

TUNE IN TEXAS

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blazer, a blue and white checkered shirt, and light-colored trousers, stands on a city street. He is smiling and has his hands in his pockets. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and a red car.

MAGAZINE - SPRING 2025

BOB LILLY, JR.

BOB LILLY PROMOTIONS

A CEO'S JOURNEY LEADING
THE NEXT GENERATION OF IN-
NOVATION AND
PROMOTIONAL MARKETING

SONGS AND STARS CONCERT SERIES

SONGWRITER TREY CALLOWAY
BENEFIT CONCERT

INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

JUSTSERVE

PROVIDING SUPPORT
FOR TEXAS CHARITIES,
COMMUNITIES, AND
SCHOOLS



AUSTIN , TEXAS

EXCELLENCE IS THE
HEART OF HERITAGE

Title Insurance and Escrow Services in Texas to Clients Nationwide

HERITAGETITLEOFAUSTIN.COM | 512.505.5000



JOIN THE GIVING REVOLUTION

GIVE LIKE A BILLIONAIRE

jointheglow.com



TUNE IN TEXAS

MAGAZINE

contents

Cover Photo

Chris Kinsman

Cover Stories

08 | **Bob Lilly Promotions**

A CEO's journey leading the next generation of innovation and promotional marketing

22 | **Songs and Stars**

Songwriter Trey Calloway benefit concert

48 | **JustServe**

Bridging charities in Texas and across the world

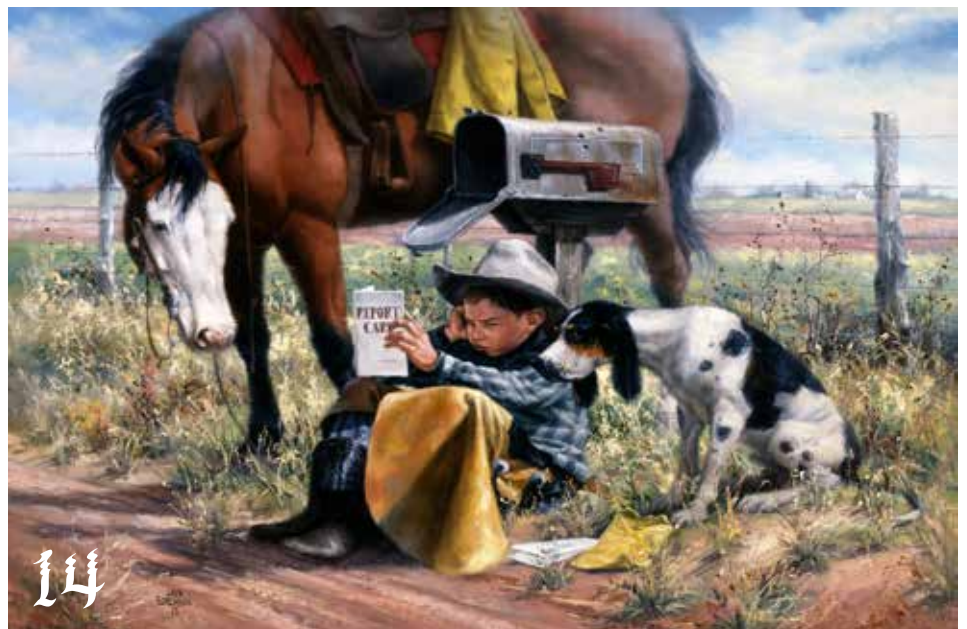
Charities

22 | **Songs and Stars**

Songwriter Trey Calloway benefit concert

38 | **Peak Performers**

Job opportunities for professionals with disabilities





42 | **SEARCH**

Houston homeless services helps alleviate homelessness

48 | **JustServe**

Bridging charities in Texas and across the world

56 | **Avondale House**

Helping families navigating severe to moderate autism

60 | **Houston ToolBank**

Lends tools to transform community projects.

Artists

14 | **Jack Sorenson**

Western artist who paints the soul of the Texas

28 | **Trey Calloway**

CMA Texas Songwriter of the Year

Philanthropists

08 | **Bob Lilly Promotions**

A CEOs journey leading the next generation of innovation and promotional marketing

32 | **Cody Johnson**

4X CEO Cody Johnson calls to action inclusion in the workplace.

52 | **Darren Skyles**

Houston attorney serving the community





Celeste LaRocca



Melissa Orsak



Joe Newman

TUNE IN TEXAS

MAGAZINE

Celeste LaRocca

Chief Editor
Publication Director
Advertising
celeste@tunetexasmagazine.com

Melissa Orsak

Publisher
Designer
Editorial Director
melissa@tuneintexasmagazine.com

Joe Newman

Copy Editor
newmanassociates7@gmail.com

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Copyright 2025 Tune In Texas Magazine. All rights reserved. Written permission from the publishing company is required to reproduce, copy, or reprint any part of the Tune In Texas Magazine (in whole or in part). Tune In Texas Magazine does not warrant or endorse any product, service, or company mentioned or referred to in Tune In Texas Magazine.

— a letter from the editor —

Spring and New Beginnings

Hello Texas,

Welcome to Tune In Texas Magazine- where empowering giving connects businesses and philanthropists across Texas. Spring is here, reminding us to renew ourselves with purpose and commitment to serve. Our magazine honors the extraordinary talents of acclaimed Texas songwriters, shares the inspiring journeys of philanthropists, and shines a spotlight on the charitable businesses that contribute to our charities and communities across our incredible state.

In partnership with various organizations, our dynamic team actively engages with media communities, influential social platforms, and visionary corporate leaders. Together, we cultivate a culture of generosity and community involvement. Each feature we publish goes beyond storytelling; it is a heartfelt celebration of individuals and organizations charting their own paths of purpose, highlighting the profound impact of giving back and the ripple effect it creates within their communities.

So, sit back, relax, and pour a glass of cheer as you immerse yourself in our unique magazine's exclusive, unforgettable adventures. Here, we tune in to how we can help Texas charities with aspirations and narratives that will inspire you along your own quest—whether you're a business leader, a charity supporter, or a devoted family member.

Today marks the beginning of a new chapter! Do you have a favorite charity? What charities in your community need help? Is there a philanthropist you would like to spotlight in Texas? We want to hear from you! Together, we can step up and show up for our community charities. Our charities need us, and we need them! Moving forward, for every advertisement purchased, we proudly gift a complimentary ad to a charity that can advertise their services, compliment their team, and share their needs with fellow Texans.

Advertising in our magazine provides numerous benefits, including networking opportunities, fostering long-term relationships with charitable organizations and their supporters, building credibility and trustworthiness for your brand, resonating with your customers by showing commitment to community involvement and support, reaching an audience that values philanthropy and social impact, and aligning with charitable causes that can enhance your brand's reputation and demonstrate corporate social responsibility.

Subscribe to our website at tuneintexasmagazine.com and be the first to know about our upcoming concert series and events with legendary Texas Songwriters. All ticket proceeds go towards a designated charity. So, "Tune in, Texas"; your story and advertisement matter. Together, we can make a lasting impact with our charitable organizations across Texas. Get your spring on, and cheers to your new beginnings!

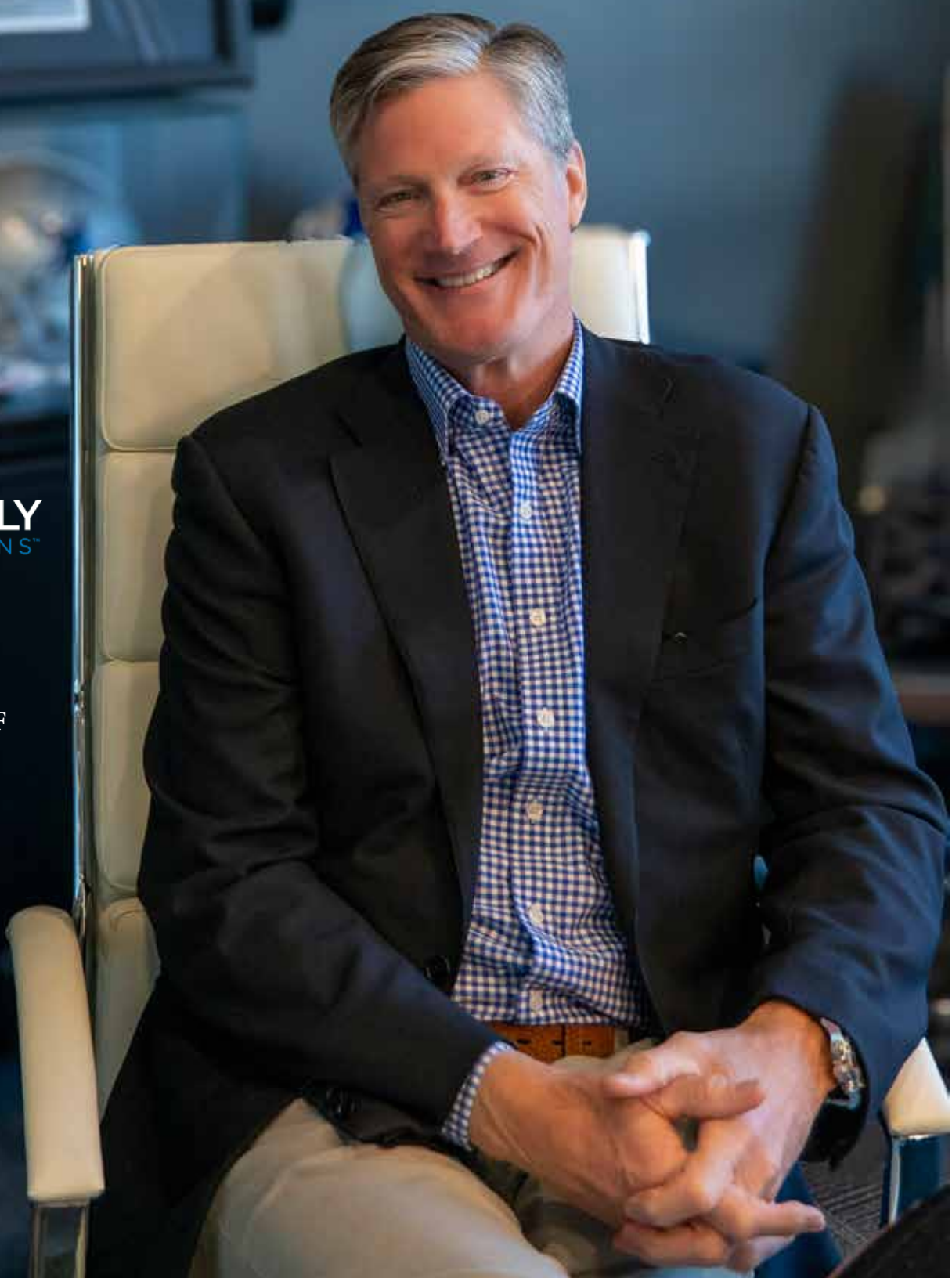
Love,

Celeste



BOB LILLY
PROMOTIONS™

**HEADLINES
THE NEXT
GENERATION OF
INNOVATION
AND
PROMOTIONAL
MARKETING**



Bob Lilly Promotions (BLP) stands as a beacon in the promotional marketing landscape, consistently redefining industry standards through innovative approaches. Amidst a sea of competition, what keeps them at the pinnacle of the market? The answer lies in the unwavering core values upheld by CEO Bob Lilly, Jr. and his remarkable team. In his own words, “For everyone at BLP, our values and integrity will always be more important than the bottom line. How we conduct our lives is the same philosophy we bring to every business transaction and every relationship we encounter through the process.”

At the heart of Bob Lilly Promotions is a steadfast commitment to fostering Trust, Leadership, Positive Attitude, Creativity, and Inspiration—elements that serve as the bedrock of their exemplary enterprise.

TRUST

From the very beginning, Lilly was privileged to grow up in an environment where trust was not merely spoken of but actively practiced and celebrated. His parents, Anne and Bob Lilly—whose legacy as a legendary 14-season NFL player earned him the affectionate moniker “Mr. Cowboy”—instilled in their children the values of unwavering dedication, integrity, and excellence. This familial foundation set an exceptionally high standard that resonated deeply with their four children.

Reflecting on his upbringing,

“FOR ANYONE LOOKING TO FOLLOW IN THEIR FAMILY'S FOOTSTEPS WHILE MAKING THEIR OWN MARK, MY ADVICE WOULD BE TO HONOR THE PAST BUT ALWAYS SEEK YOUR OWN PATH. USE THE LESSONS LEARNED TO GUIDE YOU BUT NEVER BE AFRAID TO INNOVATE AND ADAPT.”

Lilly shares, “I grew up in a family where sports and excellence were part of our daily life. My father, Bob Lilly, was a significant figure both on and off the field, and his dedication and integrity have deeply influenced my personal and professional life.” This upbringing cultivated in Lilly a genuine respect for the fundamental values that guide him.

According to Lilly, his parents were not just role models but pillars of perseverance and ethical conduct. He emphasizes, “In my business, I strive to uphold these values every day.” This commitment to integrity is reflected in how he leads his company; he actively fosters an atmosphere of transparency, authenticity, and reliability, both among team members and in relationships with clients. In a world where trust can often be elusive, Bob Lilly Promotions remains devoted to nurturing it at every level.

LEADERSHIP

When Bob Lilly Promotions was founded, Lilly reflected, “It was a modest operation, with just



a handful of employees. My career began in the promotional industry, driven by a passion for creative marketing and building meaningful connections.” Since its inception, Bob Lilly Promotions has emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of promotional advertising, proudly celebrating 25 years of remarkable success. Lilly shares, “Celebrating 25 years at BLP fills me with immense gratitude. It’s a testament to the hard work of our team and the strong relationships we’ve built with our clients and partners. It’s truly rewarding to see how far we’ve come and to know that the best is yet to come.”

Throughout its journey, the company has faced various challenges, but Lilly views these obstacles as golden opportunities for growth. He shared, “During Covid, our team remained open, servicing our clients and growing our business by double digits. We pivoted to PPE and customized kits, which helped our clients maintain their company cultures while their employees worked remotely. It was immensely gratifying to see our team come together and

perform at such a high level during what was an incredibly difficult time for all of us.”

Lilly’s ability to motivate and inspire his team during the pandemic was remarkable. His company not only weathered the storm but also thrived against the backdrop of complicated circumstances.

Beyond the corporate sphere, Lilly exemplifies leadership through active involvement in community service and support for local non-profits. “Bob Lilly Promotions is committed to giving back to the community. We support local non-profits, and I serve on the boards of several community organizations. This involvement is integral to our company ethos,” Lilly explains. His dedication highlights a strong sense of responsibility, illuminating the values of integrity and service that guide him and his company.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

If you haven’t had the pleasure of meeting Bob Lilly, Jr. or his remarkable team, I highly recommend traveling to Dallas, Texas, to experience their energy firsthand! Their positivity is truly infectious, filled with enthusiasm and warmth that encourage everyone to join in. Under Lilly’s dynamic leadership, Bob Lilly Promotions has established itself as a benchmark for optimism and ambition in the industry.

Lilly emphasizes the importance of a supportive team culture, stating, “I motivate my team by fostering an environment of open communication, recognition, and continuous learning. We set clear goals, celebrate our successes, and always keep the lines of dialogue open for feedback and new ideas.” This steadfast commitment to positivity and exceptional



**"FOR EVERYONE AT BLP,
OUR VALUES AND INTEGRITY
WILL ALWAYS BE MORE
IMPORTANT THAN THE
BOTTOM LINE. HOW WE
CONDUCT OUR LIVES IS
THE SAME PHILOSOPHY WE
BRING TO EVERY BUSINESS
TRANSACTION AND
EVERY RELATIONSHIP WE
ENCOUNTER THROUGH THE
PROCESS."**



leadership cultivates an atmosphere where team members feel valued, empowered, and brimming with hope. No wonder they have garnered numerous accolades, including a 10th Appearance on Best Places to Work and recognition as one of the 2022 World's Best Workplaces. Additionally, their reputation for excellence has earned them a coveted spot on the Inc. 5000 Award list, recognizing them as one of America's fastest-growing private companies.

This conscientious approach to nurturing positive relationships extends to their clients as well. Lilly's dedication to his clients is evident in the Loyalty Program, designed to cater to their needs. He dedicates his time to ensuring the best outcomes for them. The success stories of their clients, some of whom include giants like the NFL, Xfinity, American Airlines, TCU, American Heart Association, and Baylor Scott and White, serve as a testament to the caliber of



organizations they attract.

Their Loyalty Program encompasses a suite of exceptional services, including Personalized



Program Design, Cutting-Edge Technology, Full-Scale Execution, Innovative Incentives, Global Reach combined with a Local Touch, and comprehensive End-to-End Customer Support. One of their guiding mantras perfectly encapsulates their mission: “Bob Lilly Promotions - Where Loyalty Lives.” This ethos is not just a statement; it reflects their unwavering commitment to excellence and the genuine relationships they build with each client.



CREATIVITY

Bob Lilly Promotions thrives on a vibrant foundation of creative energy where imagination and innovation intertwine. The company cultivates a culture of curiosity, encouraging each employee to “push boundaries, challenge the status quo, and bring their unique ideas” to the collective vision. Their thoughtfully designed workspace is more than just an office; it is a dynamic environment that stimulates creative thinking and fosters collaborative problem-solving, empowering the team to devise novel solutions to their client’s most complex challenges.

Lilly emphasizes the importance of diverse ideas and perspectives in driving innovation, stating, “To stay innovative, I actively participate in industry workshops, keep abreast of market research, and foster a culture of creativity within



our team. This approach helps us anticipate trends and meet evolving client needs.”

The company boasts a wide array of innovative merchandise that cleverly embodies the essence of their clients’ brands. Lilly proudly notes, “We pride ourselves on offering unique products that are not only high-quality but also eco-friendly and innovative. For instance, we’ve introduced a line of customizable,

sustainable merchandise that has been incredibly well-received. Our idea is to create ‘Oh WOW!’ moments for our clients. There’s a lot of noise in the merchandise and marketing space, and the companies who get it right are very intentional about who they work with and what they want to achieve through merchandising their brand.”

INSPIRING

One’s ability to inspire others is intrinsically linked to their own capacity for inspiration. At Bob Lilly Promotions, this principle resonates deeply, manifesting both within the company and in their interactions with clients. The team is adept at transforming routine tasks into remarkable opportunities for personal and professional growth, fostering an environment where creativity thrives. They eagerly invite ideas and suggestions from everyone, employees and clients alike—utilizing this feedback to enhance their brand experience.

A shining example of their commitment to shared inspiration



is the innovative Brand Camp. Lilly elaborates, “Brand Camp was born from a desire to deepen engagement with our clients and introduce them to the forefront of promotional products. This event provides a unique opportunity for our clients and prospects to explore innovative products, learn about new decoration techniques, and discover the latest trends in the promotional merchandising industry.” Over the past seven years, Brand Camp has evolved into a cornerstone event for the company, consistently garnering enthusiastic feedback for its vital role in inspiring and educating attendees about the landscape of promotional products.



“Our clients often come to us looking for unique gift ideas. We facilitate brainstorming sessions and showcase a range of products at different price points, which helps them find the perfect items to represent their brand and delight their recipients. There are numerous new and innovative products available, so we focus on the process of helping our clients find the perfect solution for them”.

LOOKING AHEAD

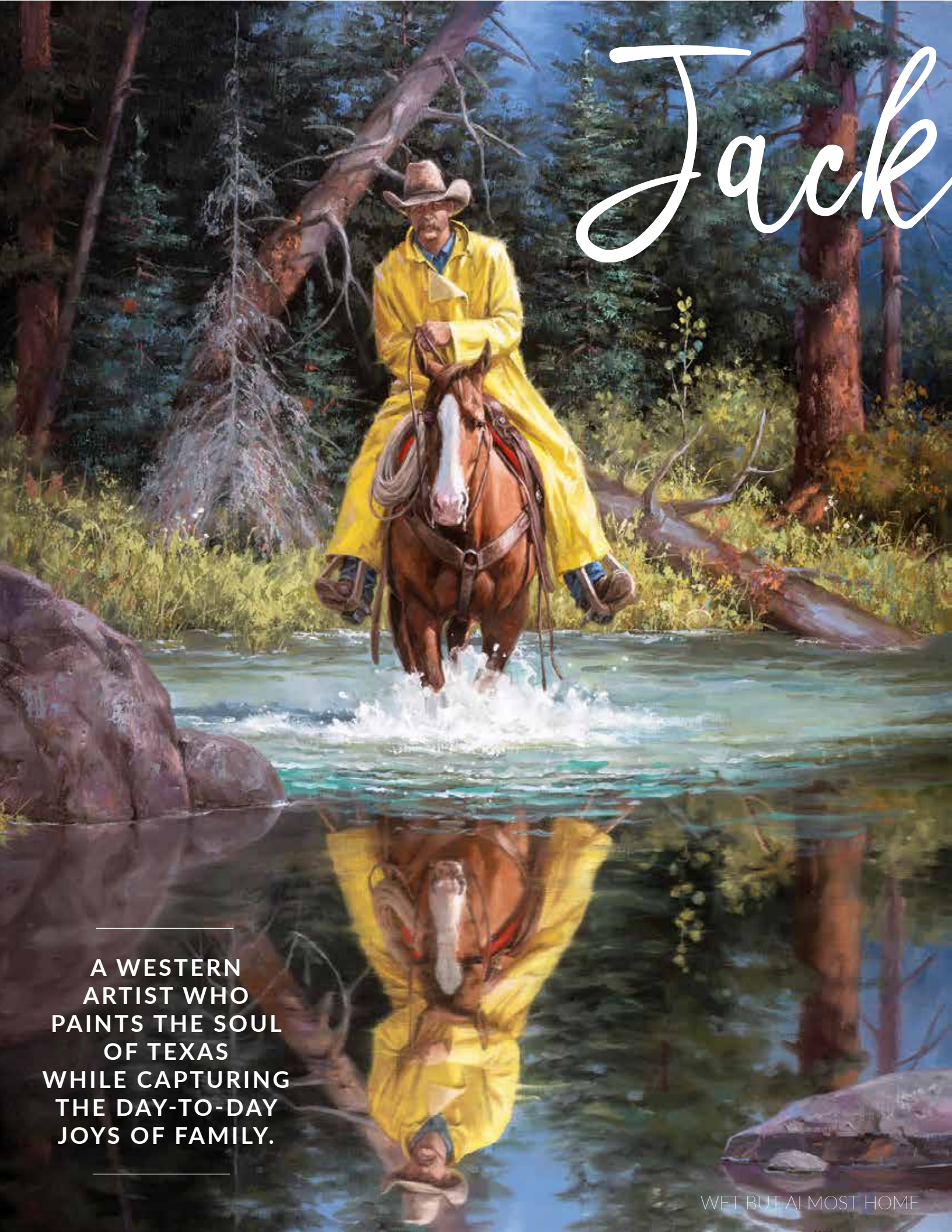
The future of Bob Lilly Promotions is poised for leading-edge promotional marketing innovation. In a recent conversation, Lilly shared exciting plans for the company: “Looking ahead, we plan to expand our digital presence and enhance our product line with even more innovative and sustainable options. Clients can look forward to a brand that not only responds to current trends but also anticipates future needs. We also plan to offer a collection of unique



event activation experiences, including onsite, custom-branded merchandise.”

Bob Lilly, Jr. exemplifies enduring success with a deep-rooted commitment to excellence while continually accelerating toward new heights in his business and philanthropic work. For organizations looking to elevate their branding initiatives, their website offers a treasure trove of next-generation products and services in their online store: <https://boblillypromo.com/>. You can also connect with them on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to stay updated on their latest offerings and innovations.



A detailed oil painting of a man in a bright yellow raincoat and a brown cowboy hat riding a brown horse through a shallow stream. The horse is splashing water, and the man is looking towards the viewer. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and green foliage. The scene is reflected in the calm water of the stream.

Jack

A WESTERN
ARTIST WHO
PAINTS THE SOUL
OF TEXAS
WHILE CAPTURING
THE DAY-TO-DAY
JOYS OF FAMILY.

WET BUT ALMOST HOME

Sorenson

ART FOR ALL

BY MELISSA ORSAK

Step into a vibrant world where the adventurous Wild West and family focus leap off the canvas, with an energy that makes your heart race and your spirit soar. This breathtaking realm is brought to life by the legendary Texas artist Jack Sorenson, whose timeless paintings embody the essence of exploration and the untamed beauty of the American frontier. Every brushstroke is infused with a sense of innocence and a longing for the rugged yet simple lifestyles and landscapes his art celebrates. His ability to create paintings that resonate with every heart is truly divine.



EARLY INSPIRATIONS

Born in 1954 in the heart of Amarillo, Texas, Sorenson's artistic journey began at an early age, deeply influenced by his surroundings. As a child, he found joy in the simple act of sketching his family dog, an energetic bundle of fur that never seemed to stay still long enough to be captured on paper. His mother recalls the amusing sight of young Jack, frustrated and determined, throwing his sketchbook when the dog wiggled away.

Sorenson's talent caught the attention of his first-grade teacher, who was astounded by his remarkable skills. She excitedly informed his mother that she believed Jack to be a prodigy, possessing a rare gift not seen among other children his age. Misunderstanding the praise, his mother, in her confusion, asked, "What did

he do now?" The teacher elaborated, explaining that she had never encountered a first grader capable of drawing with such finesse and detail. Fueled by this early recognition, Sorenson devoted countless hours to honing his craft, drawing from dawn until dusk. The flickering images on

a television screen hardly distracted him. For Sorenson, the call of the canvas was far more compelling.

Growing up immersed in the hard-working lifestyle of a cowboy, Sorenson's early years were shaped by the expansive landscapes of ranch life. His father, a seasoned trainer of cutting horses, held a more traditional view of his son, believing that pursuing art was a futile endeavor. He sought to prove this point, convinced



WHITE LIGHTNIN'

that artists could never carve out a sustainable livelihood, and one day permitted young Jack to display four paintings in a family friend's saddle shop. To everyone's astonishment, all the pieces sold on that very day with a request for more. Reflecting on the experience, Jack expressed, "It backfired on my dad, but here's what I believe: If God didn't want me to do this, he wouldn't have given me the talent and the drive to do it. So, I never thought about failure. I knew I'd be a success, and it's only because I knew it was a gift. I've had a wonderful career. It's been unbelievable."

While focusing on the brush, Sorenson had ample experiences to inspire his art. As a youth he spent time galloping across open pastures, breaking 96 horses in just five short years, donning the guise of a performance gunfighter, and wielding the reins of a stagecoach for six years at his family-run Wild West theme park, Six Gun City, nestled in Palo Duro Canyon.

Adventure seemed to be a constant companion in Sorenson's life. One unforgettable day, a stagecoach filled to the brim with eager passengers inadvertently ran over him. It began,

as fate would have it, with Six Gun City being short-staffed. That afternoon during a mock robbery, his older brother, tasked with exciting the audience, forgot to fire his pistol skyward. Instead, he aimed it straight at Sorenson's face. The unexpected discharge caused Sorenson to jump, spooking the mule pulling the stagecoach, which then ran over his leg. Remarkably, the sandy terrain cushioned the impact, allowing him to escape with no broken bones.

Near misses with disaster were a recurring theme in Sorenson's life. During a particularly treacherous day of horse breaking, he and a spirited steed tumbled over a steep hillside, plummeting a harrowing 40 feet, tragically resulting in the horse's demise. Sorenson often quips that when he enters heaven, he'll seek out his guardian angel to offer a grateful handshake, joking, "I made them work overtime!" His life is a testament to the thrill of adventure combined with the artistry he so passionately pursued, leaving an indelible mark on both his heart and his canvases.

GOALS ON THE HORIZON: CHILDHOOD AMBITIONS

In an area devoid of art galleries and museums, Sorenson found inspiration in the unfiltered beauty of his surroundings. Beyond simply capturing his daily adventures on canvas, he immersed himself in the world of art through the cherished Western Horseman magazines and Leanin' Tree catalogs that his parents had used



DASH FOR THE WAY STATION

and collected over the years. For hours on end, he would page through these issues, studying the vibrant illustrations and the distinctive styles of the artists featured within. With a burning passion in his heart, his dream blossomed: he



aspired to not only paint with enough skill to grace the cover of *Western Horseman* but also to create exquisite Christmas cards for Leanin' Tree.

Driven by this ambition, he meticulously compiled a list of 27 artists whose work inspired him deeply—artists he longed to learn from. Over the years, he took classes from 23 of them, dedicating himself to honing his craft. His perseverance bore fruit; to date, no one has had more covers than Sorenson published in *Western Horseman*. For 30 years, he has been an esteemed artist for Leanin' Tree, with more than 100 images licensed to the company. As he continued to grow as an artist, his aspirations expanded. He yearned to join the ranks of his artistic heroes and become a member of the prestigious Cowboy Artists of America (CAA), a dream he proudly accomplished in 2021.

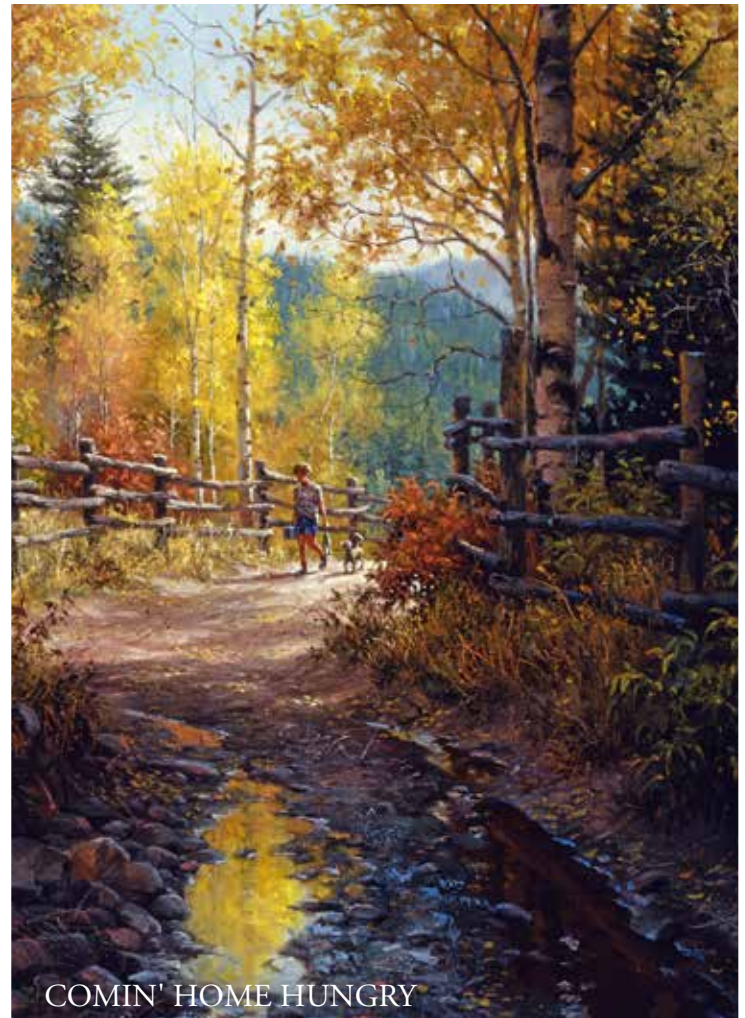
FAMILY LIFE

The love of his life, Jeanne, entered his world in a rather fortuitous manner when she decided to skip an English class with her friend to ride horses at the livery stable, where Sorenson

worked as a guide. On that fateful day, he felt an instinct that whispered he would one day marry her. After the girls left, he confided in a fellow cowboy about his feelings, only to be met with laughter. The cowboy, seasoned by experience, humorously informed him that Jeanne would never be interested in him.

Despite the odds, Sorenson was undeterred. After two years of unwavering determination, he and Jeanne tied the knot. Their early years were spent living in a rustic barn attached to his family's farm—a challenging setting. The relentless flies were a nuisance, and the lack of insulation made for extreme temperatures. Jeanne hails from an affluent family, and Sorenson took it upon himself to reassure her father, who was financially concerned. He promised that he would not pursue the less profitable and dangerous life of breaking horses. Ironically, he dedicated himself to the pursuit of becoming an artist.

Together, Sorenson and Jeanne cherished



COMIN' HOME HUNGRY

those formative years, nurturing their bond and creating a beautiful legacy with their five children. This year, they joyously celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, a testament to a lifetime of love, resilience, and shared artistic vision.

EMPOWERED BY COMMUNITY

The Sorenson family feels indebted to the countless acts of kindness and support they have received throughout their journey. Sorenson is profoundly grateful for the many individuals who have played a role in his life, with a special place in his heart reserved for his loving wife. A particularly fond memory that stands out to him involves his grandfather, who generously gifted him the 11 acres where he now resides.

When his grandfather entrusted him with the land, he lovingly directed Sorenson on where to build his future home, even taking the time to create a small pile of rocks to mark the exact



spot for a well. Unfortunately, it took Sorenson 38 years before they could afford to build on the land.

As he prepared to dig for water, the local well driller conveyed some alarming news—that, given the current trends in the area, finding water might be an uphill battle, with a hefty cost of \$17,000 for each borehole to determine the water supply. The worker had just completed drilling 13 holes on a neighboring plot. Sorenson realized that he could afford only one, maybe two, attempts to find water on his own property. Remembering his grandfather's well-placed wishes and the carefully marked spot, Sorenson chose to trust in that guiding memory. The outcome was nothing short of miraculous, as the drilling yielded an abundant supply of water—more than the surrounding area had seen in years.

In gratitude for the support he has received, Sorenson is devoted to giving back to his community and contributing to local charities. Each year, he generously donates a painting to his church, Saint Thomas. Additionally, he provides beautiful prints to Partners In Palo Duro, an organization dedicated to



THE HOMECOMING



protecting the stunning Palo Duro Canyon State Park. On average, the park sells one of Sorenson's prints daily, allowing the beauty of his work to benefit others. With a passion for nurturing creativity, he also enjoys inspiring the next generation by conducting workshops for local high school students and sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for art.

direct your eyes where I want you to look. The more you know, the more you know what you don't have to put in the painting."

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

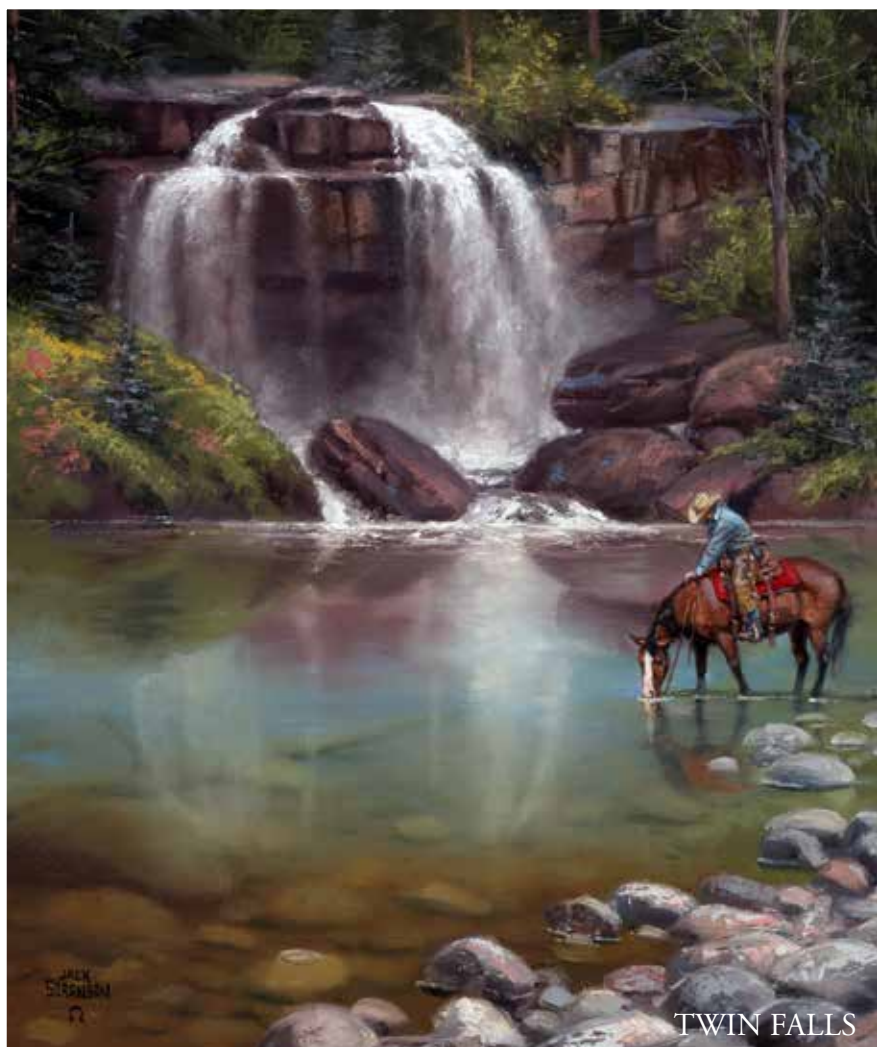
With each dynamic brushstroke, Sorenson brings to life vivid scenes of cowboys riding under an expansive boundless sky, children exploring the wonders of their world with wide-eyed innocence, and breathtaking landscapes that vividly capture the rugged beauty of the West. His paintings transcend mere artistry; they are immersive portals, rich with connection and infused with a passion for his land. To check out his art, visit his website at www.jacksorensonfineart.com, follow him on Instagram at [jacksorensonfineartactual](https://www.instagram.com/jacksorensonfineartactual), or discover his designs on pillows sold through Sweetwater Trading Company.

WISDOM FROM THE EASEL

Sorenson is a profoundly encouraging individual, dedicated to illuminating the talents of those around him. He inspires aspiring artists with his poignant words: "In the history of the world, there's never been anyone with your unique mind, your eyes, and your heart. So, show us how you see the world. Paint what touches you, what moves you." He possesses a faith-focused perspective on livelihood, expressing, "If you're working from your heart, you'll naturally make a living."

Sorenson generously shares his artistic wisdom with artists eager to enhance their skills, emphasizing the importance of drawing with a focus on negative space. By drawing attention to the shapes that surround the focal point, artists can shift their efforts from the intricate details of the main subject to the simplicity of the surrounding space, enabling a more accurate depiction of their vision.

Over the years, Sorenson has come to a revealing understanding: "The periphery of my paintings is never as finished as the focal point. I do that on purpose so I can



TWIN FALLS



DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION NEED VOLUNTEERS?

Learn more about JustServe or how your organization might benefit from partnering with us. We will invite the nearest JustServe volunteer specialist to contact you.

FREE SERVICE



For More Information justserve.org 

JUSTSERVE



TEXAS' BEST TASTING COCKTAILS & MOCKTAILS



BIGHATSPIRITS.COM

SONGS A

CONCERT SERIES

Stars twinkled like diamonds against the vast, cool canvas of the Texas sky, crafting an enchanting backdrop for all-aged concertgoers. Our guests savored their favorite beverages while indulging in an array of mouthwatering delicacies. The atmosphere buzzed with rich, melodic tunes performed by talented CMA Texas Songwriter of the Year Trey Calloway, joined by opening act Leo Mendoza.

"Songs and Stars: Harmony for Heroes," a heartfelt Veterans Day weekend benefit concert presented in the picturesque town of Dripping Springs, Texas at Creekwood music venue. The magical evening captivated everyone with entertainment and benefited Hill Country Rally for Kids, a cherished local charity dedicated to enriching the lives of countless children and families within the community.

The VIP reception hosted before the concert was a resounding success, featuring exquisite wines and an exclusive sneak preview of Calloway's latest song, Forgotten Man, a tribute honoring veterans.

We invite you to explore our photo concert gallery and sponsor thank you page, which highlights this magical night. Our upcoming "Songs and Stars" concert on April 5th will feature Texas icon and Texas Heritage Songwriter Hall of Famer Jack Ingram and songwriter for the Yellowstone Series, Garrett Bradford. Ticket proceeds from this benefit concert will be donated to MJ&M which was founded by football legend Mack Brown, ACM-Award Winning and Grammy-Nominated Jack Ingram, and Oscar-Award Winning actor Matthew McConaughey. You won't want to miss this spectacular event! Tickets are selling fast. Scan the QR code on our sponsor page to purchase your tickets today. To sponsor this children's benefit, contact us at celeste@tunetexasmagazine.com. Thank you for your support.

ND STARS

FEATURING
CMA SONGWRITER
OF THE YEAR

TREY CALLOWAY



Concert Gallery...





PHOTOGRAPHER: FREDDY CAMARGO



Thank You to our sponsors



UPCOMING SONGS AND STARS CONCERT SERIES

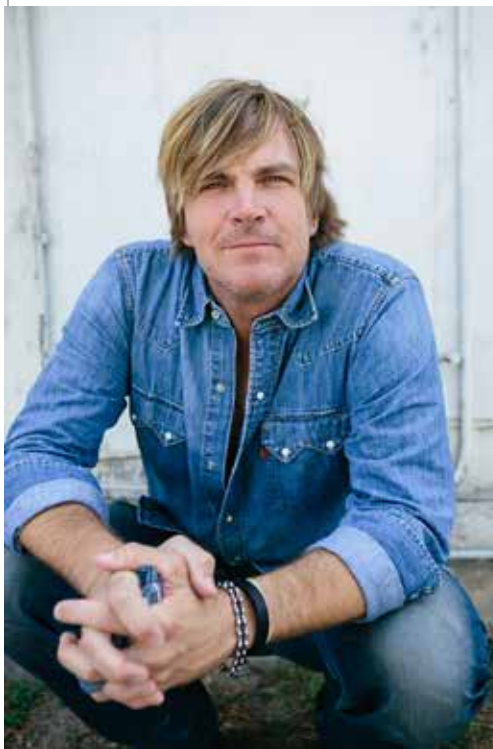
JACK INGRAM W/ GARRETT BRADFORD

Saturday, April 5th

VIP at 6:30 pm

General Admission at 7:30 pm

<https://www.creekwoodmusic.com/>



BY MELISSA ORSAK

A rush of exhilaration mingles with nervous anticipation as you step out of your car, greeted by the twinkling lights illuminating the iconic red carpet at Billy Bob's in Fort Worth, Texas. The atmosphere is electric, a pulsating blend of excitement and glamour that envelops you in its ritzy allure. This moment, a cherished aspiration for countless dreamers, transformed into a reality for Trey Calloway as he was honored with the 2023 Texas Country Music Association (TCMA) Country Songwriter of the Year Award for his heartfelt original composition "One Tough Job." He also received an Honorable Mention for his moving ballad "You Are." Calloway performed at this prestigious award show, opening doors to vast opportunities far beyond Texas, reaching all the way to the Carolinas and the vibrant heart of Nashville.

This triumph was merely the beginning of Calloway's accolades, as he garnered a nomination for TCMA Christian Songwriter of the Year in 2024, the very next year. The award-winning tracks "Horses In Heaven" and "Backroad Believer" are rich with soul and divine inspiration. Recently, Calloway seized the opportunity to appear on Fox 7's Good Day Austin, a moment that beautifully encapsulated his ascent as a rising star in the vibrant Texas music scene.

In 2024, Calloway traveled extensively across Texas during the spring, summer, and fall, gracing iconic venues nestled in Austin, Houston, and Dallas. The intimate setting of the Saxon Pub and the charming atmosphere of Dosey Doe became the perfect backdrops for his heartfelt performances.

While this country star revels in the thrill of entertaining crowds, there is a profound depth to his artistic mission. He shared, "I had an inspiring moment in 2024 when I played at Chief's Neon Steeple opening for McBride and the Ride. I played a full set of originals,

TCMA Songwr

Trey C





Artist of the Year

Calloway

and after my show, a biker approached and broke down, telling me how much “Horses In Heaven” meant to him because he had recently lost his father. Seeing this strong, tough, large-stature man so emotionally touched by one of my songs, that he sought me out to share how much it helped him, is an experience that reassured me that what I do has purpose and meaning beyond just fun entertainment.”

A few years ago, Calloway was fortunate to perform in Italy, a journey he fondly describes as the “coolest” location he has ever played. During his memorable trip, he found himself in a quaint restaurant in Florence, completely guitar-less, when he spotted a beautifully aged ~100-year-old guitar elegantly displayed on the wall. Driven by intrigue and a yearning to play, he mustered the courage to inquire about the instrument. The owner, a fellow music enthusiast, removed the guitar from its resting place and handed it to Calloway. He vividly recalls, “At first, I was hesitant because the guitar was the owner’s family heirloom, and many restaurant patrons didn’t speak English. I had to think pretty hard about what to play that people would enjoy. It ended up being so much fun. The patrons and workers were engaged while clapping and singing along. “Country Roads Take Me Home” was a big hit, reinforcing what I already know to be true, that music is a universal language.”

One of Calloway’s most admirable talents is his heartfelt ability to forge connections with people from all walks of life, easily finding common ground with everyone he meets. He passionately expresses, “I try to give back whenever I can, and I believe I’m blessed to be able to help others through my music. I have three groups that are near to my heart, and those are kids, military, and first responders.” In the past year, he has found immense joy in actively participating in various charitable events, including the Hill Country Rally for Kids in Dripping Springs, the festive Christmas 4 Kids Bus Show in Nashville, Vet Fest Carolinas—a heartfelt benefit for Folds of Honor—and Project K-9 Hero’s Performers



Although Calloway currently doesn't have any official sponsors, he remains eager to discover products and brands that resonate with his values and aspirations.

As a child, Calloway was fortunate enough to witness the captivating performance of Charlie Daniels at the Grand Ole Opry, an experience that left a lasting impression on him. He fondly recalls a pivotal moment that sparked a lifelong goal: "I ran to the gift shop to get batteries for my mom's digital camera, and when I opened them in the hall, they spilled and rolled to the elevator. As I scrambled to gather them, the elevator opened, and when I looked up, there was legendary Opry announcer Eddie Stubbs. Without thinking, I blurted out my question, 'How does it feel to be on that stage?' I'll never forget his response: 'There's no better feeling in the world.' I told him I was gonna be there someday, and I've been inspired ever since to make that dream come true." Calloway is passionately pursuing his lifetime dream to perform at the Grand Ole Opry. He continues to succeed as he mesmerizes his audience as a performer, passionately sharing his music with the world.

for Paws. His song, "Forgotten Man," released on Memorial Day 2024, is a salute to those who bravely sacrifice for others and our way of life.

Calloway's team plays an invaluable role in crafting these beautiful experiences, bringing his visions to life. He feels incredibly fortunate to have a supportive family and a remarkable manager, Dominick Sotis, who works tirelessly to elevate his career. Reflecting on their partnership, Calloway shares, "The best part about working with an agent/manager is having someone nearby who I know is always in my corner. Helping with the business side of things and calendars and scheduling is great, but for me, it's the relationship I enjoy the most with someone who's always there to pick me up and believe in me."

Calloway is releasing new songs in early 2025. The first is a heartfelt Valentine's anthem titled

"Your Love Is Safe With Me". The second is a unique storytelling song called "The Ballad of Righteous and Wrong" that narrates the poignant tale of two twin brothers. This song will be accompanied by a stunning video showcasing meticulously crafted illustrations by a remarkably talented artist—who just happens to be a twin himself. He can hardly contain his enthusiasm for fans to experience both the touching narrative and the visually enchanting collaboration between musician and artist.

As his creative journey unfolds, he



is also hard at work in the studio alongside esteemed producer Brandon Hood. Together, they are set to create six new tracks in addition to the three already completed songs, showcasing his artistic growth and versatility. Notably, he is thrilled about this upcoming EP, as it will feature songs penned by other talented songwriters for the first time. Fans can eagerly anticipate at least nine fresh tracks this coming year!

To date, Calloway has released an impressive fifty original songs across various music streaming platforms, including Spotify, iTunes/Apple Music, and YouTube. Check out all his original music,

especially early titles like his debut album “Carolina Man,” as well as emotionally resonant songs like “Heal This Family” and lively “Karaoke Cowboy.” His sophomore album “Wanted Man,” released in September 2024, has garnered significant attention, accumulating nearly 1.5 million streams.

With each step forward, Calloway continues to carve out a space for himself in the vibrant world of country music, leaving a lasting impact with his authentic sound and passionate lyrics. Calloway’s heartfelt artistry inspires those around him to connect with family, faith, and music.



**“THE BEST THING
ABOUT WINNING THE
TCMA AWARDS IS THE
GREAT PEOPLE I HAVE
MET IN TEXAS WHO
HAVE SUPPORTED
ME AND MY MUSIC
THROUGHOUT THIS
PAST YEAR.”**



Radical Inclusiveness

4X CEO Cody Johnson calls to action inclusion in the workplace.



Would you ever choose to take the harder road in life? What if you realized that you would find your mission on that difficult path? Would you still choose that path? That is one thing that places Cody Johnson at the top of his game. Not only is Johnson CEO of SCS Technologies, but he is also heavily involved in philanthropic efforts to serve the special needs community and promote inclusivity, especially for that community. When others opt for simplicity or comfort, he sees the bigger picture and strives for what is best.

A Commitment to Inclusivity and Philanthropy

Starting as a standout Academic All-American football athlete at Stephen F. Austin State University, Johnson later went on to earn a law

degree from the University of Houston. Johnson recently earned a Certificate in Management Excellence from Harvard Business School Executive Education. As the first generation in his family to attend college, he passionately shared, “I have been blessed with the opportunity to live my best life, and I want to facilitate that for as many people as possible. The inclusiveness of having a chance to participate in society, a chance for advancement, to fulfill whatever your best life is, and giving others the opportunity to do that is my purpose.”

Growing up in a community that was desegregated later than the rest of the country, Johnson reflected, “I grew up thinking about and witnessing what inclusion versus exclusion looks like. We are going through difficult times as a society right now because we are transitioning from a society that 50 years ago really valued exclusivity to a society today and in the future that embraces inclusivity.”

Johnson is deeply immersed in advocating for the intellectually disabled community, one of the many groups that promote and work for inclusivity. His dedication to this cause stems from his wife, whom he met at Stephen F. Austin State University while she was earning a degree to become a special education teacher. Through her advocacy, she introduced him to the special needs community. Reflecting on his wife's impact on his life, Johnson shared, “I didn't have a philanthropic bone in my body until I met my wife. She gets all the credit. There's hope for everybody!” While Johnson and his soon-to-be wife were engaged, she told him, “‘Someone has to have these special needs children.’ I told God that if he wanted to send one of them to us, we would be good parents,” Johnson stated, “It was important to her, and I learned that from her.”

A few years later, they were pregnant with their first child, Noah. Their beautiful baby boy was born with

CHARGE Syndrome, a rare syndrome caused by a genetic disorder resulting in heart defects, blindness, deafness, and other developmental challenges. Noah, now 25 years old, has autism and is legally blind and deaf but participates fully in his family and community. Two years after Noah was born, his little sister Joan arrived. Johnson cherishes both of his children and considers them his best friends, along with his wife.

Johnson explained, “My experience as a first-generation college student at Stephen F. Austin State University, having a son born with both physical and intellectual disabilities, and taking that path together as a family is what got me involved with philanthropy.”

Special Olympics: A Platform for Empowerment

Johnson passionately engages with the special needs community, particularly in advocating for the underprivileged. Since 2020, Johnson has been voluntarily serving as an advisory board member for the Special Olympics East and West Regions and as Chairman of the Advisory Board for three of those years. Johnson said, “My constituents live in El Paso and in Beaumont; my regions cover two different time zones.”

Special Olympics is committed to empowering individuals facing physical and intellectual





challenges by enhancing health, instilling confidence, and inspiring a sense of competition. A unique benefit provided to athletes by Special Olympics is health insurance. They recognize the challenges faced by those with disabilities, who often struggle to secure full-time employment and health insurance. AJ Winters, Executive Director-East Region Special Olympics, shared, “We offer health screenings and referral care free of cost through certified Healthy Athlete clinicians [and] generous doctors and professionals in the field that donate their time to our athletes at events.”

Last fall, Johnson hosted Special Olympics Texas’ 2nd Annual Gulf Coast Area Golf Tournament at the South Shore Harbour Country Club in League City on October 21st. This event was open to the public and provided a wonderful opportunity to serve those with special needs and meet the incredible staff who have played

a pivotal role in positively transforming the Johnson’s lives.

Another Special Olympics program highly lauded by Johnson is Unified Play, a remarkable initiative that brings together Special Olympics athletes with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. This program serves a vital role in promoting social inclusion, combating bullying and discrimination, and dispelling misconceptions about individuals with intellectual disabilities.

“It’s all about inclusion. One of my favorite baseball caps reads, ‘Radically Inclusive’- That’s what the Special Olympics is really about. It’s being radically inclusive. Unified play is so important to both the disabled and nondisabled athletes. This really strikes home to me because I have seen it with my son. Using our Unified Play program and matching disabled and nondisabled pull people together, there’s no doubt that

disabled athletes [benefit], but I guarantee you that the nondisabled get more. They come away as more centered and more empathetic, more kind, and more in touch with what really matters,” Johnson said.

Those with disabilities have a positively indelible impact on others. Johnson and his family reside in the pedestrian-friendly museum district near Houston’s Hermann Park, where they regularly bike. When Noah fell ill and had to be hospitalized over Thanksgiving last year, the community eagerly lined up outside Noah’s hospital room in an overwhelming outpouring of support. People in the park and the Texas Medical Center, familiar with Noah’s “Noah” bike license plate, had grown accustomed to seeing him cycle around the community on his adult tricycle. They were quick to offer their well wishes upon learning of Noah’s hospitalization. Their heartfelt words revealed that witnessing Noah’s exuberance and the unwavering love of his family brought light and positivity into their own lives, offering them a fresh perspective on their daily challenges.

Johnson also serves as an advisory board member for the Rotary Lombardi Award, the proceeds of which benefit pediatric oncology research. Each year, Johnson graciously hosts football players and their families, bringing them to visit Texas Children’s Hospital and MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital to bring joy to young patients. Johnson shares, “I look forward to that every year. It means a lot to us to help with the research, help fund, and to [help] patients have a day in their life where they get to be kids and football fans.”

He is also actively involved as a member of the STEM Advisory Board at Stephen F. Austin State University. Prior to this role, Johnson had the honor of being on the President’s Advisory Board from 2019 to 2021. As a board member, Johnson aims to train and educate more people in east Texas about energy and energy transformation. He passionately strives to give others the same opportunities and resources he received as a first-generation college student. Kimberly M Childs, Dean and Professor at Stephen F. Austin State University, shared, “Cody Johnson is one



“I ASSESS TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR MY JOB, BUT DURING CODY’S TENURE, I’VE BEEN ABLE TO SEE WHAT TRUE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE FROM THE INSIDE.”

-JEN SUDDUTH, MANAGING PARTNER AND FOUNDER, SUDDUTH SEARCH

of the most dynamic, prolific businessmen/entrepreneurs I have ever met! As a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council, Cody is forward-thinking and visionary, having the unique ability to engage others in productive dialog, leading to new ideas and opportunities in support of all things STEM. As an SFA alum, he cares deeply about his alma mater and represents the SFA Lumberjack community in a powerful way. I am grateful for his insight and his friendship!”

While his impactful philanthropic endeavors

are extensive, they only scratch the surface of his significant contributions to the world. The four-time CEO- specializes in leading middle-market private equity-backed companies towards and through their second liquidity event. Currently, he serves as CEO of SCS Technologies, LLC. This company designs, builds, and services fugitive gas recovery, measurement, and custody transfer equipment for the world's largest energy companies.

Johnson's expertise is sought after by fellow CEOs, business owners, and professional organizations, who often invite him to speak at industry events. He passionately espouses the belief that "Your philanthropic activities are one of the most [accurate] barometers of your culture to all of your stakeholder groups, including your customers, employees, and shareholders."

"A company's efforts to serve the community profoundly impact the local area and the

company itself and the caliber of employees it attracts. Johnson stresses the importance of attracting the right employees, stating, "I firmly

believe that we have the access to employees at SCS Technologies that we would not have but for our philanthropic and community involvement. We have employees that have come to us from Fortune-100 companies, and they want to come work for SCS Technologies because what we're doing speaks to them, and they want a full sense of purpose."

"The whole point of culture is it should attract the right stakeholders and repel the wrong ones. It should attract communities, customers,

vendors, shareholders, employees, bankers...you name it. It's a lot easier to talk about attracting than repelling. As true leaders in society, we must not be afraid to repel stakeholders who are not a good fit. In the end, this saves everyone a lot of time, talent, and treasure."

"CODY IS A CHANGE MAKER; HE PRODS, PUSHES, AND STAYS ONE STEP AHEAD UNTIL THE CHANGE IS MADE, AND THE WHOLE TIME YOU ARE WORKING TOGETHER, HE'S MAKING YOU LAUGH AND TELLING YOU RIDICULOUS STORIES THAT YOU CAN'T BELIEVE ARE TRUE (BUT THEY ARE!). HE'S ALSO A VISIONARY, ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD, DETERMINING THE NEXT GOAL."

-Jen Sudduth, Managing Partner and Founder, Sudduth Search

Environmental Stewardship and Corporate Responsibility

Inspired by BOMBAS, a company renowned for donating a pair of socks to the homeless for each pair sold, Johnson has made a commitment to incorporate generosity into SCS. Johnson shares, "As part of our ESG initiatives, we plant 100 trees for every product we sell. We provide equipment that is part of the value chain of clean molecule-based energy delivery. We think planting trees to make communities more beautiful, cooler, and experience better air quality is in alignment with our product purpose



and mission.”

In addition, SCS proudly stands as one of the pioneering 60 companies worldwide to pledge its commitment to 1t.org, a division of the World Economic Forum dedicated to advancing the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The ambitious mission of 1t.org is to plant 1 trillion trees by 2030, aiming to bolster biodiversity and safeguard our planet's future. Demonstrating its dedication, SCS has vowed to donate 1 million trees by the target year. Embracing every occasion, from holidays to employees' anniversaries, SCS seizes every chance to contribute to this noble cause.

Moreover, as part of its tree-planting endeavors, SCS supports urban reforestation efforts with an emphasis on social justice. In a recent initiative, SCS generously donated 1,100 trees to residents in Galena Park, situated east of Houston that has been materially affected by emissions from nearby petrochemical plants. The community

response was evident, with an impressive two-mile-long line of people forming at seven in the morning on distribution day to receive ten trees per vehicle. The community involvement was palpable evidence of the enthusiasm and appreciation the community felt for SCS's impactful contributions.

Urging leaders to be visible and vocal rather than leading anonymously, Johnson believes that leading from the shadows diminishes one's ability to attract and inspire others to follow. His message is clear: Let your light shine so that others will be drawn to you and what you stand for. Additionally, find your passion in service opportunities that make a difference in your community. Johnson partners with his team at home, work, and in the community to share his light with the world around him. Johnson's mindset is not driven by fear or uncertainty but by a firm belief in a bright and promising future.



BANKING YOU CAN COUNT ON

MIDLAND | ODESSA | LUBBOCK | STANTON | DFW
CNBTX.BANK | (432) 262-1600

MEMBER FDIC



Inclusion

Peak Performers

*“Championing
opportunities for
professionals with
disabilities.”*



by Melissa Orsak

Finding ideal and highly qualified employees to join your company can often present significant financial and logistical challenges. On the other hand, for individuals facing physical, emotional, or mental hurdles, the search for fulfilling employment opportunities can seem insurmountable. This is where Peak Performers steps in. As a bridge between employers and qualified professionals with disabilities, the company aims to create successful outcomes for companies and those Peak Performers are helping find work. Peak Performers firmly believes that “a diverse workforce is a stronger workforce.”

Established in 1994 and headquartered in Austin, Texas, Peak Performers has made significant strides, expanding its reach across the nation. Since its inception, the company has facilitated over 32,378 jobs, resulting in more than \$250 million in wages and benefits paid.

Erich Butler, a Disability Inclusion Partner at Peak Performers shared, “We’re committed to helping you navigate the dynamic talent market. We prioritize inclusive hiring, specifically focusing on professionals with disabilities. Our services range from temporary staffing and recruitment process outsourcing to direct hiring for specialized and executive roles. We recruit temporary, contract-to-hire, direct-hire administrative, finance, information technology, and executive-level jobs.”

Peak Performers also helps reduce the expensive costs of hiring. They shared, “According to The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the average cost per hire is around 4,700 USD.”

According to criteria set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabilities are broadly defined. Peak Performers further explains a disability as “an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. A disability may affect you physically, mentally, or emotionally.” Examples of disabilities include ADD/ADHD, Addiction, AIDS/HIV, Amputee, Anxiety Disorders, Arthritis, Asthma, Crohn’s Disease, Heart Disease, Diabetes, Back/Spinal Injury, Insomnia, Phobias, Paralysis, Sleep Apnea, Varicose Veins, and many more.

Peak Performers shares, “The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates more than 1 in every 4 American adults has a diagnosed disability. And

yet, studies show that less than 4% disclose their disability to their employer. People with disabilities experience unemployment at a rate 2x the national figure--and this isn’t even counting those who are underemployed, settling for less out of fear of being unemployed.”

The statistics clearly show that many companies unknowingly hire employees with disabilities. However, a better understanding of an employee’s background or needs can help tremendously. Peak Performers states, “We have the expertise to connect you with qualified candidates with disabilities who can bring unique perspectives and valuable skills to your team.” While a disability does not solely define an employee, it is, in part, what makes them incredible: creating depth, understanding, character, extra skill sets, and more. It is an important foundational base every company needs to funnel into its unique superpower.

“AT PEAK PERFORMERS, WE BELIEVE THAT INCLUSION IS MORE THAN A GOAL—IT’S A SOCIETAL IMPERATIVE. BY CHAMPIONING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONALS WITH DISABILITIES, WE CREATE WORKPLACES THAT REFLECT THE FULL SPECTRUM OF TALENT AND POTENTIAL IN ALL PEOPLE. TOGETHER WITH ADVOCATES LIKE CODY [JOHNSON], WE ARE BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE INCLUSION IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO.”

-BREE SARLATI, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF PEAK PERFORMERS



Embracing disability-inclusive hiring ensures open and honest communication, leading to the best matches for both employers and candidates. By adopting this approach, companies create an environment where employees can thrive and provide exceptional service to their clients.

Peak Performers advocates for those who have yet to realize their potential. They share, “Imagine being screened into a hiring process because of your disability--not screened out. Imagine working with a supervisor who has extensive experience with disability accommodations. Imagine having confidential conversations about your disability-related needs, without fear of anyone treating you differently. Imagine being empowered to thrive at work in ways you never thought possible.”

Butler and his dedicated team are deeply immersed in the local community, actively networking with both job seekers and employers. Their outreach efforts extend across private and state sectors, as they strive to identify and promote well-suited candidates for various employment opportunities. Furthermore, they prioritize forging impactful partnerships with businesses in search of talented individuals, with notable collaborations including UT Austin and the VA Clinic.

According to Executive Director Shannon

40 Spring 2025

"WE RECOGNIZE THAT DISABILITY CAN OFTEN HAVE OVERT OR SUBTLE IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT. MANY PEOPLE THAT WE WORK WITH HAVE BEEN MANAGING THEIR DISABILITY FOR DECADES AND ARE TERRIFIED TO EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE IT. THAT SAID, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE AN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DOUBLE THAT OF THE NATIONAL AVERAGE, AND IT MAY IMPACT THEIR GETTING A JOB, KEEPING A JOB, OR EVEN GETTING PROMOTED WITHIN THEIR CURRENT ROLE. PEAK PERFORMERS SEEKS TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD BY HELPING JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES FIND JOBS AND SIMULTANEOUSLY HELPING COMPANIES FIND GREAT TALENT."

-MYLES WALLACE,
DISABILITY INCLUSION PARTNER

Mantrom at Launch Pad Job Club and a Peak Performers partner, “Peak Performers has helped countless members of Launch Pad Job Club in landing either contract or permanent employment. Our members tend towards the “fine wine vintage” (being mid-late-career professionals), and while most may not have visible disabilities, age and time do take their toll “blessing” us with non-visible ailments like diabetes, sleep apnea, dimmed eyesight, etc. As a job club we are,



lunelntexasMagazine.com

therefore, so very grateful there is a staffing company here in Austin whose mission is to assist those who other staffing companies or Corporate America might disregard. We fully stand behind Peak Performers, just as they have stood behind Launch Pad Job Club.”

One of Butler’s particularly impactful success stories involves a candidate they encountered at a job fair. This individual, who grappled with severe PTSD, faced significant challenges in communicating with his case worker. During a moment alone with Butler, the candidate found the courage to share his experiences for the first time, ultimately resulting in his successful placement in a managerial position with the state. Years later, he continues to thrive in this role, occasionally returning to Peak Performers to say hello.

Butler has found his time at Peak Performers to be an incredible journey, allowing him to excel in work he’s passionate about. At Peak Performers, exceptional benefits are offered, and the company actively seeks new talent. Butler emphasizes, “We take care of our candidates and make it as full-time as possible. As a staffing agency, we offer medical, dental, and vision and a chance to put [money] in a 403 (b). They get free access to talk to lawyers and six free counseling services throughout the year [for the employee or anyone in the household].”



you're seeking a job opportunity or looking to hire exceptional talent, consider joining the Peak Performers community. Stay updated by following Peak Performers and Erich Butler on LinkedIn.



Instead of shying away from disabilities, Peak Performers believes in allowing them to empower us to take bold steps forward into the workforce and leave a unique mark. Our nation will flourish as individuals and families thrive and companies benefit from diversity and inclusion. Whether

"AS LEADERS COMMITTED TO ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, MR. [CODY] JOHNSON AND I SHARE DEEP OVERLAPPING VALUES. HIS PASSION FOR SUPPORTING SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES REMINDS US OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING SPACES WHERE EVERYONE'S ABILITIES ARE CELEBRATED."

**-BREE SARLATI, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF
PEAK PERFORMERS**

It Takes a Village to **Bring Us Home**

SEARCH Homeless Services CEO Alexis Loving and local community efforts have played a pivotal role in reducing Houston's homeless population by an impressive 61% since 2011.



By Melissa Orsak

Homelessness is a devastating issue that profoundly impacts countless individuals and families across our nation, leaving deep scars on those caught in its unyielding grip. The harsh realities of living without stable shelter create not only physical vulnerabilities but also emotional and psychological challenges that can be overwhelming. As we endeavor to cultivate a more compassionate and equitable society, it is crucial to acknowledge the transformative power of collaboration. The age-old proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," symbolizes the importance of community and collective responsibility in nurturing and supporting each other. This wisdom underlines that seeking help and offering assistance are not merely acts of kindness but essential components of fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

Alexis Loving, the President and CEO of SEARCH Homeless Services, and her dedicated team embody these principles by uniting the Houston community to provide essential resources and compassionate support to individuals and families facing homelessness. Their innovative programs and outreach initiatives provide a lifeline for those in need, helping them not only to navigate the challenges of homelessness but also to reclaim their dignity and rebuild their lives. Through collaboration and empathy, Alexis and her team strive to create lasting changes, transforming lives and fostering hope within the community.

Loving, a first-generation college student, dreamed of attending college in the bustling metropolis of New York at New York University. Her aspirations were driven by what she wanted

to study and where she longed to be. After a semester of college, she realized that her chosen field of study held greater significance than her location, prompting her to transfer to Northeastern University, where she pursued a degree in Criminal Justice and Human Services, now known as Social Work.



Loving's journey through college was not without obstacles. She found herself struggling with the tragic loss of two family members, which caused delays in securing summer internships. Despite this tremendous hardship, Loving persevered, often neglecting her well-being as she soldiered on. Loving shared, "I kept going like nothing was happening, and then I just crashed. I couldn't

go on. I went to the university counseling center. If it wasn't for them, sorority sisters, friends, and... everything, I don't know what would have happened. It was a saving grace. I always think back to how hard it was to ask for help, to receive help, and how thankful I was that it was there.

I wanted to be someone like that. That is what encouraged me to pick up those courses and go into the counseling field. To [continue] in the field of human services and in the field of helping others."

Loving's late internship placement turned into a "happy accident" for her future career. She



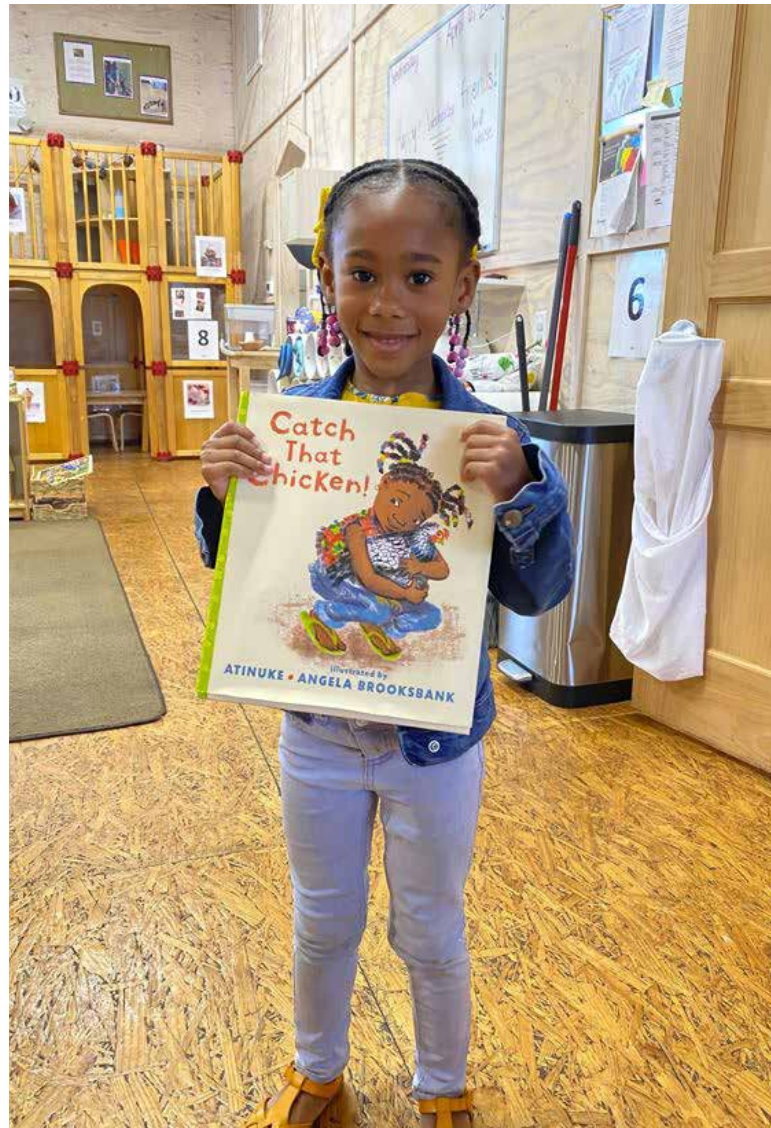


city. I applied everywhere for jobs. I didn't have a place to live. SEARCH [Homeless Services] was the only place that would even interview me. I feel so blessed because now, knowing the landscape and knowing all the organizations, there is not a place I would have otherwise chosen. I came here as a case manager working directly with our clients and housing and have been here ever since, 14 years ago. It all happened for a reason."

SEARCH is one of the largest homeless service organizations in Houston. Their mission

solidified a placement at the St. Francis House in Boston, working in their Moving Ahead Program. Loving felt connected with individuals coming out of incarceration and helping them reestablish their lives. Loving shared, "It was a 12-week program. I wanted to stay there and work full-time. The interview ended, and my graduation came, and it was time to leave Boston. I wasn't ready to stop the work. That was a decision point for me, that I needed to keep working in Homeless Services. So, I kept looking for this work."

Upon graduation, Loving found herself at a crossroads and "essentially threw darts on a board" to determine where to go next. Taking a leap of faith, her adventure continued in unfamiliar territory as her "dart" landed deep in the heart of Houston, Texas. Loving commented, "I didn't know anybody. I didn't know anything about the



statement states, "SEARCH is dedicated to providing hope, creating opportunity, and transforming lives for thousands of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness in our community. We bring this mission to life every



day by helping our clients obtain permanent housing, increase their income, improve their health, develop their children, and regain their stability and self-sufficiency.”

SEARCH offers a multitude of programs. One such program, House of Tiny Treasures (HTT), is one of Loving’s favorites. HTT is a comprehensive early childhood education school serving 64 children aged 21 months to pre-kindergarten. This program is geared toward its commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty and prepares children to enter the public school system successfully. Loving said, “We know that kids who fall behind before they even get into kindergarten are going to be labeled and stay behind. They’re more likely to drop out and fall behind their peers. We’re trying to break that cycle.”

As director of programs, Loving decided to test the program and teach her own children invaluable lessons by enrolling them in HTT. Despite the costly fee for those who are not homeless, she wholeheartedly believed in the program’s success and thought it was well worth the cost. She was enlightened by the program’s changes in her children, instilling lifelong lessons in her children’s lives. Observers often note her children’s exceptional empathy and compassion, a testament to the program’s success. Through her children’s enrollment, Loving gained valuable insights about the program that helped her further enhance the HTT offerings and goals.

SEARCH not only positively transforms lives, but it also generates substantial cost savings for the city of Houston. Evidencing its success, Houston leads the nation with a remarkable 90-95% overall success rate in addressing homelessness. This figure encompasses retaining housing for a homeless individual or family for at least one year, coupled with growth in various areas such as increased income, enhanced quality of life, improved family relations, as well as better physical and mental health and employment. Surprisingly, housing an individual for a year costs less than \$17,000, representing significant savings compared to the expenses incurred when

someone living on the streets relies on emergency services, which often amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The positive impact of SEARCH is evident in the case of a gentleman nicknamed a “Frequent Flier” for his numerous emergency calls. With the assistance of SEARCH, his annual emergency calls were dramatically reduced from over 300 to just one call.

Loving shared, “Houston is leading the way, showing others how to end homelessness. Since 2011, we’ve reduced the homeless population by over 61%! These results are higher than the rest of the nation. One of the most important things, and this is what has made Houston’s homeless system so successful, is the power and importance of working together.”

While employed at SEARCH and expecting her second child, Loving earned her MBA in Executive Leadership at the University of Houston. The program proved to be an excellent fit, offering an exceptional experience by connecting industry professionals with professors and students.

While pursuing her education, Loving encountered a transformative concept from a professor that left a lasting impression. The professor stressed the significance of strengthening existing non-profit organizations rather than establishing new ones, citing the limited resources available and the potential for unnecessary competition. Emphasizing the power of collaboration, the professor advocated for pooling resources to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Inspired by this wisdom, Loving echoed, “If you have a good idea, have something you want to do, or if there is something you care about, look for someone out there who is trying to do that as well and try to work with them. There is always more power in that. There are a lot of people trying to do good things in our communities. We are more powerful when we work together.” Fostering a culture of collaboration, SEARCH thrives on the support it receives from businesses and individuals.

Loving has this advice for those wanting to

get involved in an organization, “Talk to the organization and find out what could be helpful or take time to really understand the issue and what is at the root of it. Figure out how you can really be useful.”

We all drive by homeless people on street corners and wonder how we can help. While every city has different laws and regulations, SEARCH encourages donors to work through agencies and to approach direct outreach cautiously.

Loving's unwavering commitment and relentless work ethic have rightfully earned her the prestigious Houston Business Journal's (HBJ's) 40 Under 40 Class of 2023 Award. This accolade reflects not only personal success but also sends an inspiring message that age should never hinder our ability to contribute meaningfully to our community.

Loving also emphasizes that income and resources should not diminish our capacity to help. She serves as a poignant reminder that every individual has the power to effect change, particularly when we come together in solidarity. A community's vitality is profoundly influenced by its collective support for its most vulnerable members. SEARCH, with its unwavering dedication, is striving to uplift its community by eliminating or further reducing homelessness. Loving hopes that all will extend their support to SEARCH as they continue their mission of rescuing those who have lost hope.

EXAMPLES OF HOW **SEARCH** ENCOURAGES INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS TO SERVE THE HOMELESS IN THEIR COMMUNITY INCLUDE:



-Make hygiene packs. At home or with a group, fill clear plastic bags with new white tube socks, granola bars, cans of tuna or shelf-stable food, crackers, water bottles, and mosquito repellent. Drop off completed bags to SEARCH and their outreach teams for distribution. (Keeping bottles of water in your car is a thoughtful way to serve people on the street as you drive by.)

-Attend events that raise awareness and funds. SEARCH hosts an annual Luncheon and an annual Picnic. These fun events provide new experiences for donors while supporting a great cause.

-Contribute to volunteer needs online. Find out what SEARCH or other organizations are looking for and sign up yourself or a group.

-Donate time or money. Small donations can make a big difference. It's best to donate money directly to homeless organizations rather than to individuals on the street.





AVONDALE HOUSE

Avondale House is community where individuals with autism are welcomed and accepted for exactly who they are.

With a private, year-round day school, adult day program, residential program and employment services, we provide those with moderate to severe autism the resources, education and training to develop to their fullest potential.

To enroll your loved one in one of our programs or to learn more about how you can get involved with our Board or committees, please email us at info@avondalehouse.org



Learn more at avondalehouse.org | 713-993-9544 | info@avondalehouse.org

TuneInTexasMagazine.com

2025 Spring 47

Just Serve

JUSTSERVE

BRIDGING CHARITIES IN TEXAS AND ACROSS THE WORLD

**"I WANT TO THANK JUSTSERVE
FOR THE WORK IT HAS DONE
TO HELP MAKE HOUSTON ONE
OF THE BEST CITIES IN THE
WORLD. EACH DAY
JUSTSERVE VOLUNTEERS
GIVE OF THEIR TIME TO HELP
THOSE IN NEED AND MAKE
OUR CITY AND THE WORLD A
BETTER PLACE."**

-MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER

By Melissa Orsak

In the vast state of Texas alone, an impressive 1,284 charitable organizations harness the power of JustServe to reach out to eager volunteers. On a larger scale, 16,922 charities around the globe are benefiting from the support JustServe provides, touching the lives of people in 17 countries and accommodating diverse needs in 14 languages. The positive impact of JustServe also extends to individuals and groups searching for service opportunities. With over 892,949 users and groups engaged worldwide, including 45,919 in Texas alone, the platform continues to grow, fostering a spirit of community service and connection.

ve

RVE.ORG



JustServe's mission is to "instill a desire for good" by bridging gaps in service and providing a completely free, user-friendly online platform and in-person assistance for all 501(c)(3) charities and anyone searching for meaningful volunteer opportunities.

JustServe organizes many impactful service events. One commemorative event takes place annually in Houston, Texas, known as September 11, National Day of Service and Remembrance, and 9/11 Day. In tribute to the lives lost and the countless First Responders and members of the U.S. Armed Forces who serve our country every day, JustServe organizes a remarkable

of The Salvation Army, leaders from the Post News Group and Doblin Group, the President of Med Global, and the Humanitarian Division Director of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Colette McCullough, North America Southwest Area JustServe Director, shared a powerful story of unity and compassion. In the aftermath of the October 2023 attack by Palestine, Israel faced immense grief and loss. Amid the turmoil, Yotam Polizer, Global CEO of IsraAID and a JustServe National Advisory Council member, met with the Global CEO of Palestine Humanitarian Aid at JustServe's November council meeting. Seeing leaders from both nations' aid organizations sit side by side, united in their mission to help those in need, left a lasting impact on all who witnessed it.

Andi Cook, Greater Houston Metro Communication Director, shared, "There is no greater way that we can unite mankind than through serving each other. This was probably, to me, the most poignant example of overlooking differences, seeing needs, and then finding ways to address them. This story is the epitome of service and the sole reason JustServe was established."

JustServe collaborates with a diverse array of individuals and organizations around the globe, ranging from middle school youth groups to colleges, fostering community engagement

JustServe is a symbol of generosity and community, fully funded by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a heartfelt humanitarian gift. The Church's leaders oversee the organization globally, collaborating with dedicated local JustServe specialists. Notably, to foster better connections locally and internationally, JustServe is guided by a diverse advisory board that includes esteemed leaders from various prominent organizations, such as the Vice President of the American Red Cross, the CEO of Catholic Relief Services, the CEO of America's Service Commission, the CEO of Rotary International, the President of National VOAD, the Commissioner and National Commander

TuneInTexasMagazine.com



Mayor Sylvester Turner
Receiving the JustServe City



Helping Hands Madisonville,
Texas tornado cleanup

and volunteerism across various initiatives. As a parent of five children, I understand firsthand the vital role community service plays in their development. JustServe not only provides opportunities for youth to complete essential community service projects required for school but also empowers them to embrace leadership roles and become compassionate and responsible leaders of tomorrow.

Many cities are involved in JustServe. “The JustServe City Award is a recognition designed to honor cities that demonstrate an exceptional commitment to volunteering and have made a significant impact in their community through these efforts,” shares McCullough. Houston was among the first cities to receive this prestigious award, joining other esteemed cities like Los Angeles, CA; Mesa, AZ; and Louisville, KY.

Houston earned the JustServe City Award for multiple impactful service endeavors. In 2021, the United States government contacted JustServe to create a help center in Houston, Texas. The Family Transfer Center, aimed to connect immigrants from South/Central American and Cuba with legal documents and a court date to their family members in the United States. Collaborating with Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston Houston, Houston Responds, The National Association of Christian Churches (NACC), Houston Food Bank, and other local charities, the Family Transfer Center served over 8,500 immigrants in the first nine months, providing them with new clothes, backpacks, food, and basic supplies.

JustServe's impact extended beyond the Family Transfer Center. The organization works with Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston and Meals on Wheels to provide meals for vulnerable areas on the south side of Houston. During Hurricane Harvey, JustServe and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also contributed over one million man-hours in service and recovery cleanup efforts.

Houston's receipt of the JustServe City Award coincided with the leadership of the mayor of Houston at the time, Sylvester Turner. Mayor Turner demonstrated a strong commitment to service and maintained a close relationship with JustServe. Cook highlighted Mayor Turner as "a true example of service" in the community.

Through the collaborative platform of JustServe.org, our combined efforts drive us towards a future illuminated with hope, generosity, and a shared humanity. Visit JustServe.org today and become part of the transformative change. Let's unite in service and make a meaningful impact, one act of service at a time, as we JustServe.

“JUSTSERVE HAS BEEN A STRONG PARTNER WITH VOLUNTEER HOUSTON IN CONNECTING COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS TO PROVIDE HELP IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE. THERE ARE COUNTLESS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CITY, THE SIZE OF HOUSTON, AND WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR JUSTSERVE AND ALL THE VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS THAT DO SO MUCH TO HELP. THANK YOU AGAIN TO ALL OF YOU FOR GIVING OF YOUR PRECIOUS TIME TO SERVE THE PEOPLE OF HOUSTON. YOU ARE ONE OF THE REASONS WE ARE HOUSTON PROUD AND HAPPY TO CALL THIS CITY OUR HOME.”

-MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER



School Supplies for Jasper evacuees through Islamic Relief Canada



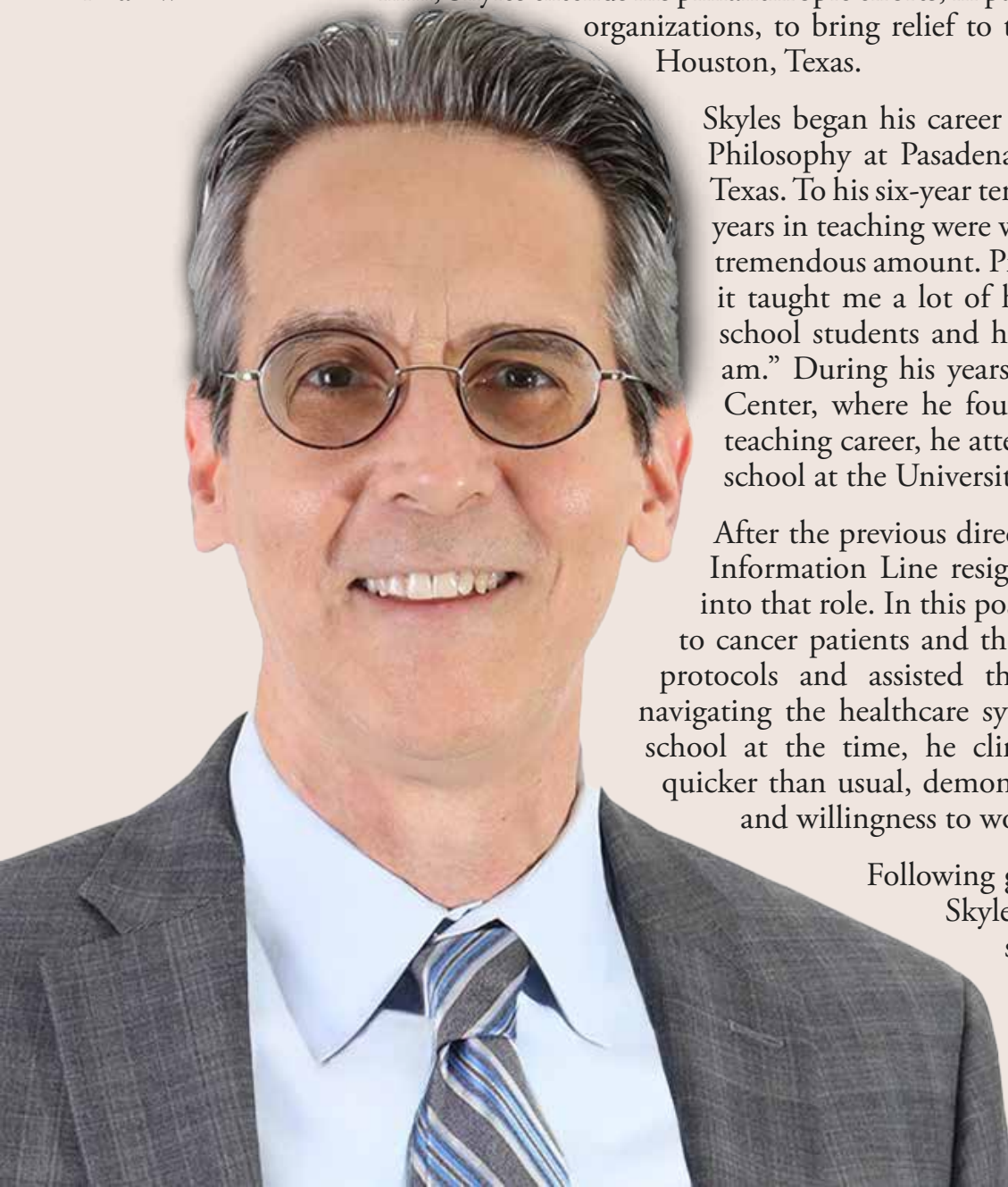
Henry's Home Sanctuary

Legal Minds, Healing Hands

Darren Skyles Houston Attorney champions health and hope.

By Melissa Orsak

In the ever-evolving world of healthcare law, Darren Skyles provides hope through his work and philanthropy. While the world may recognize him as an accomplished lawyer and fearless businessman, he focuses on bringing relief to clients as well as his community. He devotes his career to bridging the gap between medicine and law and ensuring the most vulnerable receive the care and justice they deserve. Beyond his legal practice at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP
l a w firm, Skyles extends his philanthropic efforts, in partnership with homelessness organizations, to bring relief to the homeless community in Houston, Texas.



Skyles began his career as a teacher of English and Philosophy at Pasadena High School in Houston, Texas. To his six-year tenure, he fondly recalled, “My years in teaching were wonderful. They taught me a tremendous amount. Probably more than anything, it taught me a lot of humility working with high school students and helped show me who I truly am.” During his years at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, where he found himself after he left his teaching career, he attended part-time evening law school at the University of Houston.

After the previous director for the M.D. Anderson Information Line resigned, Skyles eagerly stepped into that role. In this position, he provided guidance to cancer patients and their loved ones on treatment protocols and assisted them and their families in navigating the healthcare system. Despite being in law school at the time, he climbed the corporate ladder quicker than usual, demonstrating his incredible drive and willingness to work hard.

Following graduation from law school, Skyles dedicated thirteen years to serving as outside counsel for Midland Memorial Hospital in Midland, Texas. Throughout his professional journey, he

TuneInTexasMagazine.com

has also worked as a partner at numerous law firms across various cities in Texas. Skyles has served as Law Firm Healthcare Practice Group Leader, Director in the Division of Public Affairs of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and Vice President of Legal Affairs at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. Eventually, he returned to his roots in Houston in 2020.

Skyles is currently working as a healthcare Partner at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP law firm in Houston, Texas. He holds the firm in high regard for “Its deep healthcare bench with 70+ healthcare attorneys currently employed.” The firm is actively engaged in

the American Health Law Association, a prominent legal association catering to healthcare attorneys. When he initially joined the firm, he was presented with the unique opportunity to help open a new branch in Houston. Skyles appreciated the firm’s support when it provided help from many offices in other major markets around the country as they opened their new location in Houston. He shared, “[My] firm is tremendously collaborative and is interested in the success of all its people. It does what it does in a very thoughtful way. I have seen the attention to detail that this firm takes and the resources it spends to make sure that its people can be successful. It’s been impressive.”

His varied experience has led him to discover that “Everyone comes to the legal profession from a different direction. Some people come from in-house, and some people do the traditional law firm route, but everyone in the best environments comes together and collaborates with one another, working with each other’s strengths and weaknesses as a team to serve the client.

[TuneInTexasMagazine.com](https://tunelntexasmagazine.com)

Sometimes, I think we get it in our minds that we have to do everything independently because we’ve got this degree, and everyone looks to us for the answers. I’ve learned over my career that the more I let go of that way of thinking and just focus on what I do well in collaboration with others, I meld better with what’s going on, wherever I am. Working on teams and working collaboratively enhances the client experience and work environment.”

Skyles’ highly analytical and detail-oriented nature has equipped him with the ability to organize and oversee complicated projects, marshaling required talent and resources to ensure



their successful completion. Additionally, he excels at synthesizing a multitude of information while still being able to communicate the "big picture." Extreme awareness and sensitivity to his own and his team members' strengths and weaknesses allow him to help his team excel.

Encountering numerous hurdles on his journey while learning these traits over the years, Skyles strove to balance full-time work, evening law school, and the responsibilities of raising three children alongside his wife, Rhonda. He acknowledges Rhonda as his “greatest support.” Together, they strive to harmonize their personal



ANTHONY CHANG, CHOC CHILDREN'S; DARREN SKYLES, NELSON MULLINS;
CRAIG KWIATKOWSKI, CEDARS-SINAI; SARMA VELAMURI, LUMINARE, INC.

and professional aspirations while keeping their faith at the forefront. Skyles says, "We continue to work on keeping God the center and focus in all we do and attribute that striving to our successful marriage; 33 years this May!"

On top of juggling family and work, Skyles's compassion and ability to connect people and ideas compel him to remain steadfast in his commitment to serving his community. Currently, he holds the esteemed position of co-chair for The Campaign to End Homelessness and Hunger, a subcommittee of the Houston Bar Association. This dedicated group focuses on tackling the pervasive issue of homelessness in Houston through various initiatives, such as organizing food drives and back-to-school drives and collaborating closely with local homeless agencies. Working with this organization brings Skyles great joy as he witnesses lives change for the better. He proudly shared that Houston has emerged as a leading model for other cities seeking effective strategies to alleviate homelessness. He shared, "The agencies here work with each other closely; they all know each other well, and they communicate and coordinate well. We are all aware it is a hard issue, and it's never going to

be solved completely, but I think they've made a pretty significant dent, and there are wonderful people doing that work."

In addition to serving the homeless, Skyles and two colleagues founded the Healthcare Leadership Quorum, HCLQ. This open quorum discusses current healthcare issues, facilitating communication between the community and healthcare professionals. The quorum last year hosted its second annual seminar at the Houston Medical Center, where they worked closely with the American College of Healthcare Executives- Southeast Texas Chapter (ACHE-SETC), Greater Society for Healthcare Risk Management (GHSHRM), Healthcare for the Homeless Houston, and Society of Physician Entrepreneurs. Last October, the quorum event debuted in Los Angeles and featured three insightful panels discussing mental health, artificial intelligence, and human capital/people strategy to address healthcare shortages.

Attending a recent charity event featuring John Lucas, a former Houston Rockets player and NBA All-Star, significantly impacted Skyles. Lucas, who has battled addiction to cocaine,



delivered a powerful speech as the event's keynote speaker. He shared his personal struggles and emphasized the importance of acknowledging and embracing his weaknesses. Lucas poignantly discussed the difficulty people have with accepting life on life's terms. He went on to explain how he channeled this realization into helping others. Skyles was struck by Lucas' vulnerability, particularly as someone who appeared to have it all. Lucas illustrated the importance of remembering that everything is what one has now, which resonated deeply with Skyles, who strongly desires to share this message with others.

Skyles embodies compassion and proactiveness in serving others, even amidst the tumultuous nature of life. His insights and open-mindedness bolster his invaluable wisdom for law students and individuals navigating the challenges of the world. According to Skyles, "Let go and let God" is his guiding principle, particularly in the demanding landscape of his profession,

where one often does not feel fully equipped to face its daunting challenges. He shares, "Do the best you can every day with the God-given talents you are given and the experiences you have been given and let God take care of the rest. Things get challenging when I forget that, when I think I have to do it all, and that it's all on my shoulders." Ultimately, Skyles' perspective underscores the importance of embracing each day with grace, focusing on the bigger picture, and taking life one step at a time.

"I think law school beats into you that we all have to be perfect. Only the highest grades get the best jobs. All of that is just a lot of smoke and mirrors because you're going to end up where you need to end up based on what you have to offer the world, and the earlier you accept that and embrace that, the better." Skyles uses all he has been gifted to positively impact the healthcare industry and his community in and out of his practice.



END HOMELESSNESS AND HUNGER CAMPAIGN
VETERAN HOLIDAY BAG EVENT



A SPECTRUM OF HOPE

How families navigating moderate to severe autism find aid through Houston's Avondale House.



BY MELISSA ORSAK

Imagine a world filled with sensory sensitivities that can turn everyday sights, sounds, and textures into overwhelming experiences. Picture social and communication challenges that make connecting with others or expressing your thoughts and feelings difficult. Consider disruptions to routines that can create anxiety and confusion, leading to misunderstandings and frustration. For individuals with moderate to severe autism, these challenges are often coupled with struggles related to decreased executive function, difficult emotional regulation, and the weight of social stigma. Many also face a range of physical health issues that can further complicate their daily lives.

Navigating an autistic journey is daunting, especially without the right support system. Fortunately, Avondale House stands as a shining beacon of hope in the Greater Houston area, dedicated to providing specialized assistance to autistic individuals ages five and up, and their families. Those on the autism spectrum demonstrate that, despite the challenges they face, their unique abilities and perspectives contribute immensely to the beauty, richness, and diversity of humanity. Every individual brings their own distinctive strengths, fostering a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

CEO Steve Vetrano shares how the Avondale House provides hope and guidance for individuals and families traversing autism's array of challenges.

Founding and mission of Avondale House

"Avondale House was founded by a group of parents who were driven by the love and desire

to provide better opportunities for their children with autism. These parents realized the need for specialized care and support for individuals with autism and came together to build a community where their children and others could thrive. Avondale House's core mission is to provide individuals with profound autism the resources, care, and education they need to reach their fullest potential. We focus on empowering each person we serve, helping them live as independently as possible while offering a range of services that cater to their specific needs."

Programs and services available

"Avondale House offers a wide range of services designed to support individuals with autism at every stage of their lives. Our key programs include a specialized school

for children with autism, an adult day program focused on life skills and community integration, residential homes for adults, and employment services that help individuals gain meaningful work experience. These programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism, providing them with a safe, supportive environment where they can grow and succeed."

An individual's success story

"Beth's story is a beautiful testament to the life-changing impact of Avondale House. Beth faced significant developmental challenges from an early age. By age eight, she couldn't feed or dress herself, wasn't toilet trained, and rarely slept, leaving her family exhausted and overwhelmed. Her behavior was increasingly difficult to manage, and despite efforts to secure their home, she constantly found herself in dangerous situations. After years of searching for help with





social life, attending dances, sporting events, and outings with her housemates. The Avondale House staff provided her with love, respect, and dignity, helping her lead a life her family never thought possible. Beth's story is a powerful testament to how Avondale House not only changes the lives of individuals with autism but also transforms the lives of their families, creating opportunities, fostering independence, and

no success, Beth's family learned about Avondale House and sought support. When other services could only offer minimal assistance, Avondale House became the lifeline her family desperately needed. When Beth first came home after joining Avondale House, she accomplished something simple—she drank from a cup and put it down. For her family, it was a breakthrough. Over time, they witnessed more growth and independence with each visit. One special moment came during a Halloween party. Beth's mom, disguised in a costume, watched her daughter thrive in a social setting for the first time. Beth was calm, joyful, and even danced with her mom—an experience they had never shared before. It was then her family knew Avondale House was her home. Since then, Beth has enjoyed an enriched

offering hope for a brighter future.”

How does Avondale House measure its program's effectiveness?

“We measure success by the progress and growth of the individuals we serve. This includes tracking behavioral improvements, communication skills, and the development of life skills that enhance independence. We also gather feedback





scenes. Attending our fundraising events—like our annual Bingo Bash or Hear our Voices, Embracing Autism event—not only brings the community together but directly supports the programs that enrich the lives of individuals with autism.

For those looking to make a financial contribution, your generosity goes a long way in helping us provide essential services. Whether through a one-time donation, corporate sponsorship, or ongoing support, every contribution allows us to grow, serve more families, and create lasting change in the lives of those we serve. Your involvement, no matter how big or small, helps sustain our mission and expands our ability to reach even more individuals in need.

Taking care of an individual with severe autism can feel daunting when you don't have the right resources. Avondale House alleviates those concerns as they lovingly bring together those



with autism and their caregivers to teach, tend, and care, creating a home for all.”

from families and caregivers, monitor program satisfaction, and evaluate the overall well-being of our students and participants. Each small step of progress—whether it's learning a new skill, forming relationships, or achieving greater independence—marks success for us.”

Challenges and Solutions

“One of the biggest challenges we face is the high cost of providing individualized care and maintaining a qualified staff. The need for more residential and adult services also continues to grow as individuals with autism age. To address these challenges, we are constantly advocating for increased funding and awareness, while also working to develop innovative, cost-effective solutions. We invest in staff training and focus on creating a nurturing environment that enables our participants to thrive.”

How can businesses and individuals help support Avondale House?

“There are countless meaningful ways to get involved with Avondale House and make a real difference. You can volunteer your time by working directly with our participants, helping out at special events, or offering skills behind the



TOOL TIME

Houston ToolBank provides tools to transform community projects.

BY MELISSA ORSAK

With only five paid full-time staff members, Houston ToolBank saved charitable partners over \$3.1 million in retail tool expenses in 2024 alone. They lent over 61,041 tools to 399 nonprofit partners working on 2,219 community projects. Marly Maskill, the Executive Director of Houston ToolBank, stated that their “tool lending program provides nonprofit and tax-exempt entities with year-round access to an inventory of tools to support all aspects of mission-focused activities and operations.” Maskill continues, “Our vision is to uplift communities with tools for change, and we optimize resources for the nonprofit world by building capacity with tool and equipment lending, disaster preparedness/response, hands-on training, and more.” Borrowing tools for a nominal fee equates to substantial cost savings, allowing charities and philanthropists to allocate the saved funds to other needed aspects of their missions.

With an engineering background, Maskill was drawn to the ToolBank organization and its remarkable ability to enact significant change, much like a single tool can play a pivotal role in accomplishing great things. She shares, “When I first learned about the ToolBank, I thought it had the potential to be a small change in the nonprofit sector that does just that. While tool lending itself is a simple concept that may seem peripheral to larger issues impacting Greater Houston, our services amplify the impact of hundreds of member agencies annually. The ToolBank is a force multiplier by increasing capacity across nonprofit organizations across all mission types.”

“The Houston ToolBank maintains an inventory of more than 317 different types of tools and equipment in volumes large enough to equip thousands of volunteers at a time. In addition to our central warehouse in downtown Houston, the





ouston
TOOLBANK



ToolBank operates six Neighborhood Tool Hubs across Southeast Texas – located in Angleton, Beaumont, west Houston, Conroe, Galveston, and Richmond. Our Neighborhood Tool Hubs, along with our direct delivery service, ensures all of our partners have equal access to ToolBank resources, no matter where they are serving.”

One may wonder how the ToolBank thrives with few employees. Maskill shares, “We could not do what we do without a team of volunteers who support us across all aspects of our operations – from warehouse support to tool repair to our special events. We are always seeking volunteers who are interested in supporting the community through the ToolBank. As a nonprofit, we always welcome donations, as well, both in the form of funds and/or new or used tools that could be shared through our program.”

An example of one of the ToolBank's symbiotic partners is JustServe. Maskill said, “We collaborate with JustServe in many ways. The ToolBank provides resources for their events, JustServe provides volunteer support to the ToolBank, and as a part of the nonprofit sector in Houston, we’ve been fortunate to work alongside JustServe on city-wide volunteer and disaster response initiatives. JustServe is a true partner of the ToolBank in every sense of the word, and we’re so grateful to work alongside them in supporting the greater Houston area.”

Furthermore, SEARCH Homeless Services (partner since 2017) said, “Partnering with the ToolBank helps us ensure that our agency budget gets invested in the teachers and learning materials that make our pre-K education for kids impacted by homelessness possible while still allowing us to keep our campus environment beautiful and enriching. This year, we rented tools from the ToolBank to refill our pre-K sandboxes, refresh our sensory and butterfly gardens, and mulch our playground...Mulching the playground makes it a safer environment for students and helps SEARCH comply with safe fall zone regulations. Our gardens are beloved parts of campus and learning environments for children given our curriculum’s focus on environmental stewardship. Maskill shared that, “Since 2017, SEARCH Homeless Services has borrowed more than \$32,600 worth of tools in support of 71 such projects. We're proud of the impact that \$32,600 has when reinvested in their education program, rather than if it were spent on tool purchases and rentals.”

The Houston ToolBank is eagerly moving forward to help its new student and young adult training program, Tool School, succeed. Maskill remarked, “Now, more than ever, access to post-secondary education and creating accessible pathways to employment is critical. Tool School is one of the ways that the Houston ToolBank can help bridge gaps with students readying themselves for life after high school and can provide life skills training to individuals with intellectual or



developmental disabilities (I/DD) in service of helping to develop independence and confidence. Combining the opportunity to develop these skills with information about careers, certifications, and programs associated with work in nonprofits and the trades provides Tool School participants a more comprehensive understanding of their education and employment options.”

The Houston ToolBANK is a rapidly expanding organization with over 900 partners. They all work tirelessly to build a better tomorrow, one life and one project at a time. Whether you want to lend a hand or seek their support, reach out and allow them to be a tool to amplify the impact of your own philanthropic endeavors.



houston **ToolBANK**

WWW.HOUSTONTOOLBANK.ORG

The Houston ToolBank serves community-based organizations by providing tools, equipment, and expertise to empower their most ambitious goals.

Since opening our doors in late 2014, the ToolBank has consistently increased the nonprofit sector's capacity to make a difference. When we share high-quality tools our members are able to do more for our community – whether through disaster response, home repair, days of service, or charitable events.



1215 GAZIN ST, HOUSTON, TX 77020 | 713-674-0262

TUNE IN TEXAS

MAGAZINE