

2026

Heroes of Character CELEBRATION



DELTA MARRIOTT - SHARONVILLE

APRIL 16, 2026

MASTER OF CEREMONIES &

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

TYLER BRADSHAW

PILLAR OF CHARACTER

DON LARRICK

Hamilton Caster proudly salutes the **Pillar of Character** and **2026 Heroes of Character Award Recipients** — honoring those who lead with integrity, resilience, and purpose.

Just as we build for strength and endurance, we stand behind the values that strengthen our community.





Welcome to the 2026 Heroes of Character “Together We Thrive” Celebration

In 2025, the Character Council celebrated its 25th anniversary—a milestone that reminds us how powerful character can be when a community nurtures it together. After a quarter century, our mission to foster character development in children and adults is more relevant than ever. We are not only thriving as an organization; we are growing because of the collective commitment of people like you. When our community invests in character, we all thrive.

Tonight, we gather as one community to celebrate good character and honor the best among us. Thank you for being here and for contributing to the spirit of unity that defines this event. Every person in this room plays a role in shaping a community where character is lived, taught, and shared.

We are grateful to Tyler Bradshaw, our emcee, for bringing his energy, humor, and a brilliant keynote address to this year’s celebration. We are honored to recognize Don Larrick, retired Principal and devoted educator from the Three Rivers School District as our Pillar of Character—a shining example of how one person’s dedication can uplift an entire community.

This evening, we will celebrate 26 adult and student Heroes of Character and 12 Finalists from across the Tri-State region. Through their video stories, you’ll see how character takes root and grows in many forms—from a first grade leader who inspires her classmates to three sisters who created a faith based YouTube channel to provide safe, meaningful content for young children. Their stories remind us that thriving is not a solo journey—it’s something we build through kindness, courage, and connection.

A heartfelt thank you to all of you for attending and to our sponsors—especially Hamilton Caster, our Generosity Level Sponsor. This celebration is possible because of the dedication of our planning committee, our Board of Directors, our Ambassadors of Character, and the Hamilton City of Character committee. We are deeply grateful for every volunteer and supporter who shares our passion for building a community where character thrives.

We hope you leave tonight inspired, connected, and equipped with ideas and resource that help you, your family, and your organization thrive. Together, we truly do thrive.

Mary Russell
Board Chair

Diane Brueggemann
Celebration Co-Chair

Susan Mitchell
Celebration Co-Chair

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Tyler Bradshaw

Tyler Bradshaw serves as the Executive Director of The Nuxhall Foundation with a blend of heart, hustle, and a deep belief that sports can change lives. A childhood admirer of “Marty and Joe,” Tyler now leads the organization that carries forward legacy projects honoring The Ole Lefthander’s memory. The centerpiece of The Nuxhall Foundation’s work is The Joe Nuxhall Miracle League Fields: a baseball and recreational facility designed just for athletes with physical and developmental disabilities. Driven, approachable, and grounded in purpose, Tyler continues to carry forward a legacy that’s bigger than any one person—making sure every child, every family, and every fan has a place to round third and head for home.



At the center of his work is a commitment to creating spaces where everyone belongs. Currently, Tyler is leading The Nuxhall Foundation’s “Heading for Hope” capital campaign to build The Hope Center: a 31,000 square foot inclusive recreational facility where athletes of all abilities can play, grow, and experience belonging.

Tyler’s life has been shaped by tragedy, bringing him into the world of mental health advocacy and suicide prevention. In 2013, Scott Bradshaw (Tyler’s father) lost his life to suicide. Determined to help others avoid the pain he felt, Tyler launched a blog called *Seeya Bub* where he writes with honesty, authenticity, and love about his own loss and the importance of destroying the stigma around mental illness. Tyler’s refrain to audiences he speaks with is an important message: It’s okay to not be okay, but it’s never okay to stay that way.

Once a sports broadcaster and announcer, Tyler has also lent his voice to many teams throughout Greater Cincinnati including The Hamilton Joes, the Miami RedHawks, and the Miami Hamilton Harriers. He is a familiar face as an event emcee at a number of community programs.

Tyler is a graduate of Miami University, where he earned his Bachelors Degree in American History and a Master of Science in Education. He is currently a doctoral candidate at Miami, pursuing a degree in organizational leadership and crisis management.

More important than any job or title, Tyler is proud to be a husband to his beautiful wife, Paige, and a father to two imaginative, fun-loving boys, Jackson and Nolan. They live in Mason, Ohio.

PROGRAM

Reception

Formal Welcome by Tyler Bradshaw, *Executive Director, The Nuxhall Foundation*

Invocation by Dr. Rev. Roger Braun, *Character Council Faith Committee, Chair*

Welcome to Sharonville by Mayor Kevin Hardman

Introduction of Keynote Speaker by Kim Nuxhall, *CEO, The Nuxhall Foundation*

Keynote by Tyler Bradshaw

Message to Honorees by Mary Andres Russell, *Character Council Board of Directors, Chair*

Pillar of Character Award Presentation by Holly Simms, *Principal of Taylor High School*

Live Auction by Chris Oser

Break

Close of Silent Auction

Recognition of Heroes & Finalists

Congratulations to Gene Ferrara and the 2026 Honorees!





Our Mission

Mission: To foster character development in children and adults as a foundation for thriving.

Vision: A Cincinnati region where people of all ages consistently practice virtues that build trust, responsibility, and strong communities.

Core Values: 36 positive character qualities rooted in caring, morality, and excellence

What We Do

For over 25 years, the Character Council has served Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and Southeastern Indiana. Our nonprofit organization is dedicated to strengthening the people of the greater Cincinnati region and beyond by promoting positive character development in schools, workplaces, families, and communities. CC equips leaders with plug-and-play resources, curriculum, and training to cultivate values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and empathy.

Our Impact

The Character Council promotes shared language that strengthens school and workplace culture, and results in better behavior and fewer conflicts. In 2025 the Character Council reached over 145,000 people:

- We inspired over 99,000 visitors on our website
- We engaged over 46,000 through community events, email bulletins, and social media posts

The Character Pledge

I pledge...to practice the character quality of the month, to take the high road, the higher thought, the kinder word, and the best action in my daily life, to uphold what is true, right, and just, to be a model of good character for those around me, to operate with honesty and integrity in my dealings with others, and to do my part to make Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and Southeastern Indiana a region where individuals and families are strong; homes and streets are safe; education is effective; business is productive; and citizens care for one another.

Learn More About the Resources Available through the Character Council...



Book a Training Seminar for your school, business, or church group



Host a Character Carnival



Subscribe to our Free Monthly Bulletins



Subscribe to Power Up with Character Business Resources



Get Involved



Learn about the State School of Character Designation

Visit our website at: www.CharacterCincinnati.org



Thank You To Our Generous Sponsors:

Generosity Level Sponsor

Hamilton Caster

Enthusiasm Level Sponsors

Daly Initiatives/Blue Heron Hollow

Delta Marriott - Sharonville

Griggs Family Foundation

Loyalty Level Sponsors

Cincinnati Ohio Police Federal Credit Union

Civista Bank

Lohmiller Real Estate

Mike & Mary Russell

Pillar Law

Sunshine Corner Daycare and Preschool

The Nuxhall Foundation

Gratitude Level Sponsors

The Community Project

Hamilton City of Character

The Munchak Family

Spark Counseling

UC Public Safety



2026 Pillar of Character

Don Larrick

Lifelong Educator



2026 Adult Heroes of Character

Lacey Ashton

Educator, Washington Primary School

Mindee Callahan

Educator, Ridgeway Elementary School

Bonnie Collins

President, LIVE LIKE MAYA

Rhonda Deatherage

Administrative Assistant, Nagel Middle School

Jack & Robbie Everage

Community Volunteers, Versailles, IN

Gene Ferrara

Public Safety, University of Cincinnati

Ryan Goode

Pastor, Hamline Chapel

Shelly Hauer

Poverty Advocate, City of Hamilton

Cindy Knox

Director, Office of Student Accessibility, NKU

David Ladner

Principal, South Dearborn Middle School

Kelly Lockwood

Educator, Linden Elementary School

Jennifer Campbell Loftus

CEO Founder, JJJL-Joyful

Michael Pearl

Director, St. Monica's Recreation Center

Jessica Poe

Educator, Ignite School

Kaitlin Harrell, Meagan Hughes

& Jenna Sawyers

Creators, Praise Pals

2026 Student Heroes of Character

Jenna Brennan

Senior, Taylor High School, Cleves

Brody Byerly

Eighth Grade, St Mary, Hyde Park

Ally Byers

Senior, Beaver creek High School, Beaver creek

Gabriel Eichhold

Fourth Grade, Bridgeport Elementary, Hamilton

Konrad Gibson

Fourth Grade, Bridgeport Elementary, Hamilton

Jordan Jacobson

Senior, Homeschool, West Chester

Katie Owens

First Grade, Riverview Elementary, Hamilton

Congratulations to the 2026 Heroes of Character Finalists. Thank you for making a difference in this world!

Adult Finalists

Brian Chitwood-Educator & Coach,
Adams Co Schools, West Union OH

Bill Crabtree - Educator & Coach,
McDermott NW High School, Otway OH

Warren Edmondson-SRO,
Tipp City Schools, Tipp City OH

Danielle Froslear-Guidance Counselor
Middletown High School, Middletown OH

Ashton Hahn-Educator,
Newport Primary School, Newport KY

McKenzie Haught-Paraprofessional,
Piqua Central Intermediate School, Piqua OH

Beth Jackson-Principal,
Three Rivers Elementary School, Cleves OH

Keren Sathish Kumar-Educator,
Hamilton City Schools, Hamilton OH

Carrie Preston-Educator,
Linden Elementary, Hamilton OH

Student Finalists

Kalvin Brown-Fourth Grade,
Linden Elementary Schools, Hamilton OH

Aiden Kirkpatrick-Twelfth Grade,
Troy High School, Troy OH

Damon Weathington-Twelfth Grade,
Gamble Montessori School, Cincinnati OH



Congratulations to the 2026 Heroes of Characters and Finalists!

You are the difference...

About the 2026 Heroes of Character Logo



“This logo is a bold, hopeful expression of what it means to thrive as a group. It illustrates that true success is collective, built on mutual support, shared character, and diverse strengths.

The power of community—different individuals united in shared values. A nurturing ecosystem, where each person supports the other to grow stronger. The Character Council’s mission of developing strong moral foundations through cooperation and compassion.” Sarah Crawford, designer

2026 Pillar of Character Award



Don Larrick

Pied Piper Principal

Don Larrick has demonstrated most—if not all—of the Character Qualities, and a few shine especially bright when reflecting on his extraordinary impact on his family, parish, school district, and community. Above all, Don is a man of deep commitment. His 58 year marriage to his wife, Sharon, stands as a testament to loyalty and love that is rare in today's world.

Don devoted 48 years to the Three Rivers Local School District, serving as a teacher, assistant principal, elementary principal, and coach. His leadership helped shape generations of students and his schools earned Hall of Fame recognition from the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Even in retirement, he continues to serve the district on the Finance and Building Committee, offering thoughtful community insight. His service extends far beyond the school walls. As Family Activity Director for the St. Joseph Council Knights of Columbus, Don organizes major events, assists with youth programs, volunteers at Bengal games, prepares meals at the Ronald McDonald House, and even calls Bingo at a local nursing facility. His generosity with his time and talents is simply who he is.

Don is truly a pillar of the Cleves/North Bend and Three Rivers community. As principal, he launched the districtwide character initiative in 2014 and became the driving force behind building a positive culture on the new campus. Today he continues that legacy as liaison between

the district and the Character Council, ensuring ongoing participation in the Heroes of Character Celebration. Perhaps Don's greatest achievement is his impact on students. Former students light up when they see him at church or school events, a reflection of the warmth and encouragement he offered them for decades. His belief in the potential of every child was contagious. One of the first things visitors noticed at Miami Heights Elementary was a sign reading, "The greatest place in the world." Through his enthusiasm and kindness, Don created an environment where students, parents, and staff felt welcomed, connected, and valued.

Don has served on the Character Council Board since 2013, including as Vice Chair. He brings positivity, humor, and a willingness to pitch in before being asked. He brings the fun, but he also brings the qualities the Character Council promotes: generosity, initiative, endurance, and—above all—enthusiasm. He puts his whole heart into what he does, inspires others with a smile, treats everyone as important, and never becomes discouraged by setbacks.

Don's life is a living example of character in action. His steady presence, joyful spirit, and unwavering service have strengthened his community for decades—and continue to do so today.

Nominated by Rich Joesting & Mary Russell

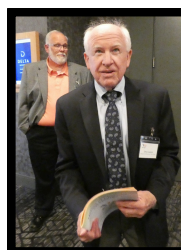
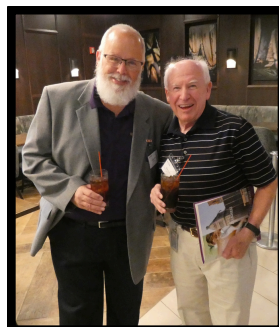
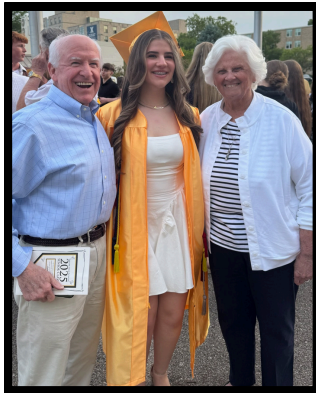
Inspiration from Don Larrick...

"You learn from your mistakes. You only get one chance to make a first impression."

Congratulations to
Don Larrick
aka

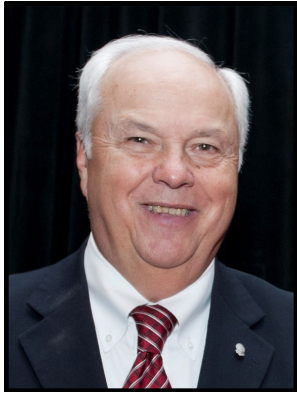
“Happy Man”

*Thank you for making every day fun and
for always being an inspiration and role
model for others.*



2026 Heroes of Character

Least Intrusive Means



Gene Ferrara
Public Safety
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati OH

Treating others the way he would want to be treated is embedded in Gene Ferrara's DNA. Throughout a distinguished career in public safety, he has dedicated his life to making the Cincinnati community a safer and better place to live. Whether serving with the City of Cincinnati Police, the University of Cincinnati Department of Public Safety, or protecting dignitaries at the Olympic Games, Gene consistently championed training, professionalism, and higher education. He encouraged others to continually improve themselves. Justice was a guiding value for Gene, always balanced with empathy. He urged officers to resolve situations at the lowest appropriate level of intervention, particularly in addressing campus "quality of life" issues. His leadership extended beyond Cincinnati through active involvement in the Hamilton County Police Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and he earned international recognition for his work in dignitary protection at the Olympic Games.

Gene also volunteered with Cincinnati Crime Stoppers and the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum. His impact was so lasting that, even after retirement, colleagues often asked, "What would Gene do?"

Nominated by Jeff Corcoran

Spreading Joy



Ally Byers
Twelfth Grade
Beavercreek High School
Beavercreek OH

Ally Byers has a remarkable ability to positively influence others while balancing a demanding academic schedule, part-time work, club volleyball, and extensive volunteer commitments. One of her teachers described her as "one of the most hard-working, compassionate, respectful, and responsible students he has ever had the privilege of teaching. Ally embodies the kind of student who not only succeeds academically but also enriches the culture and climate of any learning environment."

Ally dedicates her time to strengthening her school community, including mentoring younger students by providing personal, social, and academic support. She serves as a Network leader in a youth-led prevention program that promotes positive peer support and raises awareness to help students resist pressures related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

She is also deeply committed to suicide prevention. Trained in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) and Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention, Ally teaches middle and high school students about depression and suicide awareness. Her consistent demonstration of kindness, understanding, and generosity leaves a lasting impression on everyone she meets.

Nominated by Amber Boddie & Sarah Seilhamer

Adopting People



Jordan Jacobson
Twelfth Grade
Homeschool
West Chester, OH

From the very beginning, Jordan Jacobson faced difficult circumstances, born to a single mother with an unknown father. Yet his life reflects a powerful story of purpose and belonging. Adopted by a family seeking to complete their home, Jordan has grown into a young man whose energy and joy uplift everyone around him.

Jordan's mission in life is simple and profound: to bring joy to others. His sacrificial kindness distinguishes him as a natural leader. He connects easily with people in all settings—on the football field, in business environments, and within his family. His wide range of interests includes football, reading, outdoor sports, studying the Bible, and problem-solving.

A passionate nature enthusiast, Jordan enjoys rock climbing, snow skiing, hiking, and fishing. He has identified over 100 bird species and completed a glacier mountaineering course in Denali National Park with his brother. Always ready for a challenge, Jordan approaches life with resilience, curiosity, and a commitment to making a positive impact.

Nominated by Michael Daly

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Gene Ferrara *"Treating other people the way I'd like to be treated is in my DNA."*
Ally Byers *"Happiness comes from the way you see yourself and the way you see others."*
Jordan Jacobson *"My mission in life is to bring joy to people."*



Jenna Brennan
Twelfth Grade
Taylor High School
Cleveland OH

Invest in People

Jenna Brennan consistently demonstrates exceptional leadership, compassion, initiative, and a deep commitment to serving others. Recognizing that early readers could benefit from additional support, she created a program that pairs high school students with first graders to build reading skills and confidence. “Reading with Friends” not only strengthens academic performance but also fosters meaningful relationships across grade levels, contributing to a positive and inclusive school culture.

Jenna has a natural ability to connect with young learners and regularly volunteers in elementary classrooms, assisting teachers wherever support is needed. Her dedication extends beyond school, as she volunteers each summer with her church’s Vacation Bible School, helping children feel welcomed and engaged. She also teaches religion classes for preschool and kindergarten students.

Each Thanksgiving, Jenna spends the day with her grandmother distributing food to families in need. Her actions reflect a deep sense of generosity, empathy, and service. Jenna does not serve for recognition; she serves because it reflects who she is.

Nominated by Megan Rivet



Bonnie Collins
President, LIVE LIKE MAYA
Mason OH

Maya’s Mom

Bonnie Collins transformed unimaginable loss into a powerful force for good. After her daughter Maya bravely battled Acute Myeloid Leukemia for six and a half years, Bonnie honored her legacy by creating The LIVE LIKE MAYA Foundation. The foundation reflects Maya’s spirit of kindness, resilience, and generosity while supporting families facing pediatric cancer.

Since its founding in 2019, the organization has raised more than one million dollars to assist families, advance life-saving research, and strengthen community goodwill. In 2024 alone, the foundation provided direct financial support to families, funded research at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, and contributed to organizations such as St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, and Make-A-Wish. It also awarded scholarships and organized community service initiatives that uplift pediatric cancer patients.

By transforming grief into purpose, Bonnie demonstrates extraordinary compassion, perseverance, and generosity. Her work continues to bring hope to families during their most difficult moments while building a more caring and supportive community.

Nominated by Nidhi Bedi



Gabriel Eichhold
Fourth Grade
Bridgeport Elementary School
Hamilton OH

A Heart for Helping

Gabriel “Gabe” Eichhold exemplifies compassion in everyday actions. His teacher often reflects that Gabe represents the kind of person she hopes her own children will become. He consistently treats every classmate with dignity, kindness, and understanding, regardless of differences or abilities.

One moment captures Gabe’s character clearly. While playing an online game with a friend, another student approached him to share a drawing of the solar system. Although his gaming friend declined, Gabe immediately stopped playing to give the student his full attention. He listened, asked thoughtful questions, and showed genuine interest. While the interaction may have seemed small, the student spent the rest of recess smiling, proud to have been heard.

Gabe’s actions demonstrate that true character is often revealed in quiet, intentional choices. As his teacher observed, heroes are not always defined by grand gestures. Often, they look like Gabe—someone who takes time to care. Actions like his have the power to change the world.

Nominated by Mary Breedlove

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Jennan Brennan *“I’ve always loved working with little kids and reading so I created a reading program at my school.”*

Bonnie Collins *“I want to keep Maya’s legacy alive by helping other families battling pediatric cancer.”*

Gabriel Eichhold *“I like helping people because it helps me in my heart and it helps them in their heart.”*

How Can the Character Council Help You?

For Individuals... Focus on growing in one quality each month:



Our free email bulletins provide insights for growing in one character quality each month and simple, doable practices that help kids and families thrive. Specific emails are available each month for education, business, faith and community/family. Subscribe at charactercincinnati.org/signup

For Educators and Professionals... Five seminars for thriving



The Character Council offers dynamic professional development seminars for teachers, employees and staff to provide the tools needed to navigate today's challenges and achieve their full potential. Topics include: Success through Integrity; Understanding Your Emotions: The Key to Resilience; How to Hold Difficult Conversations; and Self Care: Building Confidence through Wellness. For more information, see <https://charactercincinnati.org/unlock-your-potential/>.

For Community Leaders...



Character Carnival: Consider hosting a carnival for children in your community with activities that focus on character. The Character Council offers a variety of fun games for rent that are appropriate for church festivals, scouting events, and summer camp. See: charactercincinnati.org/character-carnival-2

How Can You Help the Character Council?

Volunteer your Time and Skills:

The Character Council relies on the talents and generosity of our volunteers to continue this positive work of promoting and encouraging good character in the region. Business and faith leaders, educators, event organizers, writers, financial and technology gurus, social media aficionados...are all invited and appreciated. To explore Volunteer Opportunities, contact Mary Russell at marussell@charactercincinnati.org

A Financial Gift:



Your financial support of the Council allows us to continue to provide free resources to schools, community groups, and to continue to sponsor these inspirational events. To donate online, visit charactercincinnati.org/donate



Jack & Robbie Everage
Community Volunteers
Versailles IN

A Vision of Service

Jack and Robbie Everage have dedicated countless hours to serving the community of Versailles, Indiana. Through their leadership in the Lions Club, where they serve as President and Treasurer, they have made a significant impact on the lives of others. In collaboration with surrounding clubs, they conducted vision screenings for more than 5,000 students in 2025, often ensuring that children in need receive glasses regardless of financial circumstances.

Their service extends to seniors by providing essential equipment such as walkers and wheelchairs. They also play a key role in organizing the Versailles Pumpkin Show, one of Indiana’s oldest festivals. This four-day event draws thousands of visitors, and their behind-the-scenes leadership helps keep it accessible and free for the community.

Additionally, they support Camp Woodsmoke, a 200-acre camp for individuals with special needs, and volunteer at the Indiana State Fair and Special Olympics events. Their commitment reflects the vital role volunteers play in strengthening communities.

Nominated by Steve Mathes



Ryan Goode
Pastor
Hamline Chapel
Greendale IN

We All Have Gifts

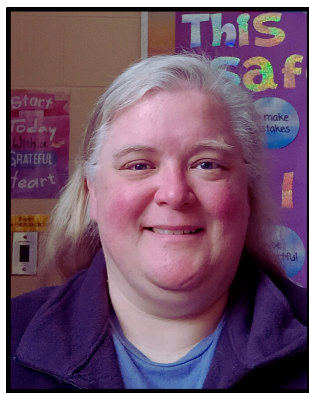
As pastor of Hamline Chapel, Ryan Goode leads with compassion and action. Through a weekly community dinner, he connected with Ken Maddin, who was addressing homelessness through The Community Project. Together, they explored how the church could better serve those in need.

When a blessing box could no longer remain on public property, Ryan immediately offered church grounds as a solution. His leadership continued to expand as he became a Greendale city councilman, President of Greendale Main Street, and pastor of a second church.

When the city considered making it illegal to sleep in vehicles on public property, Ryan worked with the city attorney to develop an ordinance that included a humane alternative—a safe place for individuals to park. He continues to advocate for dignity and practical solutions, including building shower facilities for those experiencing homelessness.

Ryan believes one of the greatest gifts is simply knowing someone’s name and listening to their needs. His leadership reflects empathy, responsibility, and a commitment to community care.

Nominated by Ken Maddin



Kelly Lockwood
Second Grade Teacher
Linden Elementary School
Hamilton OH

House of Misfits

Kelly Lockwood exemplifies selflessness in every aspect of her life. Nearly a decade ago, she opened her home to foster children who soon became her own through adoption. Since then, she has continued to go above and beyond to provide them with stability, love, and opportunity.

More recently, Kelly has extended that same care to others, transforming her home into a safe haven for teenagers in need. Over the summer, she welcomed more than six teens into her home, offering warm meals, a place to rest, and unwavering support—without expecting anything in return. The teens affectionately refer to her home as the “house of misfits - where they all come together to create a family.”

As a single mother and second-grade teacher, Kelly provides not only for her own children but also for many others who need encouragement, guidance, and belonging. She offers a listening ear, compassion, and consistency. Her actions reflect genuine generosity and a deep commitment to helping others, simply because it is who she is.

Nominated by Jill Hines

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Jack & Robbie Everage *“You work for the cause, not the applause. You live life to express, not to impress. Don’t strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt”, by Grace Lichtenstein.”*

Ryan Goode *“One of the best gifts you can give someone is to know their name. I want to be a person who is available to others.”*

Kelly Lockwood *“Your heart grows with the love you give to other people.”*



Jennifer Campbell Loftus
CEO & Founder, JLL Joyful
Harrison OH

I'm an Elf

Jennifer “Jen” Campbell Loftus began her journey with a simple yet powerful idea: an elf who spreads joy during the holidays. With her father’s help, she transformed everyday items into something magical—a Joyful Elf Cart, Glowing Elf Shoes, and a Magical Mint Dispenser. She filled her cart with gifts she personally purchased and began visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons.

What started as a single act of kindness quickly grew into a meaningful mission. Jen has since expanded her efforts, sometimes appearing as a bunny or a superhero, bringing joy to people of all ages and circumstances. She defines her purpose as “Enjoying the Journey of Life by finding joy and spreading kindness along the way. God helped me identify my gift of bringing joy to people and helped me share it with others.”

Jen sees every person as a child of God, regardless of their situation. Her creativity, compassion, and joyful spirit continue to inspire and uplift those she encounters.

Nominated by Trina McCool



Katie Owens
First Grade
Riverview Elementary School
Hamilton OH

Marshmallow Hugs

Katie Owens consistently demonstrates leadership through her actions, both in and beyond the classroom. She volunteers to assist teachers, perseveres through academic challenges, and supports her peers with genuine care. Her generous spirit is especially evident in her instinct to seek out students who need encouragement the most.

One student in her class struggles with transitions and experiences “big feelings.” Katie makes a deliberate choice each day to support him—greeting him warmly, partnering with him during activities, and reassuring him when he feels overwhelmed. Even when given the option to participate in preferred or “fun” activities, she chooses instead to remain by his side, ensuring he feels safe and supported.

Teachers often remark on her natural leadership, joking that she could serve as an assistant principal. Katie’s ability to recognize needs and respond with empathy sets her apart. Her consistent kindness and willingness to serve others create a positive and inclusive environment for everyone around her.

Nominated by Kathryn Milders



Michael Pearl
Director, St. Monica’s Rec Center
Lincoln Heights OH

Lincoln Heights Hub

Known affectionately as “Mr. Mike,” Michael Pearl has been a trusted leader and mentor in the Village of Lincoln Heights for more than 15 years. As Director of St. Monica’s Recreation Center, he has created a safe, engaging, and educational environment for young people. The center serves as a vital community hub, partnering with Lincoln Heights Elementary School to provide enriching after-school experiences.

Families rely on St. Monica’s not only for recreation but also for safety and support. Under Mr. Mike’s leadership, programs have expanded to include financial literacy, nutrition education, art activities, and participation in Girl and Boy Scouts. The center also provides meals for children while at the center, and for families during holidays and times of need. Mr. Mike’s presence extends far beyond programming. He serves as a role model, mentor, and source of stability for many children, who view him as a father figure, uncle, big brother, and friend. His dedication, compassion, and leadership have made him an essential and deeply respected part of the community.

Nominated by Dawn Delight Bailey

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Jennifer Campbell Loftus *“God helped me identify my gift of bringing joy to people and helped me share it with others.”*

Katy Owens *“I give hugs to everyone.”*

Michael Pearl *“I just want to be a blessing to any and everyone that I come into contact with.”*



Shelly Hauer
Poverty Advocate
City of Hamilton
Hamilton OH

Poor in Spirit

Shelly Hauer has devoted her life to serving as a poverty advocate in the City of Hamilton. To build trust with those she serves, she made the intentional decision to live within the community alongside her family. Her work reflects a deep commitment to understanding and supporting individuals facing significant life challenges.

Through her involvement with the Hose House Ministry, Shelly has ministered to individuals struggling with addiction and those involved in prostitution, offering conversation, prayer, and compassion. She also contributed to SELF (Support to Low Income Families), where she taught in the Jobs Now program, emphasizing the philosophy of “Hands Up, Not Hands Out.”

As a teacher at Cincinnati Christian School, Shelly developed a class focused on responsible volunteering, teaching students to respect diverse cultures and engage in meaningful service. Most recently, she served as a Client Care Coordinator at Pathway to Hope Pregnancy Care Center. Shelly believes her work is a calling and continues to dedicate her life to serving others with humility and purpose.

Nominated by Gina Graham



David Ladner
Principal
South Dearborn Middle School
Aurora IN

Principal Disciple

As principal of South Dearborn Middle School in Aurora, Indiana, David Ladner carries significant leadership responsibilities. Yet his greatest impact comes from his personal commitment to each student. He goes beyond administrative duties to serve as a mentor, counselor, and advocate for those who need him most.

David demonstrates unwavering dedication and deep empathy, particularly for students facing difficult circumstances outside of school. He takes time to understand their individual challenges and works with them to achieve goals they may have once believed were impossible. His efforts help students feel seen, valued, and capable of success.

In addition to his work at school, David partners with his church to provide Thanksgiving meals for families in need, further extending his support to the broader community. Students, staff, and families alike recognize his leadership and compassion. David’s commitment to helping every child succeed makes him an invaluable presence and a respected leader in his community.

Nominated by Amy Deaton



Cindy Knox
Director, Office of Student
Accessibility
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights KY

Human Connection

Cindy Knox recognized that many of the most common disabilities on college campuses—such as anxiety, depression, and OCD—are often invisible and carry significant stigma. Rather than focusing solely on accommodations, she became a strong advocate for cultural change, encouraging open dialogue and support for students facing these challenges. Her efforts helped break down barriers of shame and silence that often prevent individuals from seeking help.

Under Cindy’s leadership, Northern Kentucky University’s accessibility program evolved into a national model, earning recognition as one of College Magazine’s Top 10 Campuses for Students with Physical Disabilities. Her influence extends beyond policy and programs; she demonstrates exceptional character in every aspect of her life.

Even in the face of personal adversity, Cindy remains a steady and dependable presence for her students, her cheer team, and her family. She believes in others unconditionally and consistently shows up with strength and commitment. Her leadership reflects resilience, compassion, and a dedication to ensuring that every individual feels supported and valued.

Nominated by Dave Knox

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Shelly Hauer “God has given us two commands, ‘Love God and to Love our Neighbors as Ourselves’ - this is my motivation.”

David Ladner “Every day I want to make someone’s day, especially the students.”

Cindy Knox “It makes me feel good to be able to change the lives of people.”



Jessica Poe
Special Education Teacher
Ignite Institute
Erlanger KY

The Igniter

Jessica Poe is described by her principal as “the person we count on to support the students with the most significant struggles academically, emotionally, and socially. She builds them up, challenges them, advocates for them, and celebrates them.”

Her impact is evident in the lives she changes. One parent shared, “I believe in my child, but I never thought they would be able to accomplish all they have done without Ms. Poe.”

Jessica’s dedication led to a historic achievement, guiding the first two students with disabilities in the state of Kentucky to earn associate degrees.

She was recently recognized as Outstanding Teacher in Kenton County, reflecting her excellence in education and leadership. Jessica is also actively involved in initiatives such as Toys for Tots, Student Council, and her school’s blood drive. Her work consistently elevates those around her and demonstrates the transformative power of belief and support.

Nominated by Jerome Gels



Brody Byerly
Eighth Grade
St Mary School
Hyde Park OH

The Energizer

Brody Byerly has made a meaningful impact at St. Mary School by consistently demonstrating compassion, respect, and kindness. One of his most notable habits is also one of the simplest—he greets everyone he passes in the hallway with a warm smile. Whether interacting with teachers, classmates, or younger students he has never met, Brody makes others feel seen and valued.

He explains his approach to each day by saying he begins with “waking up, petting the therapy dog at school, and by spreading positivity to others.” This mindset reflects his intentional effort to create a welcoming and encouraging environment.

Brody is especially generous with his time, often helping younger students by answering questions, offering guidance, and ensuring they feel included. Many look up to him because of his steady presence and supportive nature. His leadership style is quiet yet confident, rooted in example rather than attention. Through everyday actions, Brody demonstrates how small acts of kindness can have a lasting impact.

Nominated by Jen Reker-Murphy



Mindee Callahan
Student/Family Support Specialist
Ridgeway Elementary School
Hamilton OH

Need & Abundance

When Mindee Callahan encounters a challenge, her response is immediate and determined: “we can do this, how do we make it happen”? Known by her principal as the “Google of Ridgeway Elementary School,” she is a trusted resource for families, relationships, and student needs. Mindee brings enthusiasm and positivity to everything she does, with a unique ability to turn difficult situations into opportunities for support and growth. When families faced sudden food insecurity during a government shutdown, Mindee created a fully functioning school food pantry in a single day, stocking it with items students would enjoy. In another situation, she led efforts to support eight children facing a life-altering family crisis, ensuring each transition was handled with care, stability, and dignity. Mindee is known as someone others can trust for guidance and support. She listens, problem-solves, and persists until solutions are found. Her dedication reflects compassion, resilience, and a deep commitment to serving others.

Nominated by Ryan Britton

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Jessica Poe “The little successes and wins keep me coming back every day.”

Brody Byerly “I wake up each day, pet the therapy dog at school, and spread positivity to others.”

Mindee Callahan “We can do this, how do we make it happen?”



Rhonda Deatherage
Administrative Assistant
Nagel Middle School
Cincinnati OH

Grateful & Humble

At Nagel Middle School, Rhonda Deatherage sets the standard for character and leadership. During a recent professional session, staff members were asked to identify their mentor—an overwhelming number named Rhonda. One colleague shared, “She knows intuitively what someone needs—whether it’s a hug, advice, a listening ear, a piece of candy, or a warm smile.”

Rhonda has made a lasting impact by addressing student needs with compassion and initiative. She partnered with Inter Parish Ministries to launch the Power Pack program, providing weekend meals for students experiencing food insecurity. She also led the planning of the school’s first eighth-grade trip to Washington, D.C., and introduced a dynamic sixth-grade open house featuring student-led activities and community-building experiences.

Her influence extends through events that foster connection and belonging, including a hot cocoa and cookie bar and a Pink Out volleyball game honoring those affected by breast cancer. Rhonda’s leadership brings hope, unity, and care to the entire school community.

Nominated by Carolyn Place Heller



Konrad Gibson
Fourth Grade
Bridgeport Elementary School
Hamilton OH

Victory in Loss

Konrad Gibson approaches life with a sense of clarity and purpose that reflects both maturity and strong personal values. He consistently upholds his principles, even when doing so may not be considered “cool” by others. He understands who he is and what matters most, demonstrating resilience in the face of challenges.

At the start of the school year, Konrad experienced the sudden loss of his father, a deeply personal and devastating event. Despite this, he continues to honor his father’s influence by remaining active in the sports they shared and by dedicating himself to his studies. He channels his experiences into meaningful reflection, including a poem he wrote: “He inspires me giving me those nine years of my life with him on Earth but many more to go off Earth. He will always be there no matter what, if I can see him or not he is watching me succeed. As years go by, he will always be there for me. I see him in spirit”.

Konrad’s strength, perseverance, and character inspire those around him.

Nominated by Mary Breedlove



Lacey Ashton
Washington Primary School
Piqua OH

Watering Curiosity

Lacey Ashton brings enthusiasm, positivity, and purpose to her STEM classroom at Washington Primary School. She has a unique ability to translate complex concepts into engaging, hands-on learning experiences that inspire curiosity and creativity in her students. Her lessons are designed to build foundational skills while encouraging exploration and authentic learning.

Lacey emphasizes the importance of risk-taking, teaching students not to fear failure but to view it as an essential part of growth. She instills in them the mindset of lifelong learners, encouraging each child to strive to become the best version of themselves. Beyond academics, Lacey uses her classroom as a space to model essential life skills. She teaches students to be people of purpose—individuals who recognize when others need help and take action without hesitation. Her approach fosters a culture of empathy, responsibility, and contribution. Through her leadership, Lacey positively influences both her students and the broader school community.

Nominated by Heather Koehl

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Konrad Gibson *“The real hero is my dad, he is supporting me from up above.”*

Rhonda Deatherage *“When you love God and you love people, the other parts fall into place.”*

Lacey Ashton *“I teach my students to be risk takers. Try something new, don’t be afraid to fail.”*



**Kaitlin Harrell, Meagan Hughes
& Jenna Sawyers**
Creators, Praise Pals
Butlerville IN

Praise Pals

Sisters Kaitlin Harrell, Meagan Hughes, and Jenna Sawyers identified a need for engaging, faith-based educational content for young children. Combining their talents in music education and creative media production, they developed Praise Pals, a YouTube-based program designed for toddlers and preschoolers.

Praise Pals offers a safe and meaningful screen-time experience, featuring Bible lessons, memory verses, worship songs with motions, puppets, and interactive learning moments. Their goal is to provide content that families can trust while creating an experience children genuinely enjoy.

Each episode introduces simple Bible truths, Christian values, and engaging activities that help children understand and connect with God's love. New episodes are released every other Sunday, providing consistent and accessible content for families.

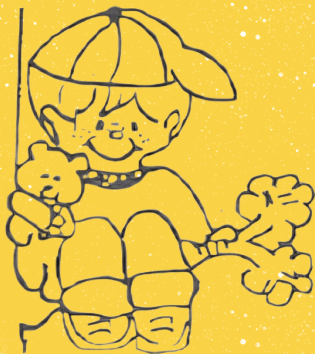
Through their collaboration, the sisters have created a program that blends creativity, faith, and education, supporting early childhood development while reinforcing positive values in a way that is both fun and impactful.

Nominated by Diann Jackson

Inspiration from our Heroes...

Kaitlin, Meagan & Jenna *"Our goal is to bring kids closer to Jesus."*

Sunshine Corner Daycare & Preschool



Lawrenceburg (2)
Greendale
Versailles



Congratulations to the 2026 Heroes of Character Finalists. Thank you for making a difference in this world!

Finalists



Brian Chitwood-Educator & Coach
Adams Co Schools, West Union OH
Nominated by Jason Little



Warren Edmondson-SRO
Tipp City Schools, Tipp City OH
Nominated by Lisa Tuttle-Huff



Danielle Froslar-Guidance Counselor
Middletown High School, Middletown OH
Nominated by Juley Lawson



McKenzie Haught-Paraprofessional
Piqua Central Intermediate School, Piqua OH
Nominated by Whitney Hosbrook



Beth Jackson-Principal
Three Rivers Elementary School, Cleves OH
Nominated by Megan Rivet



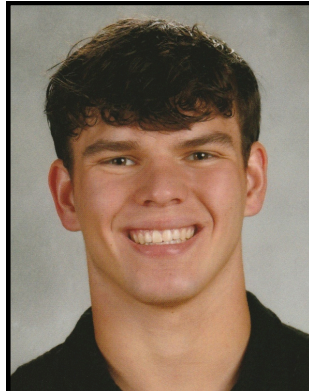
Keren Sathish Kumar-Educator
Hamilton City Schools, Hamilton OH
Nominated by Kathleen Coffey



Carrie Preston-Educator
Linden Elem. School, Hamilton OH
Nominated by Jill Hines



Kalvin Brown-Fourth Grade
Linden Elem. Schools, Hamilton OH
Nominated by Jill Hines



Aiden Kirkpatrick-Senior
Troy High School, Troy OH
Nominated by Troy Everhart



Damon Weathington-Senior
Gamble Montessori School, Cincinnati OH
Nominated by Will Davis

Not Pictured: Bill Crabtree, Ashton Hahn



**EXPERIENCED ATTORNEYS
WORKING FOR YOU**

www.pillarlgp.com
(812) 539-2111

Congratulations to
Don Larrick

and to the

**2026 Heroes of Character
and Finalists!**

*Thank you for all that you do to support our
community!*



**Noon until Midnight
at the
Lawrenceburg
Fairgrounds**

351 E Eads Pkwy,
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025

**FOOD, FUN, MUSIC,
GAMES, &
FIREWORKS**

Oser-Roth & Friends Fest is a 501(c)3 that helps to grant the wishes of severely or terminally ill children and those with severe developmental delays. Since our first year, 2010, we have raised nearly \$1,000,000 for seventy-nine recipients. We call our recipients Angels because that is how we see them. With all the challenges that life has given them, they face them with grace, dignity, and courage, all with smiles on their faces.

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE
EVENT, OUR CHARITY, AND HOW YOU CAN HELP!**

www.oserrothfest.com

Thanks to the
Character Council
for your
leadership!

It matters!

The Gendreau Family
&
Hamilton City Schools



Proudly Supporting the Character Council of Greater Cincinnati 2026 Heroes of Character Celebration

Reignite
**YOUR
RELATIONSHIP**

Rediscover the **Spark**.
Strengthen Your **Connection**.



Schedule Your Couples Counseling Session Today!



www.SparkCouplesCounseling.com

Congratulations to
Don Larrick
and the
2026 Honorees!

Keep up the great work...

The Munchak Family



The Community Project

<https://www.thecommunityprojectsei.org/>

With gratitude to the
2026 Heroes of Character and Finalists

And to the Character Council volunteers who so
generously give of their time and talent.

Thank you for making our world a better place.

Mike and Mary Russell



**Congratulations to
Ryan Goode
& all of this year's honorees!**

www.lohmillerrealestate.com



Board of Directors

Mary Andres Russell, *Chair*

Matthews Aurora Professional Development Director, Retired

Diane Brueggemann, *Vice Chair, Heroes Celebration Co-Chair*

University of Cincinnati Public Safety, Retired

Sandy S. Szczygiel, *Secretary, Education Chair*

Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, Retired

Mary Munchak, *Treasurer*

Hospital Lab Director, Semi-Retired

Dr. Rev. Roger Braun, *Faith Chair*

United Methodist Clergy, Retired

Stacey Hill-Simmons

Superintendent, Best Point Education and Behavioral Health

Don Larrick

Three Rivers Elementary School, Principal, Retired

Dolores J. Lindsay

The Healthcare Connection Founder and CEO, Retired

Ana Martinez

Badin High School, Director of Diversity Engagement and Inclusion

Jill Tomey

IT Professional, Retired

Kausha Mehta

Heritage Hill Elementary, Teacher

Michael P. Daly, *Emeritus*

Character Council Founder, Financial Consultant

A Special Thank You to:

Susan Mitchell - *Heroes Celebration Co-Chair, Event Marketing & Program Design*

Chris Oser, Cindy Oser, and Sharon Goffena *for assistance with the Silent Auction*

Wesley Carroll *for editing the hero videos shown tonight (Wesleycarroll@gmail.com 513-518-9596)*



Congratulations Jordan!!

"For this son we prayed, and the Lord has granted our request (1 Samuel 1:27)."

Jordan, your story with us began in holy surprise--placed in our arms at four days of age, you were a miracle of love. Wrapped in a tiny bundle, you turned longing into laughter and filled our home with joy.

Eighteen years later, that same light shines brightly.

Mr. Sunshine--ever cheerful, ever quick with wit, you consistently lift the spirits of those around you. You honor your parents and carry our family name with integrity, and meet life with humility, strength, and extraordinary courage. No challenge seems too great, your spirit - indomitable, and, as a result, it seems that you can do anything.

"Pinball" on the field, you ricocheted through defenders and adversity alike. Yet your greatest victories are not measured in neither yards nor records, but in the quiet consistency of virtue.

Beloved brother to two, adored Uncle Jordan of ten, a gifted athlete, a diligent student, above all, you are a young man who walks faithfully with Christ. Tonight, you are honored as a ****Hero of Character.**** But to us, you have long been something even greater--a daily reminder that God's kindness still shows up in human form.

Thank you for eighteen years of laughter, grit, faith, and goodness. Yet, somehow, we know, that the best chapters are still ahead.

We love you beyond words.

Dad, Mom, and your whole family





Thank you for designing the beautiful hero awards!

Inspiration Studios, Inc.

A non-profit organization that inspires individuals with development and intellectual disabilities to lead purposeful, healthy, and self-directed lives through innovative programming and services.



Congratulations
Gabe Eichhold and Konrad Gibson
Your Bridgeport family is very proud of you!



**Doing the *BEST* we can,
For as *MANY* as we can,
For as *LONG* as we can!**

LEARN MORE: NUXHALLMIRACLELEAGUE.ORG

Ambassadors of Character

Ron Beshear

Retired Managing Partner, Northwestern Mutual

Gayle Brock

Executive Consultant

Michael P. Daly

Financial Planner, Character Council Founder

Pamela Daly

Actress and Acting Coach

Kristi Eberhart

Retired Program Coordinator, Big Brothers Big Sisters

Mary Anne Frey

Retired

Andre Gendreau

*Executive Director of Assessment, Gifted, ESL, and K-6 Specials,
Hamilton City Schools*

Tom Gill

Owner, Tom Gill Chevrolet

Sharon Goffena

Retired

Jim Place

Character Educator and Coach

Steve Lippert

Retired Executive VP of Human Resources, Hamilton Caster

Tim Rolfes

Business and Technology Leader, The Christ Hospital

Mike Russell

Retired Sales Professional

Steve Saunders

Retired Captain, Cincinnati Police

Dan Spraul

Attorney, Spraul & Doan LLC

Del Weldon

Attorney, Pillar Law Group



Schedule a Seminar Today!!



Unlock Your Potential:

Five Seminars to Thrive in Today's World



From Negativity to Thriving

An energizing, research informed seminar that helps leaders and teams break free from the patterns that drain morale and momentum.



How to Hold Difficult Conversations

Learn to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts peacefully, and build stronger relationships.



Self Care: Building Confidence through Wellness

Discover strategies for managing stress, prioritizing your wellbeing, and boosting your self-esteem.



Success through Integrity

Develop a strong moral compass, build trust with others, and achieve lasting success in your personal and professional life.



Understanding Your Emotions: The Key to Resilience

Gain emotional intelligence, learn to manage your reactions, and bounce back from setbacks with greater ease.

In today's fast-paced world, stress and conflict are unavoidable. Social media and other pressures can make it difficult to thrive.

The Character Council offers five dynamic seminars designed to equip you with the tools and character qualities you need to navigate these challenges and achieve your full potential.

The facilitators bring years of experience and ability and can adapt the seminars for the length of time and specific environment that is needed/asked. We are confident that these seminars will provide valuable tools and insights to help you, and your team thrive.

Contact training@charactercincinnati.org today to learn more and to schedule a seminar for your group.

Character...It starts with me

CharacterCincinnati.org
3874 Paxton Ave. Suite 9366
Cincinnati, OH 45209



CIVISTA[®]

BANK

Focused on You



DELTA

HOTELS

MARRIOTT

CINCINNATI SHARONVILLE

More Inspiration from our Heroes



Lions Club
Versailles, IN



LIVE LIKE MAYA



JJL-Joyful



Praise Pals

Please use the QR code to leave a Google Review. If you are logged into a Google account, it may open directly in a review window. If not, you will need to scroll to the second entry in the Google list and click on reviews. Begin by clicking the stars. We appreciate your time.



ACCOMMODATES 46 GUESTS

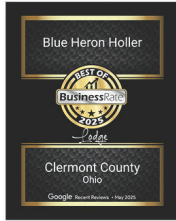
Perfect for corporate gatherings, families, or wedding and special events accommodations.

BLUE HERON HOLLER



You can witness hundreds of Blue Heron nests just a short walk from your doorstep.

BEST OF BUSINESS RATE 2025 LODGE



Learn More at BLUEHERONHOLLER.COM



5.0



GUEST FAVORITE ON AIRBNB!



Daly Initiatives

A Trusted Bridge Between Institutions, Families, and Opportunity.

MDaly@dalyinitiatives.com
+1 (513) 257-7708
DALYINITIATIVES.COM



Daly Initiatives is a relationship-driven financial firm bridging credit unions and high-net-worth individuals with best-in-class investment solutions.

FLASH CABINS & LODGING

at Flash Baseball & Softball Complex



FLASH VISITOR'S LODGE

BIG MIKE'S CABIN

TOM & JERRY'S

PAMELA'S DIAMOND

LONG BRANCH

FIVE UNIQUE RETREATS

Enjoy breathtaking sunsets after an action-packed day on the field or by the lake, where you might spot a family of Bald Eagles.



Thank you to the

2026 Heroes of Character

for exemplifying good character and for making a difference in the world.

GRIGGS FAMILY FOUNDATION