

Health Focus 2023



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*Inside
issue:*

- Blackfords helping others
- Gould's Fitness
- Health survey

After losing their son to an overdose, Blackfords want to help others

BY MELISSA PATRICK
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Nancy and Larry Blackford work intentionally to fight the opioid epidemic in Woodford County, inspired to do so because of their son's overdose death in 2017. However, when it comes to talking about their son, Larry Gene Blackford Jr., they don't focus on his addiction and death, but on the well-rounded life he led and his love for his family.

"I don't want him just to be remembered because he overdosed, but remembered for his greatness, his achievements and his ability to give genuine true love to everyone," said Nancy, adding, "True love doesn't have to be perfect, but just true."

She pointed to her son's accomplishments.

He had a bachelor's degree in media broadcasting and a master's degree in physical education. He taught physical education for a while, but later shifted his focus to media technology while working in Fayette County Public Schools. He also started his own videography business called "LB Production."

Larry spoke of his son's passion for media photography, traveling to various countries, playing the drums in two bands and in local churches here in Versailles and Lexington.

The Blackfords said they learned at their son's funeral, which was attended by more than 2,000 people, that he was a great help to others throughout the 30 years of his life. They said people told them about how he stood up for disabled children when he was young and how he helped others with their addiction as an adult.

Larry, a minister, called his son a "secret disciple."

"He had that kind of heart. He was just a real loving kind of kid," Larry said. "Everybody loved him. He loved people. He loved God."

Nancy said she and her husband take comfort in knowing their son always knew he was loved.

"One of the things . . . that we feel so good about is that even through all of Larry's problems, he felt loved. He never didn't feel like he was loved," she said. "And we felt loved."

Their son died from a drug overdose on Christmas Day 2017. Nancy and Larry said he'd attended a Christmas Eve family gathering and had called Christmas morning to tell them he was on his way home.

Nancy reflected on his excitement about having the perfect gift for her and said she told him, "Honey, don't you know, you are my gift. And I said I love you and he said 'But mom, I love you more.'" That was how they always exchanged I love yous, she said.

His gift to her was a wall-hanging that read: "In this home, we do second chances, we do grace, we do real, we do mistakes, we do I'm sorry, we do loud, we do hugs, we do family, we do love."

Nancy said at the time of his death her son was on Vivitrol, an injection used to help people in early recover with opioid addiction to manage their cravings. She said his next shot was due and that she believes he took the pills just to feel

normal and that he had no idea they were laced with fentanyl.

"Fentanyl killed my son, it was laced with his opioid pills, and that killed him and we were devastated," she said. "And because of that, I do have a passion now to try to help others."

A long history of helping others

Nancy said she and her family have always been activists, with a heart for serving the community. Before their son's death, Larry said he volunteered for 17 years in the prison system as a minister and Nancy said she co-founded a group called Bridge the Gap, which worked to remove barriers to employment for disadvantaged members in the community, including people in addiction recovery. The group dissolved after the mayor created the Director of Minority Empowerment position that is still in place today.

Nancy said she has been on the Woodford County Agency for Substance Abuse Policy (ASAP) board since 2016, and is now its coordinator. ASAP is a community coalition dedicated to the education and

prevention of substance abuse in Woodford County through a number of efforts, including mini-grants.

ASAP has also signed a contract to support a youth substance-use prevention program called "Planet Youth," designed to provide youth in the community with free after-school activities so that they have things to do between after-school hours and dark. Also supporting the program are the Woodford County Fiscal Court, the Versailles City Council, the Midway City Council and Woodford County Health Department.

Since 2018, Larry has been the chair of the Woodford County Opioid Task Force, a position that he recently resigned from. He remains active with ASAP, he said.

One of the key programs that has come out of the task force is Woodford AWARE (Awareness Woodford Addiction Recovery Education), which works to educate people about the risk of addiction from legally prescribed opiates and provides drug education programs in schools.

Larry is also a Fiscal Court magistrate for District 6.

Opioid settlement money

The Blackfords have strong feelings about how the opioid settlement money from drug manufacturers and distributors should be spent. At the Oct. 26 Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission's town hall in Lexington, they spoke to the need for safe and sober housing that is affordable.

They also called for increased regulations for sober housing and treatment centers to ensure they are doing what they say they are doing and to ensure that they have medical staff on duty.

The state is getting \$842 million, half of which will be allocated by the commission, with the other half going to cities and counties. Funds are to be disbursed annually, on various schedules, through 2038.

Speaking about these needs, Nancy said "With all this money coming in . . . security and safety should not be a worry." She also said there is a need for treatment centers and sober housing that feels safe to young college students and working professionals.

As part of a solution to this problem, Nancy said she'd like to see the local hospital offer a detox center, where anyone could voluntarily admit themselves and find a safe place to withdraw from drugs and alcohol, with medical supervision and care. This stems from conversations with her son who told her he had gone to treatment centers where he "feared for his life."

Fentanyl, stigma and love

They both said something has to be done about fentanyl, which was responsible for their son's death in 2017 and in 2021 was involved in over 70 percent of the state's 2,250 overdose deaths.

"We've got to come up with something to block this fentanyl from killing our people," Nancy said. "And I'm telling you with all this money coming in, it would be a shame if we can't do something constructive to really make a difference."

Larry said the solution must be found in the communities.

With fentanyl, he said, there lies "huge amounts of money and power and evil. I don't think that's going to ever stop coming into the country," he said. "But I think we as a community, I think we can do something locally. . . We can do all we can to find some ways to keep drugs out of our community."

The Blackford's also spoke about the importance of getting rid of the stigma associated with addiction, noting that the shame of addiction often stops people and families from seeking treatment.

"The problem was the stigma back then," Nancy said of her son. "I hate the fact that he felt like he needed to keep this image that he wasn't needing help. . . And I am so glad the stigma is kind of getting lifted."

Larry often tells of a dream he had in 2015 where he was eulogizing his son and said he felt that dream was God's way of preparing him for his son's death. He said it was also a reminder to tell his son he loved him every time he saw him.

"That's what I want to do," Larry said. "Help parents understand that you've got to love your child no matter what."

He then pointed to scripture in Corinthians that talks about why people suffer.

"God gives us certain pain and suffering to be a comfort to others," he said. "And that's what we're doing now."



NANCY AND LARRY BLACKFORD are community leaders who are inspired to fight the opioid epidemic because of their son's overdose death in 2017. They are standing beside a memorial to their son, Larry Gene Blackford Jr., at their home in Versailles. (Photo by Melissa Patrick)



LARRY GENE BLACKFORD JR. led a well-rounded life, but suffered from an opioid addiction and died from a fentanyl overdose in 2017. His death has inspired his parents, Larry and Nancy Blackford, to fight the opioid epidemic. (Photo submitted)

Gould's Fitness and Nutrition - helping customers reach healthy goals

BY BILL CAINE
WOODFORD SUN SPORTS

Living a healthy lifestyle is a choice, but for Brandon and Kelli Gould helping others reach healthy goals is a part of their daily routine.

As owners of Gould's Fitness and Nutrition, this husband and wife team serve up shakes and teas that not only fill their customers with energy but help them reach their nutritional goals. The couple say they take pride in providing the community with nutritious options that make meeting personal health goals more accessible and enjoyable.

Through their products and personal training expertise, the Goulds can provide customers with an easy and tasty way to stay fit.

Carla Mulvaney, a former Huntertown Elementary kindergarten teacher, said her life after retirement could not have been what it is today without Kelli Gould's help and guidance before and after her hip surgery.

Gould's advice and mentorship were invaluable in helping Mulvaney transition into life after retirement, and she is genuinely thankful for all the support she has received over the years. Through Gould's encouragement, Mulvaney said she found renewed self-belief and achieved a newfound confidence that enabled her to take on new challenges and pursue things she never thought possible.

"After 30 years of sitting criss-cross applesauce in my classroom, I visited a physical therapist and maxed out my potential for recovery," said Mulvaney. "Kelli helped get me into shape for the surgery. And shortly after I was back working with her, I am happy to say my plans to travel with my husband Brent have continued. We have done buddy training with the Goulds for the past two years.

"Kelli is encouraging and kind. She has a big heart and wanted me to feel better just as badly as I did. Because of the Goulds, I can enjoy kayaking, hiking and snorkeling with Brent as we travel to different national parks."

Brandon's passion for helping people motivates him to open the shop daily, he said. He wants to make a difference in the lives of others by using his positivity and dedication.

Brandon said he also strives to inspire others to take action and be empowered to control their health and wellness. "Giving people positive reinforcement and the tools to train safely and effectively can make all the difference in the success and brings them back for more," he said. "Seeing goals reached is what it's all about for us. We love a good success story."

Nutrition is just one part of Goulds' services to their community. In addition to shakes and teas, the couple offer a variety of classes that focus on cardio, strength training and flexibility. An early riser, Brandon now offers classes before the sun comes up to help his customers reach their health goals before starting their work day. He has also found that this pre-dawn routine helps people stay motivated and focused and provides a positive atmosphere for those seeking to reach their fitness aspirations.

"The first benefit of the early morning class is that you get a day's worth of activity before starting your normal daily routine," said Brandon. "You also don't have as many interruptions to your schedule that early, so it's easier to find time in the morning and stay consistent in your workouts. I've heard people say that they are sluggish without working out, but the morning workouts do the opposite and refresh your body and help you sustain the energy needed to fulfill your duties that day."

"Exercise alone is used to make us feel good," he continued. "We help folks set goals that are obtainable, but not so easy that they can reach them right away. We use fitness, nutrition, and positive motivation to help our clients succeed and believe in themselves."

The Goulds have tailored their programs to fit the needs of their clients, allowing them to train in a stress-free environment. Whether it's strength training or the rowing machine, the Goulds said they have the knowledge and expertise to help their clients achieve their goals.



BRANDON AND KELLI GOULD at Gould's Fitness and Nutrition work to improve the lifestyle of customers with various workout plans and protein shakes. (Photo submitted)

See GOULDS p. 6

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Health survey results help improve programs

By MELISSA PATRICK
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Leaders at the Woodford County Health Department and Bluegrass Community Hospital are encouraging Woodford County adults to fill out a survey to let them know what their health needs are in an effort to improve community health programs and to address social determinants of health.

"This is a perfect opportunity to tell the health care providers in this community what it is you need so that we're providing you with those services," said Angie Ingram, director of nursing at the hospital.

Anne Hagan, health educator at the health department, agreed. "This is their chance to speak up and tell us how they want their community to be and what resources they need," she said.

The survey, called a Community Health Needs Assessment, will include about 38 questions that address a broad range of topics, including questions about health priorities, health risks, health conditions and social determinants of health. Social determinants such as housing, transportation and food insecurity account for 80 percent of health outcomes, according to researchers.

Health departments are required to do the health survey every three to five years and Bluegrass Community Hospital does one voluntarily every three years.



BLUEGRASS COMMUNITY HOSPITAL conducts a community-wide health survey every three years. This year, it is partnering with the health department on the survey. (Photo submitted)



THE WOODFORD COUNTY Health Department conducts a community-wide health survey every three to five years. Results from the survey help them to improve health programs and address social determinants of health. (Photo submitted)

"Our focus was on heart health and social determinants of health; what resources and things that people in the community need that we can assist with," said Ingram.

Hagan and Cameron Faudere, marketing and communications manager at Lifepoint Health, which has owned Bluegrass Community Hospital since 2001, offered examples of how prior health surveys have inspired new programs.

Hagan said prior surveys showed a need for more transportation options in the county, especially among seniors. From this finding, she said the health department partnered with ITNAmerica and created Woodford

Wheels, a low-price transportation program that any adult in the county can use.

Faudere said a survey done at the beginning of the pandemic showed that people in Woodford County needed more access to cardiac care. In response, he said the hospital will add a full-time cardiology clinic in the next couple of weeks.

"So that's . . . an action we've taken just from a survey and just from hearing patient concerns," he said.

Further, Ingram said the hospital has joined the University of Kentucky Gill Heart & Vascular Institute affiliate network, which helps the hospital with resources and community education and is a chest pain accredited facility.

The community health survey will be administered from Feb. 13 through early April. Hagan said the survey is anonymous, but will ask if a person is a resident of the county.

She said the survey will be available on the health department's website and social media sites and hard copies will be available at the health department. The health department is also working on a schedule to make it available at various locations and public events. Hagan added the hospital will share the survey on its social media sites, as well as have flyers with the QR-code to pass out to patients.

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GOULDS continued from p. 3

As parents, the Goulds also understand the lack of free time moms and dads of young children have, and as a result, their pre-dawn training times are popular to them as well. Seeing clients reach goals or overcome a challenge is thrilling and brings a variety of emotions to the table as they reflect on success stories, they said.

Kelli found herself emotional talking about a bride who she worked with for nine months before her wedding and how she just wanted to fit into the dress of her dreams.

"Hearing her tell me how proud she was of herself for putting in the work and saying how she felt comfortable in her own skin still brings tears to my eyes," said Kelli.

"For someone my age to admit they were comfortable in their own skin, it had a big impact on me that we are helping people reach their goals. It was really special to see someone gain physical and emotional confidence like that."

The Goulds have embraced a more modern approach to their business and found success online. They also see results and engage with their followers on social media. The Goulds are conscious of their social media following and regularly post challenges for their followers to participate in, they said.

These challenges often include opportunities for their followers to comment on their results if they join in. "We've had people buy into our social media challenges, and the feedback has been great," said Brandon. "We had someone recently come in commenting on how they hadn't done jumping jacks in 20 years and how hard it was at first. We just want to engage people and encourage them to be active any way we can."

The commitment of the Goulds extends beyond working-age adults. As coaches and mentors for youth athletes, they offer open gym options and one-on-one training, creating opportunities for kids to train for specific sports and learn safely. Through their program, the Goulds said they provide a safe and positive environment where young people can stay active while honing their skills. They are passionate about giving back to the community and giving kids a chance to develop confidence and be better athletes, they added.



CARLA AND BRENT MULVANEY enjoy visiting national parks to explore, hike and kayak. Carla said she could not have had the post-surgery success to take these trips and do these outdoor activities without Kelli Gould's guidance and positivity. (Photo submitted)



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