2023 Remarkable Story Awardees

Emily and Billy Thompson are the parents of three children, including one who died from a chronic illness at the age of nine, and for whom they established and oversee the non-profit Amazing Gracelyn Organization, which serves Gracelyn’s hometown of Cocke County, Tennessee.

The organization provides a scholarship to young women from Cocke County, pursuing a health-related field of study at the post-secondary level. A blessing-box program was also created which operates on a “take if you need, give if you can” basis.

Emily, a former paramedic, has worked as an undergraduate researcher at ETSU since 2021 and presented novel research at the Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology’s Future Directions Forum. Graduating with a B.S. in Psychology and a minor in Human Development and Learning, Emily is determined to help those who need the type of support that she once needed in the aftermath of Gracelyn’s death.

Billy Thompson left an industry in which he was earning a substantial income to come back to school and pursue his dream of becoming a physician. While at ETSU, Billy participated as an undergraduate researcher in a biomedical lab at Quillen College of Medicine, and presented his research at the American Epilepsy Society’s annual meeting (2022) in Nashville. Billy earned membership in ETSU’s prestigious 1911 Society this year.

2023 Outstanding Mentor Award

Dr. Christine Anzur
Assistant Professor and Graduate Coordinator
College of Arts & Sciences
presented by student Brooke Marie Hoa Hornberger

Paving Paths of Success Alumni Spirit

Jesse Shelton, ‘13 caught the eye of Jessica Cooper Shelton, ‘13 during an Honors College welcome picnic at East Tennessee State University. Their experiences at ETSU – studying philosophy, history and psychology was part of the inspiration for The Philosopher’s House, a tea shop the couple opened in Johnson City. “A lot of the passions that underlie this teahouse were engendered while I was at ETSU,” Jesse said.

“I was a first-generation/low-income college student. The only way I was coming to college was through a scholarship,” Jessica said. “I was fortunate to get an Honors College scholarship, and I knew immediately when I saw ETSU that is where I wanted to be.”

Jesse has other business ventures, investing in property and land management, and Jessica is a choreographer for the Jonesborough Repertory Theatre. They studied abroad while at ETSU. Jesse - Kathmandu, Nepal, and Jessica - Nagoya, Japan. Both taught English in Japan for a year after graduation and recently visited their Japanese friends and toured a tea-producing farm where they were able to take part in the process of rolling, drying, and steaming their own tea.
While in Ecuador, students, under the direction of Daniel Hedden, director of capstone projects and Meaghan Heimbach, student engagement coordinator, collaborated with the Casas de Bienestar y Vida (Houses of Wellness and Life) in different parts of Quito.

The Casas de Bienestar y Vida (CBVs) are publicly funded community health organizations that target a variety of vulnerable populations and offer integral health services. All CBVs are staffed with doctors, nurses, nutritionists, psychologists, and other health professionals, but each has a particular focus and aims to serve a particular population.

**Children:** students helped with efforts to improve nutritional education, take part in workshops on growing food in urban gardens, and created a community garden for a local school. **Adolescents:** students engaged in educational discussions about addiction prevention, sexual and reproductive health and safety. **Seniors:** students were invited to share a communal meal of traditional Andean food and dance with elderly members of the community.

**Miranda Hall,** senior, is a media & communications major with minors in storytelling and Japanese. She is also the arts & entertainment editor for the East Tennessean. She spent spring semester studying abroad in Japan at Kansai Gaidai.

“While I’ve been able to make friends with many international and Japanese students, I’m lucky that I’m studying abroad with my fiancé and fellow ETSU student, Nick Meredith, pictured. We’ve been taking some intense classes this semester (it is STUDY abroad), but we’ve also been able to explore Japan. My time here has been life-changing, academically and personally.”

**Jessica Rodriguez-Potter,** Cleveland, TN  
B.S. psychology, concentration in child psychology, double minor in early childhood development and trauma and resilience. She conducted research under the guidance of Dr. Diana Morelen, presented research at ETSU's Appalachian Student Research Forum and the Dr. Jay W. Boland Symposium. Rodriguez-Potter served with POLO and the Center for Academic Achievement. Interning as a medical advocate and labor doula with Atlanta’s Embrace Refugee Birth Support group, she hopes to use these experiences to advocate for maternal and child welfare in the humanitarian aid sector.

**Paulina Ramirez,** Medellin, Columbia, South America  
B.S. biology with minors in culture & health and psychology. She conducted cardiovascular research under the guidance of Dr. Krishna Singh and presented at the state capitol, the American Physiological Society at Experimental Biology Conference, and ETSU’s Boland Symposium. She volunteered and interpreted at the Remote Area Medical Clinic and Providence Medical Clinic. Ramirez plans to obtain an M.D. specializing in cardiology to combat health care disparities in the Appalachian area.

**William (Billy) Thompson of Ocala, Florida**  
B.S. health sciences with a concentration in human health and a minor in psychology. He conducted epilepsy research under the guidance of Dr. Chad Frasier and has presented his research at ETSU's Appalachian Student Research Forum and the American Epilepsy Society's annual meeting. He also completed a senior thesis on cellular energetics in epilepsy.
Going Beyond
Spending Time in Tanzania

Jessica Potter, ‘23, a child psychology major and Honors scholar, is studying Swahili in the East African country from mid-June through early August.

“We are so proud of Jessica and what she has accomplished,” said Dr. Christopher Keller, senior international officer at ETSU and dean of the Honors College.

Potter captured a Critical Language Scholarship, a deeply competitive award offered to U.S. college students annually through the U.S. Department of State. The award provides students an in-country language immersion experience in which they gain proficiency in one of the many critical languages offered by the program. Potter stands as the first ETSU student to receive the award.

Potter is spending 10 weeks in Arusha, Tanzania, near the base of Mount Kilimanjaro. Her interest in Swahili is tied to a previous internship and a future fellowship at Friends of Refugees, a nonprofit organization in Atlanta that assists female migrants and refugees from East Africa.

“I am incredibly thankful and excited for the opportunity to travel to Tanzania and learn Swahili this summer,” said Potter. “I would not be here without the support of wonderful mentors and friends, and I hope my experiences honor the people I care for and will serve in the future.”

Community focused research

Lindsay Sliwinkski, ‘23, nursing, won first place at the ETSU Service Showcase - highlighting service-learning, alternative breaks, and community engagement by students. Sliwinkski’s project, helping to develop educational materials for families, evolved out of volunteering with Agape (a crisis pregnancy center in JC). She will begin her career as a mother-baby nurse in Knoxville.

Jessica Upham, ‘23 and Seth Morelock, ‘23 won second place, presenting on the alternative break they led in Charleston focusing on conservation.

Sara King–Hook, junior presented on womens health during her alternative break experience in Nashville, co-led with Hannah Winston, junior.

Students present theses at the Tennessee Collegiate Honors Council Conference. Dr. Contraras–Kotterbay and Dr. Medley accompanied students during the conference hosted by Austin Peay State University.

Zackarias Coker, ‘23, biology, top left is the 2023 recipient of the Barbara A. Horwitz and John M. Horowitz Outstanding Undergraduate Abstract Award.

“I’d like to thank ETSU’s Honors College, my lab colleagues, and especially my thesis mentor, Dr. Polichnowski, for teaching invaluable skills and providing necessary feedback so I could experience such an achievement. The knowledge I have gained with this opportunity will undoubtedly carry over to my career as a researcher in the field of optometry!”

Dr. Aaron Polichnowski (mentor), top right. Bottom left, Marie Wright and Jacqui Chivers (lab colleagues).
The Honors College Day of Giving Committee had 100% participation. Special thanks to Eli Combs & Andrew Letterman for serving as our student representatives.

Thank you to all who “Go Beyond” helping to support student scholarships, and honors programming. To designate your gift to a specific program, contact:

Dessi Ford, Dir. of Development
University Advancement
423-439-5125 or forddk@etsu.edu.

Day of Giving Success!

ETSU's Office of Prestigious Awards is committed to helping students apply for and be awarded some of the most impressive nationally competitive scholarships available.

2022-23 Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship
David Anglin Piper Floyd
Levi Holcomb Lillian Maupin
Gabrielle Naillon Dylan Singleton
Amaya Transou Amanda Wu

2022-23 Goldwater Scholarship
Piper Floyd

A partnership between a Disruptions in Paris course and a North African Influences in Paris course allowed for two classes to network while combining their explorations of the city. Brittany Mitchell, student engagement coordinator, lead scholars.

Students visited museums, took walking tours to see historical sites, and met with a human rights activist.

Disruptions and influences
Paris Spring Break

Student Engagement Scholarship

Lauren Ledford Conference Participation

Conducting research under the guidance of Dr. Andrea Clements and graduate student Mary Jo Oliver-Hedrick, Ledford completed a thesis analyzing the effectiveness of a Trauma Informed Care training program conducted among a group of police officers in Delaware. She submitted an abstract and was accepted to the Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) conference.

“Tasting to express my sincere appreciation for the Student Engagement Scholarship Award. This award will greatly help in making traveling to SEPA and presenting my thesis a reality.”

Speaker Series

2023 Care-Driven Leadership in the Appalachian Highlands

ETSU campus students, faculty, and staff partnered this spring to bring awareness to issues facing people and industry in the region.

Dr. Ron Roach, Chair
Department of Appalachian Studies - An Introduction to the Region of Appalachia

Dr. Brian Noland, ETSU President and Dr. Randy Wykoff, Dean, College of Public Health - Why Appalachia Lags Behind the Rest of the United States in the Interface of Jobs, Education, Healthcare, and Behavior

Dr. Tom Kincer, Associate Dean, Rural Community Programs, Department of Family medicine, Quillen College - Social Determinants of Appalachia

Matthew Rauhuff, pre-med Honors senior - Providing CPR Training to High School Students in Rural Appalachia

Dr. Nancy Dishner, President and CEO, Niswonger Foundation - Creating a Positive and Sustainable Difference in Northeast Tennessee Education

Etsu Office of Prestigious Awards

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