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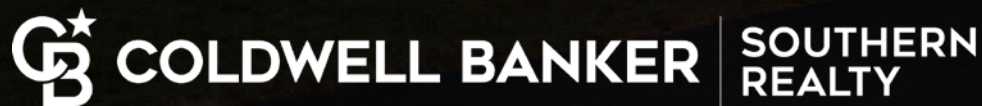
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COLUMBIA & MAURY COUNTY

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Welcome to the first issue of MuleTown Local, a magazine for Maury County residents and those living in the surrounding areas.

Our goal is to enhance local living by providing folks with more awareness of opportunities in the community, including events, visiting and shopping local merchants and services, or just learning about a neighbor. In addition, we will support local organizations, charities, and businesses and help build them up while offering introductions both in mailboxes and online.

We invite everyone to the table. Follow us on Facebook, visit us online at **muletownlocal.com**, drop us an email, or give us a call. We want to hear your ideas, story suggestions, event notices, or questions. If you are a local business or service owner, we would love to help you build your success.

MuletownLocal will publish every month and will deliver to thousands of mailboxes. Copies will also be available for pick up at many area hot spots. You can also find our online flip magazine at **muletownlocal.com**

Thanks for checking out **Muletown Local**

Thanks for your time,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeff Bryant". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Jeff" written in a cursive-like script and the last name "Bryant" in a more formal, slightly cursive script.

Jeff Bryant

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They saw a need and found a solution helping thousands of kids



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Production company broadcasts to a national audience from downtown Columbia



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Mouth-watering marinated skirt steak recipe



LOCAL FOCUS SERVICE DIRECTORY 22, 23

Creative Director: Dennis Carroll

ON THE COVER: Larry Black & Keith Bilbrey on the set of Larry's Country Diner in Columbia. photo by Robbie Mathis.

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Photography by Barrie Taylor

SNACKING LEADS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

LOCAL CHARITY PROVIDES SNACKS DAILY FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

PAM WINDSOR

Charity Kimes says the idea to create a program to provide snacks for kids in school evolved over time. The seeds were planted during her 27-years as a speech pathologist when she worked in various public schools.

“I think that was kind of the very beginning of me coming home and sharing things with my husband about the need in different schools and different areas,” says Kimes.

Her husband, Bradd, began thinking more about what they could do to help. It led to them creating Bright Apple in 2019. It is a non-profit organization that started small, but now, with the help of lots of volunteers and support throughout the community, it

delivers some 200,000 daily snacks annually to kids in six Maury County schools.

Kimes says the goal behind getting healthy snacks to kids during the day is to help keep them alert and ready to learn.

“Most schools start feeding kids lunch at around 10 o'clock in the morning to get all of them through the line. And that's unfortunate because a lot of our schools don't dismiss until around 3. So, if a teacher is trying to teach reading at 1:30 in the afternoon and that child ate lunch at 10, you can see where there's going to be a problem with them paying attention and focusing.”

The program focuses on elementary schools where kids learn fundamentals that will carry them through life.

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“If you don’t learn to be a proficient reader by the third grade, research shows things start stacking against you. From third grade to fourth grade, you really stop being taught to read, and you start ‘reading to learn.’ So, if you don’t get the reading down by then, as you go on to the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, you’ll keep getting further behind,” says Kimes.

Collecting and delivering snacks to school kids isn’t as simple as it might seem. In addition to the cost factor, there are specific requirements for what’s considered an approved snack under national nutritional guidelines.

“When you’re taking snacks into the school system, they have

to be USDA Smart Snacks,” Kimes says, “and that means there’s nutritional quality. They can be things like fresh fruit, and we do quite a bit of that, but it’s not all fruit. Since we deliver once a week, we start out with fresh fruit, and by the end of the week, it might be a Nutri-Grain bar or something similar.”

Bright Apple was off and running in 2019, and then the COVID pandemic hit. But while it could have caused a significant setback, Kimes says it turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

“When COVID hit, the community really got behind us. We were able to put together a website, and people just started donating, which was amazing. Before we knew it, we were in our dining room going round and round a table, putting five snacks in

PAGE 12 >

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< FROM PAGE 10

a Ziploc bag.”

Parents were able to pick up the snacks at the schools.

Bright Apple currently uses a distributor to package and deliver the snacks to area schools. It’s all funded by donations, most of them coming in consistently, monthly.

“We appreciate all donations,” Kimes says, “but the monthly donors are the ones really making this happen because we need to know month to month what we have coming in and what we can provide.”

She’s been pleased by the strong community support that’s allowed them to grow so quickly.

“It started with one school, then two, then three. At this point, we now have six schools and can see, in the foreseeable future, adding more. We are also talking to people about doing this in other counties. But we’re really happy it started here.”

And happy, as well, to see it making such a difference.

“I love the feedback we get from teachers and even some parents about the behavioral changes. Kids are focusing better, and all from a banana or an apple at 1 o’clock in the afternoon. If we can help these teachers help these kids with something so simple, that’s a win.”

To learn more about Bright Apple or donate, visit: brightapple.org

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LIVE FROM COLUMBIA - LARRY'S COUNTRY DINER

THE DOWN-HOME VARIETY SHOW IS LOVED BY TELEVISION AUDIENCES AND MUSICAL GUESTS ALIKE

BY JASON ZASKY

The first thing you need to know about Larry's Country Diner is that it's 100% unscripted.

"Our show is improv, and you can tell it's improv, and you never know what is going to happen next," begins the show's founder and namesake, Larry Black, before noting that they have never stopped tape in the course of producing more than a hundred episodes in the past 13 years. "I've told everyone: We're going to do one pass. If you screw up, you have to get out of it because we're not stopping," he says proudly.

The second thing you should know about Larry's Country Diner is that it's one of the most popular shows on RFD-TV, where it airs on Thursday and Saturday nights. The down-home variety show combines interviews, music, and entertainment. It features regular characters that include Black and announcer Keith Bilbrey (of Grand Ole Opry Live and Music City Roots fame), not to mention waitress Renae Johnson and church lady Nadine. It's taped live in front of a studio audience in Columbia, Tenn.—in an intimate, country diner setting.

"It's a very personal show," says Black. "There are a lot of warm fuzzies, and people feel like we're family."

PAGE 16 >

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Photography by Robbie Mathis

< FROM PAGE 14

That feeling extends to the show's guest musical artists, who appreciate the opportunity to perform their songs for an enthusiastic, country music-friendly audience.

"The thing that hits me the hardest in a positive way is when artists tell us the impact their appearance has had," says Black. "The Oak Ridge Boys came up to me once and said they got more comments about being on our show than they did when they were on The Carson Show."

Artists also enjoy the chance to banter with the show's regular characters. Black recalls one occasion when he "got smart" with Vince Gill.

"He responded with the same kind of smart-aleck comment, and I said, 'I don't have to take that. This is my show!' Then I got

up and walked out," recalls Black with a chuckle. "But then I was outside the diner wondering how I'm going to get back in. I decided to come back through the serving door with a tray of food and served a table. He just kept laughing and singing."

Moreover, when mistakes are made, they only add to the charm and allure of the show.

One time Mickey Gilley forgot the words to "Don't the Girls All Get Prettier at Closing Time," offers Black. "We took a commercial break, and when we came back, I had him start up again."

LARRY BLACK'S FAVORITE MUSICAL GUESTS

As for some of his favorite musical guests, Black is quick to highlight Gene Watson, Exile, and Bobby Bare, among many others.

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Diner guests have photo made with The Malpass Brothers on set. Photography by Robbie Mathis

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“My current favorites are the Malpass Brothers,” says Black, referring to the “retro” duo of Christopher and Taylor Malpass. “They are like the Smothers Brothers except they are country, and they have a spontaneity that nobody else comes to the table with. “The next three years are going to be real climbing years for them,” adds Black. “My prognostication is that they will be Grand Ole Opry members within the next couple of years.”

THE FUTURE OF LARRY’S COUNTRY DINER

As for the future of the show, Black makes it sound as if Larry’s Country Diner might be changing, in part because he’s getting into his late 70s.

“For me, we’re pretty much at the end of the road. My mouth still works, my brain still works—at least partially—and I love the

people. But when they get to the point where they have to duct-tape me to my chair, then I probably have to stop,” he admits. He also notes that the show has already hosted most of the possible musical guests who are available.

“We’ve never had Dolly Parton, and we’ve never had Garth Brooks,” he says, referring to a handful of possible country artists that likely remain out of reach for one reason or another.

And with his long film, television, and radio career winding down, Black says he and his wife Luann are thinking of moving from Bellevue to Columbia, as his youngest son, Jared, and five of his 10 grandchildren live in Maury County.

“Now that we are getting older, we thought if we get closer, it would be easier for them to come to be of assistance to us.

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“
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”

Photography by Robbie Mathis.

TENN PIN ALLEY ONE-STOP-SHOP FOR FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

BY JASON ZASKY

“Our motto is Eat, Play, Party.” So says Derek Ransom, co-owner of Tenn Pin Alley on Mooresville Pike in Columbia, where there’s no shortage of ways to do all three. Attractions at the 67,000-square-foot family entertainment center include 32 bowling lanes, bumper cars, laser tag, and an arcade with more than 50 games. Then there’s Max’s Café, which offers a full bar and a menu that features burgers, pizza, nachos, salads, and wings, as well as a wide variety of vegetarian and healthy options.

All the attractions are housed in a newly remodeled facility that, in a previous life, served as both a bowling center and a manufacturing space.

“When my wife and I bought (the facility), we remodeled the

bowling part, then added the attractions and tied the two spaces together to make it a family entertainment complex,” explains Ransom, who says bowling has been part of his family’s life as long as he can remember. In fact, he bowled in his first league when he was eight years old.

As for the decision to open Tenn Pin Alley in 2017, that was based on a perceived gap in the marketplace.

“(Brandee) and I both grew up here, and we have five kids. Looking for things to do, we saw a need for family entertainment. With the growth of Columbia, it was the perfect mix,” he adds, before noting that he’s expecting to open several new attractions at Tenn Pin Alley in the next year or two.

“There are still 12,000 square feet inside that we can grow into, and the next step for us is looking to add an outdoor attraction.

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COLUMBIA

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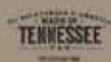
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Derek & Brandee Ransom

< FROM PAGE 20

Right now, mini-golf is in the lead in terms of possibilities," he says, hoping to have a course open on the property's 7.5 acres in the spring.

Meanwhile, bowling remains a big part of the fun, as Tenn Pin Alley hosts leagues and tournaments, in addition to recreational bowling. Patrons can also take bowling lessons.

"We have four certified coaches, including the Pro Shop operator," explains Ransom. "There's also a college coach in-house who coaches the team at UT-Southern."

As for the future, Tenn Pin Alley hopes to continue to develop in conjunction with Columbia, "which is becoming more of a destination for people to come and shop and be entertained," notes Ransom, pointing to the revitalization of downtown. "The town itself is kind of hip and cool now, and with the new retail shops coming in, it's just going to continue to grow."

With that in mind, Tenn Pin Alley hopes to host more and more events, though it already does a brisk business hosting birthday parties and holiday parties.

"We want to keep growing our corporate events and make it a destination where businesses rent out the facility and have team-building events and company parties," says Ransom.

At the same time, Tenn Pin Alley expects to continue to support the local community in various ways, partnering with the Special Olympics and Bowl for Kids' Sake, while offering a Kids Bowl Free program that runs throughout the summer. Also, the business is always looking to hire local talent to help keep the party going.

"We keep trying to create an environment where people want to come back and spread the word (about us)," says Ransom.

At the same time, he and his wife hope that Columbia retains its hometown feel well into the future.

"It's a great town, but it hasn't gotten too big. We just want to continue to grow with it," Ransom says.

It seems Tenn Pin Alley is already well on its way, considering that "2021 is going to be a record year for us," concludes Ransom. "We want everyone to eat, play, and party with us. We sell fun here, and we want everybody to have a good time."



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Marinated Skirt Steak

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VINAIGRETTE:

1/4 CUP OIL
1/4 CUP FISH SAUCE
1/4 CUP RICE WINE VINEGAR
1/4 CUP WATER
2 TABLESPOONS RAW SUGAR
1 CUP CHOPPED FRESH CILANTRO
1 LIME, JUICE ONLY
1 CLOVE GARLIC, MINCED
1 SMALL THAI BIRD CHILE OR SERRANO CHILE, CHOPPED
1/4 HEAD FINELY SHAVED GREEN CABBAGE
1/4 HEAD FINELY SHAVED PURPLE CABBAGE
2 CARROTS, THINLY JULIENNED

SKIRT STEAK:

1 1/2 POUNDS TRIMMED SKIRT STEAK
1/2 CUP COCONUT MILK
3 CLOVES GARLIC, MINCED
2 TABLESPOONS LIME JUICE
1/4 CUP CHOPPED FRESH CILANTRO
2 TABLESPOONS SRIRACHA
SALT, TO TASTE
3 CUPS COOKED BROWN RICE
1/2 CUP CRUSHED PEANUTS
1 LIME, QUARTERED, FOR GARNISH



To make vinaigrette: In large bowl, mix oil, fish sauce, rice wine vinegar, water, sugar, cilantro, lime juice, garlic and chile. Toss cabbage and carrots in vinaigrette; refrigerate until ready to serve.

To make skirt steak: Marinate steak in coconut milk, garlic, lime juice, cilantro, sriracha and salt, to taste, at least 1 hour, or up to 24 hours.

HEAT GRILL TO HIGH.

Grill 3-4 minutes each side until medium rare.
Let rest 3 minutes.

Thinly slice steaks against grain and serve with vinaigrette, rice and crushed peanuts; garnish with lime wedges.

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Michael Dominic Tedesco is a photographer in Nashville, formerly New York City. Clients include: Mutual of America, Farm Bureau Insurance, Penguin Publishing Group, Gotham Books, Avery Books, Bloomberg Markets, Men's Health, Women's Health, Men's Fitness, The Source, CMJ, St. Johns University, Decker Design, Jujamcyn Theaters, Journal Communications, Warner Music Nashville, University of Tennessee, Meharry College, Edge Artist Management and many Departments of Agriculture in the United States. View more work at www.tedescopictures.com



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