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***HardisonInk.com* accepts another award;
It's all about the blood**



LifeSouth Director of District Operations J.D. Pettyjohn (left) presents HardisonInk.com owner Jeff M. Hardison with the 'Oscar' for being a media outlet to help attract blood donors to save lives.

Photo by LifeSouth Regional Manager Trish Andress

Story and Most of the Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 26, 2017 at 7:47 p.m.



GAINESVILLE -- Publisher Jeff M. Hardison accepted another award from LifeSouth Community Blood Centers on Friday afternoon (Feb. 24) during the Media Appreciation and Chairman's Luncheon

Tish Andress (left) and J.D. Pettyjohn serve as emcees.

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LifeSouth Community Development Coordinator Laura Bialeck put the event together with the help of her interns. It was another stellar event and had the theme of The Oscars this year.

The buffet-style luncheon included tossed salad, broiled fish, green beans, stuffed baked potatoes, rolls and iced tea. There were various desserts as well.

Many members of the media, chairpersons for blood drives and representatives of organizations that conducted blood drives in 2016 all received replica Oscar awards.

“LifeSouth and HardisonInk.com Saving Lives Together” was noted at the bottom of the trophy Hardison accepted. This marked the seventh consecutive annual luncheon when LifeSouth recognized the daily news website.

There scores of recipients of trophies that afternoon.

LifeSouth Director of District Operations J.D. Pettyjohn and LifeSouth Regional Manager Trish Andress served as emcees for the luncheon and awards ceremony.

The Gainesville-based blood bank sees 35,000 donors annually, Pettyjohn said, and that includes the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties.

Donors help recipients who are military veterans at the VA hospital, trauma patients, cancer patients and even the children who need blood in pediatric care, he said.

The local media tells the people that LifeSouth always needs blood. It is a daily demand, Pettyjohn said.

On any given day, LifeSouth has a one-day to five-day supply of blood supply for the local hospitals.

Therefore, Pettyjohn said, LifeSouth is every single day trying to talk people into donating blood. Finding first-time donors is a goal. Finding repeat donors and even

lifetime donors is another objective of the group.

He thanked all of the chairs of local drive efforts, and he especially thanked all of the donors.

There is a dire need for blood.

“A trauma patient can use up to 100 units of blood,” Pettyjohn said.

Al Whitney speaks about the importance of blood drives to save lives.

AL WHITNEY

The guest speaker Friday afternoon was Al Whitney. He is on his second tour of the

United States, where he has already donated blood in every state.

He ran blood drives for 35 years as a volunteer. During his first 20 years, he ran one every eight weeks.



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The last 15 years, he ran 56 blood drives for each of those years.

“Back in 1965, I was in downtown Cleveland,” Whitney said. “And I was walking down the street and there was a sign ‘Donate Blood.’ What the heck. I can do that.”

After that first donation, as he stepped out onto the street, he heard in his mind “Al, you can do more than this.”

He called the blood bank and said he wanted to run a blood drive. The person there asked if he had ever done that before. He responded that he had not done it before.

On his first drive, Whitney said he felt it was a great success. There were three units collected.

The year 2000 rolled around, and he had been conducting blood drives for 35 years at that point.

Donors told him just before the start of that year that the Y2K virus was going to kill all of the computers. There was a prediction of turmoil and economic collapse.

Rather than retiring from the effort, he decided to join the campaign with that blood bank to collect 2,000 units to celebrate the year 2000.

The final tally was 2,069 units, he said.

He retired from running blood drives, but he continued to donate platelets.

In 2007, the phlebotomist was telling him to “Squeeze, Al, squeeze,” (the little rubber ball to help increase blood flow).

And he heard in his mind, again, “Al, you can do more than this.”

“I wish I didn’t hear that voice all the time,” he said, and the audience laughed.

That is when he chose to donate in all 50 states. It took him just under five years to accomplish this in all 50 dates. Now he is one-third of the way through his second tour.



Al Whitney holds a teddy bear as he speaks about donating white blood cells.

White cell blood donation, he explained, has zero shelf life. Donation of white cells is only on demand by a doctor for a specific need, he said. Whitney has also donated white cells.

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He learned one call that he accepted was to give white blood cells to a 12-year-old girl. Knowing this, he bought a teddy bear at a gift shop and a card.

On the card, he noted for the young patient that the bear would watch over her and take care of her while she was in the hospital and when she gets home.

The parents picked up the card and asked who it was from, because there was no name on it. The nurse told the parents that the person who provided the card and teddy bear was the person who stayed connected to a machine for three hours to donate that medicine for the little girl.

Now, every first unit of white cells that goes out to a patient from that blood bank gets a teddy bear with a card the donor can write to the patient and sign their first name, Whitney said.

Whitney said a patient who received his white cells after that wrote him a letter in return.

Whitney he read the letter to the audience and he said that he wanted all of the donors to know was addressed to them.

It follows:

“Sunday, Dec. 31, 2006

“Dear (each donor was to say their name):

“Even though I don’t know who you are, for the past year you have often been on my mind. You were the first person to help save my life.

“On Dec. 27 of ’05, I was diagnosed with leukemia and was presented with a company of host of problems and issues that went along with it.

“With your help and all of the work at University Hospital, and the Iowan Cancer Center, I was able to beat the cancer and become a survivor.

“But more importantly, you helped me change as a person. Your generosity, courage and selflessness showed the side of what a person could be, and is now what I strive for.

“The teddy bear you sent me sits proudly in my office, and is visible from in front of my computer, where everyone in the office can see it. It is a remembrance to me that people do care and all that is good.

“Thanks for all that you have done.

“Gary.”

After reading the letter to all donors, Whitney said he plans to donate after the luncheon. He was hoping to make it a double donation that day. This donation marks the 798th unit that he will have donated in his life.

His most important unit, Whitney said, is not the first one he donated. Instead, his most important unit to donate is “the next one.” The most important unit always should be the next one, he added.

PINTS FOR PERRY

Director of District Operations J.D. Pettyjohn shared an upcoming tribute to the late Perry Colson McGriff, Jr. (June 29, 1937 – Feb. 2, 2017).

McGriff was an American politician, retired insurance agent, and former All-American college football and baseball player. McGriff was a member of the Florida House of Representatives, mayor of Gainesville and Democratic nominee for a seat in the Florida Senate.

In reference to LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, he was an epic leader and donor.

“I had the privilege and blessing of knowing Perry very well,” Pettyjohn said. “He is a

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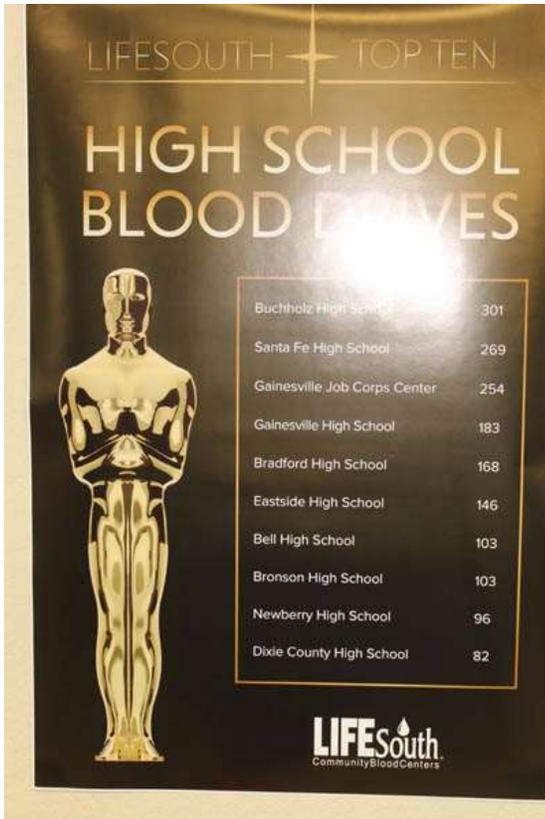
man who served the blood center for many, many years.”

McGriff was on the LifeSouth Community Blood Centers Board of Directors for more than 25 years.

McGriff was one of the group’s leaders who helped start the Five Points of Life Cross-Country Bike Ride to raise awareness for blood donations, Pettyjohn said.

Over the course of his life, McGriff donated 67 gallons.

The "Pints for Perry" event is taking place in Gainesville. During that event, the goal is to have that many gallons donated in one day as McGriff had donated over his lifetime, Pettyjohn said.



From the Tri-County Area, three high schools placed in the Top 10 for doantions this year. Bell High School was seventh; Bronson High School was eighth and Dixie County High School was tenth.

From the overall Top 10 blood drives of 2016, Walmart of Chiefland came in at fifth highest.





From the government blood drives relevant to the Tri-County Area (and Eighth Judicial Circuit) in 2016, it was the Office of State Attorney William Cervone as Number One; Cross City Correctional Institution in second place; the Florida Department of Transportation in Chiefland at fifth place; and Lancaster Correctional Institution at sixth place.