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The mom-and-pop general store has been a much-loved fixture in the Beersheba Springs community for decades.

Beersheba Springs Market Reopens

by Beth Riner, Messenger Staff Writer

When community members rallied to save the iconic Beersheba Springs Market from permanent closure last year, little did local newlyweds Audra and Billy Ray Miller know they'd be asked to run it.

Located right alongside State Route 56, the mom-and-pop general store had been a much-loved fixture in the Beersheba Springs community for decades. Rebuilt in 1953 after the original store burned in 1947, the market had several owners before Bud Whitman took over in 1976. Whitman ran it for 47 years before deciding to retire last January — only no one was interested in buying the business.

That's when John Adams and his father, Howell Adams, a long-time Grundy County benefactor, decided to step in and spearhead the fight to save the market.

"This was Howell's dream," Audra said. "He wanted this market saved. He's about leaving a footprint for the next generation."

Billy Ray added, "He's one of the best human beings I've ever met. He's thinking forward at 92."

Howell's son, John, put together a group of investors not only to buy the market but also to fund much-needed renovations while keeping its country-store character intact. The plan all along was to find a local couple interested in running the place.

"We literally had just returned from our honeymoon in Vegas when we got a phone call from Howell," Audra said. A mutual friend had suggested that she and Billy Ray might be good candidates for the job.

"Howell came and had dinner with us at our home and asked us," Audra recalled. "We were like ... ooh, that's life changing. Billy Ray was retired. I had just retired from 38 years as a hairstylist in McMinnville. It was the perfect timing. We were just a good fit."

Although they both grew up in the area, the couple didn't actually

meet until 2016. Audra's son, who was helping Billy Ray clear property to build a house, kept telling his mother that he thought she'd like his employer and his organic gardening techniques. Audra finally agreed to meet Billy Ray.

"He gave me a tour, and the rest is history," Audra said. She was fresh out of a divorce, and he'd been a confirmed bachelor for nearly 10 years.

"We had our own little Hallmark movie going on," Billy Ray said, smiling.

Audra, who attended Altamont Elementary, was part of the first eighth-grade graduating class at North before moving on to Grundy County High School. Billy Ray went to Beersheba Springs Elementary and graduated from Warren County High School in McMinnville.

Four years older than her husband, Audra, 56, said it was unlikely they would have gotten together even if they had gone to the same high school all those years ago.

"I would have been a senior in high school, and he would have been a freshman," she laughed. "I probably would not have talked to him back then."

Both the Millers took high school vocational classes that profoundly impacted their careers. Audra took cosmetology classes during her sophomore, junior, and senior years, so by the time she graduated, she had logged 1,500 hours, passed her cosmetology test, and went straight to work.

Billy Ray's time in Junior ROTC paved the way for a 20-year career in the Army — he'd eventually serve as the radio man for the Secret Service guarding President George W. Bush and First Lady, Laura, as well as Vice President Dick Cheney. After retiring from the military, he worked seven years as a veteran's service officer based at the Grundy County seat in Altamont.

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Community Blood Drive

The Red Cross has issued a critical need for blood donors across the nation, and we need your help to meet this need. Please consider giving blood from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 24, at St. Mark and St. Paul, 216 University Ave, Sewanee. You can pre-register and schedule an appointment at <https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/find-drive> (type in 37375, and you'll find our blood drive). For specific questions or to volunteer, contact Alane Osborne at Osborae0@sewanee.edu.



Julia Bates, Hospitality Shop Auxiliary Board member, with the current scholarship holders.

Hospitality Shop Board Members Interview Current Scholarship Holders

Members of the Sewanee Hospitality Shop Auxiliary Board met on Jan. 7, at the Blue Chair with two of its current scholarship holders, Stevie King of Grundy County and Montana Coffelt from Franklin County, to explore the impact of their first semesters in college. King is interested in physical therapy and Coffelt in nursing.

The application process for the 2024 Hospitality Shop Auxiliary scholarship begins this month. Forms are available in the high school guidance offices and are due back to the counselors by the end of February. Each scholarship is \$1,000 per year for students pursuing a career in healthcare and will follow the recipients through their programs for four years as long as they maintain at least a B average in college.

Both scholars urged students in high school to take advantage of dual enrollment at local colleges — Franklin County will pay for online college courses — and to take honors and AP classes whenever possible. Both efforts will prepare students for the increased difficulty of college classes. They suggested visiting college campuses to get a clear picture of where they would be going for their programs. Both students would like paid internships in healthcare during the summers to give a practical foundation to their course work. The Auxiliary Board is proud of the hard work of these scholars and looks forward to the selection of new scholars this spring.

University Convocation, Jan. 19

The University's Winter Convocation will be at 4:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 19, in All Saints' Chapel.

The University will begin a "new tradition" at the Opening Convocation of the Easter semester this year. In addition to inducting the newest members of the Order of the Gown, the teaching and scholarship of our faculty will also be recognized and honored by having one of our faculty colleagues deliver the convocation address.

This year, Professor of Classical Languages Stephanie McCarter, Sewanee's 2023 Faculty Excellence in Scholarship recipient and an award-winning scholar and translator, will speak at the convocation.

In focusing our attention on our students being inducted into the Order of the Gown and the address by a faculty member, we will not bestow honorary degrees at the upcoming convocation. We will reserve conferring these honors for two other times in the year — at the opening of the school year Advent Convocation in September and at the end of the academic year in May at the University Baccalaureate and the School of Theology Commencement.

The livestream is available at <https://new.sewanee.edu/parents-families/convocation-live-stream/>.



Shannen Williams

America's Real Sister Act Lecture

For most people, Whoopi Goldberg's performance as Sister Mary Clarence in the "Sister Act" film franchise is the dominant interpretation of an African American nun and the desegregation of white Catholic sisterhood in the United States. In her lecture titled, "America's Real Sister Act: Excavating the Hidden History of Black Catholic Nuns in the United States," Shannen Williams will explore the story of how generations of Black women and girls called to the sacred vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience fought against racism, sexism, and exclusion. In so doing, she will turn attention to women's religious life as a stronghold of white supremacy and racial segregation, and thus an important battleground in the long African American freedom struggle.

Join us at 6 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 1, in Convocation Hall. This event is free and open to the public. For more information visit: theology.sewanee.edu/williams.

"Audiences will appreciate Dr. Williams's work whether they are interested in history, civil rights, religion, women's issues, or monastic life," said the Very Rev. Dr. James F. Turrell, Dean of the School of Theology. "I am very excited to have Dr. Williams with us, and I encourage members of the community to join us on campus."

Williams is associate professor of history at the University of Dayton. Williams is the author of "Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle," which was published by Duke University Press in May 2022.

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Fundraising and Advancement: the DEI Dilemma

by Leslie Lytle, Messenger Staff Writer

"People have been doing this work for years and didn't call it DEI [Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion]," said Dr. Sybil Hampton speaking on the topic "Undoing Racism in Fundraising and Advancement" in Guerry Auditorium on Jan. 11. The convening of Jessie Ball duPont Fund higher education recipients brought together funding awardees from institutions across the nation to tackle the challenge of "Catalyzing Change: Frameworks for Repairing Histories of Racial Inequity."

As a high school student, Hampton followed on the heels of the Little Rock Nine, enrolling as a sophomore in the second class to integrate Central High School following the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. For three years not one student spoke to her. Hampton endured isolation and being spat on to return to Little Rock, Ark., 30 years later to serve as the president of Little Rock's largest private philanthropic institution, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. For her work in higher education and philanthropy, she was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame and several times named one of Arkansas Top 100 Women. Hampton's personal journey and career experiences read like a playbook for those engaged in the difficult task of finding funders, whether they be students, community project leaders, or members of a university fundraising and advancement team.

"There is a limited amount of money," Hampton stressed. "Fit is everything." She insisted on the importance of doing research to find the "fit where the magic happens" and on personal interaction with potential funders who may offer guidance rather than money. "[As a funder] the more I know about you, and the better you make me feel, the easier it is to talk," Hampton pointed out.

She offered a unique brand of encouragement, coupling hope and perseverance — "Because people don't value your work doesn't mean you can give up." Citing personal experience where she was always in a role where she was either "the only woman or only brown person," Hampton said, "I knew what they said about me wasn't true, and I produced what they needed. That didn't mean I didn't have my own agenda, but it was embedded in the institution."

"You need to get clear how you want to talk about your work so people don't feel like they're investing in the 'other,'" Hampton said, "to find words to describe what you're doing that's not DEI."

Hampton's formula: "People invest in things they feel they have ownership of." She gave several examples. A project that wanted to tell the story of Japanese Americans in Arkansas during WWII engaged high school computer and technology students and received funding from a local business. A project hoping to aid the more than 5,000 Arkansas children with parents in prison seized on the idea of producing a documentary of women in prison shackled to their beds when giving birth; notably, most of the women featured in the film were not people of color. A university with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students garnered alumni financial support when an article in the alumni magazine focused on the six-week summer orientation program for these students.

"You need to show the outside what's going on, to be able to tell the story," Hampton said, "to make them part of what people own in an institution... [to show them] the mirror." Seventy-nine-year-old Hampton attributed her success to not "giving up" and being able "to forgive."

Market (continued from page 1)

The couple put a lot of thought into whether or not to accept the offer to run the market — their marriage was a top priority. Audra thought they should do it — with one stipulation.

"Let's promise each other if it ever gets not fun or to the point it's affecting our marriage, let's walk away," she told her new husband. It was a deal Billy Ray had no problem accepting.

The investors, led by the Adams, took possession of the market in April.

"The day that Bud handed over the key to John, we all came up here, opened the doors, and started making plans," Audra said.

It's been an adventure — a labor of love with a learning curve. "We're hairdressers and Army folk," Billy Ray laughed. "We're not shopkeepers."

Their list to get the place up and running was long — clearing out the building, cleaning, knocking out walls, renovating, creating a kitchen — and it was tricky because they didn't want to lose the market's character and hometown feel.

"This was worth saving," Billy Ray said. "Everybody in this town and people not even from this town — let's call them the out-of-towners or the summer people — all have memories of being a child in this store. The common denominator is this store."

Audra and Billy Ray have their memories too.

"See the ballpark that's right back here was the hangout," Audra said. "This market being so close — it was the stop-in."

"It was the center of the universe in the summer," Billy Ray said, adding that as a child he was allowed to walk from the ballpark to the store along the path that connected the two. He was not allowed to walk along the road. The path is overgrown now, but the Millers plan to bring it back.

Clearing out, cleaning up, and renovating took two solid months.

laughed. They strive to carry those supplies that locals may need.

Billy Ray also continues to pump gas for folks whenever he can.

They plan to repaint the market after renovations are complete and want to paint a mural on the back and even add a stage so they can host local pickers and other musicians.

"Eventually, we want to have golf carts and e-bikes for rent," Audra added. "There's so much opportunity here." As the weather warms in the spring, they hope to begin moving forward with these plans.

One exciting development is that Savage Gulf State Park will be opening a new park entrance a mere 150 feet from the market — it's expected to bring increased traffic to the store as sightseers and hikers flock to the area.

"Business has been good," Audra said, noting that during the peak season the place was packed. "We have three groups — the locals, the summer people who have houses here and come and stay, and then the tourists."

They were worried what business would be like after the summer people and tourists left, but the locals have been absolutely supportive.

"We're providing for them, and they are supporting us beautifully," she said. "People come in and say thank you for what y'all are doing. Thank you for saving this place."

In the winter, the market is open six days a week, Monday through Saturday, from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. During peak season, April 1 to Nov. 1, hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays.

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