

See inside for ways you can support families.

The magazine of Buckner International | SUMMER 2023

Buckner Today



**Adoptive family
continues to learn
what it means to
lean on God**

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Buckner Today

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An answer for single parents

LEADERSHIP

PRESIDENT & CEO, BUCKNER INTERNATIONAL
Albert L. Reyes

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS
Scott Collins

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR
Isa Torres

ART DIRECTOR
Alan Paul

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS
Emily Ahrens

GRAPHIC ARTIST
Luis Pérez

CONTRIBUTORS
Russ Dilday
Erica Zamora

CONTACT

EMAIL: bucknercommunications@buckner.org
PHONE: 214-758-8000

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“My chains have been broken here. I do believe in God. I do believe in hope. I do believe in myself and my children.” – Buckner Family Pathways® mom | See page 22 for her story.

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TO BOLDLY GO



To Boldly Go” is the theme of our strategic plan for 2023. The phrase comes from Star Trek and debuted Sept. 8, 1966. If you are like me, you grew up watching Star Trek and know all about Captain Kirk, Spock and others on the crew.

Star Trek followed the voyages of the crew of the starship USS Enterprise, a space exploration vessel built by the United Federation of Planets in the 23rd century, on a mission to “explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before.”

We have not quite reached the 23rd century. We are only in the third decade of the 21st century. And yet, it may feel like we are exploring strange new worlds, seeking out new life and new ways of living and discovering new civilizations so we might boldly go where no one has gone before through our ministry at Buckner International.

CIVILIZATIONAL FUTURE

In 1996, just before the turn of the 20th century, Samuel P. Huntington, Harvard Professor and Chair of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies and Director of the National Security Council under the Carter Administration wrote a groundbreaking book, “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.”¹ Huntington proposed that the broadest level of culture and cultural identities were shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world.

He noted people all over the world define themselves in terms

of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions. They identify with cultural groups, tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilizations. Then he concludes that the most dangerous cultural conflicts are those along the fault lines between civilizations.

Just a few years later we began to see the clash of civilizations with events such as 9/11. These clashes continue today along the fault lines of our planet.

We just passed the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We’ve seen devastating earthquakes in Syria and Afghanistan that killed thousands and left even more homeless.

With everything else happening, China seems to be flexing its muscles as they aspire to make a mark on the global scene. The Chinese Communist Party appears to be using economic and military coercion to bully its neighbors, advance unlawful maritime claims and threaten maritime shipping lanes to destabilize territories along their coastline. China has become Brazil’s largest trading partner. The future looks tentative and different than the past. It sure feels like a strange new world.

This year marks a 10-year march toward 2033 when the whole world will acknowledge, and many will celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have a 10-year horizon to consider our assignment over this period.

So, what would it mean for Buckner “To Boldly Go...?” Before we can answer that question, it might be helpful to peek into the future. And while we don’t have a crystal ball, we do have trends and

changes we can document that are shaping our strange new world.

This March, I listened as Elijah Brown, general secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance, outlined six major winds of the future that I would point to as we think about Buckner's future.

WIND ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

You have heard about the demographic changes in Texas and the U.S. However, on a global scale, a few things stand out. The population of the world today is 8 billion. In the next 10 years, it will grow to 9 billion. Worldwide, people over the age of 60 will grow from 1 billion to 2 billion by 2050.

WIND TWO: INCREASED URBANIZATION

In 2020, 55% of the world's population lived in cities. By 2050, that number will increase to 68%. Megacities with 10 million or more will grow to 39 million in the next 25 years, and 20 of them will be in Asia.

WIND THREE: PLURAL AND TURBULENT CULTURES

Anger, political rhetoric and violence will increase. Traditional values will be disrupted as many countries become secular and post-Christian. The culture wars over the next 10 years will happen over education and schools.

WIND FOUR: VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND VULNERABLE DEMOCRACIES

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the U.S. is \$49,000 while it is \$7,000 in Latin America. Currently, about 100 million people are facing forced displacement from their homes. More people are moving than at any point in human history. Paul Collier, Professor of Economics at Oxford University, author of "Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World," says there is a "clear moral obligation to help very poor people and one way is to allow some of them move to rich societies." We know environmental changes will increase vulnerability, not to mention famine, war and persecution.

WIND FIVE: CHANGED POWER AND ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

The organization of the future will be the embodiment of communities based on shared purpose and calling to the higher aspirations of people. Command and control institutions are among a dying breed. The most effective leaders of the 21st century will be those who create systems of collaboration within their organization, to then build networks of collaboration throughout

the organization, and leverage those networks to address the most complex challenges. Mission must override institution, and institutions must adapt to open collaborative partnerships.

WIND SIX: TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The name of the game is content. Content is free but wisdom is not. We want to find the balance between the two. AI and new technology like ChatGPT are the new waves of intelligence. We can produce amazing information at the touch of our fingertips.

BUCKNER MISSIONS: A DISRUPTIVE FUTURE

At Buckner, our mission is unchanging: "To follow the example of Jesus by serving vulnerable children, families and seniors."

A few years ago, working with our board of trustees, we defined the growth of Buckner as going deeper with our ministries rather than focusing on expansion to new cities, counties and countries. We agreed to focus on quality over surface work and quantity.

We have spent several years moving our service offerings from 64 to four focus ministries and then sharpening our focus on quality to ensure we were delivering high quality services across all our locations. I can tell you as we focused on quality by changing our vision to "set the standard of excellence in serving vulnerable children, families and seniors," we have gained a very strong name and reputation in the fields in which we work.

It may be time for us to redefine what growth means again. This time, it may mean expanding our horizons, but with the same level of quality we have developed.

It is time to boldly go where the Lord leads us and to the places he is preparing for us. We will do our best work and develop economically-sound plans with room for dreaming, imagination and creativity to meet the challenges today and in the future.

The future will be disruptive to what we have known, but in a good way. I still believe our best option is to lead with needs and follow with words. To offer **good words, good works and good will** to hurting people now and into the future. **BT**



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Reyes".

Albert Reyes, President and CEO
Buckner International
Visit my blog at
AlbertLReyes.com

¹Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

It's how you respond

Probably the two greatest tragedies in the 144-year history of Buckner involve fires.

The first was the fire of 1897 which claimed the lives of 16 boys living in the central boys' dormitory. That tragedy nearly led to the closing of Buckner Orphans Home by R.C. Buckner because the collective grief was so palpable.

The second fire happened Jan. 2, 1923, 100 years ago. It too erupted in the boys' dormitory and spread quickly, enveloping the entire building and by early dawn, only ashes remained. Two small boys died in the blaze and although recovery workers searched for days, their bodies were never found.

Compounding the tragedy of 1923 was the complete loss of housing for 300 boys who had escaped the fire. And while the fire of 1879 nearly led to the closure of the orphanage, the response in

1923 was far different.

In the middle of their grief and shock, staff, children and volunteers took up hammers and nails and began the arduous job of building temporary housing for the boys. Within two weeks, six wooden barracks housing 40 boys each stood ready for occupation. The rest of the boys were housed in the attic of another dormitory, sleeping on pallets stretching the length of the entire space.

But that was just the beginning of the response. Knowing the girls' dormitory faced the same possibility and that housing for the boys was temporary, a group of businessmen launched a campaign to build fire-proof buildings for all the children.

Likewise, Texas Baptists across the state responded overwhelmingly, providing clothing and other necessities lost in the fire, along with funds for the building campaign.



“The fire of 1897 claimed the lives of 16 boys living in the nearly led to the closing of Buckner Orphans Home by

Over the next two years, more than \$330,000 was raised and funds from a small insurance policy were applied to build two new brick dorms. Those buildings were named for the two boys who perished in the fire – Francis McElroy and Troy Freeland.

Out of the tragedy of 1923 came a renewed optimism and a sense of determination.

But that tragedy also illustrates the kind of support and partnership Buckner has enjoyed for 144 years. And it's a reminder that we – those who work here – are never alone. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who make this ministry possible. Had it not been for those who launched the fundraising campaign in 1923 and for hundreds of churches responding in our time of need, who knows if Buckner would have bounced back.

Still, here we are 100 years later, continuing the mission and

ministry because of your partnership in this effort.

We are responding to crises every day. Not fires and floods, but individual crises of children abused, neglected and abandoned; of families on the doorstep of collapse. And as it was 100 years ago, those like you who believe in our mission are responding.

It's a good reminder that what transcends is how we respond to crisis and tragedy more than the crisis or tragedy we respond to. **BT**



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Collins".

Scott Collins is Senior Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.



central boys' dormitory (Pictured above). That tragedy R.C. Buckner because the collective grief was so palpable.”

BUCKNER *on the move*

>> Buckner Retirement Services: It's more than just a job



Buckner Retirement Services has become a place where residents can interact with caregivers who have a passion and are on a mission. The staff at Buckner Retirement Services in all six communities have opportunities to do more than just caregiving – they shine hope. They also connect emotionally and spiritually with the residents.

▶ Scan the code below to watch what the staff at Buckner Retirement Services have to say about why they serve here, and hear from a family member about how she sees the work of Buckner impact the lives of seniors.



>> Why is foster care different with Buckner International?

Foster parents can experience many challenges. Through the journey, they need support too. Stephanie and Buck Baskin share how they found the support they needed through Buckner Foster Care and Adoption to be foster parents “in the worst of times” and in their “greatest joys.”

Through services like counseling, parenting classes and sometimes just a listening ear, Buckner knows how important it is for parents to have all the tools they need.

▶ Scan the code at right to watch the interview with the Baskins.




»» New Buckner Family Hope Center® opens in Midland

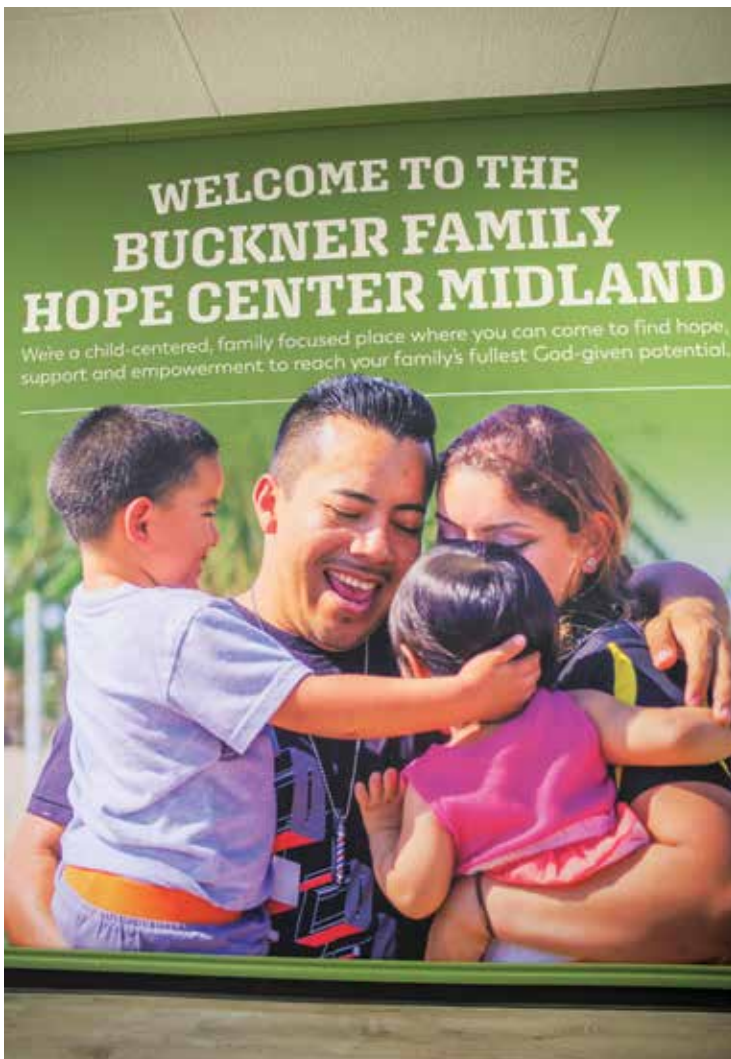
The Buckner Family Hope Center® in Midland celebrated its grand opening Feb. 28. The Family Hope Center model provides a child-centered, family-focused place where families can go to find hope, support and empowerment in their community. The model is an upstream preventative approach to social services. Through its services, families in Midland will have access to free classes, like Jobs for Life and Faith and Finances, counseling and activities for the whole family.

The programs and resources offered at the Family Hope Center are geared to interact with the needs of the population in Midland, which according to the United States Bureau, 10.5% live in poverty.

"Buckner builds families. Families are where we believe children belong and where God intended them to be," said Henry Jackson, Buckner Children and Family Services president. "The Family Hope Center works on three levels: engage, equip and elevate. The result is we are teaching parents to break generational cycles of poverty and neglect. Our model emphasizes building sustainability for our families to move them from dependence to independence."



 Scan the code at left to read more about this important event.



Red, white, and blue

For these public servants,
Buckner connections
run deep

Story by Isa Torres

The impact of Buckner is found not only in the care it provides, but also in the connections it makes in people's lives. Those connections involve people from all walks of life, even a small group of public servants, links formed through personal experiences or through relationships with friends and loved ones.

To this day, Buckner continues impacting the lives of public servants in both personal and professional days.

Larissa Plunto: Called to be a 'light in the darkness'

Larissa Plunto was adopted through Buckner in San Antonio. At 5 years old, she moved with her parents to Virginia.

She said she grew up in a happy family before she felt called to public service as a young adult.

"It's been a passion of mine, more of a ministry that I felt like the Lord called me to when I was 15 years old," she said.

"I always just heard the negative, negative, negative about politics and politicians and all these things, but I feel like that's where God was calling me. I just felt like God was like, 'You're going to be the light in the darkness.'"

Plunto went on to work as an appointee to the Pentagon for President George W. Bush. She has also worked for Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst and most recently for U.S. Representative Michael McCaul. Throughout her career, she's experienced the reality of politics: How, when a person is elected to accomplish an agenda, they are often still dependent on other circumstances, including term limits. But the challenges she has experienced have also strengthened her faith in God.

"God's like, 'Larissa, I'm going to accomplish my will. I will accomplish it. So whether you're there or somewhere else, my will be accomplished,'"



Plunto said. "I just have to lean into that and trust it."

Her own adoption story and experience working in politics give Plunto purpose. Now, she wants to make her own story, one of love and adoption, a dream for more people to experience. In March, Plunto joined Buckner International as the major donor officer in the Gulf Coast, where she will help secure resources to serve more vulnerable children and families.

Armando Walle: Challenged to give back



Texas House Representative Armando Walle was born and raised in Aldine, an area of Houston, Texas, the same district he now represents and lives in. It's where he first interacted with Buckner International. Throughout junior high and high school, Walle attended schools near the Buckner Family Hope Center® at Aldine.

But his connection to Buckner went beyond proximity.

"When I was in high school, there was a guy named Mike Downs who was a youth counselor at my high school," Walle said. "He knew some of the things that I was going through and he thought it'd be a good idea, even though I came from a very troubled background, he said, 'Hey, there's going to be a toy drive and I think it'd be good for you to come by and give back.'"

That was the first opportunity Walle had to interact with people who were dealing with challenges different than his.

"When I came here, [I] saw some kids that didn't grow up the way I did in a sense that, yes, we didn't have a lot of monetary things, but my family was always very loving and caring," he explained. "There were other kids that didn't have that, and I was fortunate that I did have that."

As years went by, Walle continued volunteering at Buckner through different events. Now Walle's own family is also connected with Buckner through giving and volunteering. When Hurricane Harvey hit Houston in 2017, Walle and his children knew they needed to be at the Family Hope Center.

"I came by and I brought my kids with me because I wanted to teach my children about the hardships that some others have, so they can be aware of service and giving back to the community," he said. "We're complex people, but it's centers like this that kind of ground you and make you realize that there are other ways to give back, and this is one of the ways that I try to instill in my children now. And I come by every year."

As a Houston native, and a direct witness of the challenges Houstonians face, Walle says organizations like the Family Hope Center can fill the gap where government sometimes can't.

"We have to have partnerships like Buckner," he explained. "Private partnerships are important."

Dade Phelan: 'Vulnerable populations must receive quality care'

The 76th Speaker of the Texas House of Representative and State Representative of District 21, Dade Phelan has always been aware of the important role Buckner International has played in Beaumont and Southeast Texas. He grew up in Beaumont, where Buckner has served children and families for five decades.

His wife, Kim Phelan, is an attorney for children in the child



protection and juvenile justice systems who has represented children living at the Buckner Children's Village and who are otherwise served by Buckner.

"The quality of the staff and the caregivers at the assessment center was amazing," Kim said. "The children were always really well taken care of, and I always had really good things to say about that place."

She is currently working with Buckner to develop a Southeast Texas Strong Families Coalition to help keep children out of the child protection and juvenile justice systems and remain safely with their families instead of in alternative placements like the Children's Village used to be.

As a legislator serving the community, Phelan knows the challenges many in the health care system are facing. Those challenges, he noticed, can present tougher issues in the area of Texas he represents. But the work done by his own family, as well as other people he knows at Buckner Calder Woods, the senior living community in Beaumont, has been admirable, even with those present challenges.

"One can have goals as a speaker, but then once session comes around, you are going to face serious issues that you have to take up, including health care," Phelan said. "Vulnerable populations must receive quality care early, because it's the right thing to do and also because it is so much more economical to do so."

For Phelan, it's clear when quality care is given early on to those who are vulnerable, society avoids bigger physical and financial costs. And that is where Phelan says organizations like Buckner, which he said are run by "our neighbors," really help the community.

Throughout their careers, the Phelans said they have noticed improvement and growth in their community and are excited to see more in the future, but trust that organizations like Buckner will continue lending a hand for the most vulnerable.

"There are a lot of men and women who have been business leaders, community leaders, teachers, as well as friends and family, who are at Calder Woods now and it is nice to know they're being taken care of," Phelan said. **BT**

‘Because we love,’
Jesus:
Texas WMU,
Buckner
celebrate decade
of home builds

Story by Isa Torres
Photography by Erica Zamora

The Buckner Family Hope Center® at Peñitas in the Rio Grande Valley and the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) of Texas have sustained a partnership for over a decade that has benefitted 11 hardworking families with homes of their own. Through that partnership, women from all over the state have volunteered to be a part of WMU’s effort to support Buckner families in the Valley.





Olga Espiricueta and Marco Antonio Zúñiga received the latest home that came from the collaboration between WMU of Texas and Buckner's Healthy Housing program.

Through the Mary Hill Davis Offering, WMU funds over 86 ministries in Texas, other states in the U.S., and Mexico. Every year, WMU sends teams of women to the Valley to help build a home.

“These are passionate, hard-working and loving women who give their time and resources to help other families,” said Marisol Sandoval, office manager and missional lifestyle strategist for preschool, children, youth and young adults at WMU of Texas.

Sandoval highlighted how the women participating in this home-build are examples of how knowing Christ leads people to action and to service.

“Because we love Jesus, we want to go help those that have a need and thanks to the Mary Hill Davis Offering, we are able to get there and get to work right away,” Sandoval added.

The volunteers work to build a home provided through the Buckner Healthy Housing program, which provides home builds and physical support to families as a supplement to the work done through family coaching and resources available at the Family Hope Center.

While this collaboration to build homes began over a decade ago and the ways the homes have been built have adapted, the dedication of the volunteers has stayed consistent.

“What hasn’t changed over the years is the hard work and commitment every group of women pours out as they build these

homes,” said Gabriel Flores, Buckner manager of missions and humanitarian aid in the Rio Grande Valley.

Each family goes through a rigorous process to apply and qualify for a new home. First, they receive family coaching through the Family Hope Center. Once they graduate from the coaching program, families are eligible to apply for the home build process through Healthy Housing.

New homes are not just a safer place for families to live, but it’s also a steppingstone toward self-sufficiency and transformation.

Olga Espiricueta and her husband, Mario Antonio Zúñiga, were the recipients of the latest WMU/Buckner home build. Espiricueta and Zúñiga have a 16-year-old son and two 14-year-old daughters.

Espiricueta and Zúñiga came to the United States from Mexico in 2006. They both worked endlessly to make ends meet, until one day Zúñiga suffered an accident

in 2014 that put him in the hospital for three weeks in San Antonio.

“That really affected us and our plans, so after he got out of the hospital, we moved to Peñitas,” Espiricueta recalled.

That challenging experience led them to the Family Hope Center in Peñitas.

“My husband was the one who first connected with Buckner and the classes they offered, and although at first I was not interested in participating, now I can say they have helped me a lot to better myself and even to deal with the hardships of life,” Espiricueta said.



Before their new home was built, their house was small and prone to water leaks when it rained. But Zúñiga takes a lot of pride in his home. As a gardener by trade, he finds joy in working in their garden at their home.

“If you go to his house, that is the first thing you’ll notice,” Flores commented. “His garden is beautiful because he has used everything he knows and everything he has learned at work at his home.”

But before the home build, the structure of their home was about to fall apart.

“We knew on the inside the house was not doing well, but they always kept it clean and had done everything possible to care for their home,” Flores said.

Two weeks before the couple received the call that they had been approved for the new home, Espiricueta had told Zúñiga that they needed to start just tackling small projects on their own. When they received the call from Buckner staff, Espiricueta couldn’t stop smiling.

As soon as she hung up, Zúñiga guessed with joy, “They’re going to build our home, aren’t they?”

Throughout the home build process, both Espiricueta and Zúñiga were present and excited for their new home. Espiricueta would often bring pan dulce to the WMU volunteers and have drinks available for them.

“Almost every day that I was there working, Olga was also there with us,” Sandoval added. “Not only was she there working with us, one day she even made lunch for us.”

Their new home is not just a safer place for the couple and their children to live, but it’s also a steppingstone toward self-sufficiency and transformation for the entire family.

“Our hope now is that our children will continue to grow and move forward,” Espiricueta observed.

“This home gives us the necessary stability for us to help them continue growing and achieve the goals they have,” she said. “I am so thankful for all of those who participated in this project, and I want to encourage them to continue doing this for other families as well.” **BT**



Women from all over the state give a week of their time to support WMU of Texas' yearly efforts to help those in need through the construction of a home.

Chef Stephan Pyles named Chief Culinary Advisor for Buckner Retirement Services

STORY BY CHRIS RUTH • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS DILDAY

As a fifth generation Texan, Chef Stephan Pyles wants his cuisine to reflect his roots. That devotion to capturing the flavors of Texas led him to be known as the father of Southwestern cuisine and regarded as one of the most acclaimed American chefs of the past three decades.

Growing up in his family's West Texas truck stop café, Pyles delighted in the smells of fried chicken and enchiladas – but as he watched travelers from around the country come together over the dishes prepared by his parents, he realized even at a young age that food is more than sustenance. Food is community.

That sense of community through food is what Pyles wants to bring to his new role as chief culinary advisor for Buckner Retirement Services.

"Seniors seem to have a greater sense of community than most other age groups," Pyles said. "They seek a place to gather where they can nourish both their bodies and their souls with good food. I'm honored to help facilitate that."

Buckner previously collaborated with the James Beard Award-winning chef to craft a new type of elevated dining experience for senior adults ahead of the opening of Ventana by Buckner in Dallas, Texas, in October 2019. The successful collaboration led to Pyles' expanded role.

"I came to Ventana thinking it would be typical of my other consultancies, but I was most pleasantly surprised," Pyles shared. "It's been a richly rewarding experience on so many levels. Both the talented culinary team and the gracious members have been a joy to work with."

"After almost four years with Ventana, I have developed an incredible respect for Buckner and have been made to feel part of the family. Therefore, I was thrilled at the opportunity to get to expand my work with more of their communities."

In addition to Ventana by Buckner, Pyles will now help enhance the culinary experiences at Buckner Villas in Austin, Calder Woods in Beaumont, Parkway Place in Houston, and Buckner Westminster Place in Longview.

Pyles will work with the communities' culinary teams to expand their menus with seasonal, local and fresh touches selected by Pyles. The menus will also include an array of signature dishes popular at many of Pyles' 23 restaurants over the past 32 years. He will also create specialty international tastings and dinners and refresh the communities' beverage programs to include inventive mocktails.

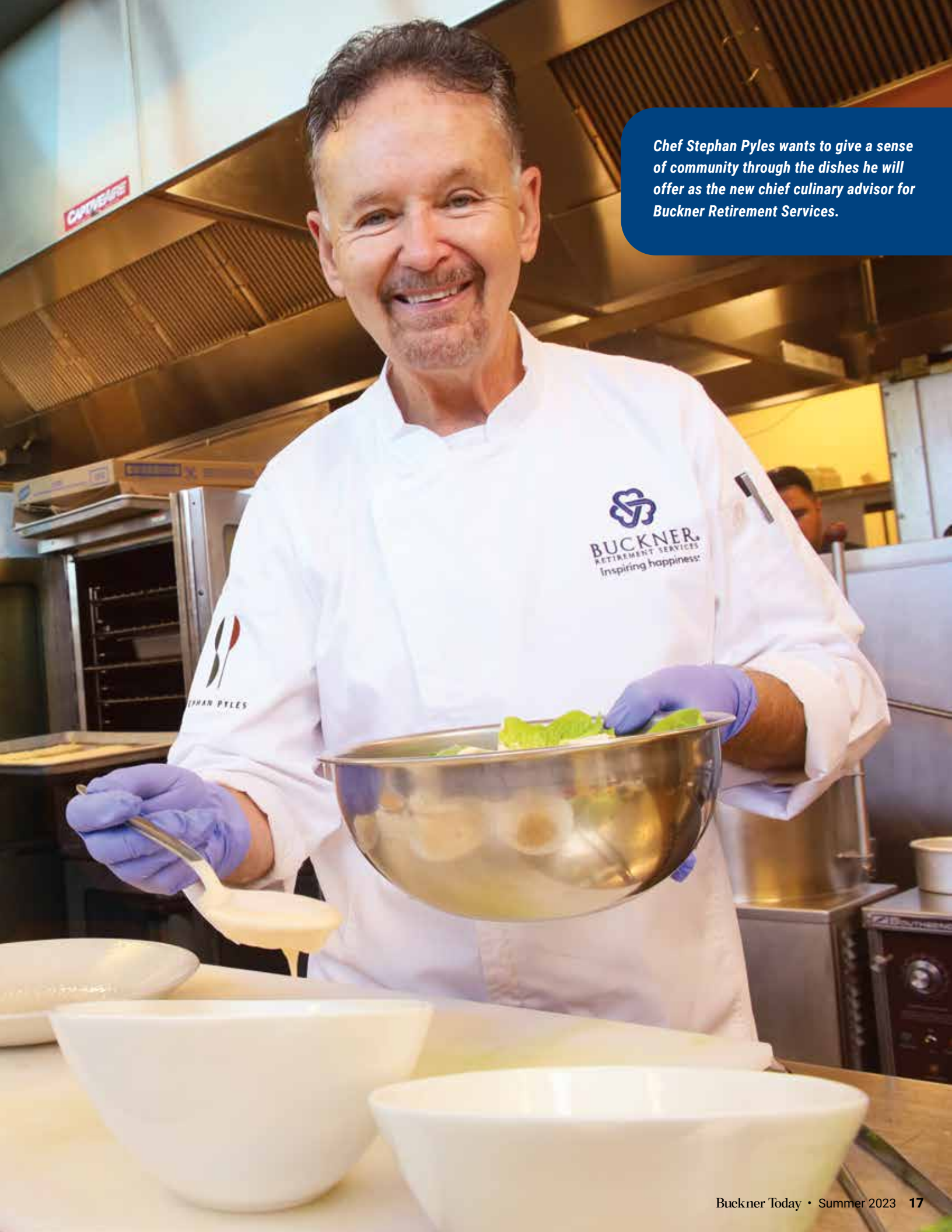
Special events featuring Pyles are scheduled at each Buckner community throughout the year.

"The resident response to our announcement was phenomenal," said Charlie Wilson, president of Buckner Retirement Services. "While we have always been proud of the dining experience our communities offer, I am excited to see how a phenomenal chef of Stephan Pyles' caliber is able to provide even more variety with an emphasis on fresher and more locally sourced ingredients."

Added Pyles, "As we age, good food becomes more and more important. Food absolutely inspires happiness, and it makes such imminent sense that Buckner would have such a wonderful food program." **BT**

Scan the code to get to know Chef Stephan Pyles.





Chef Stephan Pyles wants to give a sense of community through the dishes he will offer as the new chief culinary advisor for Buckner Retirement Services.



Something about summer

fills the air with anticipation — the bright sunshine, the longer, fun-filled days and a much-needed break.



But, as I'm sure you can imagine, for so many vulnerable children and families, the days of summer are only brighter outside. The dark clouds of **poverty, instability and difficult circumstances** still hang heavy in their lives with little hope for breakthrough.

And these children and families desperately want to believe the future could be brighter.

Thanks to you — it can be.

When you give, hope doesn't just shine through your generosity ... it blazes.

With your support today, you will give children and their families a glimmer of hope that becomes a floodlight to illuminate the bright future ahead.

Any special gift you can give today to **help meet the \$75,000 challenge in full** will have a powerful effect to give even more vulnerable families a breakthrough this summer.

Give today:
buckner.org/SummerBreakthrough



BUCKNER®

Hope shines here.®

Buckner Family Pathways® An answer for single parents

Single parents often must choose between finding ways to protect and take care of their children, or pursuing their vocational goals. So what's the answer?

Buckner Family Pathways® offers a safe place for single parents and to surround them with the support they need so they can chase after their biggest dreams. And when they join the Family Pathways program, they're able to pursue educational and vocational goals, strengthen their parenting skills and change the trajectory of their family's lives.

Single moms or single dads face barriers that prevent self-sufficiency. These barriers not only impact their potential but also the potential for their children to succeed in school and later in their adult lives. In Texas, almost 40% of children live in single-parent family homes.

Buckner meets these parents where they are and provides them support to break the cycle and create a life they love. Ultimately, these families transform into strong, successful and sustainable families.

In 2022, Family Pathways served 166 Texas families and reported a 93.9% success rate. The success rate of program completion is measured through successfully graduating with a degree or certificate, transferring to a higher degree program, and/or achieving

sustainable employment and financial self-sufficiency. Buckner monitors graduates' self-sufficiency for 90 days post-program exit.

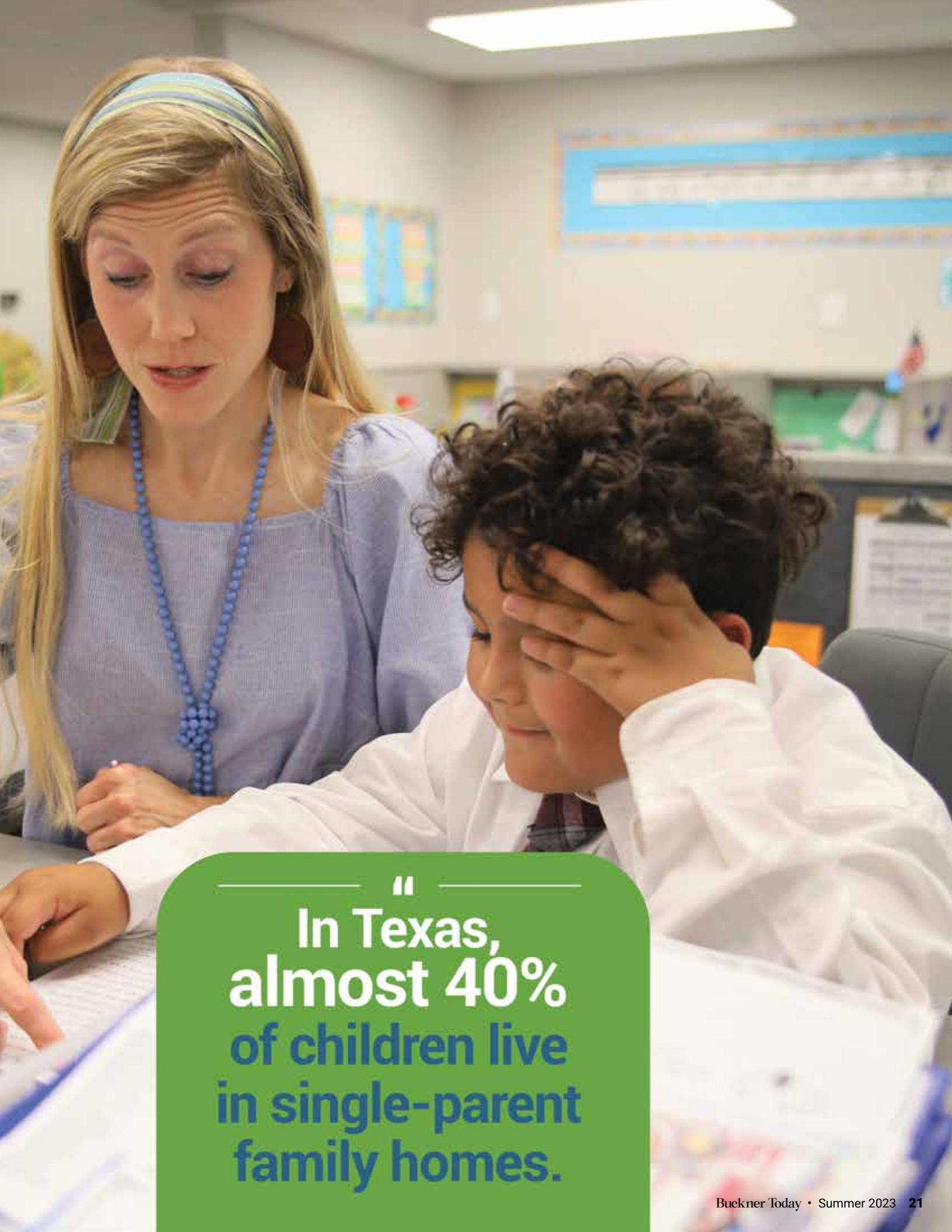
Participants in 2022 also reported a 94% satisfaction rating with the program in meeting program's self-defined standards of quality for family strengthening and support.

Single parents can find affordable housing, child care, counseling, family coaching and more while participating in the Family Pathways program. These resources help protect families from domestic abuse, financial uncertainty, homelessness and hopelessness.

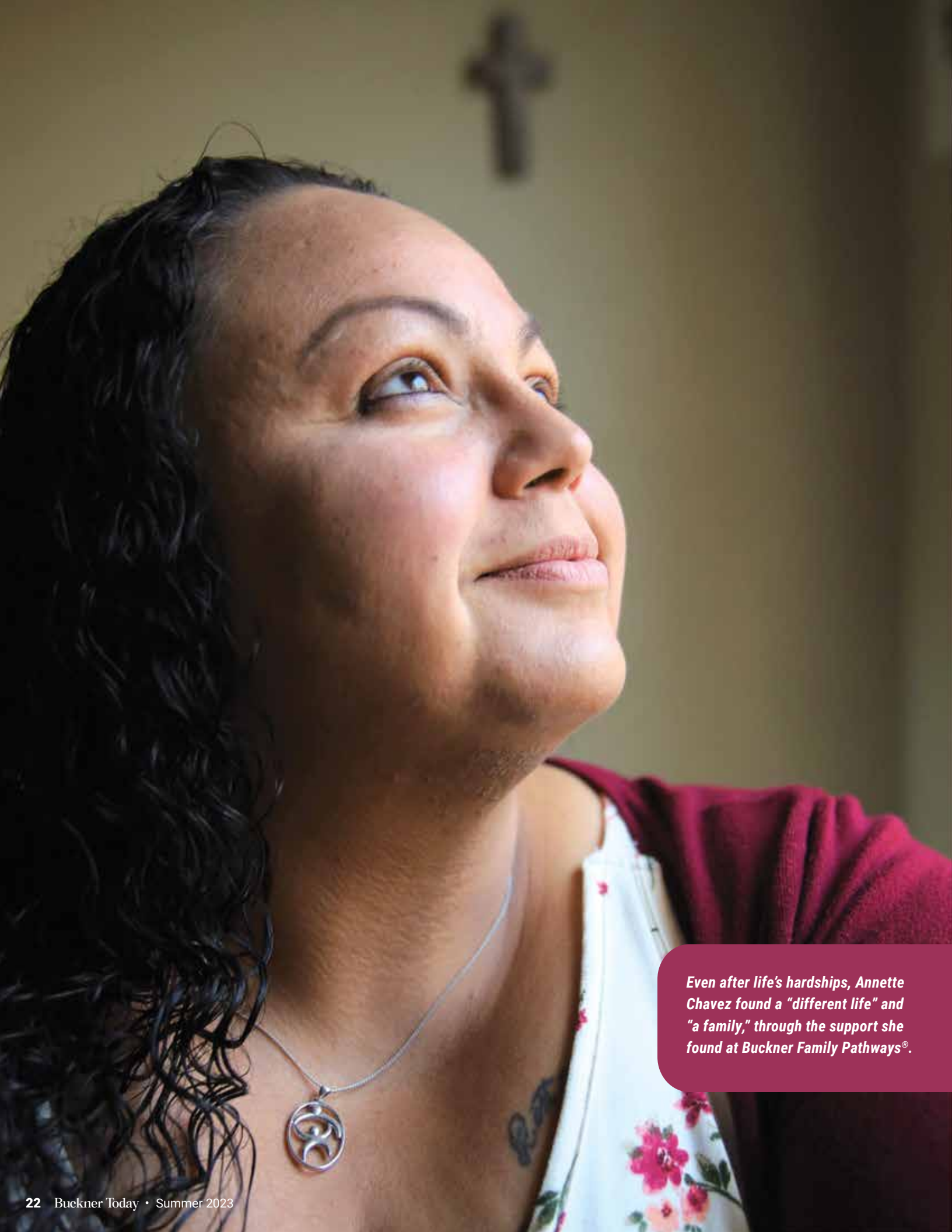
In seven cities across Texas, single-parent programs are transforming generations.

Meet a few parents who are chasing their dreams and inspiring their children.





“
**In Texas,
almost 40%
of children live
in single-parent
family homes.**



Even after life's hardships, Annette Chavez found a "different life" and "a family," through the support she found at Buckner Family Pathways®.

The journey to HOPE

Buckner Family Pathways® mom charts new course

STORY BY SCOTT COLLINS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS DILDAY

Let's start this story at the end.

When Annette Chavez leaves Buckner Family Pathways® in Longview, Texas, later this year, she'll drive away with an associate degree, a bachelor's, a job, her two children, and plenty of furniture. She is the very definition of success for a program that last year saw a 94% success rate among all eight Pathways locations combined.

As she drives away from the Buckner campus for the last time as a "client," she'll also leave with some things you can't pack into boxes. Hope. Strength. Determination. Change. Courage. Her new-found faith in Jesus. Wherever she ends up, the journey is sure to be easier than the one that brought her to Buckner.

Sitting in her apartment on the Family Pathways campus under a battery of lights staged for a video interview, the first thing you notice about Annette isn't the tapestry of tattoos covering her body. It's not the frankness and honesty she answers every question with, putting it all out there for the first time. What you notice is the grinding look of determination exuding from her face. Still, just below the surface of her strength and courage lies a measure of doubt sown from years of disappointment and defeat. She has spent her entire life up to now looking for hope – in all the wrong places. And now that she's found it, she's determined to hold it tightly.

If that's the end of this story, where does it start?

As a child, she bounced between family members. She was sexually abused by family members, joined a gang at 11, got pregnant, and saw the child's father, her fiancé, killed.

"We were probably about 10 minutes from home and I was on the sidewalk pushing my son (Shawn) in his stroller. Joe was pushing the grocery cart next to me. We were talking and then he wasn't there

anymore. I turned around and there were sparks all over the place. When I turned back to ask if he'd seen the sparks, he wasn't there. His body rolled off the car and in the next few minutes, he died in my arms."

Two months later, Shawn was diagnosed with a terminal illness and died at age 13. "Life without him tormented me," she says. She had three other children and it was while Annette was at Children's Hospital in Dallas with one of those children that she met someone who told her about Buckner and Family Pathways.

"My chains have been broken here," she says, with that determined look on her face. "I've been saved and baptized. I go to church and that's the number one thing in my life. I do believe in God. I do believe in hope. I do believe in myself and my children.

"Buckner provided a completely different life, a completely different answer, strength in a different way," she adds. "I didn't have to depend on myself anymore. I had a family. I feel like a normal human now. Buckner has been a helping hand. It has been an open door that doesn't exist for many people. For my kids, that is the chain-breaker. Buckner has been our saving grace."

Linda Womack, program director for the Pathways program in East Texas, has worked with Annette from Day One. She's seen the transformation of Annette and her children from survival mode and "the bottom, where she had nothing. She had no resources and was dealing with all sorts of tragedies in her life that were compounded by her. And now she's a leader at church and in this program.

"She's one of the best moms I've encountered in my life," Womack says. "She wants better things for her kids. She wants the best. She expects a lot from her children and she just wants to teach them to be strong Christians."

Womack adds that while Annette willingly serves other moms in

(continued on page 24)



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the Pathways program, she also puts in the effort to encourage staff at Buckner, often bringing flowers and encouraging them with emails and regular visits. “She’s just a lover and an encourager,” Womack says. “She’s just always so kind and she makes all the hard days worth it.”

Annette says she found something she’d never seen before during her time at Buckner – hope.

“I’ve found hope I never had. I never experienced hope. Hope’s not an easy thing to find. Trusting other people is not an easy thing to do.”

Now that Annette has found hope and trust, she’s determined to pass it on to others. But she believes it’s her past that offers the best connection to people who are coming from where she’s been. She intends to use her new-found education to help “not just women, but people everywhere.”

“I know God’s going to use me, so I’m ready for that. I’m not going to be fighting for me anymore. I’m going to be fighting for them, to show them that whatever it is that you’re going through, it doesn’t matter. Whether you have dealt with abuse, addiction, or whatever else, that is not the end.”

Womack sees in Annette not just the impact Pathways had on Annette as a mom, but the generational power of the program. Because of that, she knows Annette’s transformation over the past

few years doesn’t stop there.

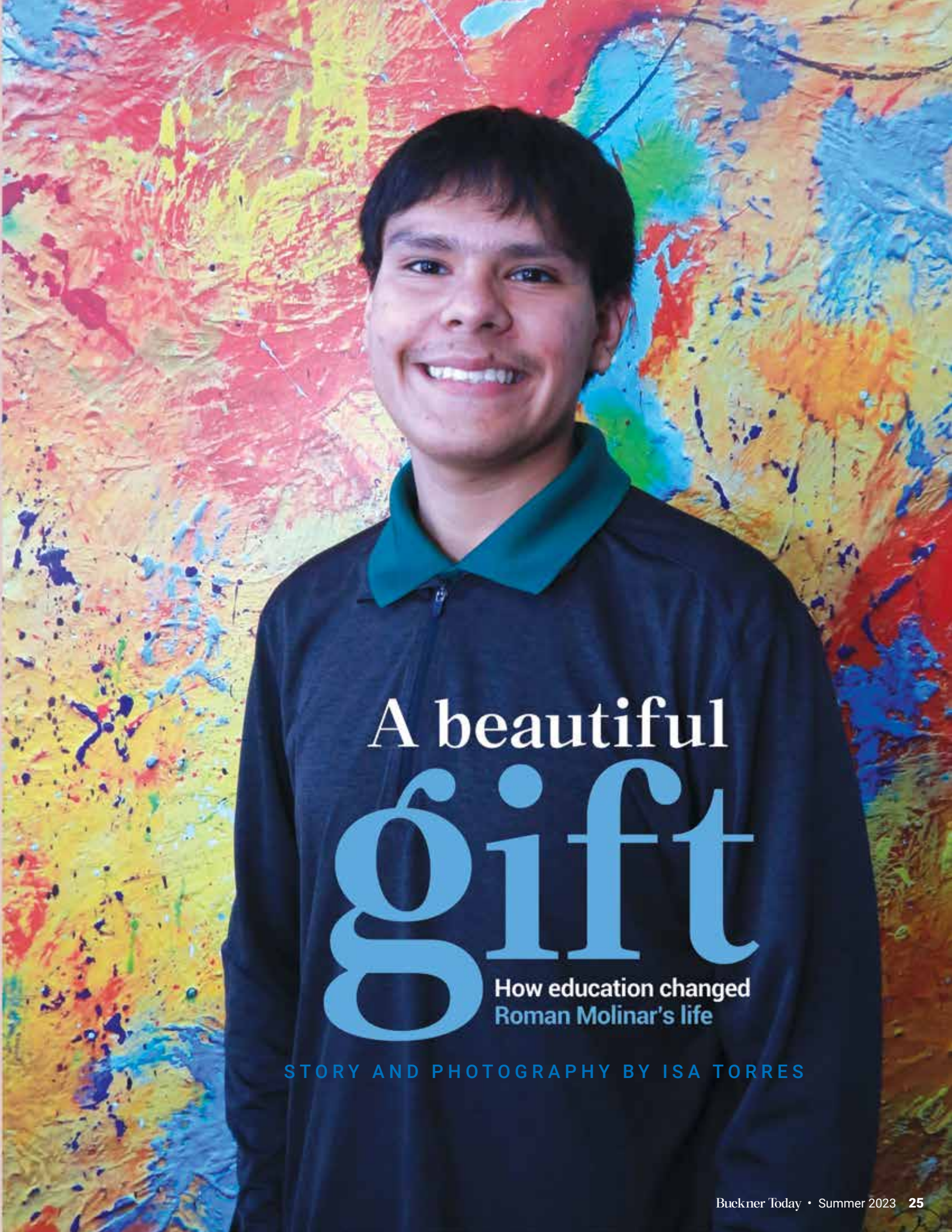
“It’s never ending,” Womack adds. “It will continue on for generations to come through her children. If I had one prayer for her it’s that she never give up, never stop.”

As for those tattoos, the thing you notice first when you meet her. They are proof that change is more than skin deep. She thought about covering them up or maybe adding a cross. But in the end, she left things the same, including the first one she got, on her ankle when she was 11. It’s her street name from her gang days. Shy girl.

Further evidence of how much Annette Chavez has changed. **BT**

**Scan the
code to watch
Annette tell
more of her
story.**





A beautiful
gift
How education changed
Roman Molinar's life

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISA TORRES

Born in Chihuahua City, Mexico, Roman Molinar was only 8 when he moved to the United States with his parents. Priscila, Roman's mother, remembers the excitement the family had at the opportunity to have a new life when they moved to Midland, Texas. But the hopes were soon replaced by challenges she and her son would face in the coming years.

Soon after arriving in Texas, Roman's parents divorced. The event left Roman and his mom alone in a new country, with Priscila a single parent sustaining her family on her own. Leaving Mexico didn't leave the struggles behind them.

"My son struggled with school ever since we were in Mexico," Priscila recalled. "He has always had a good heart. He has always been kind, polite and sweet, but also very introverted."

As Roman started attending school in Midland, teachers noticed learning differences that had not been addressed before, such as his

“
Roman is a clear
example of what
can happen when
organizations
work together for the
success of
young students.
”

ability to read and the way he'd socialize with others.

But 2017 marked a turning point for the Molinar family. Roman started junior high and Priscila began her college journey. While attending college, she heard about Buckner Family Pathways®.

After entering the program she said, "Everything changed for us at that point. I knew I had to prepare myself so I could find better jobs and give my son a better life."

Buckner staff also noticed the challenges Roman faced at school and recommended a school that could help him. Hillcrest School is a private nonprofit for students with learning differences, specializing in supporting students with

dyslexia and more.

The Yarborough Foundation has supported Buckner Children and Family Services® in Midland for many years. Through this relationship, the Yarborough Foundation covers tuition costs for children from Buckner families to attend Hillcrest.



Through a partnership between Buckner Children and Family Services® in Midland, along with the Yarborough Foundation and Hillcrest School, several families have been able to offer a better education for their children. Pictured from left to right: Myndi Easter, senior gifts officer of Buckner at the Permian Basin, Lubbock and Amarillo, Betty Starnes, founder and executive director of Hillcrest School, Roman Molinar and Annabelle Gardaphe, grant manager at the Yarborough Foundation.



Easter remarked the impact Hillcrest School had on Molinar by offering him the gift of education.

“We realized we had several children from our Family Pathways program or who had been adopted through Buckner, who could really benefit from this scholarship,” said Myndi Easter, Buckner senior gift officer for the Permian Basin, Lubbock and Amarillo. “For the last five years, we’ve had somewhere between four to five kids attending Hillcrest under the scholarship from the Yarborough Foundation.”

Roman will graduate from Hillcrest this year.

“Roman’s mom successfully completed Family Pathways, and she is an example of someone who has completed the program and become independent,” Easter highlighted. “Even though Priscila is not part of the program anymore, Roman is still reaping the benefits of her hard work.”

Roman went from being a student who could not fit in at school and wasn’t expected to graduate high school, to a senior about to graduate, plays basketball, has many friends, and looking at his options for college next year.

The collaboration between Buckner, the Yarborough Foundation and Hillcrest School has benefited many children, and “Roman is a clear example of what can happen when organizations work together for the success of young students,” Easter said.

“This has been a wonderful partnership,” said Annabelle Gardaphe, grant manager with the Yarborough Foundation. “To see the impact we’ve been able to have with this collaboration has been really special, and without the other one, this wouldn’t have been possible. I’m thankful to be able to work with Buckner and Hillcrest.”

Roman’s future looks much brighter now that he’s nearing the finish line at Hillcrest. For Priscila, studying at Hillcrest has brought out new sides to Roman she’s grateful for.

Priscila has seen her son grow and develop many gifts now, including writing. **BT**

Roman provided Buckner an essay he wrote halfway through his time at Hillcrest sharing this journey through his eyes.

A beautiful gift by Roman Molinar

Sitting in the front seat of the car, I stared unseeing out of the passenger window as my mother drove me to my new school on the first day of my 8th grade year. Memories of my experiences in other schools began to play in my mind like scenes from a horror film: having no friends, being called “weirdo” by bullies, and feeling lost and confused during lessons. School constantly made me feel alone, rejected and stupid.

At the end of 7th grade, my mom told me she was looking into sending me to a private school because I had been so miserable. I didn’t know how she was going to be able to afford that, so I was very surprised when she told me that I would be starting on the first day of 8th grade.

As Mom pulled into the parking lot of Hillcrest School, I groaned imagining how this new school would be no different than any other school. Since I knew it cost money to go to a private school, I prayed this school would be a safe place for me to learn. As I hesitantly followed my mother into the office, I knew I was about to find out.

The Dean of Students, Mrs. Bakke, bubbly and spry, led me to my classroom. As I entered, I was surprised at the contrast to my other schools. The atmosphere was different, it seemed welcoming. I was introduced to my teacher. Ms. Williamson’s sweet and kind eyes sparkled as she introduced me to the rest of the class. The students acted glad to have me. I wondered if they were on their best behavior. As the day wore on, I became more comfortable because everyone remained pleasant and upbeat. I found myself relaxing, laughing, and talking with other students and even enjoying myself.

At lunch, a big tall guy came up to me and said, “Hello,” in a booming voice. This was my introduction to James who has been my friend since the first day. Gradually, I learned all their names and their quirks. Everyone in the room had different skills and different issues. I fit right in!

Not only was I excited by how friendly everyone was, I was also excited to have a teacher who was easy to understand and very patient with me. Mrs. Williamson never made me feel stupid when I didn’t understand something. By the time the last bell rang, I felt pretty good about Hillcrest School.

It has been two years since that first day, and I still have all my original friends and more. Not only do I have friends and excellent teachers, I also have opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. This year is my second year to play basketball on the Eagle team, and that has given me many fun experiences like traveling to out of town games, competing in tournaments, and attending sports banquets.

*I will never fully understand how my mother was able to afford to send me to a private school, but it has changed my life. This gift means everything to me! At Hillcrest, I never have to be lonely, rejected or unsuccessful. I want to give the same love and support I have received to everyone. **BT***

Daughter's future inspires mother to excel

Buckner Family Pathways® in Midland offers launching pad for Chalace Phillips' new mission

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISA TORRES

For Chalace Phillips, life hasn't always turned out how she planned. But she's always looked at each day as a chance to make things better.

And part of making things better includes serving as the executive director of Midland Teen Court after being inspired by her experience at Buckner Family Pathways® in Midland. Teen Court is a nonprofit that creates opportunities for others in challenging situations.

A few years ago, Phillips was working as the resource director with the Midland Independent School District. She helped families find needed resources like food and household items, but she also guided them to programs aimed at strengthening families and reducing barriers to self-sufficiency.

The Family Pathways program in Midland was one of the programs Phillips often recommended. She realized it wasn't just a good fit for the families she worked with, but also for people like her.

During that time, Phillips and her then 4-year-old daughter were living with a family member and sharing a bedroom. Phillips was working and a full-time college student. Even though she had worked most of her life at different nonprofit organizations, she was lacking independent life skills.

Through the Family Pathways program, single parents like Phillips have access to affordable housing, child care, counseling and support to strengthen their family. After two years, Phillips graduated from the program, began directing a non-profit organization, and purchased her own home.

"The biggest benefit for me was the financial literacy," Phillips said. "I had never really learned proper financial management and once I began the program, I learned to save, I learned to budget and became financially stable."

Phillips is motivated to help others because she's been the one in need before.

"I have been helped in my life and had it not been for that, I wouldn't be where I am," she noted.

And through the nonprofit she directs, she wants to help young teens who have made mistakes understand there are ways to correct those errors and grow from them.

Midland Teen Court aims to inspire "good citizenship by providing

an educational opportunity through youth participation in an alternative system of justice."

The hope is for this process to promote "accountability and community engagement."

Midland Teen Court explicitly works with individuals age 10 to 18, and with those who have received misdemeanor citations or truancy court referrals. The goal of Teen Court is to "interrupt developing patterns of illegal behavior by motivating youth for self-improvement, development of healthy attitudes toward authority, and accountability for their actions."

Participants serve as defendants, jurors and attorneys, with local judges and attorneys presiding over court sessions. Community service is required instead of fines and court fees. And at the end of the whole process, the citations and referrals will not be on their records.

"It's a second chance for the youth that have made a mistake to come back, fix it and start clean again with no record," said Phillips. "That way they can go on to their adult life with no record."

As a mother, executive director of Midland Teen Court, college student, volunteer, and member of the advisory board of the new Buckner Family Hope Center® at Midland, Phillips is still looking for ways to give back to the community. Another driving force for Phillips is her daughter.

"My daughter motivates me," she said. "She's the reason I do this."

After her time at Family Pathways, Phillips noted her daughter had the chance to see that it takes a village to raise a child.

"She saw the community rally around and get us through to where we can take care of ourselves," she remarked.

Now that Phillips feels she has something to give back to the community, she also hopes her daughter will have a better future.

"I want her to grow up and be whatever her idea of successful is," Phillips said of her daughter. "I want her to have choices in life and not have to do things out of desperation. I think Buckner put me on a path to have choices and that's really all I want for her, to be able to make choices."

Standing with confidence today, Phillips knows that while she may go through difficult situations, there will always be opportunities to change, grow and impact other lives. **BT**



Chalace Phillips always sought to help others, but after she completed the program at Buckner Family Pathways®, she has been able to also give herself and her daughter a life with more opportunities.



STORY BY ISA TORRES
PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY THE
CASIDAY FAMILY

The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40 have dictated the lives of Joel and Leslie Casiday. Since before they were married 14 years ago, they dedicated their lives to the service of children. Answering that call on their lives, the Casidays recently adopted Elijah.

Their process to become foster parents through Buckner Foster Care and Adoption began nine years ago. Over the years, they've had 12 different children placed in their home. Four children, ranging

from 2 to 8 years old have found their forever home with the Casidays.

In late 2019, as they were starting the process to adopt another child, their plans suddenly fell through when COVID-19 became a reality.

Disillusioned but hopeful, the Casidays decided to take some time for themselves before moving forward with another adoption. Those plans would change quickly when Leslie received a call one night in May 2020 about an almost 2-month-old boy who needed a home soon.

This placement was different from any others and was fast and furious. Their children went to bed that night and woke up the next morning to a new baby at home.

The experience took the couple back to their initial calling to help children. Leslie and Joel worked together at a camp and had an experience that deeply shaped them. They met a boy whose parents couldn't afford clothes or school supplies.

"It was at that point I just told Joel this is what we need to do. We need to look at doing foster care to adoption," Leslie said. "I knew we could do this. I knew we could provide a home for a child that needed it."

Both teachers, the Casidays know they must provide structure for children who face several challenges.

"We see that need, we know there are kids in our own community that need an advocate, that need someone for them," Leslie observed.

While 2020 brought several big changes for the Casidays, Leslie and Joel have found that the strength of their marriage has allowed them to go through the good and the difficult without losing track of their destination. As a planner, Leslie does well in the classroom, but in the process of adoption, planning is out of her control. But even though adoption can take a long time, Leslie leans on Joel for strength and patience.

"My plans are not always his plans. God can take a situation when you think, 'it's the end of the world,' and now we have five children," Leslie said. "With each and every placement, it has made us realize

the only thing we can do is trust him and trust his plan."

Now that their family has grown almost three times, Leslie and Joel support each other to be their best for each other and their children.

"In every single decision we make and every step we take, we have to be on the same side," Leslie said. "We work together to make it all happen."

Through this journey, they've seen the power of connection – whether through one decision or one step in one direction. For their adopted children, they've had the opportunity to connect with the birth families and enjoyed becoming a part of those families as well. Other important connections they've found helpful have been through those that have prayed for them and offered guidance and encouragement.

Leslie recommends for those who are looking into adoption to find brothers and sisters in Christ to be there for them in prayer.

"Prayer warriors are important," she said. "Each child has individual needs and if parents can have someone there to pray for them, then that is already a lot of help."

While it was not an easy road to adopt Elijah, the Casidays understand it has all been the work of God in their lives.

"We know we can trust in the plans God has for us," Leslie said. And together, Joel and Leslie will help their five children see that too. **BT**



Baby Elijah (left) came to the Casidays back in 2020 when the world had shut down because of COVID-19. After first hearing God calling them to adopt, Elijah is now the fifth child Joel and Leslie have adopted. In this way they live up the teachings of Jesus through his parables, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

‘It’s a calling:’

Longview couple inspired to foster by their family

STORY BY EMILY AHRENS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS DILDAY

Nathan and Kylee Spraggins heard a word from their pastor in 2020 that they were supposed to have children in their lives – whether biological or not. Neither of them sure what that would look like, they chose to fervently pray and ask God for guidance.

They began pursuing the idea of foster care – with encouragement from Rachel and Lincoln Wingerd, Nathan’s sister and brother-in-law. Rachel and Lincoln opened their home to foster care through Buckner Foster Care and Adoption and adopted their last three placements.

“Seeing them do that, and being a part of that family, becoming an uncle and an aunt to those kids was very inspiring and motivational for us, seeing how the process unfolded,” Nathan shared. “Seeing it as

like maybe this is something we’re supposed to do.”

Nathan and Kylee both had hesitations walking into the possibility of foster care.

“It’s a big commitment,” Nathan said. “There’s a lot of uncertainty there, a little bit of fear. But as we started to look into it, we knew we’d want to go through Buckner because that’s who Rachel and Lincoln went through. And we saw the support system they had there.”

After a lot of prayer and a little extra faith, they both knew this was their next step.

“We do this because this is where God’s told us to go. This is our calling at this point – this is our ministry,” Kylee shared.





In December 2021, Nathan and Kylee welcomed their first placement – two sisters. When the girls first entered the Spraggins' care from a tough situation, they were hesitant to let Nathan and Kylee in. But with time came trust.

"Once they knew they were safe here and [we] gave them consistent structure and a dependable home life, we really started to see them blossom," Nathan shared.

"Seeing two broken children nine months ago and watching them become self-sufficient, independent, confident, mature children who I am confident will be able to maintain these skills and foundations throughout their lives has been an amazing thing to see," Kylee agreed.

For these first-time parents, community and family were key resources when navigating new behaviors and situations. Parenting is not easy and foster care comes with its own unique challenges.

"Rachel has been an invaluable resource to me any time I would see a behavior. We don't have biological children, so any behavior I was like, is this normal?" Kylee said. "She was able to give me insight on whether that was a normal kid thing – or this is possibly a trauma response. Here are some things you can do to help and guide, support and love her in a way that's going to be more constructive to what she's going through right now."

The two families lean on each other and foster a safe, reliable and genuine community for their children. Having a support network to be able to call on at a moment's notice has been instrumental in what Nathan and Kylee have been able to provide for the two girls. For Nathan, he's thankful to give them a bigger family to be a part of.

"Those are their cousins now. I can see their connection going far beyond those girls being placed in our home and those relationships lasting a lifetime," he shared.

Another facet of their support network came through Buckner staff, other foster care families, and the resources available. Their family had the opportunity to attend

Camp Buckner as well as other foster care events. Through those outings, the Spraggins family connected with other Buckner foster care families.

"We are lucky to be in the position we are with our family community already being foster care minded," shared Kylee. "But there are families who come into foster care and they don't have the support system. These [Buckner] events where families can get together and meet each other and grow that community, I think has been really beneficial to others who aren't as lucky as us."

For the Spraggins family, foster care has been an adventure for the whole family. And they're excited to see where it leads them next. **BT**

The two families lean on each other and foster a safe, reliable and genuine community for their children.

BUCKNER

En Resumen

Este año ha traído varias historias del trabajo que Dios está haciendo en las vidas de niños, familias y adultos mayores a través de Buckner International. Con el llamado del presidente y director ejecutivo, Albert Reyes, de “**Ir Con Audacia**,” Buckner se compromete a continuar el llamado que Cristo nos ha dado. Con la proyección de los cambios disruptivos que vienen, los cuales se ven en la transformación demográfica del país y el crecimiento de las poblaciones urbanas, así como la pluralización cultural y las turbulencias que esto traerá, los cambios en la organización y las dinámicas de las autoridades en el poder, la tecnología y la inteligencia artificial; Buckner desea seguir el ejemplo que Jesucristo nos dio e Ir Con Audacia a donde Dios nos está llamando a ir.

»» Peñitas - Family Hope Center®

La colaboración que Buckner International y Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) ha tenido por ya más de una década benefició a 11 familias que con mucho esfuerzo han podido obtener un hogar. Olga Espiricueta y su esposo, Mario Antonia Zúñiga, quienes han trabajado arduamente desde que llegaron a Estados Unidos en el 2006, siguieron el programa del Family Hope Center para poder llegar a la autosuficiencia. Y al final del año pasado, la familia de Espiricueta y Zúñiga finalmente pudo obtener su hogar. Con los fondos de la Ofrenda de Mary Hills Davis, WMU invita a grupos de mujeres de todo el estado a que se dispongan a viajar al sur de Texas y participen en la construcción de un hogar. Según las palabras de Marisol Sandoval, la gerente de oficina y estratega de vida misionera para preescolares, niños, jóvenes y jóvenes adultos en WMU, “Esto lo hacemos porque amamos a Jesús y por ese amor es que nosotros podemos ayudar a quienes lo necesitan.”



»» Texas - Buckner Retirement Services

El reconocido y premiado chef, Stephan Pyles ha aceptado trabajar con los servicios de retiro de Buckner para adultos mayores ofreciendo una buena experiencia culinaria para los residentes. Pyles primero trabajó con Buckner en Ventana by Buckner, en Dallas, en el 2019, pero su experiencia ahí fue diferente tras ver que los “adultos mayores tenían realmente un sentido de comunidad aún más grande que grupos de otras edades.” Pyles dice haber notado que “ahí era un lugar donde ellos podía juntarse y recibir alimento para sus cuerpos y para sus almas. Es un honor para mí poder ayudar con eso.” Ahora, el chef Pyles podrá participar en los servicios culinarios que Buckner Retirement Services ofrece en Buckner Villas en Austin, Calder Woods in Beaumont, Parkway Place en Houston, y Buckner Westminster Place en Longview.



>> Texas - Buckner Family Pathways®

Muchas veces madres y padres solteros tienen que tomar decisiones difíciles, como son, entre elegir sus carreras o la preparación para tener una, y el cuidado y bienestar de sus hijos. Pero Family Pathways apoya a padres y madres de familia con un hogar y con el sustento necesario para que ellos puedan alcanzar sus sueños. El programa de Family Pathways realmente es una inversión en la vida presente de madres y padres solteros, pero también en el futuro de sus hijos.

★ Longview

Un ejemplo del 94% de éxito que el programa de Family Pathways tiene a través de todo el estado es **Annette Chavez**. Ella está a punto de completar el programa, y lo hará con una licenciatura, un trabajo, sus dos hijos y bastantes muebles de hogar. Con un pasado muy difícil, el cual la llevó a vivir en las calles, sufrir de abuso, llegar a la adicción, unirse a una pandilla y ver a su prometido, el padre de su bebe, ser asesinado. Dos meses después de que el hombre con quien se iba a casar muriera, su bebe nació con una enfermedad terminal. Sean, como se llamaba su hijo, moriría ocho años después. "La vida sin él me atormentaba," dijo Chavez, pero fue mientras estaba en el hospital con otro de sus hijos que alguien le contó de Buckner Family Pathways. "Buckner me dio una vida completamente diferente, una respuesta diferente, una fuerza diferente," Chavez afirmó. "Ahora veo que ya no tengo que depender sólo en mí. Tengo una familia. Y ahora me siento como un ser humano normal. Buckner da la ayuda que muchos no tienen. Para mis hijos esto ha sido un cambio completamente. Buckner ha sido una fuente de ayuda."



★ Midland

Mientras las cosas no siempre han salido como **Chalace Phillips** planeó, ella ha tomado cada oportunidad que ha tenido para hacer todo mejor. En este momento, Phillips dirige su propia organización sin fines de lucro, llamada Midland Teen Court. A través de esa organización, Phillips ayuda a jóvenes que han tenido problemas con la ley, a enmendar los errores que han cometido. Desde que Phillips trabajó con Family Pathways, ha podido terminar sus estudios, comprar su propia casa y ahora da de su tiempo para ayudar a otras personas. "Lo que más pude aprender con Buckner fue como manejar mis finanzas," comentó Phillips. "Antes, no sabía cómo hacer un presupuesto, pero ahora sé cómo ahorrar para ser independiente financieramente." Lo que no ha cambiado en la vida de Phillips, antes de Buckner y ahora, es su motivación, la cual es su hija.

Otra historia de Midland viene del hijo de Priscila, Roman Molinar, quien se graduó este semestre pasado de Hillcrest School. Priscila conoció a Family Pathways después de haber llegado de México. Ella esperaba que aquí las cosas serían mejor, pero antes de ver buenos resultados, ella y su hijo tuvieron que lidiar con situaciones complicadas. Una de esas situaciones fue el desarrollo académico de Roman en la escuela. Tras haber conectado con Buckner, a Priscila le llegó la oportunidad de inscribir a su hijo en Hillcrest. Esto fue posible a través de una beca dada por Yarborough Foundation, una organización que busca proveer oportunidades a niños con necesidad de estudiar en diferentes sistemas de educación y que sean parte de familias asociadas a Buckner. Para Roman, la diferencia educativa cambió de un día al otro, y él definitivamente ha aprovechado esta oportunidad escolar. Él se destacó en su escritura, con sus amistades, y en el equipo de básquetbol de la escuela.



>> Lufkin – Foster Care and Adoption

Joel y Leslie Casiday siempre han sentido el llamado a servir a los más pequeñitos. Los dos son maestros y desde que empezaron a planear sus vidas juntos, el plan abarcaba adoptar. Ese plan ha traído algunos retos, incluyendo un caso en el que un niño al que estaban a punto de adoptar fue devuelto a su familia que decidió cambiar de planes al último momento. Pero repentinamente durante una noche en el 2020, Leslie recibió una llamada donde se le preguntó si su familia estuviese dispuesta a adoptar a un niño de dos meses. Aunque los Casiday ya habían adoptado antes, esta adopción fue diferente porque todo cambió con la pandemia del COVID-19. "Aunque mis planes no siempre son los planes de Dios, nosotros hemos aprendido que Dios puede tomar una situación donde uno piensa, 'Ah, esto podría ser el final del mundo,' y llevarnos hasta aquí, donde tenemos ya cinco hijos," dijo Leslie. "Con todos y cada uno de ellos, nosotros hemos aprendido que no hay nada más en que confiar, más que en el plan de Dios."



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