come back and be available and serve

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the patients and families of my community,” said Thomas, who left her job at the hospital for Hospice in 2005.

Sixteen years later, Thomas, who is the family services manager and a social worker, is now the longest-tenured staff member with Hospice. She oversees the other two social workers, two bereavement coordinators and a chaplain.

“That’s where the Lord called me,” Thomas said, noting that hospice work is a calling. “We do the Lord’s work.”

For Thomas and the other social workers, responsibilities include providing emotional support to patients and their families and assisting with caregiving needs,

such as if patients have to be placed in a facility.

During her career with Hospice, Thomas has seen a gradual increase in the number of patients the organization helps on a daily basis. When she started in 2005, she said the average number of daily patients fluctuated between around 28 to 38; the organization is currently providing care for an average of between 66 to 68 patients each day.

While the majority of patients are 55 and older, the organization serves people 18 and up. Thomas recalls that the youngest patient she’s ever worked with was in their early 20s.

A small portion of the patient population over the past year and a half has been peo-

ple that had contracted the coronavirus, though usually they have other comorbidities such as cancer or lung disease.

“So once traditional medicine was not working and families made the decision to bring their loved one home with Hospice we have cared for some of those that had the Covid pneumonia and ended up passing away in their homes,” Thomas said.

Some of the many community events the organization typically hosts includes the Hospice Golf Tournament, the Angel Tree Lighting ceremony and the Festival of Trees at Stanly Commons. Other key events include Camp Forget-Me-Not, a free bereavement day camp for

children ages 6-17 and their families, and Hope Blooms, where people learn more about grief.

While the Hospice of Stanly has changed and the number of patients has increased over the years, what has stayed constant is the organization’s mission of providing high-quality care and compassion towards its patients and their families.

“Things change in management, but in the end our goal does not change because we want to serve our community with the best care we can,” Thomas said.

Even with the big milestone, Hospice of Stanly has no plans to slow down.

“I hope we can be here 40 more,” said Thayer. “That’s the plan.”

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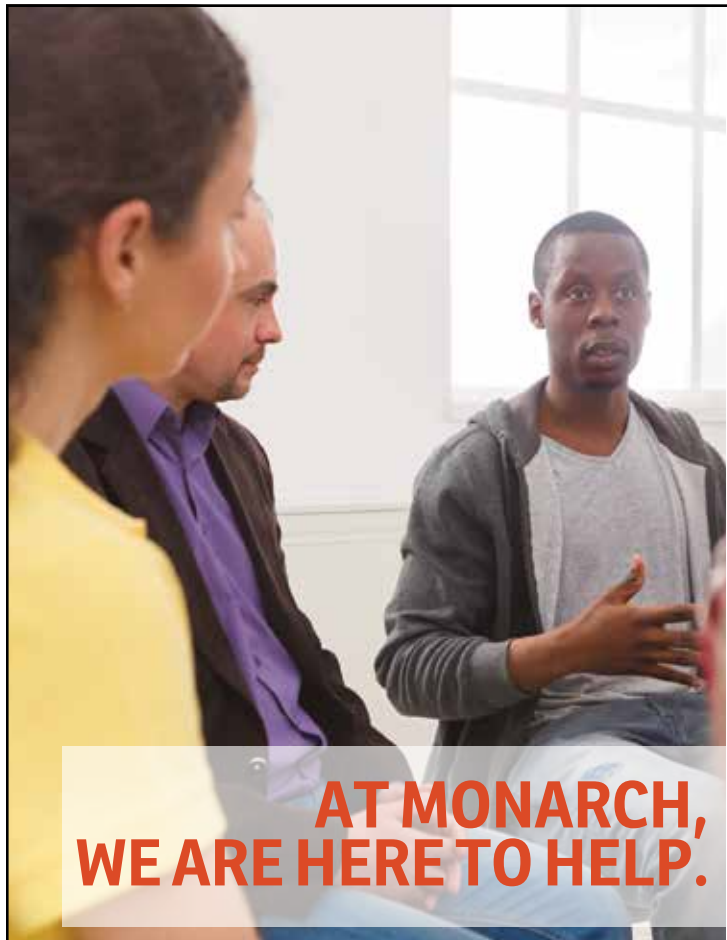
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