

Round Up Program Benefits Area Benefactors

Tullahoma Utilities Authority customers generated more than \$40,000 in donations to area non-profits in 2022. A total of \$40,200 was disbursed in January in third round of charitable giving through TUA's annual Round Up Program.

TUA President Brian Skelton presented three checks in the amount of \$5,000 each to representatives of Attic Outlet, Shepherd's House and Coffee County Salvation Army.

Another \$4,000 was presented to Partners for Healing, Tullahoma Day Care Center, and Hospice of the Highland Rim.

Recurring donations of \$550 per month are made to the Henry Center and Good Samaritan Ministry to help clothe and feed members of the community. All monies generated by customers who allow their bills to be rounded up to the nearest dollar are disbursed to local organizations that serve families in need. Additional monies were used to fund the Home UpLift Program, which addresses energy efficiency needs for low-income households.



Rural Route 4 Antiques

There's a sign above the white clapboard house naming it an antique mall. Outside, in the parking lot, there's a restored 1950-ish Ford pickup with advertising on each door. There's a crunching sound as a car pulls up and parks near it. An elderly woman in a rocking chair on the porch greets visitors, all the while holding her cell phone with a firm grip. Her cell phone seems out of place here. A neon sign in the window flashes "open" every few seconds. Inside there's another sign that's not as friendly. "You break it, you buy it," it says.

Antique stores are misnamed. They should be called "memory banks." You can't meander through one without conjuring up memories. There's a red Huffy Sportster bicycle in one booth. It has brakes on the handlebars and a couple of gears. I remember my first bike. It was a Burgess Hybrid. It had a 24-inch wheel on the front and a 26-inch wheel on the back. The chassis was mostly rust, but in a few areas, you could see faint blue. It was assembled from parts I collected over time. The most expensive part was a 99-cent mirror I had bought at Lynn's 5 & 10 and put on the right side of the handle bars. But it was dependable enough to get



Phillip Burgess

(Continued on back)

Watts Happening

TUA stalwarts retire, taking 87 years' experience with them

TUA lost roughly 87 years of combined experience when two of its longest-serving leaders stepped down in January. Vice President of Administration and CFO Mary Mealer retired after more than 42 years with the company; Field Operations Supervisor David Johnson retired after more than 44 years.

Johnson began his career with TUA at the age of 17 as a groundman truck driver. In time, he apprenticed to be a lineman and was promoted to foreman. In 2008, he became assistant supervisor. By 2010, he'd taken the helm of the department. Now, he plans to enjoy retirement with his wife, Phyllis, and "hopefully, become a better golfer."

Mealer began her career in late 1980 as a customer service representative. In 1985, she moved into payroll and later advanced to an accounting position. In 2015, after completing her Bachelor's degree, she became the first woman in company history to claim a VP-level management position—an achievement of which she says she is "especially proud."

In retirement, Mealer says she plans to travel and to "step up" her volunteer work; but mostly, she says, "I'm going to do whatever Mary wants to do, whenever Mary wants to do it!"

TUA thanks them both for their dedication and valued contributions and wishes them both well in retirement.



(Continued from front)

me to and from Rip's Needmore Grocery on hot, summer afternoons for an RC and peanuts.

A few booths over from the bicycle is an Elvis telephone. An oversized hand holds the receiver. I go back to 1977. I'm in the middle of my radio shift on a muggy August afternoon. The Associated Press teletype bell rings. That means there's a news bulletin coming. I stand over the machine as it types. There's only two words: "Elvis dead."

I wander over to a booth whose shelves are filled with tintype photos. Lots of Civil War soldiers in their uniforms. There's one taken on Lookout Mountain, near Chattanooga, after the "Battle Above the Clouds." There are soldiers posing on an outcropping of rocks. I have been to that rock and have sat where they did. But the tintype that is most haunting is that of a man and his wife. She sits to his right. Her hands are folded in her lap. Her husband wears an old coat. There's a hole in it near his left shoulder. He looks tired. Neither is smiling. Life hasn't been easy for them. And I remember a picture of Pa & Ma Burgess. It is strikingly similar. They aren't smiling either. And I know their life was hard.

There's a shelf of plastic model cars, trucks and airplanes, the kind you assemble with a tube of glue. I remember my dresser in the room I shared with my brother on Rural Route 4. There was a '57 Chevy, a '65 Chevy and a '49 Coupe on it.

A couple of airplanes hang from the ceiling by fishing line and a thumb tack pushed into the ceiling. I see a full-length mink coat on a mannequin. And I think that Mama B might have liked it back in the day. There's a green sugar bowl like the one that Pa Burgess always kept on his table.

I stop looking. My heart is full. I drive home as my head spins with memories. And I didn't buy a single thing.

Philip Burgess' book, "Rural Route 4, The Good 'Ol Days Were Never Better," is available on Amazon.