

BUILDING BRIDGES. BREAKING BARRIERS. THE RIPPLE EFFECT.

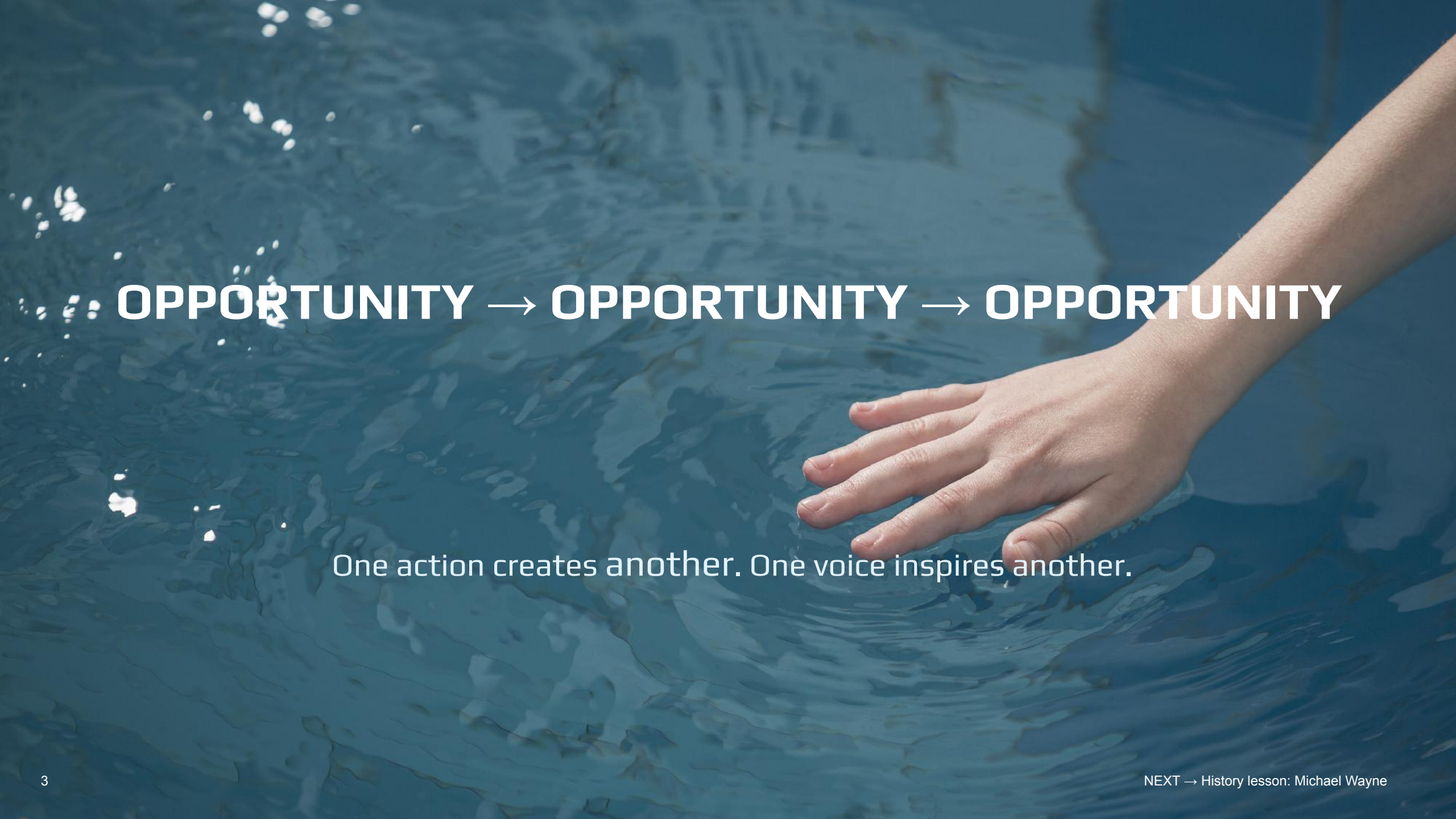
Speak Up and Speak Out:
Stronger Together. Protecting our Community.,

THANK YOU





One opportunity can change the direction of a person's life.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching out of a body of water. The water is a deep blue with many small, shimmering ripples. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with fingers slightly spread. The lighting is soft, creating a calm and contemplative mood.

OPPORTUNITY → OPPORTUNITY → OPPORTUNITY

One action creates another. One voice inspires another.

- Knock at the Door
- Push on the Door
- Someone else opens the Door
- Find the Door
- Each Door creates opportunity





THE RIPPLE EFFECT

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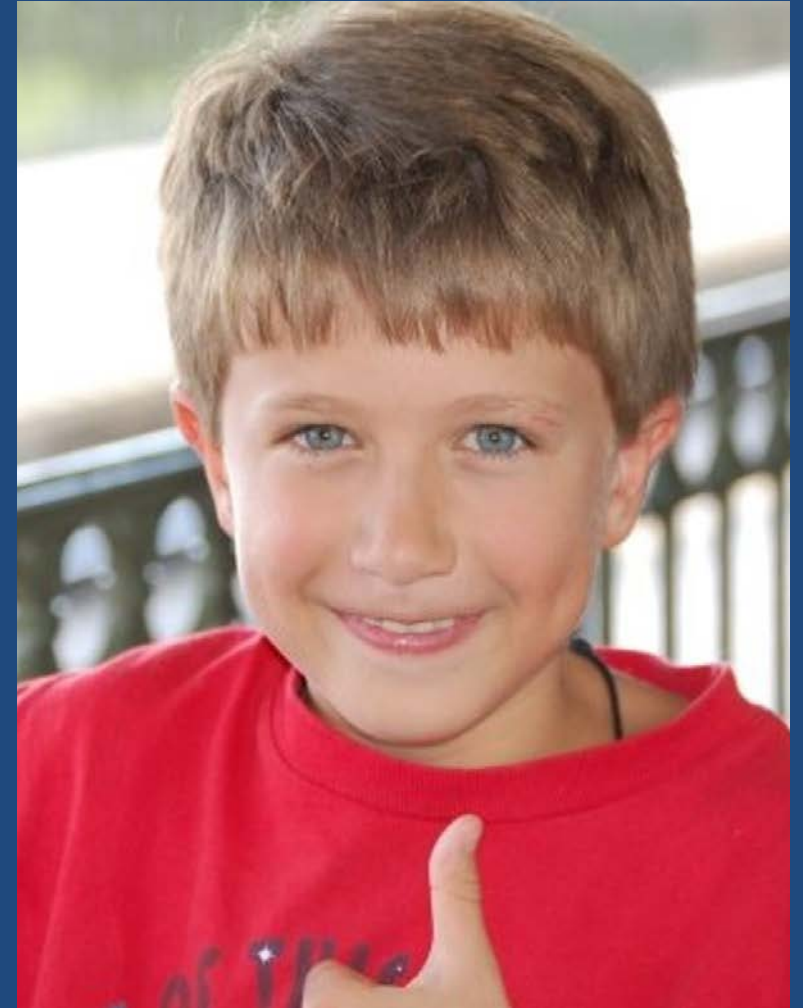
A HISTORY LESSON ON MICHAEL WAYNE



Newborn – I cried



Around 3 years old

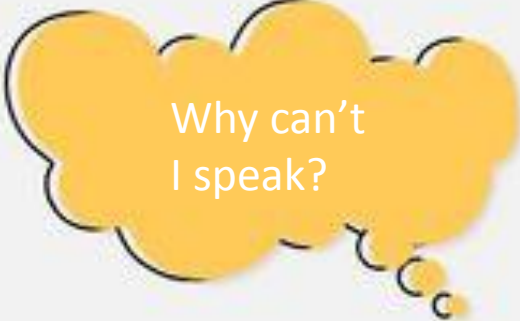


Learning to communicate

Early diagnosis from TEACCH,
UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC

***TEACCH stands for:
Treatment and Education of Autistic
and Related Communication
Handicapped Children***





Why can't
I speak?

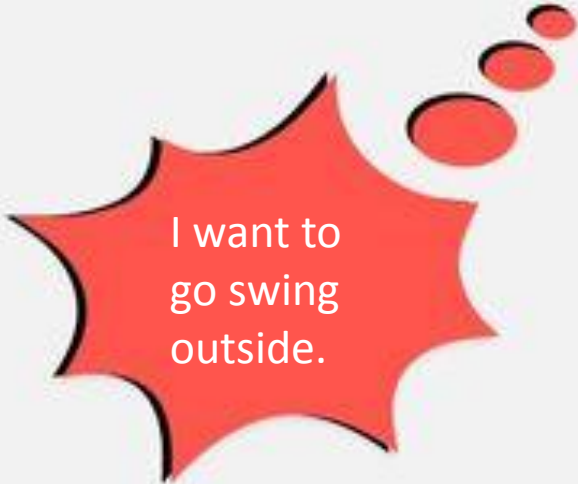


I want my
Barney.



I'm hungry.
Please give
me food.

Thought Bubbles



I want to
go swing
outside.



I'M
THIRSTY!



Video please!

A VOICE DOES NOT REQUIRE SOUND TO HAVE VALUE.

Have we learned how they communicate?



All communication
types have value



Compliance. Consistency. Patience. Persistence.
=
Best Outcomes

Persistence creates ripples too.



Socially, I needed help. Fortunately, students saw my longing to fit in and asked our teacher to help bridge the gap.

Fourth grade: a Bridge to Belonging



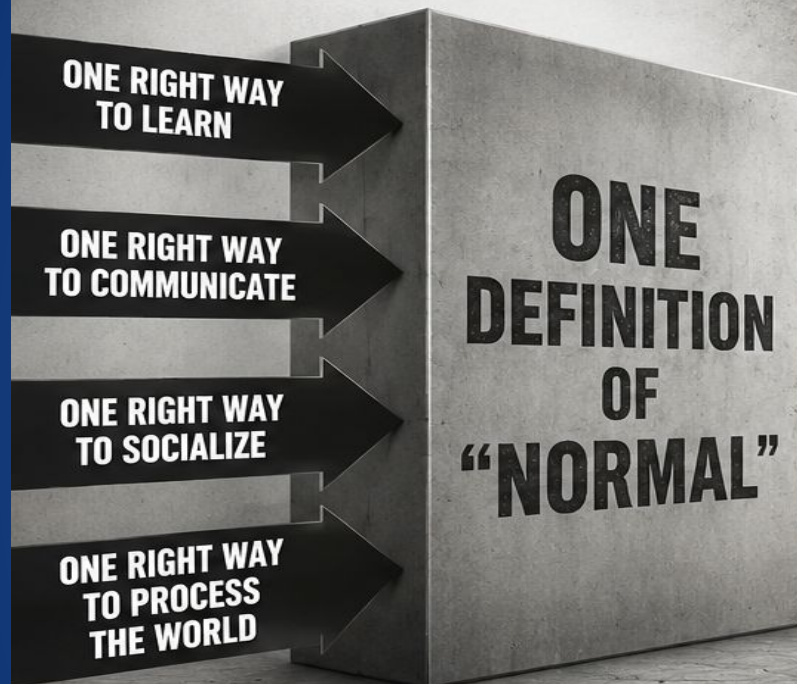
Ms. Durant created an inclusive environment



NEXT → Birthday party



**THE OLD WAY:
ONE SIZE. ONE EXPECTATION.
ONE DEFINITION OF "NORMAL."**



**WHAT IF WE
STOPPED ASKING
PEOPLE TO FIT
THE ENVIRONMENT?**

**THE NEW WAY:
CREATE ENVIRONMENTS
WHERE DIFFERENT PEOPLE
CAN SUCCEED**



**Different Ways
to Learn**



**Different Ways
to Communicate**



**Different Ways
to Connect**



**Different Ways to
Experience the World**

**Inclusion isn't changing the person to fit the world.
It's changing the world so more people can belong.**

ACCESS → INCLUSION → BELONGING

Do people know me? Do I contribute?
Belonging creates meaningful inclusion!

In fourth grade, I crossed a bridge to belonging because one teacher decided she would create the bridge!



Ms. Durant – One of my heroes!

Inclusion is an experience — not a location.

Is the student....

Learning? Participating? Connected? Heard?

Are supports appropriate?

Are expectations meaningful?

SELF-ADVOCACY DOESN'T BEGIN AT GRADUATION.

Teach it. Practice it. Encourage it. Make room for
it.

MAKE TIME FOR IT!

SPEAK UP AND SPEAK OUT

— STRONGER TOGETHER. PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITY. —



THE POWER OF FAPE

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is more than a legal right—it's the foundation for hope, opportunity, and a brighter future.

FAPE MEANS EVERY STUDENT HAS THE RIGHT TO:

- ✓ A quality education at no cost to their families
- ✓ Individualized support to meet their unique needs
- ✓ Access to the general education curriculum
- ✓ The opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential



INCLUSION CHANGES LIVES

Inclusion isn't just a place—it's a mindset. When students with intellectual and developmental disabilities learn alongside their peers, everyone benefits.



BELONGING

Students feel accepted, valued, and connected.



GROWTH

All students develop empathy, respect, and understanding.



SUCCESS

Inclusive classrooms lead to stronger academic and life outcomes.



COMMUNITY

We build a more inclusive, equitable society—together.



Let's work together to **protect FAPE** and **champion inclusion**.

*Speak up. **Speak out.** Make a difference.*

Finding my people through sports



Water boy



Team



Belonging

- My friend, Anthony, looked beyond my ability and saw an opportunity because I showed interest.
- “Maybe there’s a way Michael can be part of this.”
- That’s belonging inclusion!
- That’s building bridges!
- That’s breaking barriers!



From the sidelines to a dream



Friday Night Lights



Social life



Responsibility

**DREAM BIG.
KEEP BELIEVING.**

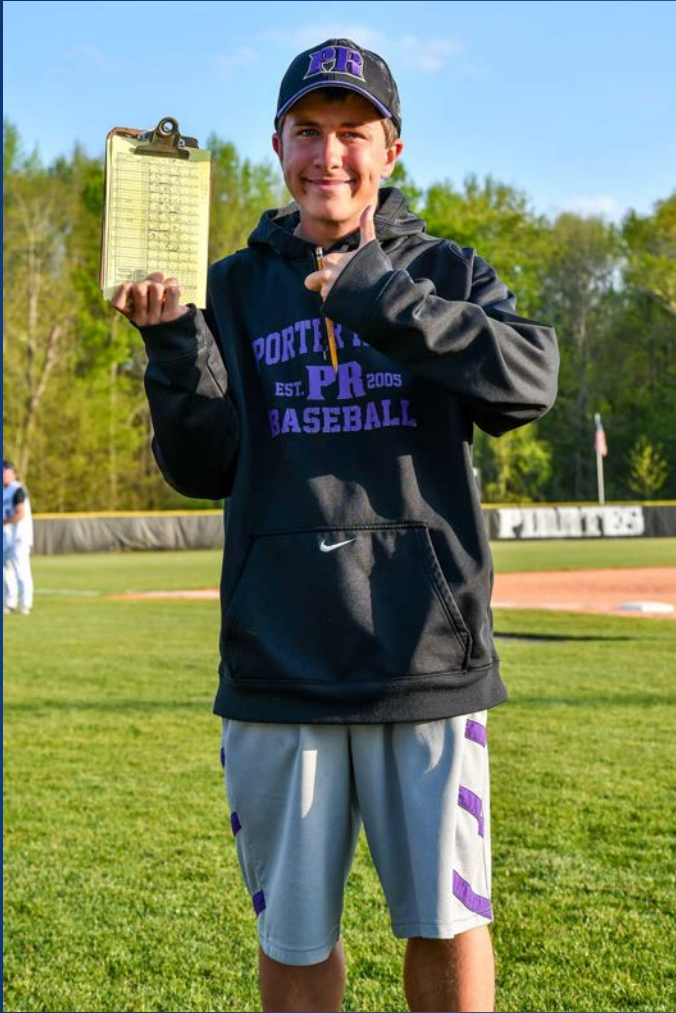


**ONE DAY, I WILL BE IN THE BOOTH
DOING WHAT I LOVE...**

and inspiring others along the way.











STRONGER TOGETHER.



PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITY.



I found
my voice.

I found
my voice.

I found
my voice.

I found
my voice.

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my voice.

I found
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I found
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I found
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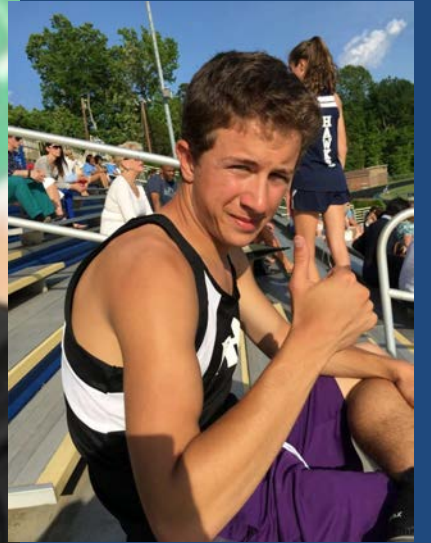


A dream can begin with someone else's voice.
Meeting Al Michaels a few years later

**YOU MAY NEVER MEET THE PEOPLE YOUR LIFE
INFLUENCES.**



Just because you don't see the ripple... Doesn't mean the ripple isn't moving.



YOUR JOURNEY. YOUR CHOICES. YOUR FUTURE.

Many Paths. One You.

COLLEGE



Expand your knowledge.
Build your future.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Affordable. Flexible.
A smart start.

TRADE SCHOOL



Learn skills.
Build your future.

VOLUNTEERING



Give back.
Make a difference.
Grow your heart.

GAP YEAR



Explore. Experience.
Discover what's next.

YOU HAVE
THE POWER
TO CHOOSE
YOUR PATH.

*Believe in yourself.
We're with you
every step.*

WORKPLACE OPTIONS



Earn. Learn. Grow.
Build your career.

START HERE

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SUCCESS

Inclusive classrooms lead to stronger academic and



COMMUNITY

We build a more inclusive, equitable society—together.

ONE VOICE. MANY CONVERSATIONS.

Endless Opportunities.

1 IEP MEETING



Building a plan for success.

2 COLLEGE ACCOMMODATIONS MEETING



Ensuring access and support in college.

3 CONVERSATION WITH AN EMPLOYER



Talking about strengths, skills, and fit.

4 THE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT



Advocating for health and well-being.

5 CONVERSATION WITH A LANDLORD



Discussing needs and building a great fit.

6 LEGISLATIVE MEETING



Sharing ideas and advocating for meaningful change.

7 TESTIMONY BEFORE A COMMITTEE



Using **your** voice to make an impact.



**SELF-ADVOCACY TODAY.
LEADERSHIP TOMORROW.**



EDUCATE



EMPOWER



ADVOCATE



INSPIRE

BUILDING BRIDGES, BREAKING BARRIERS.



ISOLATION
LIMITED OPTIONS
LOW EXPECTATIONS
NO OPPORTUNITIES

*One step. One choice.
A world of possibilities.*

OPPORTUNITIES
EVERY DAY.
YOUR FUTURE
AWAITS.

EDUCATION

CAREERS

COMMUNITY

FRIENDSHIPS

INDEPENDENCE

POSSIBILITIES



Graduation was festive!



the graduate himself

WALKING ON *Sunshine*



Jerry Snow, Editor, with The Enquirer Journal newspaper, gave me my first opportunity that would eventually propel me into a career in journalism.





Union County Public Schools Board of Education
Barry Tucker recites the oath of office before being sworn in as a member of the Union County Public Schools Board of Education on Tuesday, Jan. 14. He is surrounded by family members.

Tucker joins UCPS Board

BY MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL
MWONELL@THEEJ.COM

MONROE, N.C. — Barry Tucker was sworn in as a member of the Union County Public Schools Board of Education on Tuesday, Jan. 14.

After considering a recommendation for him from the Union County Republican Party, UCPS board mem-

bers voted for Tucker to join the board.

He will fill the vacant District 3 seat of former board member Gary Sides, who resigned to take a seat on the Union County Board of Commissioners.

Tucker, who will fill the seat for two years, says he plans to be "a voice for our kids."

"When children and families prosper, the entire community prospers," Tucker said. "I am committed to doing my part in my power for the foundation for the future generation."

A native of Union County, Tucker said he plans to be "a voice for our kids."

SEE UCPS/PAGE 10

The Champagne Manor closed its doors just after New Year's Day, emailing couples who had booked weddings there with news of the foreclosure on Jan. 2.

The Champagne Manor, located at 4707 Sugar and Wine Drive in Monroe, was known as a European-style mansion and a popular wedding destination on 35 acres with a lake.

The Manor's owner Jason Lottman said in a statement that the Manor reached out to all pending weddings notifying them of the closure, but one said that they only learned of the closure through their florist. Lottman said the Manor is working with each couple individually to figure out refunds, but none of the couples who shared their stories had received any refunds yet.

Lottman bought the property four years ago on a "short-term bridge loan, due to COVID



The Champagne Manor, known as a European-style mansion and a popular wedding destination, shut its doors unexpectedly Jan. 2, leaving multiple couples who had booked the venue in the lurch.

making it near impossible to find conventional financing for a wedding venue," he said in the statement.

"After some extensions and other moves over the last few years, in hopes to one day find permanent long-term financing, the plan that the Manor was in was no longer allowing us to extend," Lottman said in the statement. "Unfortunately, after exhausting all efforts, and after a very challenging 2024, we were unable to bridge the gap between our loan balance and what our approved new funding would allow."

"Despite a major increase in mortgage/rent from our lender,

we were able to rent the property back from them at a premium to make good on our fall 2024 events, but the increased rent amount was not sustainable for 2025," Lottman said. "This is an absolutely heartbreaking time for all of us, and we plan to make things right with everyone involved as quickly as we can," Lottman said.

Rachel Staley and Travis Marshall from Myrtle Beach, S.C., committed to have their wedding at the venue. After they signed the contract with the venue, Lottman stopped communicating with them. Staley said on a Facebook post that she and Marshall were able to rent the property back from them at a premium to make good on our fall 2024 events, but the increased rent amount was not sustainable for 2025, Lottman said.

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Art Walk draws 100

BY MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL
MWONELL@THEEJ.COM

MONROE, N.C. — The 7th annual Art Walk last weekend drew about 100 artists, whose art was shown in five galleries and at local businesses in Monroe.

Portraits, beaded crepons and paintings of all kinds were on display Friday, Oct. 11, and Saturday, Oct. 12, while the Monroe Art Festival was being held on Main Street.

The Art Walk has been held twice a year — in October and April — since 2007 to give people a chance to see pieces created by local artists. Co-founder Joyce Rent-



From a voice to 'The Voice'

BY MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL
MWONELL@THEEJ.COM

INDIAN TRAIL, N.C. — Jaylen Dunham has a voice like no other, one that attracted the attention of "The Voice" earlier this year.

The Porter Ridge High School freshman has already built an impressive resume of singing and acting. Dunham's first stage appearance was with Innovation Drama Academy's production, "Once on This



Shipley scores first NFL touchdown en route to Super Bowl LIX

BY MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL
MWONELL@THEEJ.COM

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. — When Will Shipley lunged into the end zone for the first time in his young NFL career, he was greeted with hugs and smiles from Philadelphia Eagles players.

Saquon Barkley was another player who greeted Shipley and hyped him up after Shipley scored his first postseason touchdown.

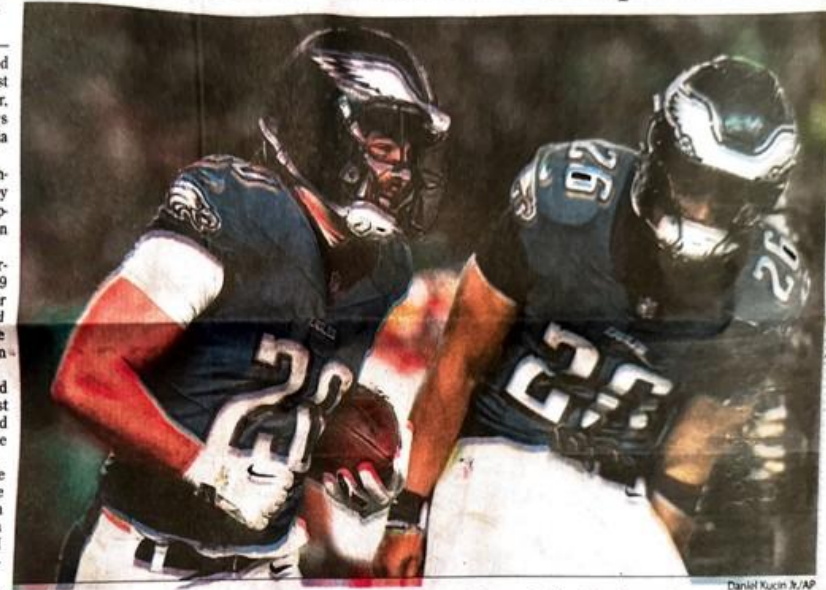
Shipley's unheralded performance as a 5-foot-11, 209-pound special teams player and running back helped Philadelphia to a 55-23 home win over the Washington Commanders Sunday.

Monday morning, Good Morning America journalist Lara Spencer interviewed Shipley about going to the Super Bowl for the first time.

"It's just a dream come true," Shipley said on the GMA interview. "To do it in the NFC Championship with my teammates and guys I love, I couldn't be more blessed."

A rookie fourth-round draft pick, the 2021 Weddington High School graduate had his first run of over 50 yards in the postseason when he dashed through Washington line.

Shipley also gave Philadelphia a lift in the second quarter when he ripped the ball away from Jeremy McNichols and forced a fumble recovered by second-string running back Kenneth Gainwell.



Philadelphia Eagles running back Will Shipley (28) celebrates with teammate Saquon Barkley (26) after scoring a touchdown during the NFC Championship football game against the Washington Commanders on Sunday, Jan. 26, in Philadelphia.

"I was trying to get a hat on them," Shipley said of his special teams play in the GMA interview. "I felt it hit my legs so I was looking down and trying to grab it. It got kicked backward."

Shipley contributed a 35-yard kickoff return before finishing the game with four

carries and 77 rushing yards. He also had two tackles on defense.

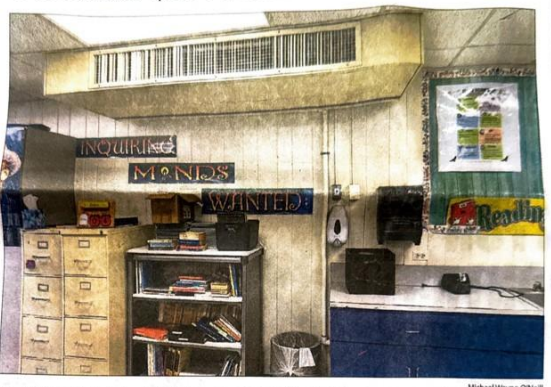
Washington Commanders wide receiver Jamison Crowder, a 2011 Monroe High graduate, only recorded one reception for four yards.

Shipley will also be the second athlete in Union County history to be on a 53-man roster that makes the Super Bowl. He will be the first Weddington High School football player to make the Super Bowl since 2010 graduate Darius Kilgo did it in 2016.

Kilgo has one Super Bowl ring with Denver Broncos and another with the New England Patriots.

Shipley's Eagles will face Kansas City, who won the previous two Super Bowl titles last season, on Feb. 9 at the Superdome in New Orleans. The game is a rematch from Super Bowl LVIII in Glendale, Ariz., when Kansas City edged Philadelphia with a 38-35 win.

Needed: \$39.4 million for schools



An old-fashioned HVAC system is still in place at East Union Middle School. The school board referendum on local ballots includes \$27.5 million to renovate the current Forest Hills High to be the new East Union Middle School.

Bond referendum includes moving EUM, design for new Parkwood High

BY MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL
MWONELL@THEEJ.COM

UNION COUNTY, N.C. — The Union County Public Schools has a \$39.4 million bond referendum on local ballots this fall. The money would pay for renovating the current Forest Hills High School to serve as the new East Union Middle School and cover the design phase for a new Parkwood High School.

Both schools are aging facilities that still have amenities from the 1960s when they were built. The current bond will continue to build on previous bond referen-

dum investments. The bond's more expensive project is phase two of the East Union Middle School project, which is the last piece of the puzzle for the Forest Hills cluster.

The county had a successful bond in 2022, resulting in the replacement of two old schools — Forest Hills High and East Elementary, both of which are nearing completion. They are expected open at the start of the 2025-26 school year.

The plan is once the new Forest Hills High School opens, the old building will be renovated to become the new

East Union Middle School. The anticipated cost of the work needed for the relocation is \$27,567,447. The two schools would then be on the same campus, as well as share athletic fields.

The preconstruction project for Parkwood High would cost \$10,705,804. That would pay for design services for a new school, environmental studies, land surveys, traffic impact analysis, geotechnical testing to identify soil and subsurface materials, and site development and construction permits.

Both projects were approved for this bond by the Board of Education during its April 11 meeting before it shared the resolution four days later with the Board of County Commissioners, which approved adding it to county ballots later this spring.

If approved, the bond would cost Union County homeowners an additional \$8 per \$100,000 in property tax value.

RENOVATIONS
Colon Moore, UCPS assistant superintendent of administration and operations, said UCPS planned renovations

off of the total price at her venue, which includes tables, gold Chiavari chairs, ivory linens, access to all decor, set up and clean up. She also has a caterer and photographer that have offered their services at a discounted rate for affected couples.

"I truly feel for these couples who were left in such a heartbreaking situation," Wiley said. "Planning a wedding should be one of the happiest times in their lives."

Hollie Fox, owner of Hillside Farms, is offering half off the venue booking price for long as couples need it. She said interested couples in the venue should reach out directly to her at Hollie@hillsidefarms.com. "We were saddened to hear about the recent, unexpected closure of Champagne Manor and the impact that it will have on many couples," Fox said. "We understand the importance of and stress behind this situation and would like to help ease some of that. We are committed to helping in any way we can, and we hope to be part of their special day."

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Rachel Staley and Travis Marshall from Myrtle Beach, S.C., committed to have their wedding at the venue. After they signed the contract with the venue, Lottman stopped communicating with them.

Staley said on a Facebook

STEPPING IN TO HELP

In response to the closure, wedding venues surrounding Union County are offering discounts to help the engaged couples affected by the foreclosure.

Among many of the venues offering discounts are Tuscan Ridge Wedding Venue in Oakboro, The Hotel Concord, Sofia's Weddings and Events in Oakboro, and Hillside Farms



**WITH EVERY OPPORTUNITY
THERE COMES RESPONSIBILITY.**





Independence is a Choice

*It's about knowing yourself,
making smart decisions and
advocating for what you need.*

- ✓ Self-awareness leads to self-advocacy.
- ✓ It's okay to step outside your comfort zone.
- ✓ Know what you want — and what you need right now.
- ✓ Independence means making choices that work for you.

*Confidence grows when you speak up,
plan ahead and advocate for yourself.*







I was accepted and chose to go to Wingate University because it is a Christian school and my faith is important to me.



The first son in my family to graduate from college!



**A DIAGNOSIS
SHOULD GUIDE
THE SUPPORT**

A PERSON RECEIVES — NOT

DEFINE THE FUTURE

THEY ARE

CAPABLE OF ACHIEVING.



*The future is
yours to write.* ♥



Stronger Together

Protecting Our Community



Stronger Together

Protecting Our Community

SPEAKING UP

IS ABOUT MAKING SURE

your voice is in the room.

Your voice
becomes a
ripple!



WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE **RIPPLE** THAT REACHES YOU TODAY?

Because **if you leave here and do nothing...** It stops.
But if *something* you hear today changes *one* action... *One* conversation...
One expectation... *One* opportunity you take or give someone...

The ripple continues.





MY STORY IS NOT FINISHED...

The ripple continues.

PLEASE FOLLOW ME!



Follow me

INSTAGRAM



FACEBOOK

Building Bridges. Breaking Barriers.



**INSPIRATION
STATION**
—OF—
AMERICA



Website

Questions?



One pebble. One point of impact. Then the circles begin.

PLEASE
SHARE YOUR
FEEDBACK.

THANK YOU!

