



Kelsey McFadden and Jessica Baker

Through the Looking Glass A Mad Gala Charity Ball 2025

BY AUDREY HANES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

Now in its 54th year, Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro's annual Charity Ball is an event looked forward to by so many because of both the elaborate evening itself and the cause for which it raises money – the children of Craighead County.

The 2025 Charity Ball chair, Kelsey McFadden, now in her fourth year with Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro (JA), has been working year-round with the 95 active members of the nonprofit organization to make "Through the Looking Glass – A Mad Gala" an enchanting evening for guests. Charity Ball will take place on Feb. 22 at the Red Wolf Convention Center, where the creative theme will come to life amid live music, gaming and more.

"I'm absolutely thrilled to invite each and every one of you to an evening full of magic, wonder and purpose with Through the Looking Glass – A Mad Gala," said McFadden. "As chairwoman of this incredible event, it's truly an honor to be part of something so special that impacts the lives of youth and families in our community."

McFadden is originally from Wynne and moved to Jonesboro to attend Arkansas State University, where she earned a degree in radiologic science and a specialty in sonography. Now an ultrasound technologist at St. Bernard's OBGYN Associates, she and her husband, Lathan, have a son, Benson, and a daughter, Parker. McFadden says that every moment with her children brings her purpose and joy, and she has found similar fulfillment with her volunteer work with JA.

"I have always loved children and wanted a way to be involved in the community, so Junior Auxiliary was a great fit for me," said McFadden. "Serving the youth in our county is a privilege. In the past four years, I have volunteered for Growing Healthy, Literacy and More, Girl's Enrichment Junior High and Senior High, The Learning Center and Consolidated Youth Services.

"Some of my favorite JA memories are volunteering with Growing Healthy at local public schools. The kids are always so excited for these events, and they remember them forever. We still have people tell us that it was one of their favorite school



memories years after graduating and how they have held onto that experience."

Current JA President Jessica Baker, now in her fifth year with the nonprofit, was first introduced to the organization by her mother and was eager to get involved with JA herself.

"My mom, Diane Hicks, is a life member of Junior Auxiliary and was heavily involved in JA in the community I grew up in," said Baker, controller at Southern Marketing Affiliates Inc. "I can remember her serving in JA, so growing up it was always something that was a part of our lives. When I was given the opportunity to join JA here in Jonesboro, it was not only important to me to continue a legacy my mom was a part of, but also to serve the community. Being involved in JA allows me to work with other service-minded women to help make a difference in our community, especially among children, and allows our organization to drive meaningful change in Craighead County."

Baker, an A-State graduate who has served as the advisor of the university's Alpha Gamma Delta sorority for 15 years, is also on

the Board of Directors for the Arkansas State University Alumni Association, is a Goodwill Ambassador for the Jonesboro Chamber of Commerce and recently graduated from Leadership Jonesboro in 2024. She and her husband, Jon, have two sons, Jett and Jaxon.

McFadden, Baker and the other dedicated JA members serve 5,000 individuals through their 12 service projects, which work to improve the lives of Craighead County children, youth and families in the health, welfare, civic and educational fields. JA members, through the organization's projects – Growing Healthy, Crown Club, Molly the MegaBody, Literacy and More, Kickstart Kindergarten, The Learning Center, Consolidated Youth Services, Community Outreach Programs, Share and Wear, Scholarship and Girls Enrichment – are dedicated to making a difference.

Because the money raised at Charity Ball solely funds those 12 projects, it is an important evening for the community to step up and support.

"Last year, thanks to the generosity of our incredible community, Charity Ball raised more than \$171,000," said



McFadden. "These funds allowed us to serve approximately 5,000 individuals and fund 12 service projects across Craighead County. That's amazing, right? But we can't do it without you – whether it's attending the event, becoming a corporate sponsor, bidding on items in the silent auction (which will be available online, so you can bid from anywhere), or purchasing a raffle ticket from a JA member for a chance to win a getaway at Gulf Place Beach – it makes all the difference.

"When you support this event, you're directly helping put coats and shoes on children in need, providing scholarships for students aspiring to continue their education, offering support to struggling teens and so much more. Every dollar counts, so I invite you to don your most whimsical attire, grab your friends and get ready for a night of fun and giving."

Baker says that community involvement and support is what helps JA continue to thrive and be successful.

"By donating to Junior Auxiliary and attending Charity Ball, our community is able to directly impact children and families in need," she said. "Serving and giving back has always been important to me because it fosters such a sense of belonging and creates a positive impact for the future of our community. The Jonesboro community has always been so supportive of helping others in need, and I'm grateful that they believe in the mission

of JA and our collective efforts help build a brighter future for everyone for generations to come."

The Feb. 22 Mad Gala will feature a live auction, a gaming room and music from City Mix on the Tommy's Express Car Wash Stage. Guests can also enjoy photo ops on the Honda of Jonesboro Green Grass Walkway to Wonderland, a 360-photo booth and a traditional photo booth to capture all the memories.

"This year's theme, Through the Looking Glass – A Mad Gala, is incredibly creative," said Baker. "Kelsey McFadden, our 2025 Charity Ball Chair, has done such a great job helping organize fantastic live auction packages, silent auction items and a night full of amazing entertainment. I can't wait to see the decorations and creativity on display through this theme. The band, City Mix, is going to put on such a great show, as well. Their playlist will make everyone want to be on the dance floor."

The 54th annual Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro Charity Ball will take place at 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 22 at Red Wolf Convention Center at Embassy Suites of Jonesboro, located at 223 Red Wolf Blvd. The ball will include a cocktail hour, dinner, a program, live and silent auctions and more. To purchase tickets, text "CHARITYBALL2025" to 44834. For updates and more information, follow Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro, AR on Facebook.



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