

## JANUARY 2021 SPOTLIGHTS



**Nicki Martin** and her husband Jeff are the owners of Weeping Willow, a women's clothing and accessories store, and The Bronzer Tanning Salon, both located on Main Street in McArthur. The Martins knew that starting businesses in a small town was a financial risk but both are thankful they made the investment. The local community and people in surrounding counties have been great to support the shops and the couple are looking to expand. They are particularly grateful things are going well given the COVID-related circumstances. Both businesses took a huge hit earlier this year when they were forced to shut down because of the virus. Nicki said the interruption in their operations was especially devastating to their family because both she and her husband are self-employed. Thankfully, they were able to reopen after eight weeks and the local support has returned. Nicki said she believes people feel safe in their businesses and enjoy shopping locally. She added, "We look forward to continuing our businesses while watching Vinton County expand." The ESC is happy for the Martin's success and appreciative of their willingness to serve as a community partner to support our work in education.



**Charlie Hudson** wears two hats, one as owner/managing member of Sugar Creek Pizza LLC & New River Pizza LLC and the other as the mayor of Wellston. Mr. Hudson reports the pandemic has brought about changes and challenges in both areas of service. As a restaurant operator he has had to pivot from a dine-in environment to touchless delivery of off premise meals all the while trying to keep the workforce healthy and employed. Mr. Hudson has been able to stabilize the businesses by maintaining jobs via CARES Act funds, retraining the staff on sanitation procedures, and operating at food safety levels higher than ever.

Regarding his duties as mayor, Charlie stated, "As for managing the city, we have taken every precaution to ensure that basic services will be met at all times. We developed a quarantine plan to sequester water and sewer plant key people in case of an outbreak in those departments. Zoom meetings have replaced in-person council and committee meetings. We used CARES Act money through grants to Community Action Agencies to assist folks with utility payments and other creative uses that were allowed under the guidelines. The most important thing we accomplished was to role-model the behaviors we expect from our citizens: take it seriously, wear masks, don't congregate in large groups and look out for each other. Our slogan is to put the WE in Wellston and let's get through this together."



**Mindy Caldwell** is the owner and director of French City Academy, a child-care center located in Gallipolis. During COVID, the center has had to make several adaptations to normal routines. One area that has been a struggle is maintaining parent communication and engagement while limiting public access inside the center. To help with this situation, the staff is using HiMama, an app that supports communication between staff and parents. HiMama is used to send pictures of children doing activities throughout the day, deliver notes to encourage parent and student discussion of the days' events, and share additional activities for the parents and children to engage in at home.

Mindy stated, "While this year has been a tough year for all of us, it has also been a year of growth. I feel like we have gained the ability to think quickly on our feet and adjust our care to fit the needs of our children and their families. We have had to step up and change the services we provide at a moment's notice and I feel that this has only made us stronger."