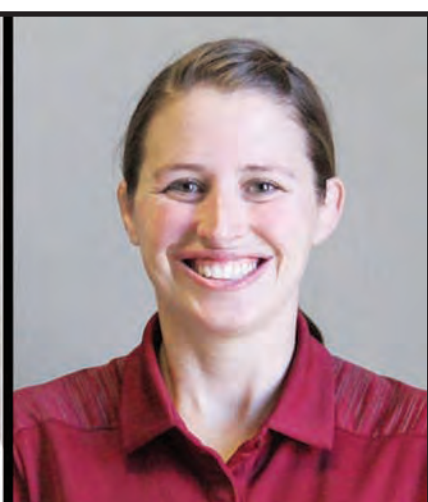
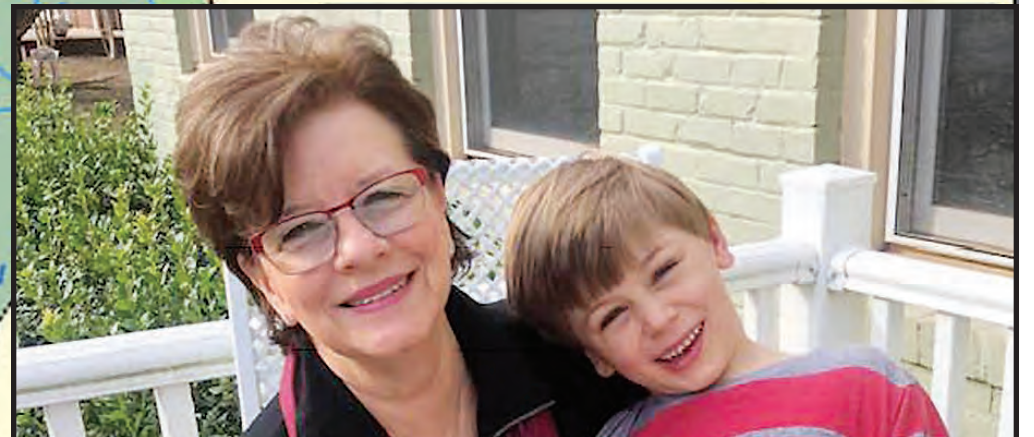
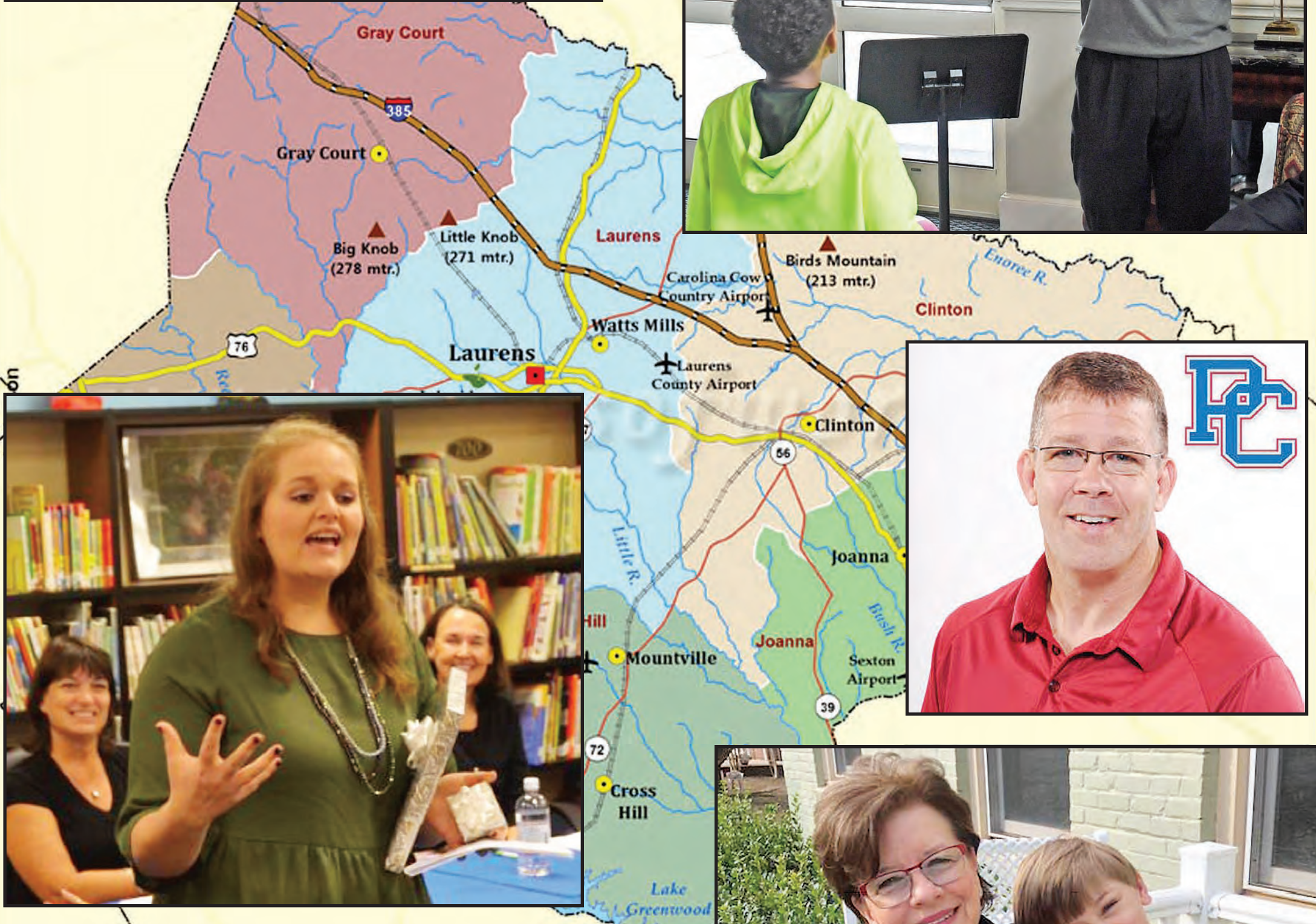


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# Prisma Health's Regional Operating Officer

# Justin Benfield

By Vic MacDonald

Editor

The mind is always working. Just a day after attending a breakfast where it was explained how differently-abled people can hold down productive jobs in the community, Justin Benfield was thinking, "They could do that around here."

Benfield is Regional Operating Officer for Prisma Health's Southern Region and the interim COO of Hillcrest Memorial Hospital. He is at the forefront of local response a merger that creates Prisma Health, and re-brands the county hospital as Prisma Health-Laurens County Memorial Hospital.

He attends a lot of meetings. He and team members attended the Feb. 8 State of the District breakfast at Clinton High School, for District 56, Clinton-Joanna-Cross Hill. He and team members attended the Feb. 12 breakfast meeting of the Laurens County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. He read "Green Eggs and Ham" at the Feb. 9 Interactive Reading Program sponsored by United Way of Laurens County at Edmunds Hall, Presbyterian College.

He also has a ton of in-house meetings. All give him ideas. He has assembled a team that makes those ideas a vision, and translates that vision into success.

In just two years, the team has brought LCMH from a 2-star rated hospital to a 4-star rated hospital, based on analysis by an independent group. Another rating has gone from a C to a B.

Oh yes, did we mention - he reads comments in patient satisfaction reports.

This attention to detail stems from a work ethic born in the dirt of Edgefield County, South Carolina.

"Edgefield (like Laurens) is a rural community, home of 10 governors. You may hear people around here call me 'Guv'na' - my grandfather was mayor, my father was on the town council. They related to me the idea that 'we can do a lot more together.' I played sports, I'm an independent thinker who likes to work together."

Benfield and Dr. David Williams run the Laurens County hospital in a dual, regional model developed by GHS. They are implementing this model in the hospital departments, as well.

"We are poised for greatness and growth - geographically and as our relationships take root," Benfield said, during an interview the day after he attended the LCDSNB's breakfast.

Now, he has the idea that differently-abled in-



New PTC Foundation Board Member Justin Benfield, left, and Board Vice Chairman Jeff Field. - Photo provided

dividuals could have a role in campus maintenance, and front lobby appearance. It's one of countless ideas he's mulling over; if he decides to move on it, chances are good a team member will be calling Diverse Solutions, the disabilities agency's workforce branch (see The Chronicle, Feb. 20).

"I am getting more physically into the community - LCDC, Chamber, Future Scholars, United Way, Community Garden," Benfield said. "Relationships in the community are key. They need to be sustainable and revolved around the kids. We are affecting behaviors and culture (to champion wellness)."

Within the hospital, he is interested in promoting personal responsibility and candor, and stopping gossip. He wants every employee to have the opportunity to grow.

He and Williams recently spoke to students in Laurens County Junior Leadership.

Benfield has more than 24 years of diverse healthcare experience. He was for seven years UMG operations director responsible for various areas including the Department of Medicine's primary care, specialty and cardiology divisions, and pediatric specialties. Also, he was administrative lead for the UMG Clinical Operations Committee.

Before coming to GHS, Benfield was administrator of Carolina Cardiology Consultants, PA, functioning as an administrative and strategic development partner. He was director of invasive cardiology at Bon Secours St. Francis Health System.

Benfield earned an associate of applied science degree with an emphasis in cardiovascular technology from the Georgia Heart Institute School of Cardiovascular Technology, an affiliate of Augusta Technical College.

He earned a bachelor of science degree in healthcare management from Southern Illinois University - Carbondale.

He earned a master's degree in business administration from Southern Wesleyan University. He has learned to embrace "Leadership By Example."

Benfield says, "We're active as a community developer. I want to see greatness for this community, in industry, in entrepreneurs, in influences outside of healthcare."

After being part of a "fun" environment that took Carolina Cardiology Consultants from 14 practitioners to the largest firm of its kind in just five years, he advised the company that being acquired by GHS was a good idea. "I joined GHS

in 2010, and was able to spread my wings. When this opportunity arose, I did not know what was in front of me, what powerful capabilities are here. We have a saying, 'No money, no mission.' It's fun and exciting."

Prisma Health-Laurens County Memorial Hospital is expanding services. Its physician referrals are up 86% in the ambulatory infusion center. It intends to bring sleep studies back in-house this March. Its Women's Life Center is recruiting another OB-GYN - "people still don't know that we birth babies here," Benfield said.

The rural health, federal program center is combining the expertise of social workers, case workers, pharmacists and diabetes educators to address the unique needs of rural patients. Benfield can see the day where, at a clinic in Joanna, a nurse practitioner can "cell-phone" a specialist to get advise on first response to any illness.

"We are all about the patient experience, recruiting and retaining quality people. We have 90 beds - that's a lot for a rural hospital - our people are constantly roving. We have wonderful volunteers, but it is a challenge retaining in environmental services. We are expanding our community partnership, this is culture building."

Diversity will be the hallmark of the upcoming Patient Family Advisory Committee, Benfield said, and the hospital is "well ahead of our target" in preventing infections.

Still, there are challenges. How do you offer reliable transportation to people who must have diabetes treatment? How do you educate diabetes patients - how do you persuade them to be compliant with treatment? Can you encourage development of the IT infrastructure that will allow virtual visits to the doctor? Can you train a force of community health providers that go into people's homes - the old "doctors house calls"?

One way to tackle some of these challenges is using a resource that's already here.

"LCMH and Hillcrest Hospital are only 28 minutes apart," Benfield said. He was interim COO there as the operations officer worked on a Prisma project in the Midlands. When that project ends, what's to stop Laurens County and Hillcrest from forging an even closer bond of cooperation?

"We can share, that's a preliminary result of our finances working together, and reduce duplication," Benfield said.

Think about it - a trauma center located somewhere in the split between I-385 and I-26, equidistant from two already established hospitals. Like a thousand others for Justin Benfield, it is an idea.



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## Laurens-based Prisma Health executive joins PTC Foundation Board

The Piedmont Technical College (PTC) Foundation recently welcomed Justin Matthew Benfield to its board of directors.

Benfield is chief operating officer for the southern region at Prisma Health, formerly Greenville Health System. He is based at Laurens County Hospital in Clinton. In this role, he oversees Prisma Health's operations at the Laurens County Medical Campus as well as physician practices and outpatient services in Laurens, Abbeville, Newberry and Greenwood counties.

"As Piedmont Technical College continues to grow its nursing and other health care programs, we are particularly excited to welcome someone with Justin's extensive health care background to our Board," PTC Foundation Board Vice Chairman Jeff Field said. "It is obvious that Justin cares about our community, and we look forward to working with him to bring educational opportunity and economic prosperity to the region we serve."

Benfield earned his bachelor's degree in health care management from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and a master's degree in business administration with a focus in health care from Southern Wesleyan University. His record of service on governing boards is expansive. Benfield serves on the boards of the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce, the Laurens County Development Corporation (Executive Committee), Laurens County Future Scholarship and the United Way of Laurens. He and his family are members of Buncombe Street United Methodist Church in Greenville.

"I am honored to serve on the Board of the PTC Foundation," Benfield said. "It is truly exciting to serve the Foundation at a time when the college is growing so robustly and enrollment is on the rise. During my time on the Board, I pledge my commitment to sustaining that growth for future generations."

[www.ghs.org/locations/laurens](http://www.ghs.org/locations/laurens)





# Teacher of the Year Carissa Messer

By Vic MacDonald

Editor

Rissa Messer likes to be busy. Keeping up with three kids and a husband while holding down a full-time job and worshipping every Sunday will do that.

She wants to be busy, just maybe not as busy as last August. Messer was slated to give a major speech at the District 56 opening convocation, as the district's teacher of the year. Not content to just talk, she organized children into an inspiring performance of Rachel Patten's smash hit "Fight Song," to motivate her colleagues to make the 2018-19 school year their best ever.

Husband Christopher handled creating and presenting the PowerPoint, and all the audio-visuals. Nine days later, Christopher had surgery to remove a benign brain tumor. The extended Edmisten-Messer family waited in a MUSC waiting room.

"I got some schoolwork done," Rissa said. "Not much but some."

Add to that, Christopher and Rissa's church was moving. He is worship pastor and "he lets me help out" leading worship, Rissa says. Heritage Fellowship now is going great guns in the old Florida Street School, but last summer there was the small matter of bringing an old building back to new life.

And, as if all that wasn't enough, the academic year was getting underway; and Rissa knew her classroom colleagues at Clinton Elementary School needed her partnership in working with their special needs students.

It all got done. Things now have calmed down, a little.

The Messers are preparing the adoption of a son, who will become their third child, later this year from Thornwell.

For all her work with special needs, music, the local district's teacher forum, speaking to statewide conferences and inspiring young teachers, Rissa Messer is The Clinton Chronicle Horizon 2019 Co-Teacher of the Year.

"I would rather have a full plate than an empty plate because an empty plate doesn't allow for adventure. We live for adventure," Messer said.

She spoke at the statewide Teacher of the Year forum, but not before making sure it wasn't a mistake. She was on an e-mail invitation with the top five nominees for South Carolina Teacher of the Year, and yet she knew she had not been named a finalist. "I wrote them back and said, 'This is kind of embarrassing, but I don't think you meant to send this to me.' They said, 'No, we did. We met you, we like your passion.' That was super cool."

Her parts-of-two-years time as D56 TOY goes into this year as she will be speaking in May to the Presbyterian College teacher induction ceremony. "You figure once your year is done, it's done. I did all the stuff from last year, went to the forum and the conference. I founded the LCSD Teacher Forum and I'm president of that until I pass it on to Caroline Hunt (2020 Teacher of the Year)."

About her "District 56 on fire" address at August's opening convocation, Messer explains that the "Fight Song" presentation involved kids from her church, some current and former students of hers, her foster son and her biological son (who was age four), and a good many students from

Thornwell. She also "snagged my nephew" for a group that was "a neat assortment of kids from all background, a diverse group. That's an accurate representation of our district."

Now into her 8th year teaching, Rissa Messer says she feels like "I'm such a rookie but I'm getting on up there. I taught regular ed in Laurens my first year."

A proud graduate of Clinton High School, Messer graduated Lander University dually certified in regular ed and special ed to "make myself marketable." It wasn't a plan going in - "I was about to graduate a little early, and my husband is a music major and they do not move as fast as other people. He said, 'Rissa, you could take a few more classes get this add-on', and it's served me well. I not only know what they do in special ed, I know regular ed. I have the same training they had. Without it, I might not know what my kids need to know, it's given me an edge in knowing what they need to know in all areas."

"I thank my husband for moving slow."

She finds special ed teachers in the weirdest places. "I'm getting my wisdom teeth out in March, and my oral surgeon said we have something in common, special education. I'm thinking, 'Oh, no, he used to be a teacher and he hated it.' Turns out, his wife's been teaching 28 years. When you're around that life, you speak the language. But, I was thinking, 'He hated it so much he went back to school for a really long time and became an oral surgeon.'"

Rissa's co-passion is music. "I'm an Edmisten by blood and a Messer by marriage. If you don't sing in my family, there's something wrong with you. My mom and dad wrote songs that I sang, and other kids were like, 'What song is that?' I thought it was a regular song that every kid knew; your mom and dad don't write songs? Sometimes, it's the fastest way to convey a message."

For the "Fight Song" presentation, Christopher made it to the Clinton High auditorium an hour and a half early make sure all the audio-visuals were working.

"That was nine days before we traveled to Charleston," Rissa says. "We found out during the summer he had no spinal fluid going from one side of his brain to the other. They were shocked when he walked in - they expected him to be on a cane or in a wheelchair."

The surgery produced a surprise - "We thought (the tumor) was 1 centimeter - it was 1 inch."

An 11-hour surgery later, the mass was found to be not cancerous. "We are super grateful for that."

Rissa says, "It was a weird time. I knew I wanted to give that speech but nine days later we packed up the whole gang and went down there. We sat there for 11 hours, but school doesn't stop. School just doesn't wait. I got to come to school for six days and then I'm leaving for a week."

"The town was beautiful. People gave us gift cards, brought us meals, took my children to school, checked on Chris even when he didn't want anybody around. He walks around the neighborhood and all the stay-at-home moms are like, 'Hey, Chris, you good?' He asked me, 'Are you asking them to do this?' I said, 'No, that's just how Clinton is.'"

Christopher is from Kansas Messer, 5A



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# Messer

From Page 4

City. Rissa says it took a little while for him to adapt to southern culture. "That gave us even more to be grateful for. The doctors recommended we schedule the surgery as soon as possible (after diagnosis), so I said I can just cancel the speech, I'll just say I can't do it. Chris said no. All summer the kids had been working on the song, I'd been working on my speech. He was like 'You're going to do it,'" Rissa said.

"He and I are a very good team."

Rissa says Chris started playing in a band in middle school, and his talent quickly became evident. "I couldn't marry a man who didn't do music. He would be an outcast in my family if he didn't do some kind of music. He told me, 'Music ministry, that's where the Lord has me.' We made the decision for him to become a bi-vocational worship pastor. It's really cool. He does work he loves in the district and does pastor work. He's the worship pastor, but I'm the pastor's wife," she smiles.

At the new Heritage Fellowship location, "it's still a little bit scary, the building is so old and it has lots and lots of history. We started with a young crowd and now we're pulling in some older people. We've been in operation for five years - we were nervous (moving to Florida Street School), young people accept appearance flaws a little better. Now, the older people are like, 'I remember walking into that classroom, I remember the principal's office was here.' It's cool that people can realize the building is being repurposed. They've done a lot of work over there."

Rissa says, "It's been neat; last year was a busy, busy year." The Messer team experienced forums and conferences, a brain tumor, transition in church, and preparing for adoption -- all part of the adventure.

"I like mild adventure. Chris is like let's go, let's live on the cusp. We balance each other. I've spoken to some people, my principals have always been great, who've asked me if I've thought about being a principal. I would rather be in the trenches, as teachers call it. If I had a platform, like Miss America, I would have chosen in social media we've got to stop talking about being a teacher like it's a burden. We say things like 'in the trenches' and 'thank goodness it's summer.'"

"I try to stay away from that, I don't want to steer people away from this profession. On TV teachers are dim-witted. That's not what I see.



"I see them at dinner, with their lesson plans, eating with their family."

She continues, "I really love teaching, I want to get away from saying 'just teaching' - it is a task. I try to get away from saying anything bad about teaching; people run with it. If I say it's my passion and I'm all about that work, I need to be about that work. I think that's one of the reasons why we have a teacher shortage. We are the mouthpieces; if we talk in a negative way, we're not encouraging people to come and be with us. It's not for the faint of heart. I want the public to know

about teaching, it's not what it is on TV, and it's not what it used to be - in a good way and a bad way. It's not just writing, writing, writing; we're doing a lot of hands-on stuff."

Members of the District 56 Teachers Forum have talked about this perception issue, having congressmen and representatives to shadow them; "before they make laws for us, see what I truly do, come in the same time I come in, leave when I leave, and do everything in the middle with me. We are inviting them to come."

Come, and join the adventure.

### LCSD 56 INITIATIVES

1. Improve current facilities and uphold the security of all students and staff
2. Incorporate real-world experiences within classrooms to promote employment and to further education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner
3. Create technology-centered classrooms and integrate technology on a regular basis
4. Create a culture of trust, teamwork, and respect among all stakeholders

### OTHER INITIATIVES:

- School Report Card Ratings: 3 Average, 1 Good, 1 CSI
- New Gear-Up Grant starting with 7th graders
- New art teacher at Eastside Elementary
- 4K now has PE, art, and music
- Afterschool programs available at all locations
- Crisis Interventionist hired at Clinton Middle
- Kindergarten Readiness Assessment scores improved 20% from last year
- Expanded Chinese program at Clinton Middle
- Small group tutoring offered at all Title I schools
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# Clinton High AD Defies Odds, Inspires Others

## Nickie Templeton

By Christina Cleveland

For The Chronicle

Clinton High School Athletic Director Nickie Templeton grew up only 2 miles away from PC, but the campus seemed much farther away.

"Presbyterian College was like a distant place," Templeton said. "I often felt uncomfortable even attending basketball games because I felt as if I didn't belong there considering where I grew up.

"When you grow up like I did in the part of town that I grew up in, college wasn't a part of your everyday conversation. It was a dream that you really didn't think you could attain because there was a lot of money involved with going to school."

Where Templeton grew up was the Lydia Mill neighborhood. Those in Templeton's immediate and extended family struggled with addiction since the time Templeton was a child. Her father worked in both Lydia and Clinton Mills and worked hard to provide for his family.

At an early age, Templeton learned the value of hard work as she saw her father work two and sometimes even three jobs to provide for his family. Those times during her childhood left an impact on Templeton that she still remembers today.

"It isn't where you come from that defines you," she said, "It's the amount of work you are willing to put in to rise above it but not for personal gain, rise above it to help somebody."

Templeton had to grow up faster than most kids her age. She often looked after her two younger siblings and even worried about how the bills would be paid.

Sports provided an outlet for her when she did have time to be a kid. She learned to play softball and football by playing with the older kids in the streets of Lydia Mill. She began to get involved with sports when she was in elementary school.

"I got semi-good at a few of them, so my perspective about college changed," Templeton said. "I became very driven to go no matter the cost."

Sports opened her eyes to the possibility of a life beyond Lydia Mill and the four walls of her childhood home. She knew college was her way out, but she struggled with how "wanting more" in life could separate her from her loved ones.

"I had a lot of internal wars going on at an early age, as a middle-schooler, as a high-schooler: Do I fit in with my family? And if I pursue these dreams, does that separate me from my family?" Templeton said.

"I have a loyalty to my family, and I am very open and honest about where I grew up because I am proud of that. I had to learn that it's okay to want more and to want to be successful and to understand that you're not better than your family because you want those things."

Despite the challenges of her childhood, Templeton says she grew up with love.

Her grandmother saw her potential. Her grandfather was a constant cheerleader and sat behind the outfield fence during every softball game she played in.

When it was time for college, her grandfather's health declined, and she wanted to be close to home. She accepted an athletic scholarship to play softball at PC.

Templeton wasn't the typical student in high school, and she wasn't the typical student at PC either. Instead of driving a car, she rode a bike. And she helped to take care of her sister between playing softball and working a part-time job.

Templeton worked in direct care with the Laurens County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. She took the position because it paid more than what a fast-food restaurant could offer, but it ended up opening doors for her and changing her vision for her life.

"I was able to develop relationships with the clients," she remembers. "They were just amazing human beings trapped in bodies that didn't work. And I thought, 'Wow, this is something I really want to know and learn.'"

Templeton began to stand out for reasons other than sports. She majored in special education, and her PC professors energized her career path. The challenging classes made her a better student, she says.

Her softball teammates also became family – on and off the field. They rallied around Templeton when her grandfather passed away and later when the team lost one of their beloved teammates, Jessica Trimnell.



After graduating from PC, Templeton accepted a position as a special education teacher and coach at York Comprehensive High School in York, S.C. She later worked in a similar job at Byrnes High School in Duncan, S.C.

She wasn't far from home, but she had to move closer still: Her grandmother's health was failing, and Templeton decided she had to take care of one of her cousins.

She came back to Clinton to teach at Bell Street Middle School and Clinton High School. Templeton is currently in her seventh year at Clinton High School and in her third year as athletic director. She is the first woman athletic director in the school's history, making a difference every day in her community.

"It's kind of cool, and there's a lot of stress and responsibility involved with that because you don't want to disappoint people and you want to be a picture to other women of, 'Hey, this is what leadership looks like: It's not gender-based,'" she said. "I'm excited and nervous about the opportunity to be able to show that to other people."

Templeton also has another mission: to help others who grew up just like her and change misconceptions about those living in poverty.

"I have very good relationships with people who are unappreciated, who have value in this world, and just because their bank account is zero dollars, the world thinks that they don't matter," she

said. "I know people who are drug addicts who have value. They're just wonderful people who have been exposed to unfortunate circumstances that we can't place judgment on."

When she started her doctoral process for her degree in educational administration, she decided to write her dissertation on children in poverty. As part of the dissertation, she studied intervention programs and developed a training called Education Is The Exit Plan.

"It's what the name implies: The only way out of poverty is through education, and within the walls of the education is the intervention programs such as what I studied," Templeton said.

Part of that includes making content relevant for children in survival mode and creating relationships with them. Today she speaks about the topic: Survive, Learn, Live. It's what she lives by today.

"We did our jobs as impoverished kids, and we survived," she said. "It's the educator's job to figure out how to help us learn, and then after that, we are responsible for living and for living well."

PC gave her the confidence to do her work today, and Templeton says her upbringing gave her a drive to never give up.

"I feel blessed to be in that position and feel like I'm supposed to tell that story," she said. "I'm supposed to represent the people in the place that I'm so proud of, and I'd like to do that in a way that helps kids get to high school, get to college and understand that they are deserving."

- The Chronicle's Teachers of the Year**
- 1996 Howard Pierce, Clinton Elementary School
  - 1997 Amy Poag, Clinton High School
  - 1998 Elizabeth Crowder, Eastside Elementary School
  - 1999 Cynthia Simmons, Thornwell
  - 2000 Nancy Morgan, Eastside Elementary School
  - 2001 Diane Evans, Clinton High School
  - 2002 Valerie Jones, Thornwell
  - 2003 Paula Pace, Bell Street Middle School
  - 2004 Debbie Green, Eastside Elementary School
  - 2005 Courtney Robertson, Laurens Academy
  - 2006 Prondolyn Copeland, M.S. Bailey Elementary
  - 2007 Hunt Coffey, Martha Dendy Sixth Grade Center
  - 2008 Marjorie Tobias, Clinton Elementary School
  - 2009 Susan Cauble, Joanna-Woodson Elementary
  - 2010 Terri O'Shields, Bell Street Middle School
  - 2011 Erica Coats, Bell Street Middle School
  - 2012 Jenks Howe, Clinton Elementary School
  - 2013 Jennifer Satterwhite, Joanna-Woodson Elementary
  - 2014 Jennifer Howard, Clinton High

- School
- 2015 Nancy Wood, Clinton High School
- 2016 Annette Bodie Clinton High School
- 2017 Brian Lyda, Clinton Elementary School
- 2018 Dr. Brooke Spatta, Presbyterian College

- The Chronicle's Citizens of the Year**
- 1996 Jim Roberts
  - 1997 Joel Evans
  - 1998 Josh and Ella Savage
  - 1999 Pat Neal
  - 2000 Ted Hunter
  - 2001 David Peden
  - 2002 Bailey Dixon
  - 2003 Jimmy Revis
  - 2004 Dr. Jerman Disasa
  - 2005 Wayne Deitz
  - 2006 Lumus Byrd and Russ Emerson
  - 2007 Cynde O'Rear
  - 2008 Dr. Bud Marchant
  - 2009 Norman Scarborough
  - 2010 Ruth Sharpe
  - 2011 Ron and Nancy Dove
  - 2012 Norman Pigeon
  - 2013 Rev. Mims Camm
  - 2014 Rev. Herb Codington
  - 2015 Peggy Nibert
  - 2016 G Ramage
  - 2017 King Dixon
  - 2018 Brenda Ligon

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# Teacher of the Year Til Culbertson

*“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all of the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” (Genesis 1:29, KJV)*

By Vic MacDonald

Editor

The teacher has become the learner.

Til Culbertson, who 25 years ago with her husband Glenn founded Laurens Academy, has embarked on her latest education

mission, launching a children’s book that explains how God has provided everything we need for survival.

It’s “The Back to God Game,” and it has evolved from a real-life story. Culbertson and grandson Alden were on a car ride and began playing a game that, long before, Til had played with son Ryland. “He (Ry) doesn’t even remember playing it.”

Culbertson said, “I’ve wanted to write a book since I was a child.”

After the day-to-day of Laurens Academy, Til Culbertson, daughter of two deaf parents, a

printing house proofreader, volleyball player at Presbyterian College and a volleyball coach, launched Yo Cup coffee house and bakery. It had locations in Clinton and Laurens, but “I was working myself to death.” She slowed down but realized, “I’m not dead. I still want to make a difference.”

That’s why she is self-publishing this book. And, to accomplish that, she has watched “a ton of webinars,” on self-publishing, marketing on Amazon and developing a pen name. “People all the time think Til is a man,” she said, “(but) this is not a man’s book.”

“I’m a jack of all trades, master of none. I’ve always wanted to write but nobody wants to read about my experiences.”

Though she does have some colorful stories to tell. Once, she and young Ryland were stopped by the police, and not just a minor traffic stop. We’re talking every officer patrolling that day, in Clinton, because they thought Ry’s red cap was a dead-ringer for the cap a bank robber had worn in Laurens. Dealing with hundreds of students in a quarter century association with Laurens Academy has produced thousands of stories, as well.

That all grew from 10 5th graders in one room of a church, and later a portable. The academy grew to its highest enrollment of 308 in 2002. Laurens Academy held its 25th anniversary open house on Feb. 7 (the day Til was interviewed for this article).

“I so appreciate everyone there now who keeps it going. I am grateful for those 10 students’ par-

ents who brought them to me, in a one-room school. I don’t know that I would have done it.

“I sit in a full gym, on Grandparents’ Day, with all those banners (championships and star players), and all that noise, and I get a tear.”

She gets the special honor, at each graduation, to present a senior with a special award. For her legacy contributions to education in Laurens County, Til Culbertson is co-recipient of The Clinton Chronicle Horizon Teacher of the Year honor.

Now, to be a self-published author, Culbertson is on a mission to raise \$4,000 - one cupcake at a time. A master baker who’s catered countless wedding receptions, she was taking time away from lucrative Valentine’s Day baking to sit for a newspaper interview. If she raises \$4,000, she pays for illustrations. If pre-orders go well (through a website), she will be able to order 1,000 books, fulfill the pre-orders and invite all the pre-ordering customers to the first book-signing, then look at ordering more in time for Christmas.

Culbertson has two more books at the fore-front of her ever-active mind, and others on “the drawing board”. This first book charts how everything we have comes from God - a chair, from wood, from a tree, from the soil; a car, from metal, from the earth - interior leather, from a cow, from God giving man dominion over animals.

A healthy-eating and tower-garden enthusiast, Culbertson said, “Genesis 1:29 tells us God gave us all the food we need. Think about it, everything is from the Earth - nothing has been brought to the Earth from the outside.”

Ore is minded from the ground.

Trees grow from the soil. Water covers 7/10s of the planet’s surface.

All from God, Culbertson said. One reason she is going the self-publishing route is because traditional publishers don’t look at unsolicited manuscripts, and they advise authors to leave “God” out of their books. Making it “Christian” alienates at least half the audience is the logic behind the suggestion.

“If I leave God out, there might as well not even be a book,” she said.

Once she grabbed the “Back to God Game” idea, the book flowed to paper over a weekend. It’s meant to be read aloud, and likely is a grandparent-to-grandchild gift, rather than the other way around. Of course, the author has no objection to a child buying the book and presenting it, with a reading request, to a grandparent or parent. “It’s good for children and adults to think about this,” Culbertson said. “I’ve had my pastor and teacher-friends read it, and they all said, ‘I can see myself doing this’. Some have said, ‘I can hear your voice reading it’. Many of them say, ‘I have never thought of this’ (the idea that every product in the world can be traced back to God).”

If everything goes as planned, the book will be ready in August. It’s 32 pages, 8 1/2 x 11 and fully illustrated. True to form - the teacher becomes the learner - she has taken webinar instruction on how to market through Amazon.

Culbertson said she knows public schools cannot bring her in for readings.

But she would love to read her book during children’s sermons in church, in private or charter schools, and to youth groups. After the story, the book has a guided activity for adults and children to do together, and some scientific data about natural elements. The story does include a reference to tower-gardens, but Culbertson is quick to say she is not “selling anything”. The inventor of tower-gardens lives in Greenville, she said, and it has been very enlightening to be able to interact with him.

“God has a plan for our health,” Culbertson said.

Her book encourages creation science, thankfulness, and family unity. It will be published under her pen name “Tilly Culbertson” - family and friends have long called her Tilly.

She grew up with ink in her blood.

Her dad ran a print shop, and because he was deaf and immune to loud noise, he could spend hours setting type with a litho-

Culbertson, 9A

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# PC's new Residence Hall could mean more for local economy

By Sage Hinkleman

For The Chronicle

If you're driving down South Broad St. and turn onto Calhoun, you can see PC's new residence hall in the distance. Their presence adds more to the PC campus and could also mean more for the local economy.

PC students have been excited about the residence hall since talk about them began. The upperclassman housing is actually being built based on feedback from students over the last five years.

Currently, PC offers only three other living spaces for PC seniors: Scottish Arms, Spradley Hall, and the Townhouses. Two of the three are located off campus, making the new residence hall, located in the middle of campus behind Springs Student Center, an attractive option for upperclassmen.

For many reasons, the new residence hall is just what PC students have been waiting for. The residence hall will hold 144 students in 36 units. Each space is intended for four students to live in. Since space is limited, PC is giving preference to students with higher grade-point averages.

The new upperclassman housing should be ready for students to move into this fall. The class of 2020 will be the first to experience the new spaces, with each unit featuring a full kitchen, living area, two bathrooms, and four separate bedrooms.

The new senior housing is one part of The Promise of PC, the College's strategic plan. One of the plan's goals is, of course, to recruit and retain students. The plan also includes adding new majors, a graduate program in occupational therapy, and more varsity and club sports.

Current and future PC students aren't the only ones who stand to benefit from The Promise of PC's new offerings or the new residence hall. The local economy should see a boost as well.

"The College's plan for strategic growth is what will affect the local economy," said Dr. Joy Smith, PC's vice president for campus life and dean of stu-

dents.

Smith and other school officials believe that the new housing will improve retention among current students and attract future students to Clinton. While PC's current undergraduate enrollment is around 1,000 students, the goal by 2022 is to have that enrollment number reach 1,200 students.

This goal was stated in 2017 when there were only 940 undergraduates enrolled. Research by PC graduate Sela Vaughn in 2018 revealed the impact that PC has on the local economy. According to Vaughn's research, PC makes a \$61 million annual financial impact on the economy of Laurens County.

This figure is based on a student enrollment of 1,063 undergraduate and graduate students as well as 312 employees. Adding a new residence hall potentially can attract more students and impact the local economy even more.

The Atlantic Monthly article "Could Small-Town Harvards Revive Rural Economies?" backs up this point. The article states that "college campuses and educational institutions can bolster the economies of small towns," and it includes examples of how and where this has been done.

According to the Atlantic Monthly, college students spend money on restaurants and other services, while professors and administrators do the same and also buy houses and cars.

In addition, many undergraduate and graduate students continue to live in their college town after they graduate. Many PC students say they fell in love with the campus the first time they stepped on campus. Clinton's charm plays a big part in that. So, when a student becomes a PC student, the same student can potentially become a Clinton resident forever.

PC's upperclassmen are the ones who will enjoy living in the new residence hall, but they're not the only ones who will feel their impact. The new living spaces can keep and bring more students, professors, and life-long Clinton residents. That means a better economy. And a better local economy benefits everyone in Clinton.



## Cody, PC wrestling director, inducted to National Wrestling Hall Of Fame

The National Wrestling Hall of Fame of the Upstate New York State Chapter announced their 2019 inductees into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and who will be receiving the Lifetime Service Award. The list includes Presbyterian College Director of Wrestling Mark Cody.

"I am grateful to receive this honor. It's special to be recognized for what you have given to the sport of wrestling," said Cody. "I hope I have served both my former and current student athletes well."

Cody was hired in December of 2017 to be the Blue Hose Inaugural Director of Wrestling after spending the prior six seasons as the head wrestling coach at the University of Oklahoma.

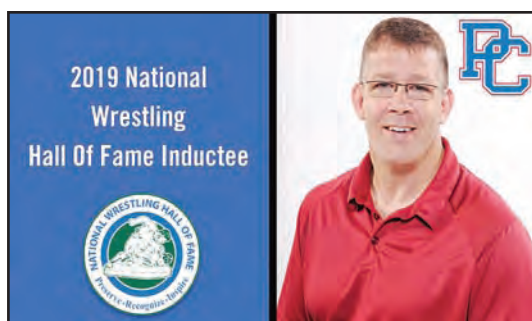
In Norman, Cody led the Sooners to four top-13 finishes, including a 10th place finish in 2014. Under his leadership, the Sooners produced 10 All-Americans, and three national finalists, including two National Champions, Kendric Maple (2013), and Cody Brewer (2015).

Cody was also instrumental in developing wrestlers off the mat and in fostering an OU Wrestling presence in the community. His student-athletes earned a total of 13 National Wrestling Coaches Association Academic All-America honors, and OU's six Academic All-Americans during the 2013-14 school year were most in the nation. He also instituted an anti-bullying campaign in 2015 in which his wrestlers and staff routinely spoke to students at area elementary schools.

Cody came to Oklahoma after nine years at American, where he led the Eagles to a program-best fifth-place finish at the 2011 NCAA Championships. The team produced three All-Americans after qualifying six for the tournament, while also posting a school record 3.48 grade point average.

He took over the program at American after it had been dropped and then resurrected with just 4.5 scholarships available for seven wrestlers. Cody helped American earn its first national qualifiers in 2005 which led to six straight season of top 25 finishes as a team and earning trips to the NCAA Tournament.

His tenure at American included the school's first national champion, 14 All-Americans and 16 NCAA qualifiers (all since 2005) and 21 academic All-Americans. His American teams were strong in the classroom as well, earning the highest GPA



in Division I wrestling in 2008 and 2009, while finishing second in 2010.

Cody came to American after spending two seasons as an assistant coach at Oklahoma State. He helped OSU to a Big 12 Championship and a fifth-place finish at the 2002 NCAA Championships. In addition, the squad earned recognition from the NWCA as a top-25 academic team, and two were named Academic All-America by the NWCA. Nine were also named to the Academic All-Big 12 team.

Before joining Oklahoma State, Cody served as the upper-weights coach for 12 years at the Nebraska. During that time, he was responsible for bringing in some of the nation's top recruiting classes, including national champions Tolly Thompson (Hwt.) and Brad Vering (197). Vering later became a two-time Olympian with Cody in his corner.

While Cody was at Nebraska, 23 Cornhuskers were named All-America, including Rulon Gardner, who later captured the heavyweight gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Cody spent the 1986-87 season as an assistant coach at Oklahoma State. He was also an assistant at Bloomsburg University during the 1985-86 season and for the University of Missouri in 1984-85.

From Binghamton, N.Y., Cody was a three-time All-American as a wrestler in college. He spent two years at the State University of New York at Delhi before transferring to Missouri in 1983. His greatest success came during his senior season of 1984-85 when he earned All-America status and was named the team's most outstanding wrestler. He graduated from Bellevue University with a Bachelor of Science degree in business. He was also a member of the New York Athletic Club, he was a 198-pound finalist at the 1988 U.S. Olympic Trials.



## New wrestling coaches named

**Tony DeAnda**

Tony DeAnda grew up in South Sioux City, Neb. His wrestling career took off at Augustana College where he received All-America honors in 1992-93. He was also a five-time Mexican national champion and a three-time U.S. National's place winner. In 2005, he became Real Pro Wrestling's first Champion at 60kg.

DeAnda started coaching in 1996 at Lincoln East High School in Lincoln, Neb. In 2000, he coached at Briar Cliff College, but returned to his alma mater, Bishop Heelan Catholic High School, in 2004. He took the assistant coaching position at the U.S. Olympic Education Center in the summer of 2005 until fall of 2011. In 2010 he conducted an Olympic Solidarity Coaches Seminar for the International Olympic Committee in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

As a coach, during the 2011 Cadet World Championships he coached a world champ as well as a silver medal winner. In 2010 he had the team champions during the Youth Olympic Pan-Am Qualifying Event and the Senior Pan-Am Championships. In 2008 and 2009, he coached team champions during the Cadet and Junior Pan-Am Championships back to back years.

**Dany DeAnda**

Dany DeAnda grew up Kailua, Hawaii where she honed her wrestling becoming a 3x state champion. Dany continue her wrestling career at the Olympic Education Center where she was a 3x Jr. World team member placing both Silver and Bronze respectively. Dany returned home to

Hawaii in 2010 and began coach at Punahou Schools and help out with Team Hawaii.

"Dany has had success at every level of the sport. She is passionate about taking part in the growth of women's wrestling. We know how important it is for this program to be successful, being the first D1 women's wrestling program and Dany is the type of coach that is capable of leading that charge," Cody said.

In Fall of 2011 DeAnda joined the coaching staff at the University of Jamestown and was there until 2017. In 2018, she moved to the University of Providence where she helped build the women's wrestling program. Dany has helped coach 16 WCWA All-American along with 6 WCWA Scholar Athletes.

DeAnda started coaching in 2008 with the Hawaii National Team in Honolulu, HI. In 2010 she spent time working with the United States Olympic Education Center in Marquette, M.I. She spent a pair of season with Punahou High Schools as the head coach before transitioning to the University of Jamestown as an assistant coach for seven seasons. DeAnda coached most recently with the University of Providence in Great Falls, MT as their assistant coach.

**Personal:** Tony DeAnda earned a degree in Spanish from the University of Nebraska. Dany DeAnda holds a Bachelor's of Science in Physical Education from North Michigan University. Tony and Dany have three children, Avery, Joaquin and Camila.



# Culbertson

From Page 7

graph. Tilly was his proof-reader. Her dad taught printing at a school for the deaf in Virginia; Til has taught innumerable sign-language classes. She says she could never understand why people would say "I'm so sorry" when she told them both her parents were deaf.

"I never knew anything different," she said. Her parents were deaf, not dead, and for that she was grateful.

She was teaching in Laurens - where she inaugurated the accelerated reader program - when Glenn came into her classroom one day and said

their daughter would not be attending her school. Their one-room school morphed into an academy on Hwy 49 with portables. When those were destroyed by a fire, they acquired \$1.2 million and built a gym - two stories with classrooms and auxiliary spaces in the same building. Two years ago, Laurens Academy survived a near-direct hit by a tornado. All their graduates go to college; their girls' basketball team is favored to repeat as state champion.

Culbertson said the two crowning achievements of Laurens Academy are "every child can participate in sports" and the C students gets the same opportunities as the A students. Her playing days at PC taught

her the value of young people participating in team sports. It is a K-12 family environment, she said. "What people love about it," Culbertson said, "is it's so easy to get involved."

Laurens Academy has a thriving foreign students' program. Many students come from China, as their families want them to attend American universities. Others come for a year abroad experience. "I had two French exchange students, boys, and that was an experience," she said. "I had to bring in an interpreter."

Foreign students "saved the school," Culbertson said, "and we introduce them to Christ."

Culbertson said Laurens Academy is grateful to Thornwell for providing a home for the foreign students, and appreciates the countless parents who have sheltered the students in their own homes.

True to a message in "The Back to God Game" book - thankfulness - Culbertson said she, Glenn and others have always resisted offers to make Laurens Academy a charter school. The offers come with a stipulation - to sanitize God from the curriculum.

Til says, "The school is in God's hands. We're not taking it out."

More info: [Blessed-press.com](http://Blessed-press.com)



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