

# UNDER THE BIG TOP

*Junior Auxiliary to Host  
Circus-Themed Soirée*

BY AUDREY HANES  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

Next month, hundreds of charitable patrons across Northeast Arkansas will gather at Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro's annual Charity Ball with the purpose of funding its 12 service projects and the thousands of hours its members dedicate to bettering the lives of area children each year.

Heading up Charity Ball 2023, "Circus Soirée," is fourth year Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro (JA) member Amy Turner, who is excited to bring an evening under the big top to the community. Turner, a quality control specialist in loan review at Centennial Bank, is a longtime Jonesboro resident and Arkansas State University graduate who was eager to join an organization that would help her impact the lives of children in her community.

"After I graduated from A-State, I was able to stay home with my boys, and when time came for me to go back to work, I chose not to teach," said Turner, whose degree is in early childhood education. "This left me missing the joys of helping children learn important skills and celebrating with them their successes. A friend of mine that was in JA at the time suggested that I put in my letter of interest, and the rest is history."

Turner, who also volunteers with The Foundation of Arts, has seen firsthand the way JA can truly make a difference.

"Working with kindergarteners can be interesting, but what most stands out to me is the progress that one of my students made in 2021," said Turner of her time with Kick Start Kindergarten, one of JA's 12 service projects. "She came into the program struggling with letter recognition, and by the end of the year she was reading and spelling three-letter words. The progress she made was largely impacted by the amazing teachers and interventionists that were in place in her school, but I know that our sessions also made a lasting impact. She would always look forward to using Hot Wheels cars to help identify the letters, and that excitement changes things for them."

Turner has also volunteered with Growing Healthy, one of JA's most well-known projects. The hands-on project facilitates healthy lifestyle choices and teaches students about the risks associated with smoking and obesity for area 6<sup>th</sup> grade students through the dissection of pig and cow hearts and lungs and with the guidance of local physicians who volunteer to help.

"Another fond memory is actually being able to be present with my own child during a pig heart and lung dissection," said Turner, who has two sons. "I always thought I would struggle with Growing Healthy, but I have grown to love the message behind

it – teaching children what those organs actually look like can help associate their knowledge of healthy choices throughout their lives."

Kirby Smith, the current JA president, is passionate about giving back and is involved with numerous other local charities, as well: Shark Wave Aquatic Team (SWAT) founder and board member, St. Vincent De Paul Walk/Run coordinator to help the poor in NEA, Blessed Sacrament School PTO member and president of Arkansas Eosinophilic Esophagitis Support Group.

"When I was asked to be a part of Junior Auxiliary five years ago, I was thrilled because I have always admired the work they do with children in the community," said Smith. "Our 12 service projects cover so many needs in our community for our children,

and I love knowing we are helping our neighbors. We are able to assist schools, programs, scholarships and mentorship programs in Jonesboro.

"I try to live by the statement from Saint Francis of Assisi, 'For it is giving that we receive.' I see this organization live out that statement daily helping others in our community, and I am so proud to represent that. I have spent the majority of my life in Northeast Arkansas and love serving in this area. It is my home."

Smith and her husband, Chance, have three sons. She owns and operates Massey Swim, where she teaches stroke and technique and lifesaving swimming skills to children and adults.

Along with Growing Healthy and Kick-Start Kindergarten, JA members also volunteer with and run 10 other service



*Leslie Felipe, Amy Turner, Bennett Young*

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AMY TURNER



projects – Community Outreach Programs (COPs), Crown Club, Girls Enrichment Junior High, Girls Enrichment Senior High, Consolidated Youth Services (CYS), Literacy & More, Scholarship, Share & Wear, The Learning Center (TLC) and Times Tales. Together, the 95 women in Jonesboro's chapter of Junior Auxiliary dedicated more than 2,000 service hours to the children of Craighead County in the past year.

"We look for ways to improve the lives of Craighead County children by developing and implementing programs that instill self-esteem and challenge minds," said Smith. "We work on community service projects in the health, welfare, civic and educational field and work closely with local school districts and other organizations to identify children with unmet and special needs such as clothing, school supplies and medical/dental care. Being a member of Junior Auxiliary requires a high level of commitment, dedication and, above all else, a heart of service."

Leslie Felipe, a first-year member in Girls Enrichment – Junior High, has benefitted greatly from her participation in the service project. "Girls Enrichment helped me get out my comfort zone and

made me try and learn new things and meet new people," said Felipe. "It's all about having fun and having a good experience with each other, which I really appreciate."

Bennett Young is another area student who has worked with one of JA's service projects. She is a third-year member of the organization's Crown Club, the high school version of JA that also focuses on fundraising and charitable work with children.

"It has been one of the most impactful experiences of my high school career, and I am overjoyed to be the president this year," said Young. "Crown Ball was an event to replace our finance project, and we went in a little nervous about doing it for the first time. It ended up being the most successful event Crown Club has hosted in years. I am so proud of all the girls and know how impactful the money we raised will be."

All 12 projects are entirely funded by the organization's sole annual fundraiser, Charity Ball. Typically attended by more than 600 guests and raising more than \$100,000 for JA, the 2023 circus-themed soiree will feature gaming, live and silent auctions, dinner and drinks, live music and more.

"I tried to think of ideas that could be grand and fun but still not take over the purpose of the event; Circus Soirée seemed perfect to keep some of the fun youthfulness to our event that we try to implement with our various projects," said Turner of the circus theme. "This year's event will be at The Embassy, like the past two in-person events, but I hope that some of the changes and decorations we are implementing will help it feel like a totally different event. Most of all, I hope the attendees leave Charity Ball knowing about the organization that their attendance was supporting and how their donations are contributing to the children of this amazing community."

"There will be a red-carpet entrance with photo opportunities and champagne provided by Honda of Jonesboro, Memphis Soul Revue will be featured on the Tommy's Express Car Wash Stage and the gaming room has been revamped to accommodate some changes that were needed along with adding a poker tournament. The amazing silent and live auction items we have gathered are really the highlight of the evening. Cap that off with a couple of raffle opportunities, and I just know that this year will be one for the books."

Turner is thankful for the women who have worked alongside her for the past year to help make Charity Ball a success.

"I hope that everyone that attends this year appreciates and understands the hard work that goes into the event," she said. "We are a group of women that gather together for the sole purpose of serving this community. The members are all very talented at many things, but they are also moms, daughters, sisters, wives and employees. Our work with JA is in addition to all of that and we give it everything we have, so when you see a JA member at the event that you know, please give them a hug or high-five – they have 100% earned it."

A Circus Soirée will take place on March 4 at the Red Wolf Convention Center at Embassy Suites of Jonesboro. Doors open for the black tie-optional event at 5:30 p.m. with the program and dinner beginning at 6:30 p.m. For more information about Charity Ball 2023 or to purchase tickets to the annual event, go to [bidpal.net/jacharityball2023](http://bidpal.net/jacharityball2023) or visit Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro on Facebook or Instagram.

Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro presents

# CIRCUS Soirée

Charity Ball 2023

## SATURDAY March 4, 2023

Embassy Suites by Hilton Jonesboro  
Red Wolf Convention Center

Doors open at 5:30 PM  
Program & Dinner begin at 6:30 PM

Try your luck at

REGISTER HERE:

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