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Inside {local} August'23

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STILL SOLD ON COLUMBIA

The voice of the Blue Raiders is still connected to his hometown 16

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ON THE COVER: Chip Walters in the press box of Johnny "Red" Floyd Stadium and Horace Jones Field on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University. Chip, a native Columbian, has been part of the Blue Raiders broadcast team for 33 years. Photo by Michael Tedesco.

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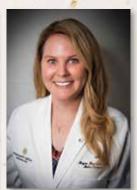


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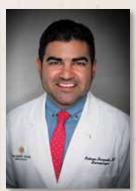
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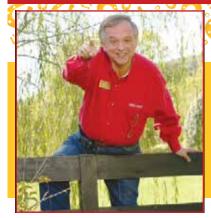
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STILL SOLD ON COLUMBIA

THE VOICE OF THE BLUE RAIDERS REFLECTS HIS BELOVED HOMETOWN.

BY JASON ZASKY

Chip Walters—aka "the voice of the MTSU Blue Raiders"—has been working in broadcasting since he was 15 years old but has never strayed far from his roots. Growing up in Columbia in the 1970s, he spent summer nights listening to Major League Baseball games on the radio, marveling at how people got paid to broadcast Atlanta Braves and St. Louis Cardinals games. Suitably inspired, he was soon calling Columbia Central's football and basketball games, a high school endeavor that jump-started a career that continues to this day.

In fact, Walters has been part of Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) football broadcasts for 33 years and has served as play-by-play man for both football and basketball for the past 15 seasons. He says he enjoys the job as much as ever and especially appreciates the opportunity to reminisce with players from years gone by when they return to campus and visit the booth.

As for his favorite Blue Raiders broadcasting memory, that

came in 2016 when the No. 15 seeded MTSU basketball team stunned No. 2 seeded Michigan State in the NCAA tournament, becoming just the eighth No. 15 seed to knock off a No. 2 since seeding began in 1985. His No. 1 football memory came last year when MTSU shocked the No. 25 ranked Hurricanes in Miami.

Yet even more exciting upset opportunities are just around the corner, as MTSU football opens its 2023 campaign against Nick Saban's Alabama Crimson Tide in Tuscaloosa on Sept. 2, with another road game against an SEC team a week later at Missouri.

Conference USA also has a different look since last season, with four new programs—Liberty, Jacksonville State, Sam Houston State, and New Mexico State—having recently joined the league.

This year's football schedule also features what Walters describes as an "interesting twist," as the Blue Raiders will play three games on either Tuesdays or Wednesdays in October, getting MTSU and other Conference USA programs on national television week after week.

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That said, Walters likes the team's chances to make another run at a Bowl game, much like it did in 2022 when the Blue Raiders finished 8-5, culminating with a 25-23 victory over San Diego State in the Hawai'i Bowl.

Meanwhile, Walters continues to find time to serve as a real estate agent for Exit Realty Bob Lamb & Associates in Murfreesboro, even in the midst of the football and basketball seasons.

"I worked in corporate sponsorship sales for a good long while before starting in real estate seven years ago," he recalls. "Fortunately, being the Voice of the Blue Raiders gives me a platform to be visible in this town and to be somewhat recognizable to folks who have been around a while."

Working as a real estate agent has also given Walters the opportunity to re-connect with his hometown on a more regular basis, having already done business there—with the hope of doing more.

"Every time I come home, I try to drive around the square and see all the exciting things going on," he begins, with the music scene and the downtown area of particular interest. Walters admits he tries to time his business trips to Columbia around midday, so he can grab lunch at the Jumbo House, which is operated by a friend he has known since first grade.

"That was my favorite place when I was a kid, and I still like to go there. I also like going to Southern Tré when I am in town, not

to mention Betty's Parkway, which is great for a steak or burger."

Notably, Walters says he remains close with many of people from Columbia Central High School.

"I'd put our senior class (1981) against any other as far as being a group that enjoyed being around each other, and more than 40 years later, we enjoy being around each other just as much. I'm really happy to have those relationships, and I'm always excited to come back home," he adds, with his sister still residing in the house they grew up in.

Now he hopes that his hometown can continue to grow in a healthy way, reminding that there's a lot of new construction underway in what he describes as a "picture-perfect" small southern town.

"I hope that Columbia and Maury County work together to do a good job of managing the growth that is happening and not forget about the folks who have been there forever," he says. "While you're going to welcome new people into the community, don't lose the charm that invited the growth to start with."

CONTACT:

Chip Walters at Exit Realty Bob Lamb & Associates 2630 Memorial Blvd. Murfreesboro, TN 37129 615-896-5656 ChooseChip.net

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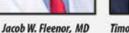
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"When you go in a lot of co-ops, they tend to be smaller buildings, and technically, they're just small farm stores," says Ryan Pilkinton, Location Manager. "But with this one, while we're a farm supply first, we also have clothes, boots, footwear, a home décor section, a huge pet section with a self-serve dog wash, and an automotive section, as well."

Co-ops are created to serve their members, but anyone can shop there. What this store does offer, especially for farmers, is not only an array of items but expertise, insight, and advice.

"I have very good employees who are very knowledgeable," Pilkinton says, "and we pride ourselves on customer service. Some of them have been working 30 plus years, so they've been around, done a little bit, and seen a little bit of everything. And a lot of them have animals themselves. So, if you have questions about a product, they can tell you how to use it, when you need to use it, how much you need to use, and they'll even tell you if you probably shouldn't use it right now."

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< FROM PAGE 16

Pilkinton grew up in Maury County and had a farming background. When it came time to pursue a career, he knew he wanted it to be farm related.

"I always wanted to do something in agriculture, so when I got out of high school, I started working for what was then Maury Farmers Co-op. I worked on the dock as a warehouse employee, loading feed and stuff like that, then I moved inside and did sales. And I continued working part-time when I started college."

He stayed with the Co-op, and in 2020, when they opened the new store, he was given the job as location manager. He's seen some changes through the years, including a merger that brought different co-ops together. The list included Maury, Humphreys, Dickson, Marshall, and Williamson Farmers Co-ops.

"As I mentioned earlier, we were Maury Farmer's Co-op, but in 2021 a group of us came together to make one co-op which is called United Farm and Home Co-op. And we now have 11 retail locations across Middle Tennessee." The move was designed to better serve co-op members.

"The bigger you are, the stronger you are," Pilkinton says.
"We're able to take advantage of buying power, obviously. If you're buying for one location, now you're buying for 11 locations, so you tend to get a little bit of a better deal, and we can pass that on to farmers. It's also made us stronger in terms of assets and equipment. We can share with each other."

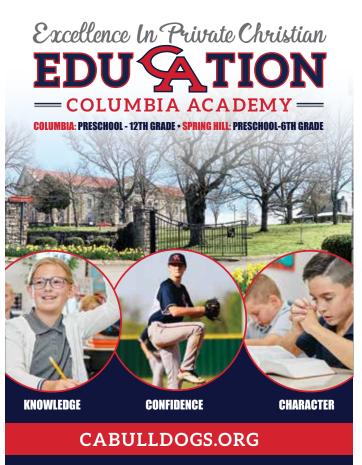
United Farm and Home Co-op sponsors many local events and organizations, such as Mule Day, the county fair, and sports teams. It's a way to make sure some of the money spent locally stays local.

Pilkinton says he's proud of his store, the community it serves, and all it offers.

"If you've never been in our store, I would highly recommend it. I promise you, it's not what you're thinking when you hear coop. This is not like any other co-op."

For more information see the United Farmers Co-Op ad on page 5.

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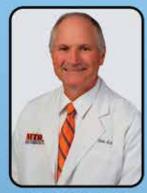
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