



The Bulletin

Liberty Place ribbon-cutting nears

Next week we officially commemorate Liberty Place, KCDC’s first housing site specifically for veterans who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the 32-unit community is set for 11:15 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 21, at 3627 Division St. in West Knoxville.

“Liberty Place will provide essential housing for veterans who need assistance to stabilize their life and living accommodations,” Ben Bentley, KCDC executive director and CEO, said. “It’s important that these residents also have the resources to maintain that stability. We’re committed to not only providing a safe, quality home, but also a place that can provide supportive services.”

Liberty Place residents will participate in the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, a joint initiative by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Veterans Administration (VA) to transition veterans and their families from homelessness to permanent housing.

The VA will also provide on-site case management to coordinate medical services and community resources for residents, offering comprehensive support through intensive case management and long-term housing assistance. Liberty Place cost \$15 million and is scheduled to be finished in December.



CONTENTS

02

FIRST CREEK PHASE I EARNS NATIONAL HOUSING AWARD

03

SHOWCASING PATHWAYS FOR LOCAL YOUTH

04

WALK TO SCHOOL DAY / HURRICANE RELIEF DONATION

05

JIM BARKER RETIRES FROM KCDC

06

WESTERN HEIGHTS COMMUNITY GARDEN DAY / MANOR FALL BLOCK PARTY

07

KCDC SPOTLIGHT - ERIC D. BELLAMY

08

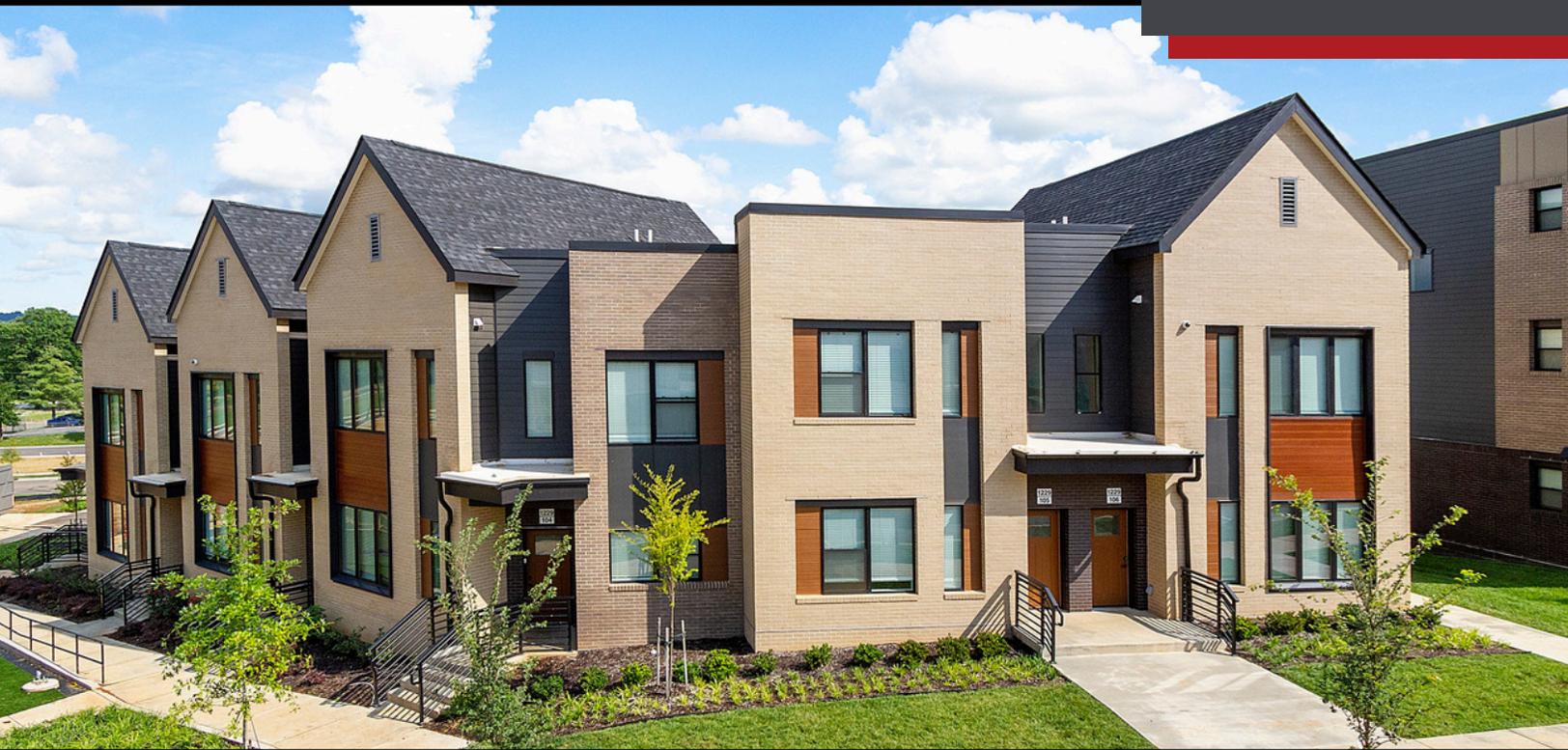
COWORKERS DRESS UP FOR HALLOWEEN

09

HEALTH & WELLNESS - SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER / NEW HIRES & RETIREMENTS

10

THANK YOU, VETERANS / ANNOUNCEMENTS



First Creek at Austin Phase 1 earns national housing award

Knoxville's Community Development Corporation (KCDC) has earned a top award from a national housing and community development organization for First Creek at Austin Phase 1.

The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) selected KCDC for an Award of Merit in the category of project design for the holistic approach to the neighborhood, including community input; preservation of culture; connection of the site to opportunities; open and walkable spaces; and trust built with residents and stakeholders well before construction started.

"First Creek at Austin has become a blueprint and innovative catalyst for neighborhood revitalization," Ben Bentley, KCDC executive director and CEO, said. "The transformation of the neighborhood is apparent across the development through variations in housing styles, resident amenities, downtown access, and opportunities for employment, education, recreation and connectivity. It's also the city's first mixed-income affordable housing community."

KCDC received the award during a presentation ceremony at NAHRO's 2024 National Conference and Exhibition in Orlando, Fla., last month.

NAHRO, which was established in 1933, is a membership organization of more than 26,000 housing and community development providers and professionals throughout the United States. NAHRO members create and manage affordable housing for low- and middle-income families, and support vibrant

communities that enhance the quality of life for all.

First Creek at Austin is built on the site of the former Austin Homes, which was established in 1941 on nearly 23 acres. The redevelopment of the site followed months of dialogue with residents, stakeholders and community members in interviews and public meetings and included options for overall site use, street layouts, residential building types and green spaces.

Phase 1 opened in 2022 with 105 total units – 57 in one multifamily building and 48 spread across eight smaller townhome-style buildings. Phase 2 opened in 2024 with 180 one- to three-bedroom units.

Construction for Phase 3 is underway now and will provide approximately 161 new housing units, including 50 supportive housing units for low-income seniors, age 62 and older. The family units will be located in large buildings and townhomes and will offer one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom options.

Master planning for the community was provided by Gensler and Johnson Architecture, the architect of record for the redevelopment project. Applied Real Estate Analysis, Inc., and CRJA-IBI Group were also members of the planning team.

KCDC is the public housing authority for Knoxville and Knox County, Tenn., tasked with finding solutions to create affordable housing to address the dwelling unit shortage. Construction funds for First Creek at Austin came primarily through \$13 million of low-income housing tax credits from the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA), which allowed KCDC to raise tax credit equity to fund development.



Showcasing pathways for local youth

From August to October, more than 20 young men and women from six KCDC communities explored their post-high school options through the Pathways program.

Funded by a City of Knoxville Opportunity Youth Engagement grant, this pilot initiative aimed to connect youth, ages 16-24, with community resources to help them achieve their career goals.

“When the City of Knoxville’s Office of Community Safety announced the grant, Marisa (Moazen) and I saw it as a great opportunity for me to gain experience and meet a community need,” Christina Slabinski, program lead and AmeriCorps VISTA, said.

A 2021 needs assessment had highlighted the importance of youth development opportunities in KCDC family communities.

“We brainstormed ways to reach young people in this age range, a period when they are expected to make important decisions about their futures,” Christina said. “We wanted to show them there are various opportunities available, and they shouldn’t feel limited to a single path.”

The program focused on higher education, trade schools and workforce development, professionalism/entering the workforce, and service to the community. Local organizations provided presentations at sessions held for Western Heights, First Creek at Austin, The Vista at Summit Hill, Lonsdale Homes, Five Points, and Montgomery Village. Participants also had the option to take a field trip to West Town Mall to purchase interview-appropriate attire.

Additionally, Pathways addressed myths about income inclusion/exclusion and its effect on household benefits, recognizing that some participants may avoid pursuing opportunities due to concerns about negatively impacting their family’s rental payments.

Families have already asked if the program will be offered again, and Christina hopes it will. She plans to leave detailed notes for her successor after her AmeriCorps term ends.

“I hope participants realize there are people and organizations who want to help them succeed and will do whatever they can to support them,” Christina said.

Participant perspective

Ultimately, 21 of the 26 participants received certificates of completion. Some joined with a specific goal, while others participated out of curiosity.

Lazarie, 17, took advantage of the program when it was offered for Five Points, hoping it would help her pursue her goal of becoming a lawyer or anesthesiologist. Although it didn’t directly advance her toward that goal, she still found the experience valuable.

“I feel like it gave me a lot of resources if I wanted to explore certain pathways,” she said. “It was something I needed. It strengthened me as a person. ... A lot of the programs they presented, I had already participated in or knew about, but for many of the kids, they didn’t. I think it’s a great opportunity for people who don’t know what they want to do, helping them figure out a direction in life.”

Lazarie, who is a senior at Austin-East High School, has been accepted to East Tennessee State University, though she’s still hoping to be admitted to the University of South Florida.

First Creek resident LeBrisha, 24, is in her second year at Chattanooga State Community College and aspires to a career in psychology. After moving to Knoxville last year, she wanted to explore the available resources. Pathways provided just that. LeBrisha brought her daughter to each session.

"I'm the first person in my family to go to college, so I'm hoping to set that path," LeBrisha said. "Hopefully, she'll follow in my footsteps."

Western Heights residents Daniel, 21, and Jayden, 19, both joined Pathways after family members encouraged them to participate.

For Jayden, the goal was to ensure he didn't miss out on any community resources. Recently starting work on his car, he thought that a hands-on career might be the right path for him.

Daniel's main objective was to gain a better understanding of life.

"It's a better way to handle things than being on the streets and doing the wrong thing," Daniel said.

Montgomery Village resident Tekeya, 22, learned about Pathways through social media and decided to participate to explore her next steps in life.

"They helped me with a lot of different resources," Tekeya said. "I already had a plan in mind, and they basically showed me the steps I needed to take, which helped me finalize what I really wanted to do."

Tekeya plans to study culinary arts at Pellissippi State Community College.

"I would recommend this to anyone," she said. "I've been encouraging others to attend the meetings. Some think it's a waste of time, but they provide us with valuable resources at every session."

I hope participants realize there are people and organizations who want to help them succeed and will do whatever they can to support them.

- Christina Slabinski

Walk to School Day held in Western Heights

With help from Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee, we handed out bags filled with apple sauce, peanut butter crackers, apple juice and a granola bar to Beaumont Magnet Academy students Oct. 16 during Walk to School Day in Western Heights.



Collecting supplies for hurricane relief

On Oct. 11, we delivered supplies to God's Warehouse Ministries in Morristown to help those impacted by Hurricane Helene. This effort wouldn't have been possible without the gracious donations from KCDC staff and American Museum of Science & Energy for providing collected supplies from the community.





Jim Barker retires from KCDC

Jim Barker retired Nov. 1 after seven years with KCDC. During his time, he served as deputy director of finance and administration before becoming vice president of administration. Jim served as an external auditor before joining KCDC in 2017. A retirement party was held Oct. 31.

1. When did you start to think of retirement? How far in advance have you been considering this?

Retirement has been a topic of conversation since my hiring, at which time I committed to Ben to be here at least two years. Those two years stretched to seven. It is prudent to prepare for retirement, but retirement has never been a goal of mine. Instead, my focus has always been on producing rather than consuming for as long as I can.

2. Why now?

I believe I have completed the objectives I was hired to achieve. My time here has been incredibly fulfilling — assisting the finance department, supporting KCDC in selecting and implementing Yardi, collaborating with IT, HR and procurement, navigating challenges from the COVID-19 shutdown, and working on various special projects.

KCDC has made significant strides in recent years. We now have 21st-century technology and a business model that efficiently aligns with our mission. Our leadership teams and frontline staff have taken ownership of their areas of expertise, which makes it the right time for me to step aside. I want to ensure that KCDC's resources are maximized and that other staff members have the opportunity to flourish.

3. What will you miss?

First, just being a part of this mission. The historic element of our mission has resulted in thousands sleeping safely and comfortably every night, and having a place to call home every day. The current mission includes helping those same people overcome obstacles to education, health, good jobs and transportation so that they may thrive.

Second, the incredible people at KCDC. I have great respect and admiration for my colleagues, and it has been an honor to work alongside such talented and dedicated individuals who are committed to advancing our mission.

Lastly, I will miss the daily routine. I thrive in a structured environment, and I find comfort in the familiar. I will particularly miss the creativity of developing Excel spreadsheets!

4. What do you want your legacy to be when you leave KCDC?

I haven't spent much time thinking about my legacy, but I hope that when others reflect on my time here, they think of me as someone who was faithful to God, to the mission and to His colleagues.

5. What's next?

I'm not entirely sure what's next. The possibilities are wide-ranging — from consulting with PHAs on special projects or tackling complex issues in finance and administration to perhaps working at Ace Hardware in a red vest! One thing I know for certain is that I won't spend a lot of time lounging on the couch. I believe that work is what makes leisure fun and life fulfilling.

I often end my emails with HAGD (Have A Great Day!). My hope for all of you is not just to HAGD, but that you will make it a great day for yourselves, for your colleagues and for those you serve.

Community rallies for garden day in Western Heights

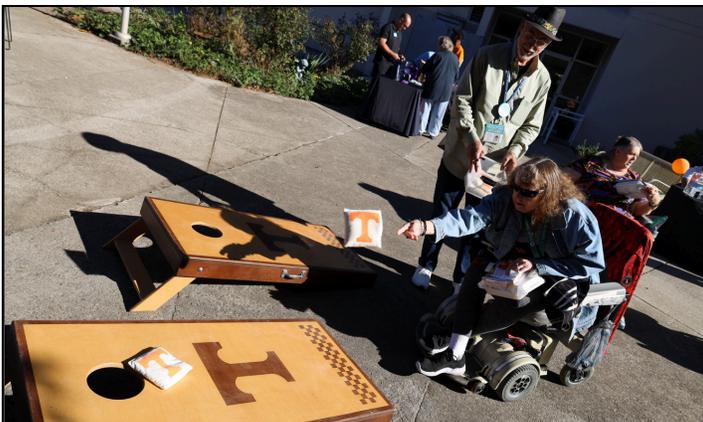
On Sept. 6, a collaborative effort between residents and eight partner agencies resulted in the construction of six raised garden beds next to the Western Heights Baptist Center. These beds were crafted to support an afterschool garden education program, led by resident ambassador Teleia and Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) AmeriCorps VISTA member Caroline.

The idea for the garden beds and program was initially proposed by Teleia to CAC in May. CAC then connected with Beardsley Community Farm, which organized volunteers to help build the beds. Over the following months, with the support of CAC, Beardsley, the Knoxville Police Department, the City of Knoxville, Turn Up Knox, Broken Vessel Studios, UTK Family Medicine and the Baptist Center, the project became a reality.

“My passion is doing gardens, I’m an herbalist with BattleField Farms. I’ve done the master gardener program – that’s for me,” Teleia said. “But the real I think seed is to plant it in kids where they’ll learn how to feed themselves and for our future and everything like that so that they’re eating right and loving it, learning where it comes from, how it grows, what soil is, all those things. Kids love worms. I just think it’s important to educate.”

The goal in mind is teaching kids about nutrition and food security sustainability, Caroline said. She hopes the kids will share what they’ve learned with their family and the entire community.

“We’re probably going to take a few beds for food and maybe one or two for flowers,” Caroline said. “Basically, whatever seeds that we can really get and are seasonably appropriate.”



Fall block party held for The Manor

The annual Fall Block Party fundraiser was held Oct. 8 at Northgate Terrace. From 4-6 p.m., those attending were able to have a BBQ dinner, speak with partner agencies, peruse items in a rummage sale, and listen to live music from The Mt. Leconte Jug Band. This year’s fundraiser brought in \$1,400 for The Manor at Northgate Terrace.



KCDC Spotlight

The Spotlight aims to recognize the amazing things KCDC employees are doing to help make the community and workplace better. Email jnash@kcdc.org if you think there's someone we should highlight.

Eric D. Bellamy

Information Technology Analyst



Nov. 8 marks the 25th year that IT Systems Analyst Eric D. Bellamy has come to work each weekday for KCDC.

Many within KCDC have likely encountered Eric if they've ever needed IT assistance.

"I'm in a position where I get to help a lot of people," Eric said. "We have a lot of folks that need assistance with something every day. In IT, we are in a unique position to help anyone and everyone in the company. Our mindset is that of servanthood. We're here to help others who are having problems, figure out what's going on and do our best to make the problem go away and help their day get better.

"One of the reasons why I like this job is because it does give me an opportunity to help people and that's a big deal for me, because I enjoy helping others when I can," he added.

Eric emphasized the importance of teamwork, noting that the job couldn't be done without a group effort from everyone in the IT department.

"Teamwork is key to what we do," Eric said. "We all work together helping each other out. We have a great chemistry and that translates over to the service we can provide. Teamwork is always going to be a priority to me, it's a major part of my mindset and how I operate."

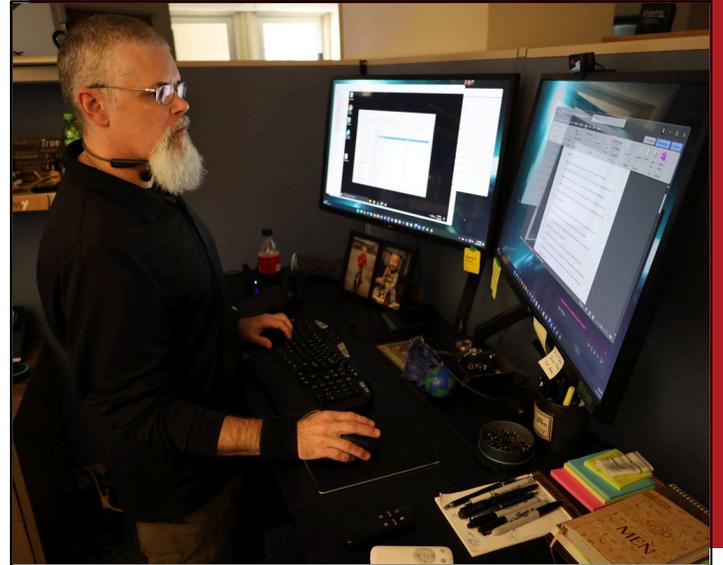
Eric joined KCDC in 1999 after graduating from Carson-Newman College, which he still proudly calls "college" because that's what it was then. Initially, he focused on graphic design for the now-defunct social services department and later for the entire company. Over time, his role shifted to fully IT work, which was a natural progression due to his experience with computers.

A native of Kentucky, Eric has continued to work at KCDC for two main reasons: the people and the challenge.

"That landscape has changed quite a bit over the years," Eric said. "Most everyone that was here when I was first hired on are now gone, but as new people take their place, you have an opportunity to get to know them and create new relationships, even if you never get to see them face-to-face. There have been lots of people over the last four years, especially during COVID, that I got to know and would say became friends with. However, they came and left without me ever getting a chance to meet them in person. That's just the dynamic of our job these days."

Eric has long adopted a problem-solving mindset in what he does: "Whatever happens, find a solution, work the problem."

"There's never a dull moment in what we do," he said. "There's always something that goes sideways. You may come in having a lot of stuff on your plate that you need to do, then just like today for example, you may have a property go down, you may have servers not working right, or the power may be out. It could be



anything. That's when you have to work the problem as I said and figure out how to make things right. There is always going to be a challenge."

A focus on family and faith

When Eric isn't working, he's often at church or at home with his wife, Tomica, and playing with their two grandchildren every chance they have. While this fills most of his time, he wouldn't have it any other way. He adores Denton ("D") and Mathilda ("Tilly Bug"), who, though only nine months apart, share a special bond as brother and sister.

For about two years, Eric's daughter, Britney, and son-in-law, John, had been trying to have a child without success. But that changed suddenly in 2022 – on Eric's birthday – when a friend from church told them about a woman seeking to place her unborn child up for adoption. Just 10 days later, Denton was born. Then, in an unexpected twist, Britney and John learned shortly after that "Tilly" also was on the way.

"Tilly was born Jan. 27 of the following year, so there's only nine months and few days in between them so they're on top of each other," Eric said. "To us we just always felt that, OK, nothing worked because God intended for us to have Denton, because obviously everything fell into place once we got him. 'D' doesn't like anyone in his space while 'Tilly' wants to be in everyone's space so as you can imagine, that makes them a handful, but they're awesome and I wouldn't change a thing about either of them."

Faith plays a central role in Eric's life. Since 2000, he has attended Black Oak Heights Baptist Church, where he serves on the church's security team and as a deacon.

"I'm a born-again Christian, Jesus is my Lord and savior, and that is a vital to who I am and what I am," Eric said. "That's the driving force behind everything that I do. Everything that I try to be as a person. There's not anything in my life that doesn't touch."

Interests

Though his free time is limited, Eric still finds moments to enjoy his favorite pastimes: reading military history, watching sci-fi shows like Battlestar Galactica, Star Wars and Star Trek, and catching University of Kentucky basketball games, but we won't hold his fandom against him.

His favorite sci-fi show is Star Trek – so much so that his college service fraternity nicknamed him “Spock,” a name his friends still use to this day.

“I started watching it when I was kid,” Eric said. “When I started watching it, let’s be honest, the original Star Trek hadn’t been out for maybe a decade or so at that point. I don’t know, they had all the cool aliens, spaceship, they had all the cool stuff like communicators, the phasers, etc.”

Eric’s interest in military history is personal, inspired by his father and uncles who served. He has a particular fascination with World War II and, more recently, the Vietnam War.

“I grew up knowing that was a big deal to my dad and my parents,” Eric said. “Dad’s best friend was killed over there. That was the era that I grew up in and so I wanted to know more about it. Since I turned 50, in the last five or six years I’ve probably read 67-70 books on Vietnam alone.”

One of the reasons why I like this job is because it does give me an opportunity to help people and that’s a big deal for me, because I enjoy helping others when I can.

- Eric D. Bellamy

Coworkers dress up for Halloween



Health & Wellness

Do you experience brief periods of sadness or feel “off,” especially when the season changes around this time of year? If so, you’re not alone. Mood changes in the fall and winter are common when shorter days can bring “winter blues,” whereas spring’s longer daylight often boosts mood.

For some, these mood changes are more intense, impacting daily thoughts, feelings and behaviors. If you’ve noticed significant mood shifts tied to seasonal changes, you may be experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder.

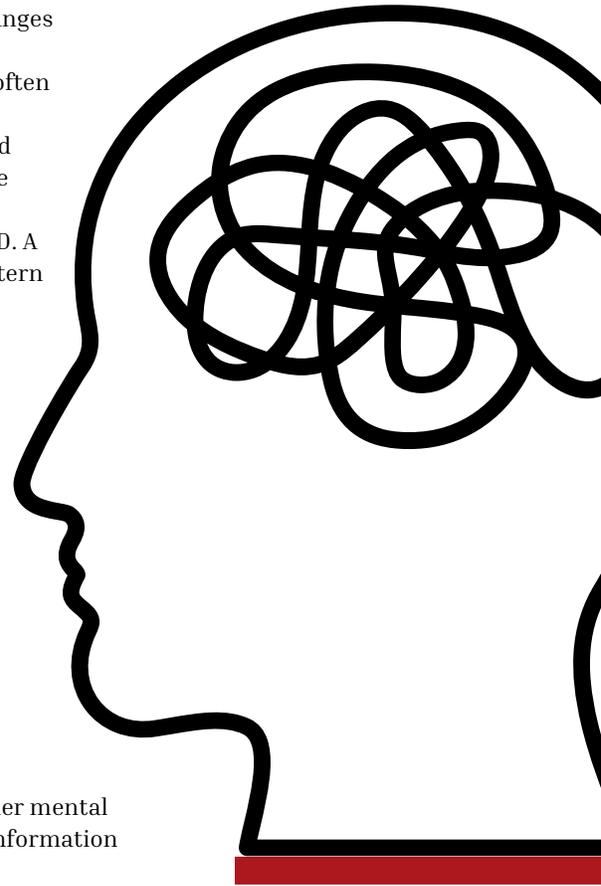
Most people with SAD feel symptoms in late fall or winter, known as winter-pattern SAD. A smaller number experience symptoms in spring or summer, referred to as summer-pattern SAD.

Symptoms

According to John Hopkins Medicine, here are the most common symptoms for SAD:

- Increased sleep and daytime drowsiness
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed
- Social withdrawal and increased sensitivity to rejection
- Grouchiness and anxiety
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Excessive tiredness (fatigue)
- Decreased sex drive
- Decreased ability to focus
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Increased appetite, especially for sweets and carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Physical problems, such as headaches

Symptoms can come and go at around the same time each year. SAD may seem like other mental health conditions, so see your health care provider for a diagnosis if needed. For more information on SAD, visit [here](#).



New Hires

The following were recently hired through Nov. 4 at Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation:



Brandy Tolliver
Hired: 11/4/24
Title: Admissions Specialist
Place: Main Office



Robert Scruggs
Hired: 10/15/24
Title: Asst. Property Manager
Place: Isabella Towers



Marie Dalton
Hired: 10/21/24
Title: Asst. Property Manager
Place: The Vista at Summit Hill



Mark Adams
Hired: 9/9/24
Title: Maintenance Tech. II
Place: Western Heights



Cilvolya Sligh
Hired: 10/17/24
Title: Leasing & Occupancy Specialist
Place: Five Points Properties



Jacqueline Jones
Hired: 10/16/24
Title: Leasing & Occupancy Specialist
Place: North Ridge Crossing

Retirements

The following recently retired from Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation:



Jim Barker
Retired: 11/1/24
Title: Vice President of Administration
Place: Main Office

Thank you, veterans!

A heartfelt thank you to all who serve and have served our great country! On Nov. 12, we proudly attended the 40th Annual Veterans Appreciation and Awards Luncheon, hosted by the East Tennessee Military Affairs Council at Bridgewater Place. We were especially honored to have U.S. Marine Corps veteran and First Creek at Austin Property Manager Peter McKay join us for this meaningful celebration. Peter served six years as a light armored vehicle crewman.



First Creek at Austin Property Manager Peter McKay, center, served six years in the U.S. Marine Corps.



Announcements

Got an announcement you'd like to put in The Bulletin? Email the information to jnash@kcdc.org. The deadline for content will typically fall on the last Monday or Tuesday of the month before publication.

- **Holiday luncheon**
 - KCDC's holiday luncheon is set for 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 11, at Supportive Maintenance. Keep an eye out for more information.



Newsletter Dates

The Bulletin is scheduled to be released every two months. Here are the newsletters for 2025:

- January-February
- March-April
- May-June
- July-August
- September-October
- November-December



Newsletter Ideas

Got something you think could be in The Bulletin? Email information to jnash@kcdc.org. The deadline for content will typically fall on the last Monday or Tuesday of the month before publication.

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Resident Resources

