

Food for Thought



Nutrition · Education · Connection

1075 General Newsletter

November 2024

Vol. 6 No. 5

Executive Director's Message

As I begin to write this recap, my first thought is to share how heavy our hearts are for Western North Carolina as they deal with the destruction of Hurricane Helene. Our thoughts and prayers will continue over the next weeks, months and years as they continue to recover and rebuild.

September and October Happenings

- Food Pantry served 2051 households
- (35 % of HH come once a month, 5-7% come twice a week)
- Volunteer Hours 1192 (food pantry, various projects, and volunteer support for our annual fundraiser)
- Leadership Jones - 6 week course - 9 participants
- Teaching Kitchen Classes - 10 participants
- Ham Radio Education Course - 12 participants
- Attended the Jones County Heritage Festival
- Hosted a Candlelight Vigil in partnership with Coastal Women's Shelter
- Hosted National Weather Service Community Forum
- Board of Directors Meeting on Sept 15, 2024



- Held our 4th Annual Fundraising Event - "A Perfect 10" - our goal is \$60,000 and only \$10,000 away from finishing strong. Thank you AGAIN to Carolina East Health System for being our Title Sponsor this year.
- New Warehouse Project Update - we ordered the new building in August and will be delivered at the end of November
- The Filling Station was featured in the September 2024 Issue of Our State Magazine

We are heading into the season of Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Each week we make it a priority to "roll out the RED carpet" for our clients making them feel important as we assist in filling unmet needs. Giving Tuesday, December 3rd, is a day set aside worldwide for organizations to highlight and celebrate the mission. We will be participating in the 5th Annual Carry it Forward event at Union Point Park from 2-5 PM. This is an opportunity to visit 40-50 non profit organizations who are serving those who need a "hand up". A Special Giving Tuesday BUTTON will be posted on our website: fillingstation1075.com highlighting the opportunity to give on this special day.

Continued on p. 2

Mary Ann's Column Continued

Join us for the Town of Pollocksville Christmas kick off celebration on Sat, Dec. 7th at 5:30 PM - Parade with Santa, Coffee and Cocoa in the Front Gathering Space of The Filling Station for children to write letters to Santa and photos. Food Trucks, Vendors, and lighting of the tree.

We are excited to partner with Pollocksville Rotary Club to host this event for the community.

Thank you again for your continued support, love and prayers.

Mary Ann LeRay, Executive Director

Prayers for Western NC



Thank you Duke Energy team, Jones County Emergency Management and Solid Rock Global Methodist Church for your help in loading items to send the Western NC.



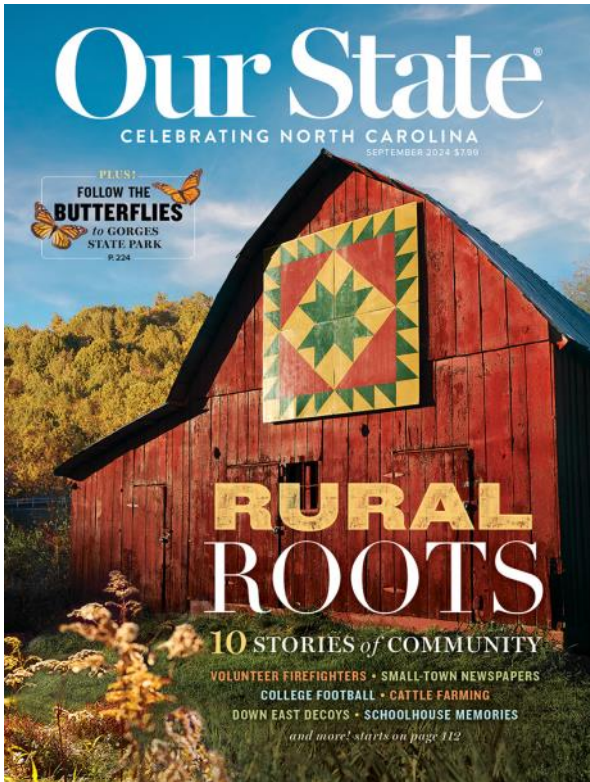
HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

VETERANS DAY

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September



“A lot of people have the intention to do good. The volunteers at The Filling Station made it happen.”

SHELTER from the STORM

In the tiny town of Pollockville in Jones County, the placid Trent River roared to life during Hurricane Florence, threatening homes and businesses. A group of volunteers formed to clean up the mess, one neighborly smile at a time.

written by JILL WARDEN LUCAS | photography by CHRIS ROBERTS

THE RURAL ISSUE



100 GOLF STAM | SEPTEMBER 2024

A FEW WEEKS AFTER Hurricane Florence devastated Jones County in September 2018, Mike Beifer couldn't resist the urge to take a walk down to the Trent River. She was amazed to see that the clearing flood water that had crested beyond its muddy banks still lapped up Main Street, a surprising sight and sight to someone of Pollockville.

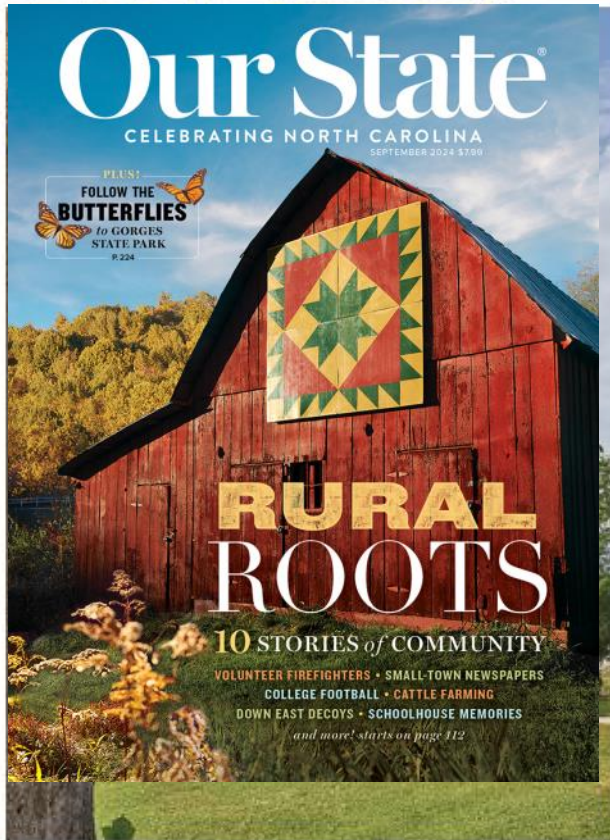
Chaos about washing into the polluted water, she watched as a group of people gathered just outside of a former propane business, near the spot where the surge had stopped. "I didn't know what it was, but I wanted to be part of it," Mike Beifer, who'd moved to the town from Connecticut a year earlier, drove to the rural community right outside her door.

The group that Beifer encountered consisted of volunteers from The Filling Station, a nonprofit headquartered in the old store and composed of local churches and service organizations that support neighbors in need. The meeting had been planned, but several towns and grateful towns to share their concerns. The first visit of how could it be that your progress was changed so fast for one for each of your, Mike and Kelly.

"This gathering is the group said, 'Hold on! We want to be here and get me a jar of pepper butter



The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September



From a building that once housed a propane company (top left), Filling Station board members like Clyde Murphy Jr. and Willie Smith keep the spirit of downtown Pollockville and Jones County alive by helping clean up after disasters and assist residents in need.

The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September

SHELTER *from the* STORM

In the tiny town of Pollocksville in Jones County, the placid Trent River roared to life during Hurricane Florence, threatening homes and businesses. A group of volunteers formed to clean up the mess, one neighborly smile at a time.

written by JILL WARREN LUCAS / photography by CHRIS ROGERS

A FEW WEEKS AFTER Hurricane Florence devastated Jones County in September 2018, Millie Belfort couldn't resist the urge to take a walk down to the Trent River.

She was stunned to see that the churning flood waters that had rushed beyond its muddy banks still lapped up Main Street, swamping her adopted hometown of Pollocksville.

Uneasy about wading into the polluted water, she watched as a group of people gathered just outside of a former propane business, near the spot where the surge had stopped. "I didn't know what it was, but I wanted to be part of it," recalls Belfort, who'd moved to the town from Connecticut 13 years earlier, drawn to the rural community by its milder weather.

The group that Belfort encountered consisted of leaders and volunteers from The Filling Station, a nonprofit headquartered in the old store and composed of local churches and service organizations that support neighbors in need. No meeting had been planned, but several locals had gravitated there to share their concerns. Belfort told of how she'd experienced price gouging when charged \$21 for one jar each of peanut butter and jelly.

"This gentleman in the group said, 'Hold on.' He went back in and got me a jar of peanut butter



POLLOCKSVILLE MAYOR
JAY BENDER

The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September

THE RURAL ISSUE

and a jar of jelly — no charge,” Belfort recalls. “He told me he was sorry that I had to go through that. It was like a gleam of light in the darkness.”

The volunteers, she says, “helped us all come together and heal. A lot of people have the intention to do good. They made it happen.”

When The Filling Station set up its board five months prior to the hurricane, the goal was to ensure that residents of the low-wealth county could put food on their tables. No one could have foreseen the need that would soon arise. But after overcoming the challenges that Florence threw in their path, members of the group saw that they could do more to lift up their hard-hit community.

They soon expanded their programs, offering summer camps, a tutoring service, and a learning academy to strengthen the pipeline of future leaders. From 2019 to 2023, the number of households that volunteers served more than doubled, from just under 4,000 to nearly 9,000. Fueled by the can-do enthusiasm of its executive director, Pollocksville native Mary Ann LeRay, The Filling Station has continued to adapt, finding new ways to nourish its neighbors.



“A lot of people have the intention to do good. The volunteers at The Filling Station made it happen.”

THE ORGANIZATION HELD ITS FIRST DRIVE-THROUGH food pantry under clear skies on September 6, 2018. A week later, as Pollocksville Mayor Jay Bender monitored warnings for the large, slow-moving storm, he found himself pondering lessons learned from Hurricane Floyd, which hit the town 25 years ago this month. Experts called it a thousand-year storm, but Florence would prove to be worse. Days of record-breaking rain pushed a 20-foot rush of foul water up Main Street, overtaking everything in its path before stopping — miraculously, some say — at the steps of Pollocksville Presbyterian Church.

More than 750 families across Jones County, most without flood insurance, were forced to evacuate. Some never returned, and Pollocksville’s business corridor remains mostly shuttered. Folks who never imagined that they’d require food assistance, who were displaced or needed help mucking out their flooded homes, were desperate for aid.

It took about 10 days for floodwaters to recede enough for Mayor Bender to access his riverside office in the old town hall, which had been submerged to the rafters. With doors swollen shut, he used a chain saw to gain access through a window. Despite the care he’d taken to stack essential government documents and equipment atop folding tables, the murky water claimed countless records and keepsakes that documented generations of life in Jones County. Officials later estimated statewide damage from Florence at \$17 billion.

With local government operating out of his living room, Bender grew concerned about the time

Executive Director Mary Ann LeRay (left) oversees operations at The Filling Station, where food is distributed to clients via a drive-through pantry (above).

The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September

Volunteers and community members cook together at The Filling Station as part of a NC Cooperative Extension program called Take Control. In June, Reece Carter (below) won a Governor's Volunteer Service Award.



it would take even highly motivated state and federal officials to respond. What he needed was a central location where folks could come for aid. He needed The Filling Station, and LeRay — someone with deep roots in the community — was ready for his call. At Bender's request, The Filling Station became Jones County's disaster recovery hub.

"We really had no choice," LeRay says with a smile that's capable of both soothing heartbreak and brokering critical partnerships. "We were one of the few places still dry."

ALTHOUGH NO ONE PREDICTED THE severity of Florence's impact, LeRay recalls a compelling sense of urgency among The Filling Station's board in the months leading up to the storm.

"We felt like we were preparing for something important," she says. "Our training and our contacts were critical to serving people of all ages and walks of life when they most needed us."

LeRay's drive comes from both her mother and her father, tobacco farmers who instilled in her the belief that you commit to a task until it's done. LeRay likewise inspired fellow responders, many of whom had experienced significant storm loss themselves.

"Somehow, somehow, things were orchestrated for us to respond," she says. "We knew that we had to get it together, identify needs, and get things done without a lot of red tape."

"Some people think rural counties can't achieve, but we can sit at the table and belong."

Early interventions included hand-delivering financial relief — much of it donated through the nonprofit's new website — to more than 125 families who'd lost everything. When the holidays approached, Filling Station volunteers returned with gift cards provided by corporate partners.

While some in Jones County were still dealing with hurricane recovery, The Filling Station continued to expand its reach. It helped clients access services and adjust to isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Its offices house a ham radio station — a vital resource when other communications are down. And construction will begin soon on a warehouse funded by the Golden LEAF Foundation to expand the food pantry.

It also has a teaching kitchen operated in partnership with the Jones County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension. Jacob Morgan, the county's extension director, says that the space is used to realize opportunities that the nonprofit creates for the community. "It's given us a chance to meet and serve people in a different manner," Morgan says. Classes have ranged from how to make the best use of seasonal produce to preserving deer meat as a shelf-stable resource to



The Filling Station Featured in Our State Magazine in September

teaching dinner party etiquette to 4-H youth, who prepared and served a meal to county commissioners.

THE FILLING STATION HAS NEVER BEEN AT a loss for helpers. Based in a town with more than 200 residents, more than two-thirds that number of people committed to about 5,000 volunteer hours last year. Those eager to do more have access to the Leadership Jones academy's training, which nurtures cohorts of hometown heroes. A fourth class begins the six-week program this month, with participants likely to follow their peers in local leadership roles.

Belfort, who learned of The Filling Station during that fateful walk by the Trent River, completed the program last year. "I learned a lot about how governments and organizations work," she says. Belfort herself relied on The Filling Station for assistance when she lost her job, her car, and her mother within a four-month period during the pandemic. "It helped me to be less critical of agencies' limitations and focus on how we can all participate to help our community grow."

Tharesa Chadwick Lee likes to hear testimonies like that. Retired from a career of facilitating relationships between local governments and nonprofits, Lee returns to her hometown to deliver the course to new advocates. "Some people think rural counties can't achieve," she says, "but we can sit at the table and belong. People who chose to root here are making a difference."

Last spring, Reece Carter, now 14, became the program's youngest graduate. A food pantry volunteer and home-schooled student who works with his dad in a family-owned handyman business, Carter says that the training has inspired him to think long-term about ways he can serve his community. "I'm glad that they're not treating me like a kid," he says. "I feel like they are interested in my ideas, and they make me want to do more to help my town."

LERAY AND HER HUSBAND, JEREMY, SPENT 20 years after college living in Colorado.

FILL 'ER UP!

The Filling Station will hold its annual "A Perfect 10" fundraiser from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on October 19, rain or shine, at locations along 10 Mile Fork Road in Jones County. Highlights include hayrides, farm tours, and a chance to interact with animals; a yesteryear museum; arts and crafts; music and food trucks; and cow pie bingo. For \$10 tickets or to make a donation, visit fillingstation1075.com/jones-county-a-perfect-10-event

While they adored the mountain life, LeRay always knew she'd return to Jones County, where her grandfather had established a large family farm.

"I felt a heaviness on my heart to move back and give back," she says. "My granddaddy used to say, 'No matter where you go, Jones County is the greatest place.' It's part of me."

Currently, she's focused on getting more portable defibrillators for the fire trucks to compensate for the fact that the 473-square-mile county has just one ambulance. "It's another example of where we need to be empowering and equipping our neighbors to respond, and it's working," she says. "It's been awesome to watch people learn how to collaborate for the good of Jones County."

LeRay had intended to serve only briefly as The Filling Station's executive director, and then hand over the position to someone else. Ten years after joining the multi-church board that conceived the organization, she can't imagine doing anything else. The job, she says, "was the call of my life." **Og**

Jill Warren Lucas is a writer based in Raleigh.

THE FILLING STATION
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The Filling Station Board Member:

Hello! My name is Sheron Bender and I've lived in Pollocksville for about 43 years! I was born in Sanford, NC- in 1955! I spent the first 25 years of life- in the Piedmont (Burlington, Thomasville, Elon) as well as a few years in Boone NC- attending Appalachian State University. I started my career in Winston- Salem, teaching special needs high schoolers—before being swept off my feet by Jay Bender- and brought to Pollocksville! Jay and I have been married for 42 years, and have two adult children, Bryan and Becca, and one sweet grandson- Dixon!

I spent a few years teaching in Jones Co- before getting my Masters degree from ECU in Counseling- and spending about 25 years working in the Craven Co. Schools.

I retired from education after 32 years- and have worked part-time for Weight Watchers for the past 13 years! All of my professional years have been spent helping people- create the change they want to make to be successful! I love working with people of all ages!

I am a member of Pollocksville Presbyterian Church. I've taught Sunday School, been the Youth Leader, served on the Session, and been active with the Women of the Church.

I also serve on the Backpack Blessings Board that serves Craven, Jones and Pamli-



co- for about 13 years. I recently joined the local Rotary Club- which works to serve our town and County.

I've been involved with the Filling Station since the early "dreaming" days.... When it became a reality- I was there- sorting cans right after hurricane Florence—and have been there ever since. I enjoy serving in the Pantry- organizing and keeping things moving.

All the years I worked in education- I worked with lower income students. I know that kids can't learn if they're hungry. I know that parents can't rest if they don't know how their children will be fed. I LOVE TO FEED PEOPLE! This is what attracted me to the Filling Station. I love that our mission is feeding the stomachs, the minds, and the hearts of the people we serve! I'm honored to be serving on the Board of Directors.



News that's New



Board of Directors Meeting on September 15, 2024 - Great to have Meredith Edminster, New Executive Director for Atlantic Dance Theatre, visit our meeting and share appreciation for the partnership.



Thank you Rick Meyer, Coastal Photography Club, for donating your time and talent to take NEW headshots for the Board of Directors and On site leadership

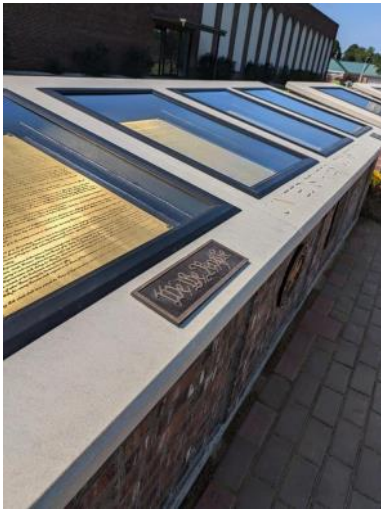


Thank you Miranda Moore, massage therapist, for donating her time to bless the volunteers with chair massages after serving at the Food Pantry.



National Weather Service held community forum to discuss Hurricane Preparedness. Great to have service partners at the meeting - Jones County Emergency Mgmt, New Bern Amateur Radio, Catholic Charities, Blue Cross Blue Shield
Left to right: Jeremy LeRay, Sissy Mills, Erik Heden, Mary Ann LeRay, Johnny Jernigan, Kitti Hardison, John Taylor

More News that's New



Jones County Charters of Freedom Dedication Ceremony
L to R: Mary Ann LeRay, Tharesa Lee, Caroline Wilson from
Congressman Greg Murphy's office



Great to have the Food Bank, Kathleen and Jowita, in the kitchen teaching how to cook butternut squash soup.



Thank you American Heart Association, Margaret Sharp, for a grant to help purchase equipment to record the cooking classes in the teaching kitchen. This tool will remove the barrier of transportation so more clients may access nutrition education. Thank you Jeremy LeRay, New Bern Webdesign, for your expertise in building the control center to support the teaching kitchen.

More News that's New



Thank you Angela Paige for your volunteer support at the Jones County Heritage Festival



Thank you Miss Heritage for stopping by our booth



Thank you Jennifer King for all you do for Jones County!



Thank you to the Banks Brothers Farm for your generous donation to the Perfect 10 Annual Fundraiser!



Great to have our church partners, Kinston Pentecostal Holiness, Cypress Creek Church and Pleasant Hill Church

Hooked on Seafood Class



Hooked on Seafood Class - How to Filet a Fish - Thank you Greg Bolton, NC Cooperative Extension/Carteret County for visiting and sharing your expertise.



Sarah Ware, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for NC Cooperative Extension, teaching a class "Hooked on Seafood" before hands on demo in the teaching kitchen. Thank you United Way for a grant to make these classes possible.



Hooked on Seafood Series - N.C. Cooperative Extension/Jones County



Leadership Jones Cohort 4



Theresa Lee welcoming Leadership Jones Cohort 4



Leadership Jones kicks off Cohort 4 on September 23, 2024 - Great to have Theresa Lee, Intentional Excellence, leading this program.



Leadership Jones - Breakout session - SCOT Analysis and why does it matter



Thank you Mayor Jay Bender for sharing with Leadership Jones - Cohort 4 and answering the question "what is the most important thing you have learned in 41 years as mayor?" Answer: Show up to everything you can and make connections that will serve you for a lifetime.



Thanks! Panera Bread (New Bern) & Backyard BBQ (Trenton) for catering lunch



Thanks!



Thank you to all the many volunteers who serve at the Food Pantry each week. You make a difference!



Thank you Christine Van-Dyke for donating and planting the beautiful flowers around the Little Free Library.



The Filling Station welcomed "Coastal Center for Hope and Healing", previously named "Coastal Women's Shelter" for a Candlelight Vigil on Oct 24, 2024. This was an evening of reflection and solidarity as individuals/families were honored who have experienced domestic violence. We are grateful to partner with this organization to fill unmet needs serving the residents of Jones County.

Thanks!



Thank you John and Brenda Hall who volunteered their time and talent to cook a beautiful meal for the Leadership Jones Luncheon "A Place at the Table".



Leadership Jones work session on understanding the importance of working from your values and strengths.



Willie Smith, Treasurer for The Filling Station, Charlie Dunn, County Commissioner, Jay Bender, Mayor of Pollocksville, Kyle Smith, Jones County Manager, and Schumata Brown, Town Manager of Maysville led an informative discussion on the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats as we work around the table in building a greater Jones County.



Thank you Theresa Lee, Intentional Excellence Consulting, for leading "Leadership Jones" program.



Thank you New Bern Amateur Radio Club and Pete Wene, Instructor, for bringing Ham Radio Education to Jones County.

We are hosting a full class this fall as participants are earning their license. We appreciate partnering with Jones County Emergency Management in delivering this valuable education and connection.



Perfect 10

Jones County - A Perfect 10 Event was held on Saturday, Oct 19th, 2024 along Ten Mile Fork Road. The weather was PERFECT for a farm tour which included live music, painting ceramics, museum of yesteryear, cow pie bingo with a hayride, ham radio demonstration, walking trails in the tree farm and shopping at Z.A.Ks. Thank you to Carolina East, Title Sponsor, and all the sponsors and volunteers in making this a success. We are still accepting donations toward our GOAL of \$60,000. We are only \$10,00 away from making that happen.



Above: Boy Scout working on his merit badge with the New Bern Amateur Radio Club Mobile Communications trailer



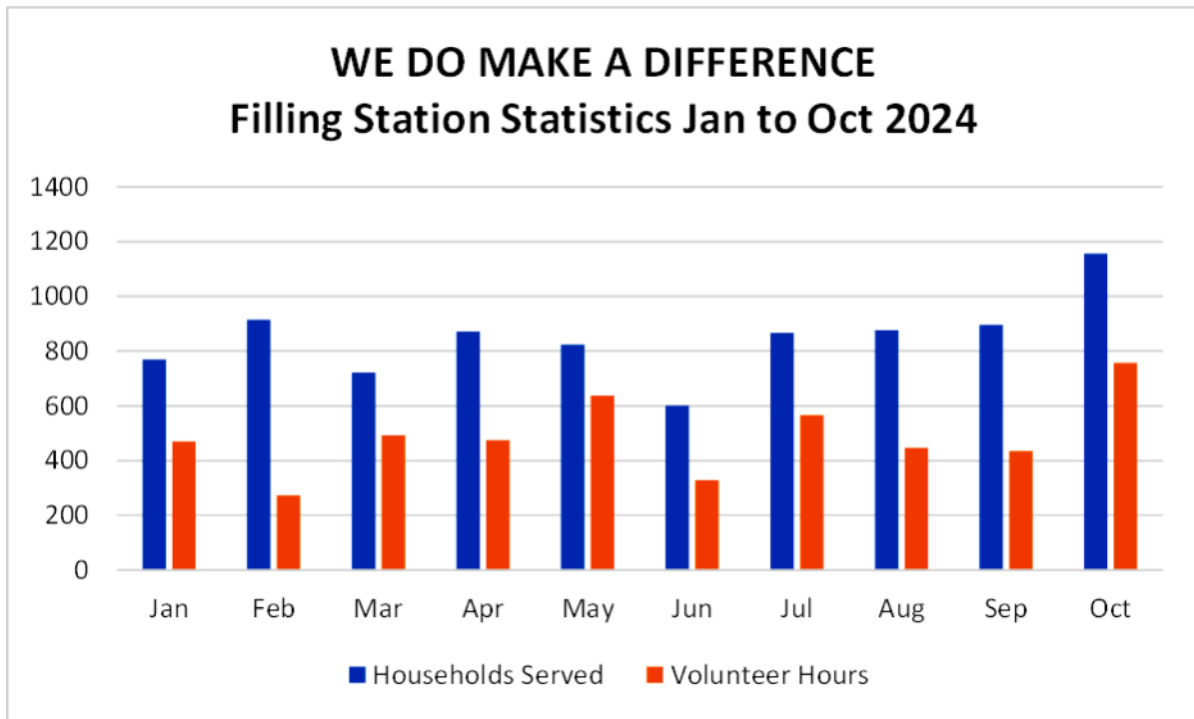
Bob Mattocks, Colby Jordan, and Carol Mattocks.. Colby provided BBQ sandwich lunch at Jenkins Farm.



Hay Ride a huge success!



Thank you Comfort Fire Department for cooking a hot dog lunch at the Bassler Farm.



June: Food Pantry closed last week due to camp.



Annual Board Training | New Bern Chamber of Commerce

— July 2024 —

Front row: Carol Mattocks, Board Advisor, Bobby Darden, Willie Smith, Mary Ann LeRay

Back Row Left: Greg Thornburg, John Taylor, Estelle Surles, Emily Andrews, Colby Jordan, Christopher Rogerson

Back Row Right: Kenneth Spivey, Michael Pretty, Charley Jones, Sheron Bender, Ella McDaniel, Ellis Banks

Board Members not pictured: Clyde Murphy, Jr., Beverly Collins



Nutrition · Education · Connection

Our mission is to assist with filling the unmet needs in the areas of nutrition, education and connection serving the residents of Jones County.

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Board Members

Chair: Bobby Darden

Vice-Chair: Clyde Murphy

Treas: Willie Smith

Secretary: Beverly Collins

Emily Andrews

Ellis Banks

Sheron Bender

Charley Jones

Colby Jordan

Ella McDaniel

Michael Pretty

Christopher Rogerson

Kenneth Spivey

Estelle Surles

John Taylor

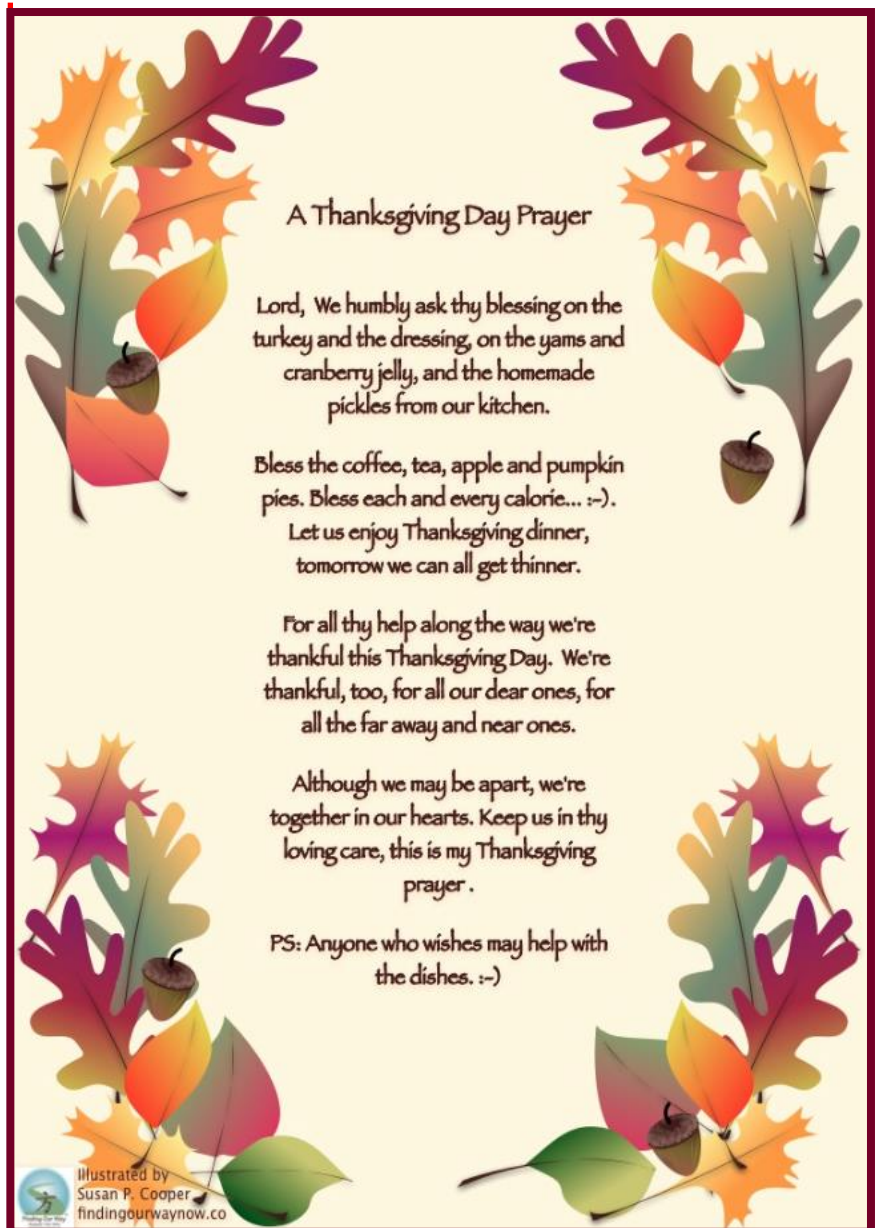
Greg Thornburg

Carol Mattocks, Board Advisor

Tharesa Lee, Consultant

Mary Ann LeRay, Ex. Dir.

Judy Hills, Editor



The Filling Station, a dream born out of a long vacant, propane company building, opened its doors on August 28, 2017. Why the Filling Station name? During a walk-through of the building, someone noticed a red hazardous material warning sign with a flame and the number 1075, the DOT classification for propane. The group discovered that Psalm 107:5 read: "They were hungry and thirsty; their lives were slipping away." A new mission was launched and it was called "The Filling Station" to refer to the building's prior use as well as to its new purpose. Our mission is to assist with filling unmet needs in the areas of Nutrition, Education, and Connection serving the residents of Jones County.