

'Our Miracle Baby'  
Family cares for child with disabilities

It's a boy's world  
Boys learn to be real men

'What I'm supposed to be doing'  
Foster mom trades single life for higher calling

# BUCKNER TODAY

The magazine of Buckner International

Fall 2016

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# HOPE

Fulfilled

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President and CEO Albert L. Reyes



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pairs of shoes



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# BUCKNER TODAY

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#### On the cover

Jason and Felicia Arnold of Lufkin, Texas, were compelled by the haunting statistics of how many older children in foster care are never adopted into a forever home.

Meet (left to right) Noah, Felicia, Landry, Jason and Ariana on page 27. Photo by Chelsea Q. White

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Enhancing Trust

# Protect children. Strengthen families.

*It's what we do.*

**M**ission drift. It happens time and time again in organizations. In short, mission drift is what happens over time to organizations that lose their focus and forget the reason they were started.

I'm often asked, "How has Buckner survived and thrived for so long?"

The first answer is God's blessing. We have been blessed for 137 years by God's favor as he has provided vision and provision for Buckner to serve the most vulnerable in our society.



*Buckner International has been committed to strengthening families and protecting children since 1879. It continues carrying out that mission by serving vulnerable children and families like this one in Mexico.*

As God has been faithful to bless our work, we have been faithful to our calling as Buckner "transforms the lives of vulnerable children, enriches the lives of senior adults and builds strong families through Christ-centered values." [Buckner Mission Statement]

As early as Jan. 11, 1877, R.C. Buckner wrote about the need to discover "the best means of providing homes, comfort and education for the hundreds of orphans in our state."

If you compare our current mission statement with the very foundational ideals that led to the opening of Buckner Orphans Home, you find our mission has not changed. We are as committed now as our predecessors were 140 years ago to protecting children and strengthening families. It's what we have done and what we

continue doing. There is no mission drift.

And while the mission of Buckner remains steady and focused, we have changed and adapted our methods with each generation. That is a third reason Buckner survives and thrives. We are willing to create and innovate.

At the core of our mission to protect children and strengthen families is the belief that children belong in a loving home with parents who are equipped to care for them in a safe environment. We believe God created the family as the best vehicle to protect children and as a place where children can grow and become all they were created to be.

That passion, based on our biblical values, drives us to develop ministries that strengthen families and make families a place where children are safe. Around here, we call those "family preservation programs."

As we look to the future, our vision for growth centers on these preservation programs. We believe this continues Buckner's mission of caring for the most vulnerable children by caring for the most vulnerable families in a way that is multi-generational.

We also believe our family preservation programs provide the best model for future growth in other geographical areas when and if God opens those doors.

As we frame our vision for the years to come, it's beginning to look like this:

## **Priority: Family Preservation Programs**

*"Buckner becomes the standard of excellence for building strong and healthy families."*

This is a priority for Buckner because we believe the family is God's perfect design and is the best place to raise and nurture children in the way they should go. Because the family is important to God, it is important to us.

Our two primary programs designed to preserve and strengthen families are the **Buckner Family Hope Center** and **Buckner Family Pathways**. Imagine a world where children can stay in their own homes, with loving parents. That is the goal of these two unique ministries. Through the Family Hope Center, we are able to penetrate communities where vulnerable children and families live and transform the direction of their homes. And our Family Pathways

programs provide a safe place for single parents to live while getting a much-needed education to put them on a new track.

### **Growth: The Americas**

*“Buckner becomes the faith-based organization of choice for solutions to family stabilization for the Americas.”*

As we look forward to geographical growth, Buckner is focusing on opportunities in our own hemisphere. We already serve in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Dominican Republic. At the same time, many of the people we serve today in Texas are coming from those same countries. It seems logical from a cultural and geographical perspective that our future growth would be south.

As we look for ministry opportunities in the Americas, we will utilize the Buckner Family Hope Center as our primary program for expansion. It works well in any culture. In fact, the Hope Center model started with Buckner Guatemala, and we later imported the idea to the United States.

And finally, let me mention a fourth reason Buckner continues to thrive and hold to our calling – **YOU**. Even before the doors of Buckner Orphans Home opened in 1879, generous donors were providing financial support. The fact is, without that generosity, those doors would have never opened, and we would not be here today.

As we look to the future and as we look for more opportunities to protect children and strengthen families, we need your support in every area – prayer, finances, influence. In whatever way God has blessed you, please consider how you can be part of our mission.



**Albert L. Reyes**, President and CEO  
*Buckner International*  
Visit my blog at [www.bucknerpres.com](http://www.bucknerpres.com)



# Heroes

We hear a lot these days about heroes. Since the events of 9/11, we've come to realize the sacrifice our first responders make to serve our communities and our nation.

We've also been drawn to recognize those who serve in our military. Go to a baseball game and see what happens when military personnel are announced. We stand and applaud.

Heroes and heroism are back in, after several years of absence.

I count among my heroes our Buckner foster and adoptive families. They go about their daily lives unseen and unsung. They do what they do because they have been called by God. The last thing they want is attention and they would never consider themselves heroes.

That's one of the traits of true heroes – they don't even know they are one. And for sure, they don't want recognition.

Our foster and adoptive families often step into situations that would cause most of us to turn and run. Their perseverance is a hallmark of these families, as is their commitment to the children they bring into their homes.

Another trait of these families is that even though they should have capes like a super hero, they are actually just like the rest of us. They are a constant reminder that God uses those of us who are willing vessels.

And while our foster and adoptive families are ordinary, they are also extraordinary because they have been called to a special task.

This issue of *Buckner Today* gives us a glimpse, literally, of some of our families. Since November is National Adoption Month, we thought it would be appropriate to show you some of our heroes.

As you look at the photo portraits that begin on page 18, pray for these families. And pray that God sends us more heroes like these.



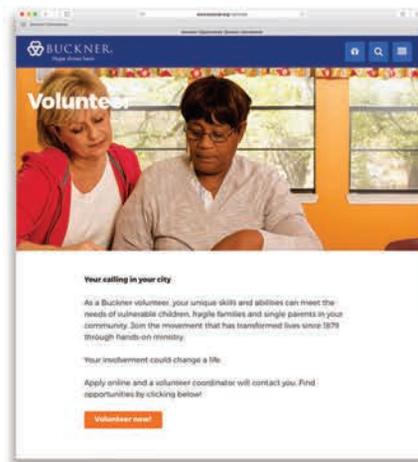
Scott Collins is Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.

# buckner.org



Jeremy and Holly James always knew they wanted to adopt. They began praying for God to bring a brother for Clyde. When they were first matched with Nathaniel, they had never even seen a picture of him, but they formed an instant connection with him. **Learn more at [buckner.org/bucknertoday](http://buckner.org/bucknertoday).**

Visit [buckner.org/volunteer](http://buckner.org/volunteer) to find volunteer opportunities in the United States and around the world. Help organize holiday activities for foster children, prepare boxes of food aid or deliver shoes to orphans and vulnerable children around the world!




**Letters to the Editor**  
If you have any questions or comments about the articles you've read in *Buckner Today*, e-mail us at [news@buckner.org](mailto:news@buckner.org).

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## Camp Buckner Foster Family Camp: A week of firsts for foster children, families



**BURNET, Texas** — Buckner foster and adoptive families know family is more than biological connections. It's about people who love and care about each other.

In July, more than 600 Buckner foster and adoptive children and parents got a glimpse into just how big their family truly is at the Buckner Foster Family Camp at Camp Buckner in Texas.

"I couldn't get over how beautiful every family at camp was," foster and adoptive parent, Tiffany Cassidy said. "People of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds coming together to take care of kids in need. I know the kids in foster care face all kinds of struggles, but this weekend was just about families getting out and having fun. It was encouraging to see parents who have been involved with foster care for so long."

Families had time to unwind, relax and connect with other foster families through worship, teaching times and activities. Parents discovered other encouraging parents who understood their struggles and joys.

"Camp Buckner was a highlight of

our summer as it provided a set aside time for our family to have fun together, be refreshed and refueled," foster and adoptive parent Katy Adamson said.

The foster care camp gave parents the unique opportunity to have people invest in their lives like they typically do into the lives of children.

"I really appreciated how many people were there to serve us," Cassidy said. "We are typically the ones taking care of other people's needs, and it was really touching to be on the other side."

Camp Buckner Executive Director Jeff Edmonds said Foster Family Camp is among his favorite times of the year.

"It is a great connection for our staff to meet the foster care families and share the bigger ministry of Buckner," Edmonds said. "It brings all the children back. It's a fun time to catch up and see how families are growing together."

The camp included opportunities that are new to foster children. Parents got to see the exhilaration on their children's

faces as they flew through the air on the zip line or caught their first fish.

"It's a fun time," Edmonds said. "Children get to experience something many of them may not have had the chance to do, whether it's zip lines or ropes courses or hanging out by the pool."

The highlight for many of the children and parents was a talent show.

"Our children also were able to perform in their first talent show, and it was a hoot!" Adamson said. "Camp Buckner was such a loving and encouraging place for the kids to perform. Everyone was supportive and encouraging to each brave performer."

Families cherished the encouragement, support and chance to see how much they've grown.

"Thank you Buckner for a great family camp experience," Buckner foster parent DeeAn Thompson said. "It was great to be able to spend time together without the usual busyness of daily life. It was also a great time of reflection on how much my girls have matured since last year." —John Hall

# Buckner Family Pathways, Family Hope Center in Longview begin serving at new location

**LONGVIEW, Texas** – The new Mac and Tom Stone Buckner Family Pathways and Linda and Ken Hall Buckner Family Hope Center in Longview are now serving families.

Construction on the new campus began in summer 2015 after the campaign raised \$7.5 million, surpassing the Shining Hope Longview Campaign goal by more than \$1.5 million in one year.

Sitting on nearly 4 acres of land, the new campus houses 17 apartments for the Family Pathways ministry, a transitional housing program for single parents and their children. The expanded Family Hope Center is also located on the campus and is assisting vulnerable families through family assistance, life skills training and sustainability services.

“At Buckner we strive to create programs that will protect children and strengthen families,” said Buckner President and CEO Albert Reyes. “Adding the Family Hope Center and Family Pathways programs to Longview will make a lasting impression on the families they serve, empowering them to completely transform the direction of their home and create a safe and nurturing environment for their children.”

Seven families, including 14 children, moved into the new Family Pathways apartments in August. Nine additional families will begin the program in January.

Services offered at Family Pathways include affordable housing, education support, case management, counseling, life skills classes, transportation and spiritual development.

In addition, the Family Pathways program is working with Kilgore College, where the residents will attend classes.

“I have never known such a sense of peace,” said Deana Betts, a resident at Family Pathways. “We’ve lived with my mom for the last three years, all in one bed. So this is amazing. It’s so surreal. I still get weepy at times.”

For Danesha Butler, the security of having a stable home is enabling her and her two daughters to focus on their education and pursue dreams they thought they could never accomplish.

“It means everything,” she said. “It’s more than a blessing having a stable home and not having to move place to place while I’m going to school. My future is looking

---

*The new Mac and Tom Stone Buckner Family Pathways and Linda and Ken Hall Buckner Family Hope Center in Longview are now serving families. Danesha Butler, a new resident of Family Pathways, (left) and Family Pathways Director Kimberly Clough celebrate the first families moving into the Buckner Family Pathways apartments.*

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*The Family Hope Center in Longview has helped families and people like Vanessa Powell, (top left), who have needed some encouragement and assistance when going through a hardship. Seven families moved into the new Family Pathways apartments in August, including Deana Betts (top right) and her children (bottom left). A welcoming picnic (bottom right) allowed new Family Pathways residents to meet each other, Buckner staff and supporters of the Family Pathways program.*

real good right now because I have stability. I can focus on school, and I have a place to come and be with my kids.”

The expanded Hope Center is 10,000 square feet and includes a computer lab, multi-purpose rooms, classrooms and office space for Buckner Children and Family services of Longview.

Vanessa Powell remembered how the Hope Center supported and encouraged her when she was suffering some hardships.

Facing some medical issues and being out of work, Powell was discouraged until staff at the Hope Center introduced her to a local program that helped women re-enter the work force.

“All the staff set me on the path to accomplish what I need to do to support my family,” Powell said. “Without Buckner, I would still be on my own feeling sorry for myself.”

“The expansion of the Family Hope

Center and the addition of Family Pathways is going to completely change the destination of families in Longview,” said David Ummel, executive director of Buckner Children and Family Services in East Texas. “People who are coming out of generational poverty are going to completely redirect their families, and Buckner is excited to be part of that change for the community of Longview.”

—Staff report

# Buckner joins ministry partners to change future of Houston

**HOUSTON** – Concrete, steel, brick and glass are rising up out of a 48-acre pasture just south of the Astrodome in Houston. But this is not just another commercial or residential development in Texas' largest city; it's a vision to change the trajectories of thousands of lives.

Cornerstone Community<sup>SM</sup> is under construction in Southwest Houston. The vision of Star of Hope, a historic ministry to Houston's homeless, Cornerstone Community will be a "transformational campus" for homeless families when its first phase is completed in 2017, said Star of Hope President and CEO Hank Rush.

"We've been providing services to the homeless for 109 years, but we asked, "How could we do it better? We dreamed of a place where people can come and have basic services like emergency care, recovery services, personal development, job skills and placement. So why don't we build a community and invite some ministry partners to go further?"

To achieve the dream, Star of Hope sought out partners to help create a continuum of services that would not only provide short-term solutions to homelessness, but longer-term answers to prevent it from reoccurring and to lift families from generational poverty. Among its choices: Buckner International and New Hope Housing Inc., a well-known Houston provider of life-stabilizing, affordable, permanent housing with support services for the homeless and those living on very limited incomes.

Star of Hope finalized a partnership with Buckner in 2013 that includes the construction of a Buckner Family Hope Center as well as a Buckner Family Pathways program as part of Cornerstone Community, undergirding the desired range of ministries that can lead people to

becoming economically self-sufficient.

"We see this project as a broad continuum of services for our families," said Betty Nunnally, Star of Hope's vice president of programs. "Once you have provided families with children with housing, what happens to them when they leave our program? Here they'll be able to utilize the services of Buckner. We're aligned; our vision is the same for the families and is anchored by strong Christian values."

Buckner President and CEO Albert L.

Reyes, agreed. "What excites me most about this partnership is how three organizations, each with different models of ministry, were able to map out a complete continuum of services, fitting the strengths of each together like a puzzle."

By partnering with two well-known Houston ministries, he added, "Buckner will be in a stronger position to better serve Houston than we ever would have been on our own."

The Family Hope Center will provide area families experiencing poverty, family issues





and a lack of services with family assistance and community events; equip families through education, financial empowerment, child and youth development and spiritual development; and elevate families through family coaching, counseling and spiritual enrichment. It will be the fifth Hope Center in Texas and the second in Houston.

Family Pathways, which is slated to be located within one of New Hope Housing's residential areas on the east side of the campus, will provide single-parent families housing, access to child care assistance

and a variety of other services. Family Pathways programs protect families from domestic abuse, financial uncertainty, homelessness and hopelessness.

"We began talking about Family Pathways and Family Hope Centers and our approach to working with families," said Randy Daniels, Buckner vice president for program development.

"A huge piece of that is affordable, safe housing and the dignity that comes with that. Hank and I talked about housing, and about partnering with New Hope.

"As we've talked to New Hope Housing, first through Star of Hope then directly, we found a same mind. In fact, we've found Houston to be innovative, with organizations willing to take some risks. I think God brought us together with the right people and the right model of services for this partnership."

Joy Horak-Brown, president and CEO of New Hope, agreed. "There is a marvelous confluence of interest between these three organizations to create an internal continuum of care where families can enter in an emergency or by seeking programmatic assistance through Star of Hope, then to have affordable permanent housing right there on site through New Hope, and Buckner there to provide the critical programming supports, together we are lifting families out of generational poverty."

"I've traveled all over the country looking at housing models for the homeless and those at risk and I have seen nothing else like this," she said. "I'm convinced by our three strong non-profits joining forces, we're creating a unique, cutting edge national model that's replicable."

—Russ Dilday

Cornerstone Community, a vision of Star of Hope, is under construction in Southwest Houston and will be a transformational campus for families. Star of Hope sought out partners, like Buckner International and New Hope Housing Inc. to help create a continuum of services that would not only provide short-term solutions to homelessness, but longer-term answers to prevent it from reoccurring and to free families from generational poverty. (pg. 10 top) The New Hope Housing development at Cornerstone Community is slated to host a Buckner Family Pathways program. (Pg. 10 bottom) Star of Hope's new Cornerstone Community will also be the new home of a Buckner Family Hope Center.



# Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood services new area

**DALLAS** – The Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood has expanded to serve a newly-built 160-unit affordable housing apartment complex across the street from the Hope Center's campus.

The Hope Center has an office on-site and a family coach available twice a month to help families going through a crisis or in need of resources. In addition to a family coach, a community programs coordinator is also available throughout the week to help promote family relationships through financial, nutrition, health and other education courses, family movie and game nights and tax preparation.

"The apartments are beautiful inside but that doesn't change the heart of a man because you put him in a nice apartment," said Cheryl Williams, Family Hope Center at Wynnewood director. "How do you get to the heart of the family? How do you encourage relationships to be healthy? That will be our opportunity. We're going to do a lot of teaching and a lot of character building. We get to help families

build a foundation and hopefully show them how to build a home."

The developers of High Point Family apartment complex – a partnership that includes the Central Dallas Community Development Corporation and Bank of America, which owns the site – saw the importance of providing services beyond a safe living experience for their housing project.

"I think Buckner provides that stability of

growth so not only are they housing-wise taken care of, but they're also [helping] financially, emotionally, with child care and parenting," said Darren Smith, senior vice president of Bank of America. "Buckner provides those building blocks so people could have success steps. We never envisioned doing it without Buckner because they know the community and they know the services that need to be provided." –*Aimee Freston*



# Buckner introduces Voluntary Adoption Program

**DALLAS** – Buckner is launching the Voluntary Adoption Program to better serve vulnerable children in need of homes in January 2017.

In an effort to help the 6,800 children in the Texas foster care system awaiting adoption find forever families faster, families in the Buckner Voluntary Adoption Program (formerly Domestic Infant Adoption) will participate in the foster-to-adopt and Waiting Texas Children programs as well. The move

empowers families to serve a wider range of vulnerable children.

"Based on the needs of the children we serve, our emphasis is more on this integrated approach and informs families of all the available options to serve as a forever family for our Texas children in need," said JoAnn Cole, vice president of Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services.

Infant adoption continues to decline, with 36 couples for each infant placed for adoption. The Voluntary Adoption

Program enables families to adopt young children through multiple programs rather than only Domestic Infant Adoption. The program is part of Buckner's continued efforts to protect children and preserve families whenever possible while also meeting the need for adoptive placements when necessary.

"It is a privilege to continue our longstanding ministry of adoption and maternity counseling," Cole said.

–*Staff report*

# \$90K scholarship only the beginning for Buckner Aftercare alum

**ALLIANCE, Texas** — Recent Lubbock high school graduate and Buckner Aftercare alum Teneil Wallace has a lot to smile about. Wallace is a recent recipient of the Family Fellowship scholarship, which awards \$90,000 to 15 young adults formerly in foster care across the country.

After being referred to the scholarship by a community school program, Wallace had an extensive interview process that included a Skype interview and trip to California with the scholarship board. She waited anxiously for a month to hear back. When she did, it was hard to believe she had earned such a prestigious honor.

“I was overwhelmed,” Wallace said. “It took the ride home and for me to get an email saying ‘Welcome to the family’ for it to really sink in.”

While it is the culmination of years of hard work in school and activities like mock trial, National Honor Society and academic decathlon, in a way it’s only the beginning of a life full of promise. Things haven’t been easy for Wallace. Her father died when she was 7 years old. Her grandmother, who raised her after her father’s death, died when she was 13.

Wallace and her twin brother, Taylor, entered foster care at 14 and later aged out at 18. The twins didn’t have the support they knew they needed to thrive. That’s when Buckner Aftercare, a transitional program designed to help young adults with independent living, stepped in to fill the gap.

“When we got to Buckner, they helped us find a place to live,” Wallace said. “We were in a rough situation, but they gave us stability.”

Wallace is looking ahead with a bit of

sadness, but mostly excitement. She plans to study business management at Prairie View A&M University and will use the leftover scholarship money to fund her first year of law school. Living separately



from her twin is bittersweet, but she knows he is only a phone call away.

“It’s going to be new because we’ve always been close,” Wallace said. “It’s going to be a good experience and a hard one. When I’m not strong, he steps up and I do the same.”

Wallace offers messages of support and encouragement to Buckner and her community.

“I would like to say thank you to Buckner. Your hard work is truly making a difference,” she said. “To kids and foster kids like myself, I would say to believe in your dreams. The only way they won’t come true is if you don’t believe in them.”

—Christina Wilson

# Thank you Buckner supporters

**Buckner wishes to thank the following corporations, foundations and other organizations for their charitable contributions of \$1,000 or more during the second quarter of 2016.**

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- Luda Belle Walker Foundation
- The Walmart Foundation
- Wolfforth Caregivers, Inc.

# Reyes elected vice president of North American Baptist Fellowship

**DALLAS** — Buckner President and CEO Albert L. Reyes was recently elected vice president of the North American Baptist Fellowship.

Reyes will serve as one of the leaders of the fellowship, which is a network of 30 Baptist groups from across Canada and the United States that includes 80,000 churches with 15 million members. NABF supports the mission of the Baptist World Alliance, a global group of Baptists from more than 160,000 churches.

“The North American Baptist Fellowship is grateful that Dr. Albert Reyes has agreed to serve as one of the vice presidents of the NABF,” said Elijah Brown, general secretary-elect of the group. “Dr. Reyes rightly reminds

us that our first priority and commitment is to adhere to the Jesus agenda. His proven and effective leadership will help point the NABF to ongoing engagement with those



who are most vulnerable. Dr. Reyes brings tremendous national and international

leadership, and I am looking forward to working alongside him in continuing to strengthen a public witness for mission and justice.”

Reyes said he is honored to serve the NABF and shine hope into the lives of the most vulnerable.

“When God brings Christians together, his message of hope and love is amplified in a world that desperately needs to hear it,” Reyes said. “That’s exactly what God does through the North American Baptist Fellowship. I’m excited to serve with my brothers and sisters in Christ as we seek ways to advance the kingdom of Christ.”

—Staff report

# DFW Shoe Drive brings in more than 3,000 pairs of shoes

**DALLAS** — What can bring a veterinarian’s office, water parks, churches and dental offices together for the same great cause? New shoes — and a message of hope — for vulnerable children.



On Aug. 19, Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® and WFAA-TV, an ABC affiliate, wrapped up a month-long Dallas-Fort Worth shoe drive with a diverse group

of shoe collection partners from across the Metroplex. Together, they brought in more than 3,000 pairs of shoes that will be given to children in vulnerable situations in North Texas and around the world.

“It was really energizing for us to see different kinds of organizations and churches across DFW come together in this effort,” said Rachel Wallis, director of Shoes for Orphan Souls. DFW-based businesses Milestone Electric and Hawaiian Falls used multiple platforms to give, donating television ad space and collecting shoes on service calls and on-site at the water park locations. Individuals, like Natasha Potts of Arlington, also got involved by promoting the shoe drive in her workplace. Potts had a special connection to Shoes for Orphan Souls before the drive.

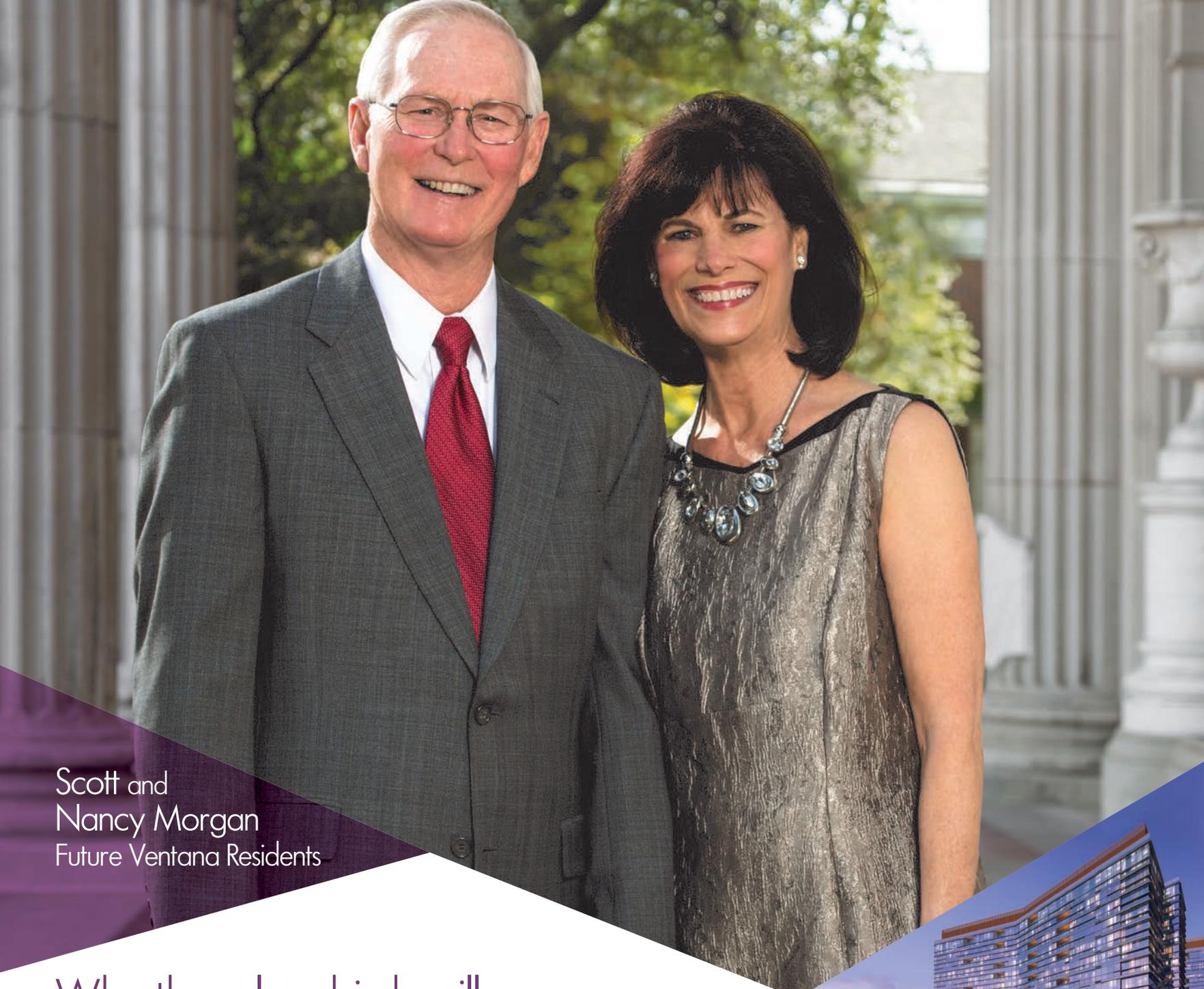
In 1999, Potts was a 9-year-old growing

up in a Russian orphanage. The pair of shoes she received from Buckner was one of the first things she ever had of her own. Later, a Buckner couple adopted Potts and her brother, and they joined their forever family in the DFW area. Potts remembered “wearing her Buckner shoes home” as they flew to the U.S.

“I decided to help with the DFW Shoe Drive because it’s part of my story,” Potts said. “This was one way I could give back to something so dear to me and show that a simple pair of shoes can change a child’s life. It brought me joy to see people donating because they saw my story, and they wanted to make a difference.”

Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls is already planning for the next DFW Drive.

—Charis Dietz



Scott and  
Nancy Morgan  
Future Ventana Residents

## Why these lovebirds will soon be nesting at Ventana.

They met as two widowed parents of young children. Over the next 24 years, they combined families and built a life. Now, with their brood nearby, Scott and Nancy are thrilled to be landing at Ventana by Buckner.

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A DISTINCTIVE SENIOR LIFESTYLE



When a young Bob Gloyna assembled his father's discarded wooden matches into miniature bridges and buildings, the average price of gasoline was 19 cents a gallon.

While Roger Owens paid his way through Texas Tech University to earn an electrical engineering degree, Germany invaded Poland and Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Jim Baker waded through snow to check tension levels on rural power lines for an electrical engineering firm in Des

Moines, Iowa, as Marvel re-introduced Captain America.

When Howard Wilson graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in electrical engineering and a commission into the U.S. Army Reserves, America began developing the hydrogen bomb.

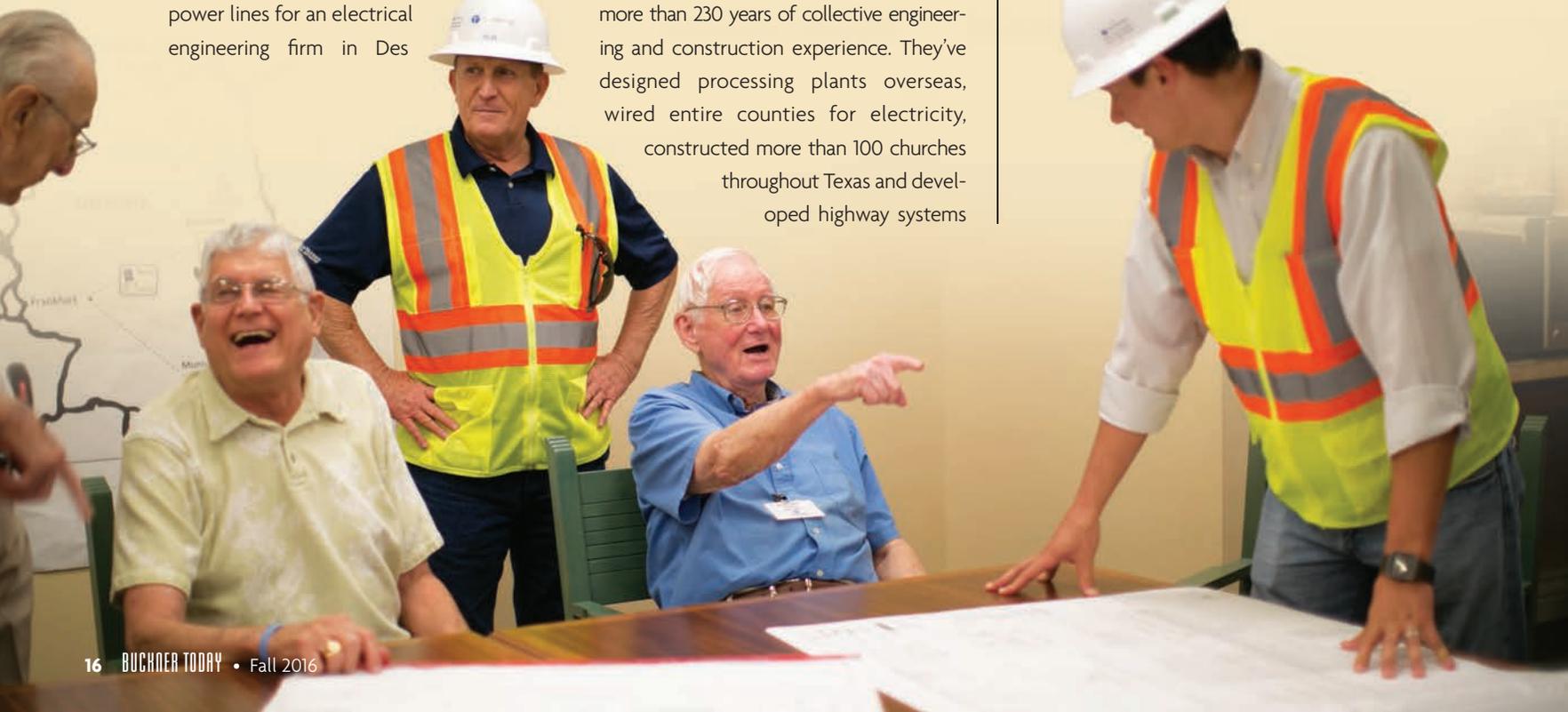
Ray Horton worked as an apprentice carpenter when department stores sold Tupperware for the first time.

Together, these now-retired men share more than 230 years of collective engineering and construction experience. They've designed processing plants overseas, wired entire counties for electricity, constructed more than 100 churches throughout Texas and developed highway systems

across the nation.

Engineering isn't just what they did; it's who they are.

Today, these Buckner Villas residents in Austin are dusting off their hard hats thanks to Hill & Wilkinson General Contractors, the Richardson-based construction company managing the GreenRidge expansion



project. The construction crew regularly visits Men's Coffee, giving residents an opportunity to examine the latest drawings of the expansion.

When not talking to the crew about the plans, many residents frequently gather at a fourth-floor window to watch the construction in real time.

"Watching the construction and visiting with the guys is the best entertainment in the world," said 97-year-old Owens who worked in engineering for 48 years before turning in his license at age 85. "They're doing it well. They don't know we're watching them and judging them."

The meetings began when several residents approached Buckner Villas Executive Director Doyle Antle, and asked if Hill & Wilkinson would be willing to meet with them. More than 20 residents attended the first meeting.

"They're pretty involved," said Bob Sharp, superintendent for Hill & Wilkinson. "Everyone's curious. Most of them just have questions for us."

Sharp and Zach Sienkiel, a project engineer, brought armloads of blueprints and renderings for the men to review during the first meeting.

"We usually get a lot of 'Y'all almost done?' and 'Hurry up!'" laughed Sienkiel. "But for that first meeting we showed up with nothing really on our agenda and just answered questions the whole time."

More than anything, these meetings provide a space for residents to be heard in a field they may feel has forgotten them.

"Construction ran through my career the whole way through," said 86-year-old Gloyna. "I'd go back in a minute if I could, but age prevents me from it. I recently saw this ad in the paper for an assistant project manager, and if I were 20 years younger I'd apply for the job!"

Through the years, these men have watched their craft change dramatically.

From the integration of technology to the acceptance of women, today's engineering firms hardly resemble those of the mid-20th century. Still, the bond these men share with their modern counterparts is unshakable.

"An engineer is a weird guy, or girl now!" Owens beamed. "They have to know how it works. It's a passion with them. And they have to know how to tell somebody else how to do it. I think engineers are better today than we were. Now they've got computers in their pockets!"

Horton, 87, is especially invested in the

construction jobs, but the one who pays attention to detail is the one who gets the job done."

Including the men in the construction project lets them be "liaisons" between the other residents and the construction staff, Antle said. They're able to encourage safety around the construction site and keep everyone informed about what changes to expect during the project.

"I think proactive is a good word," Antle said. "What they're doing is keeping the residents involved from a controlled environment. Doing it this way enables the



## Hard hats and coffee

The construction crew regularly visits Men's Coffee, giving residents an opportunity to examine the latest drawings of the expansion at Buckner Villas in Austin, Texas. Jim Baker, a retired engineer, examines the latest drawing and acts as a liaison between the other residents and the construction staff.

expansion project. His son, Sonny, is the contractor whose company is responsible for pouring all the expansion's concrete.

"I'm very proud of him," Horton said. "He listened. He paid attention. I taught him how to work."

For the next generation of engineers, the men advise to, above all, do the job and do it well.

"You make the drawings and then you build the rascals and then you go on," said 97-year-old Baker.

"Details make or break the job," Gloyna added. "Anyone can lay on roller brush

residents to talk about it and spread the word about safety. They'll watch out for each other."

The GreenRidge expansion is set to finish in 2018 and will feature underground resident parking, an expanded dining room and beauty salon, a full movie theater, an upgraded café and 69 new independent living apartments. Hill & Wilkinson is also managing the Buckner Calder Woods expansion in Beaumont, scheduled to open in early 2018. ■

*A photo essay by Chelsea Q. White*

# H O P E

Fulfilled

Foster and adoptive parents are our heroes. They have been for more than 130 years. The only thing more open than their homes is their hearts. The only thing stronger than their desire to serve children is their ability to care for them.

This issue, we celebrate foster and adoptive parents. You inspire us. You motivate us. May we all learn to care like you.

## The James family

Jeremy and Holly James always knew they wanted to adopt. They began praying for God to bring a brother for Clyde. When they were first matched with Nathaniel, they had never even seen a picture of him, but they formed an instant connection with him and finalized his adoption in September 2015.



## The Battles family

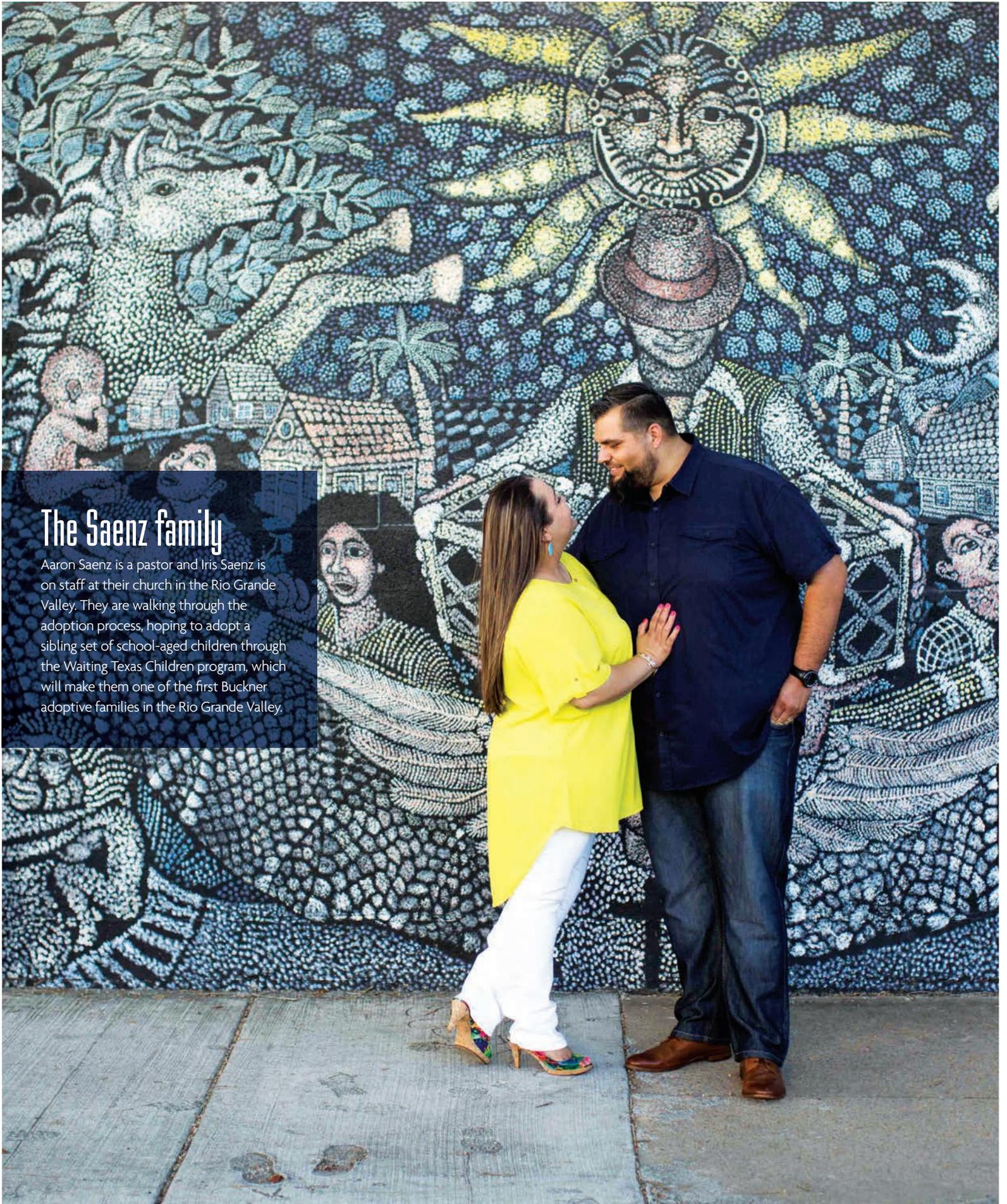
Phillip and Sandra Battles have been caring for foster children in Beaumont, Texas, since 2000. Having grown children, they never intended to adopt until they met Shelly. "This little girl doesn't have anybody," Sandra told her husband. "This is the first time in my life I met someone with nobody. We're going to have to adopt her." On National Adoption Day in 2014, Shelly found her forever family with the Battles.





## The Alfaro family

Public school teachers in Lubbock, Texas, Adrian and Kylie Alfaro decided to adopt to provide a safe haven for kids who really need it. They adopted 2-year-old Ivan on National Adoption Day in 2015.



## The Saenz family

Aaron Saenz is a pastor and Iris Saenz is on staff at their church in the Rio Grande Valley. They are walking through the adoption process, hoping to adopt a sibling set of school-aged children through the Waiting Texas Children program, which will make them one of the first Buckner adoptive families in the Rio Grande Valley.

## The Brower family

Dan, a Dallas pastor, and his wife Charity have two biological teenagers and were compelled by their faith to adopt older kids through the Waiting Texas Children program. From left to right: Levi, Kayla, Dan, Charity, Wesley and Chloe.





## The Hernandez family

The day after they received their foster care license, Richard and Bonnie Hernandez in Odessa, Texas, received a call from Buckner about their first foster care placement – a sibling group of four. They adopted those four children along with another boy through foster care, making the Hernandez home a full one. From left to right: Dezmen, Jacob\*, Jericho, Elijah, Hannah, Mercedes, Bonnie and Richard.



\*Name changed to protect the privacy of foster children.

## The Gonzalez family

Foster-to-adopt parents Dave and Jennifer Gonzales from Amarillo, Texas, love their two energetic, sweet sons, Zane and Tristyn. "They fit in well with us," says Dave. "I like to think we're perfect for them."



## The Shelton family

Ben and Deena Shelton of Longview, Texas, always wanted to adopt, discussing the possibility even while they were dating. Their vision became a reality when after months of prayer, siblings Banks and Everly joined their family through the Waiting Texas Children program.





## The Arnold family

Jason and Felicia Arnold of Lufkin, Texas, were compelled by the haunting statistics of how many older children in foster care are never adopted into a forever home. Last year on National Adoption Day, they adopted 12-year-old Ariana from foster care. From left to right: Landry, Felicia, Ariana, Jason and Noah.



**D**ressed in a white T-shirt and bright orange sneakers, Bishop Putney stands out. While the other five boys glue pieces of wood together, he stands over a two-by-four, his right arm sliding a handsaw across a wooden plank. A flurry of dust falls to the ground.

He focuses intently. The cut must be made at precisely 30 inches just like Dan Molinski has shown him.

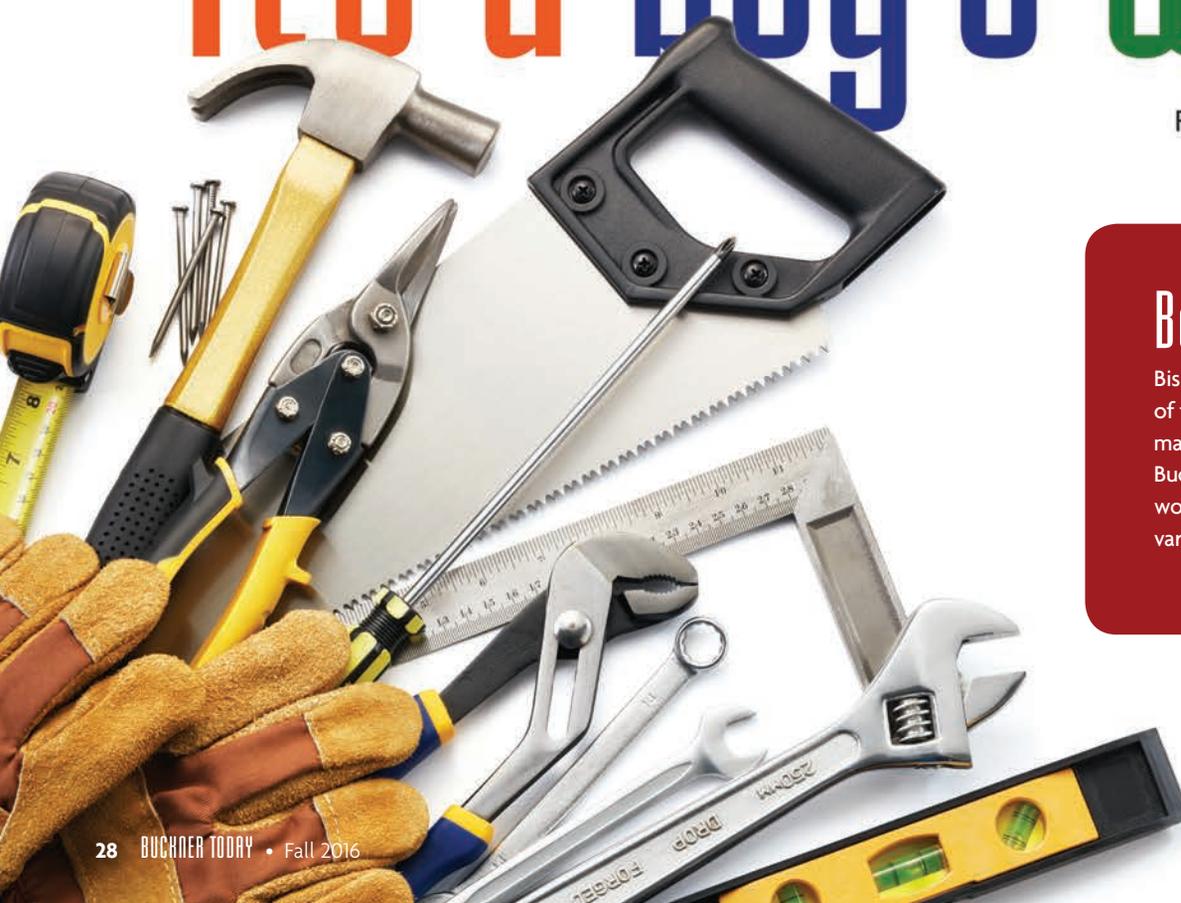
“He’s very good at fixing stuff, like tables,” Putney says. “And he’s good at making stuff. He’s showing us how to be a man. A real man.”

# It's a boy's world

Story by Christina Wilson  
Photography by Aimee Freston

## Boy's club

Bishop Putney saws a piece of wood with the assistance of teacher Dan Molinski for a lemonade stand they are making together. Molinski teaches a Boy's Club at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood where he works to give the boys meaningful experiences with a variety of projects they make themselves.







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Dan Molinski volunteers to teach Boy's Club at the Family Hope Center at Wynnewood where in addition to making hands on projects with them, he teaches them valuable lessons about respect, honesty and kindness.



Surrounded by young men dressed in a variety of basketball shorts and tennis shoes, Molinski demonstrates how the base of what will be a lemonade stand is constructed. The Boy's Club at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood in Dallas meets every week with a purpose: To grow as men and have fun.

"For many children at the Family Hope Center, emotional and spiritual fatherlessness is the norm," Buckner Ministry Engagement Coordinator Sarah Jones says. "Consistent, strong, compassionate and reliable men are important to every child, but they leave a powerful impact on boys. Dan is teaching the boys valuable lessons about respect, honesty and kindness through these weekly Boy's Club meetings. The boys are learning more than a cooking or construction skill; they are learning what a father looks like."

After moving to Dallas a year and a half ago, Molinski wanted to help the community he lived in, so he called Buckner.

"I asked Wynnewood if they needed any help," Molinski recalls. "I felt like I would be a good fit and someone had just vacated the position."

That was seven months ago. Today at The Boy's Club, Molinski works individually with a boy who is attempting to saw wood and talk at the same time. Molinski and the boys use simple items to construct their projects, like heavy-duty Elmer's glue and nails.

"I buy the supplies myself, but the costs for the lemonade stand will be minimal," Molinski says. "Most of the wood is from old pallets I find at hardware store trash bins and in the junk piles my neighbors leave on their curbs."

Like a magician, Molinski pulls out a power saw and lines it up carefully on a long block of wood. He acts like he's about to cut, then turns around to the group.

"What did I forget?" Molinski asks animatedly.

"Safety goggles!" scream the boys.

The Boy's Club couldn't have completed projects like Spaghetti Day, wooden Texas flags and Make-A-Bench Day without the help of Buckner Life Skills Specialists Erika Beck and Jennifer Hiland.

"The boys are generally attentive in the class only because Ms.

Erika and Ms. Jenn are so good at running a tight ship at the center,” Molinski says. “I’m not much of a disciplinarian so I’m glad they keep the children in line.”

Together, Molinski, Beck and Hiland work to give the boys meaningful experiences. One boy in a black T-shirt looks on with a smile as Molinski cuts the rest of the two-by-fours with a power saw. The smell of wood fills the air, making the room seem even more

like a rustic cabin in the woods instead of a community center in the middle of Dallas.

After every piece is taken care of, everyone claps and cheers. Boys Club isn’t a one-man job. They are a team. The boys are grateful to Molinski for taking the time to invest different skills in them.

“He’s a nice businessman,” Alex Bowman says with a smile. “He teaches us more than what we could know by ourselves.” ■



# Vital Signs: Single mom goes from homeless shelter to self-sufficiency at Buckner Family Pathways

Story by John Hall • Photography by Aimee Freston

**6p.m.** That's when Leticia Harley, her 2-month-old son and 2-year-old daughter could re-enter the emergency homeless shelter in Dallas. They would file in line early, three among many, looking for a warm meal and a safe bed at night and breakfast in the morning before being forced to leave the next day.

Until 6 p.m.

"I felt like there was no hope," she said. "I felt like a skeleton moving around."

A staff person at the shelter noticed Harley and her children and discovered she was taking classes at Northlake College, part of the Dallas County Community College District. She saw Harley was driven to improve her life – for herself and her family.

The staff member referred Leticia to Buckner Family Pathways in Dallas, which provides housing for single-parent families and empowers them to grow while continuing their education.

Harley was amazed when she met Family Pathways in Dallas Director Cynthia Rentie, who gave her a tour of the campus and explained the ministry. In November 2013, she started the program.

She soon discovered her new apartment was more than a place to live. It was a place of healing and hope. After suffering physical and emotional abuse, Harley didn't trust anyone. She built walls to protect herself and her children. She hid her pain. Her experience in the shelter compounded those feelings and she lost her sense of self-worth.

Through counseling and interacting with other Family Pathways residents, Harley discovered who she is. She embraced her strengths. She found people she could trust, individuals who would help, not hurt her.

An admitted bad cook, Harley said other residents invited her family over to eat regularly. The mothers worked together to get their children to school and pick them up.

"My experience has been fantastic," she said. "It's like having another family. My family is in New Jersey. I don't have any support here. The women here are like family. I love Buckner."

Harley is a vital part of that family. She's gifted academically and willing to help others. She tutors other moms, guides them on what classes to take and even helped one mother earn a full scholarship.

Her nursing classes proved vital as well. A brother of one of the Family Pathways residents had been feeling ill but didn't want to go to the doctor. At the resident's request, Harley agreed to visit with him as a precautionary measure. She urged him to go to the hospital quickly. He did the next morning and was rushed to the intensive care unit. Now, he's improving.

"Leticia really blossomed in the Family Pathways community," Rentie said. "She learned how to build healthy relationships with others, and she found she has value. She's been an incredible addition to our family."

Working together with the other residents has helped Harley grow. "I got stronger as a person, as a student, as a mom," she said. "I think I've transformed."

Harley now is working on a nursing degree at El Centro College. She also works in the emergency room at Parkland Memorial Hospital. She's found fulfillment in caring for others, particularly the homeless and poor. She shares her story as a way to connect with them while they're in the hospital.

"I've been able to build self-esteem," she said. "I can use my circumstances to help others. I can develop relationships with friends, co-workers and other people."

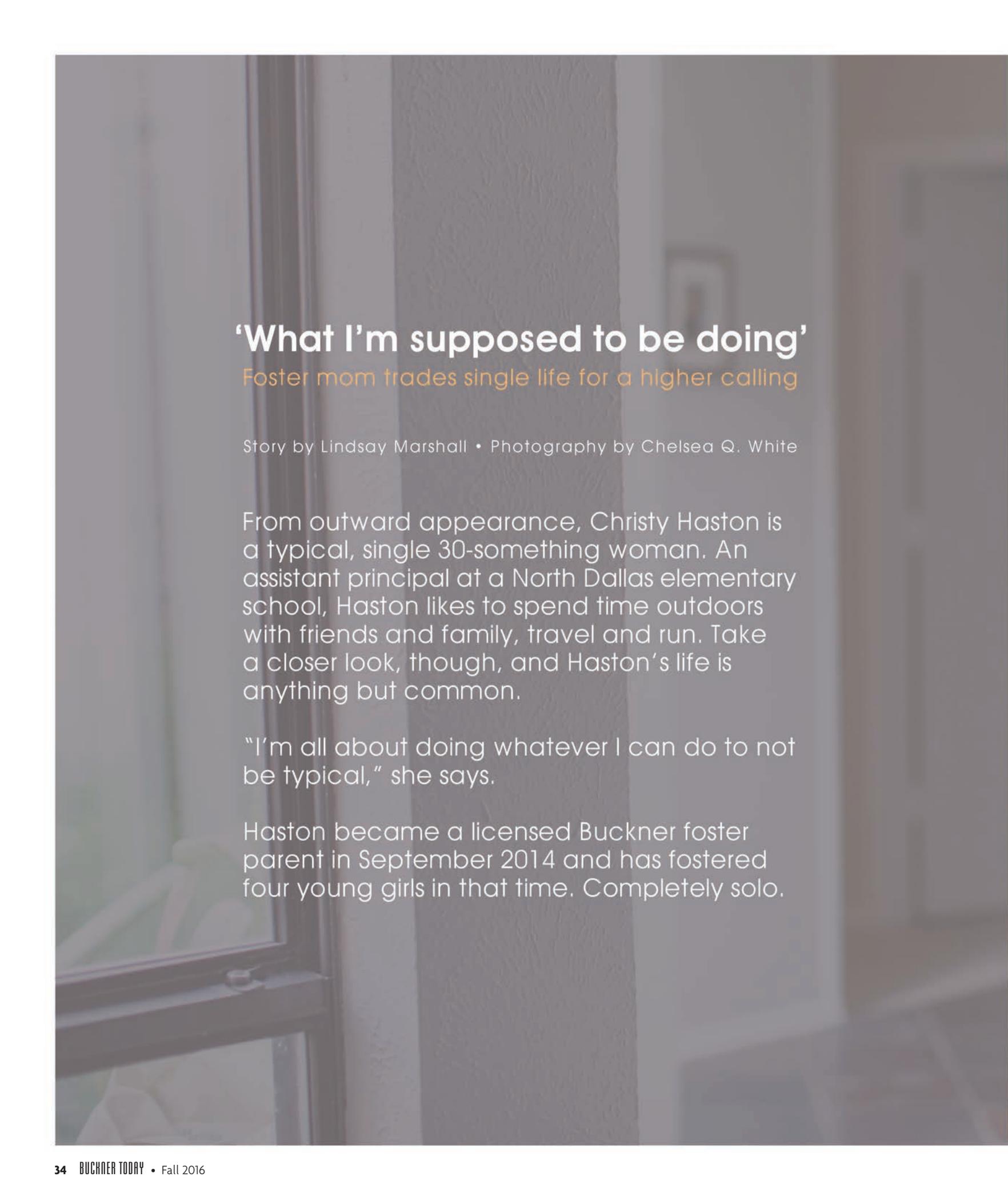
Her hard work at school and in the emergency room is paying off. Recently, she was hired by CareFlite to help transfer patients from one medical center to another.

"I couldn't believe I got the job at CareFlite," she said. "That's a dream job for many people."

The future for Harley's family looks bright. She is thankful for God who faithfully led her to Buckner and has blessed continually along the path.

"God has a plan for me," she said. "I don't know what it is, but he is opening doors for me." ■





## 'What I'm supposed to be doing'

Foster mom trades single life for a higher calling

Story by Lindsay Marshall • Photography by Chelsea Q. White

From outward appearance, Christy Haston is a typical, single 30-something woman. An assistant principal at a North Dallas elementary school, Haston likes to spend time outdoors with friends and family, travel and run. Take a closer look, though, and Haston's life is anything but common.

"I'm all about doing whatever I can do to not be typical," she says.

Haston became a licensed Buckner foster parent in September 2014 and has fostered four young girls in that time. Completely solo.



Caring for vulnerable children has always been on Christy's heart. As a 22-year-old elementary school teacher fresh out of college, she and her best friend started a fund to one day open an orphanage. A portion of that money now covers some of Haston's foster care expenses and will hopefully one day support adoptions.

"I realized I'm going to be held accountable for my single life someday. Yes, I have lots of extra time, money and freedom, and yes it is fun to have all of that," Haston says. "But, do I want to stand in front of the Lord and say, 'Look at all these trips I took and things I purchased.' Or do I want it to stand for something?"

In 2008, Haston's dad died, catalyzing a season of reflection. She took a year off teaching – what Haston calls her Year of

Jubilee – to serve in different places and see where the Lord had her next. Her travels took her to Uganda where she served in an orphanage. One young boy was so sick he couldn't stay at the orphanage, so Haston went to help the woman caring for him in her home.

"I remember her telling me, 'You can't hold him too much, because he can't get used to it. When he gets back to the orphanage, there are only two mamas to eight babies,'" Haston recalls. "I remember sitting there holding him thinking, 'That's so wrong. He's so sick. He deserves to be held by his mom. That's not a privilege. That's a right.' That sparked something in me. As my Year of Jubilee ended and I knew I had to go back to work, the goal was to start pursuing foster care."



Haston's first placement was a little girl, about 2 years old. Haston says she was "precious, super easy." Her next foster assignment was a bit more challenging – twin 6-year-old girls.

One of the girls, Mia\*, was struggling with self-esteem and a tough friendship at school so she and Haston sat down to discuss ways to handle the situation. After achieving reconciliation with her friend, Mia came home beaming the next day, proclaiming "Miss Christy, when I do this [smile], it means I'm proud of myself."

Moments like this remind Haston of the ministry of foster care: "Mia smiled differently from when she first came to me and when she left. I hope there's a little seed of Jesus somewhere in that. I hope they walk away knowing a sense of being loved. Knowing that love will run deep, and the Lord can use that to drastically alter her life."

Being a single foster parent isn't without its challenges, so Haston leans on her Dallas community, family, church small group and Buckner for physical and emotional support. Six friends have become licensed respite caregivers to help give Haston a break, and the previous owners of her quaint North Texas home even left some essentials – a swing set, washer and dryer, furniture and a grill – behind. They knew she was becoming a foster parent, and they wanted to help.

Buckner has also been there to pick up the phone exactly when Haston needs support, guidance or a sympathetic ear.

"With the twins, there was a moment where I thought, 'I need somebody to call me because I just feel like I'm defeated, not doing a good job and at an impasse,'" Haston recalls. "My home developer called me immediately and was so encouraging and helpful."

She also trades off respite support with another Buckner foster family.

"It's fun to have this community. We are this Buckner family," Haston says.

Haston's third placement, Zoe\*, 3, is gregarious and fun, and the dynamic between the two is sweet and special. Zoe has since left Christy's house to live with a relative, leaving Christy heartbroken but hopeful. Christy wrote this sweet post on her Instagram account shortly after saying goodbye to Zoe:

"This girl walked right into my home and arms two months ago and stole my heart. She is fiercely independent, crazy smart, full of love and giggles, beautiful, and insanely brave. This past Friday she was returned to her grandmother and my house is



once again eerily quiet. She was mine for two months but she has always been and will always be [God's] first and foremost. And that is what is getting me through! This is one of the hardest parts of foster care but I am constantly reminded that the Lord loves and provides far better than I can."

Transition is always tough as a child leaves Haston's home and she shifts back into the single life, but she remains confident in the work God is doing in her and the lives of the children she fosters.

"I don't know if this is forever for me. I don't know what my forever is," Haston says. "I don't know what the rest of my story is. But I know right now, this is what I'm supposed to be doing. ■

*\*Name changed to protect privacy.*

## A growing family

When Addison\* came to the McCarthy home at one month old with a brain injury, April and David McCarthy never even considered not taking her in. Though she required a lot of extra care, the McCartys say she has touched their lives in a special way. Christian, 13, in particular has formed a sweet bond with his foster sister.





Story and photography by Aimee Freston

# miracle 'Our baby'

In five years of doing foster care, David and April McCarthy have had 13 foster children stay in their home – all of them boys. They have eight children, three biological sons and five sons adopted through foster care. Even still, when they got the call one year ago asking if they would foster a 1-year-old girl and her 1-month-old sister who suffered a brain injury at birth, they never hesitated. **The answer was yes.**

Addison\* came to the McCarthy home in Lubbock, Texas, straight from the NICU, where she spent a month recovering from a difficult birth. The extent of her brain injuries was unknown at the time, but she had several doctor's appointments scheduled with specialists to follow-up on her case.

"All we knew is she had a brain injury from birth, but we really didn't know what we were getting into," April said.

At 1-month-old, Addison was seven pounds, and they couldn't get her to gain weight or stop crying.

"She was a tiny screaming doll of a baby," April said.

At night, Addison would continue to cry and scream. April and David were lucky if they got 30 minutes of sleep.

"It was just us," David said. "I was trying to work and April was trying to take care of the other kids. We were like zombies."

When Addison was just shy of 3 months old, April took her to the hospital for an MRI. For April, it was just another of a

multitude of appointments for Addison. But later that day, their pediatrician called and told them to take Addison immediately back to the hospital. She already had a bed waiting for her.

The MRI showed fluid on her brain, an issue possibly related to her original brain injury at birth.

"It was causing so much pressure, it was actually crushing her brain, making her brain shrink," David said.

Doctors immediately operated, putting a shunt in her brain. Then at the end of the month, inserted a feeding tube since Addison still wasn't gaining any weight. After the second surgery, Addison's constant crying ceased.

"They put in her feeding tube and that flipped a switch," April said. "She stopped crying."

"She was just so hungry all the time," David added, "and she couldn't get the nutrients she needed."

Addison is now 1 year old and hasn't had any more surgeries

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*David and April McCarthy have three biological sons, five adopted sons through foster care, and are in the process of adopting two girls from foster care. "We went into foster care thinking we were going to bless other children, but we found out pretty quickly, they were going to bless us," David said. Back row, left to right: David, Addison\*, April, Damien, Christian, AJ, Bailey Front row, left to right: Garrett, Easton, Ashlyn\*, Jaxson. Not pictured, David and April's oldest son, Jordan.*

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though she often has follow-up MRIs with the neurosurgeon. She has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. She is still little for her age, but the feeding tube has helped tremendously.

At times, caring for a child with special needs can be challenging, but David and April see it as a privilege.

"It did take some time to get used to," David said. "Some people questioned if we were sure we wanted to do this, and we'd [answer] 'yeah.' If she was our own child, we wouldn't just give up on her. That's not fair to her. It's not her choice. She will still be loved just the same way as any other child."

"Addison is our sweet little princess," April added. "She's our precious little angel."

Cristian Garcia, director of foster care and adoption in Lubbock, said children with special needs are harder to place and having families like the McCarthys who can love and support children like Addison is important and needed.

"Many times, you see families wanting children who are certain ethnicities or nationalities, but children with intellectual disabilities are often overlooked," Garcia said. "Every child deserves a loving family regardless of their needs and abilities."

While caring for a child with special needs has been challenging, David and April also see the joy.

"It's been surprising," April said. "They're called special needs because they are special. They just touch your heart in a special way I would have never imagined."

Caring for Addison has prompted April to go back to school this year and become a registered nurse.

"I've actually always wanted to be a nurse," April said. "I've been busy raising a family, but after getting Addison, she's really motivated me. I feel it will help me parent her better as well just to have that extra education."

The parental rights for Addison and her sister have been terminated and April and David intend to adopt them at the end of this year or early next.

"We'll just take it one day at a time," David said. "We already know there's a good chance Addison will need care her whole life and that's OK. They only gave her 40 percent chance of living past seven months. We're passed all that. She's an amazing little girl – our miracle baby." ■ *\*Name changed to protect privacy*



**Read more about the McCarthy's story in a special weekly serial in November for National Adoption Month at [buckner.org/NationalAdoptionMonth](http://buckner.org/NationalAdoptionMonth).**

# How a plastic bag changed a life

Story by Chelsea Q. White • Photography by Gabriel Flores

**W**hen Marilyn Garcia, now 18, was in kindergarten, her mother couldn't afford to buy a backpack for school so she used a shopping bag. That seemingly insignificant plastic bag was the catalyst for changing Garcia's life.



Her fellow classmates teased her about her makeshift backpack. Her mother was a single parent to Garcia and her two older siblings. They had recently moved from Mexico to Peñitas, Texas, just across the border and were scraping by.

It wasn't just her backpack that caught the attention of her classmates. She struggled with learning English for the first few years.

"I've been through a lot," Garcia said. "We all go through a lot of hard stuff – but I know that when we came over here, when my mom came over here, we had a lot of trouble finding somewhere to live."

Where some might wither under the constant teasing, Garcia used it as an opportunity to prove everyone wrong. She saw her mom

working hard each day at a clothing warehouse, trying to provide for Garcia and her siblings.

"My mom is really hardworking," Garcia said. "She was working for me to become somebody, so why would I listen to somebody telling me not to overcome the teasing? I tried really hard; I was a top reader in my class. My grades were really good – they were all As. I tried very hard to overcome what they were telling me. My mom has been my motivation. She's worked really hard for me, so I'm trying to do the same for her."

Several years ago, Garcia was having trouble finding scholarships for college. The school counselor recommended she go to the Buckner Family Hope Center for help.

Garcia, her mom and the counselor went to meet with Gabriel Flores, family coach at the Hope Center. He helped explain the college application process to Garcia and her mom, and some options for scholarships. At the end, he casually asked Garcia for an essay about her life and why she works so hard. Garcia wrote it and didn't think anything of it.

Several weeks later, she received a surprise phone call from Flores: she had been awarded a Buckner scholarship to pay for tuition.

"As I got to know Marilyn's story, I thought of the verse in 2 Timothy: 'For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline (1:7),'” Flores said. "Marilyn has been through so many tragedies like her father leaving them, moving to a different country, learning a different language and other instances worthy of

discouragement. But to see her at the top of her class simply tells me she has an unbreakable and determined spirit! We could not think of a more deserving student for this scholarship."

Garcia graduated third in her high school class and is enrolled at the University of Texas at the Rio Grande Valley. She's going to study nursing but her dream is to one day become a doctor and help people with low income get the medical care they need.

"I'm really grateful that Buckner is here for me. They've been really nice to me and every time I need something and I ask, they help me. I've been coming to their events to help out. So, we're working together. Hopefully we get more involved with each other." ■

# Buckner Family Hope Center helps make life '200 percent' better for single mom

**BK** Mazone had reached rock bottom. As a single mom in Longview, Texas, she had no job, transportation or income. The Buckner Family Hope Center's summer feeding program was one of the few bright spots in Mazone's life.

She started taking classes at the Hope Center and through the Jobs for Life class, she connected with an employer and was hired. Recently, she moved into a better housing situation and passed a test that will empower her to get better paying work.

"I have a goal and a plan and right now I'm working toward that," Mazone said. "Any resources Buckner has, I always take it and run with it. I've pretty much completed every task I've taken on. Life is better. Two hundred percent better."



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