

# THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND NEWSLETTER

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*Friends of Tennessee's*  
**BABIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

**3rd Quarter 2025**



## FOTB DAY AT RIPLEY'S AQUARIUM OF THE SMOKIES!

Over 1,000 guests dove into fun at our Friends of Tennessee's Babies Day at Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies on August 27<sup>th</sup>! Families explored the wonders of the deep from giant crabs to graceful stingrays and sharks that swam overhead.

Children squealed with delight as they got to pet jellyfish and look for the elusive sea turtle in the tunnel all in a sensory friendly environment! This magical day of connection and discovery was made possible thanks to our generous sponsors: Workshop Tools, The Old Mill, Performance Food Service, Tennessee State Bank, Axle Logistics, and Concord-Farragut Sertoma Club. Thank you also to our incredible group of volunteers. Your support helped create a space where every child, regardless of ability, could feel celebrated, curious, and completely immersed in ocean joy!

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The Greater Knoxville Sertoma Club hosted the 2025 Celebrate Sound walk on Sept. 21st at the beautiful UT Gardens! Celebrate Sound® returns 80% of the net proceeds directly to East Tennessee through support to: The University of Tennessee Speech and Audiology Department, Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs, and The Hearing and Speech Foundation. Thank you to everyone who came out for this wonderful day!

# Celebrate Sound Walk 2025

# Golfing for Good!

## The Concord Farragut Sertoma Club Hosts the 35th Annual Lindsey Nelson Golf Tournament

Friends of Tennessee's Babies was honored to once again be a beneficiary of one of Knoxville's most beloved golf tournaments...the Lindsey Nelson Golf tournament. Golfers teed off on August 5<sup>th</sup> at the beautiful Avalon Country Club to honor the late broadcasting legend who has left such an impact on our community. Proceeds from the event directly benefits our outreach event programs at FOTB. We received \$30,000 from this year's event! Thank you to the Sertoma Club, all of the generous sponsors, golfers, and many volunteers who made this day such a success!



## THANK YOU, VARIETY FOR SUPPORTING FOTB!

Variety, the Children's Charity of East Tennessee delivers equity, independence, social inclusion, mobility, and self-esteem to children in our area. A longtime, supporter of FOTB, we are incredibly grateful for this organization and the impact they have on our community. This year, we were awarded \$5,000. These funds will help us with our respite programs and Zoo day!



# 2025 Tennessee Nonprofit Conference

Executive Director Robin Hamrick traveled to Nashville in August to attend the 2025 Tennessee Nonprofit Conference at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. This conference is designed to offer support to Tennessee's non-profits through innovative breakout sessions, networking, and an inspirational address by keynote speaker Amber Hamilton who has over 25 years of experience in the non-profit world. Topics included impact, finance, fundraising, culture, leadership development and advocacy.



## Bidding Farewell to a Friend... A Tribute to Bill Williams

East Tennessee said good-bye to a legend in August. Many of you knew Bill Williams from his decades on [WBIR Channel 10](#), where he was a trusted voice and a compassionate storyteller. But in our world, Bill was so much more—a tireless advocate for East Tennessee's special babies and a beloved member of the Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs family. Bill was a charter member of our advisory council when it was established in 2012, and he continued to serve faithfully until his passing. His heart for children and families was unwavering, and his impact will be felt for generations. For 24 years, the Bill Williams Fishing Tournament has supported FOTB, raising funds and awareness with every cast and catch. That tournament—and the joy it brings to our families—stands as a living tribute to Bill's legacy of love and inclusion. We will miss him dearly. His kindness, his voice, his smile, his words of encouragement, and his deep commitment to our mission will never be forgotten.



**GIVING  
TUESDAY**  
*December 2nd*

Would you like to be a "friend" to Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs? It's EASY! Just visit our website [www.helpingbabies.org](http://www.helpingbabies.org) and click on the volunteer/give tab at the top of the page. You can make a big difference in the life of Tennessee's babies!

# A New Home for a Vital Resource: FOTB Hearing Aid Loaner Bank Moves Forward

Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs is proud to announce a new chapter for our Hearing Aid Loaner Bank, a trusted resource for pediatric audiologists across the state. Now housed and managed by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center Audiology Clinic, the Loaner Bank continues its mission: ensuring that infants and young children (birth to age 5) have access to temporary hearing aids while awaiting their personal devices. This well-stocked bank offers a wide variety of hearing aids to fit a broad range of hearing levels helping audiologists provide timely support during the critical stages of language and developmental growth.



We extend our deepest gratitude to Dr. Crista Froeling, who faithfully managed the bank during its time at the Tennessee School for the Deaf. Her dedication helped countless families navigate the early days of hearing loss with confidence and care.

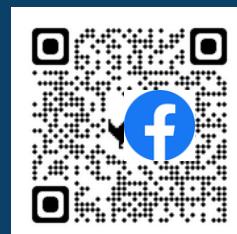
To request a loaner hearing aid, pediatric audiologists may contact: [FOtaids@uthsc.edu](mailto:FOtaids@uthsc.edu) or call (865) 974-4652.

## A Pipe Dream Come True... Office plumbing gets a major upgrade!

This fall, Friends of Tennessee's Babies took the plunge with a full plumbing overhaul in our offices! Thanks to the incredible team at Wilson Brothers Plumbing, our pipes are now flowing freely, our fixtures are fresh, and our basement is officially cleared out and ready for its next chapter. It was a bit like our own episode of Home Improvement (minus the laugh track) plus a lot of teamwork and gratitude. Thank you to everyone who helped us tackle this project!



**To see highlight reels from our events and keep up with all of our happenings, scan the QR code and like and follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Please tell your friends too!**





The Mill & Mine in Downtown Knoxville was once again hopping as Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs hosted its premiere annual fundraising event Jazz Baby 2025...and what a night it was! With the soulful sounds of Vance Thompson and his Jazz Ensemble filling the air, guests gathered to celebrate community, generosity, and the joyful spirit of inclusion and support that defines FOTB. From the first note to the final bid, the evening was a testament to the power of coming together. Attendees enjoyed lively performances, heartfelt stories, and a spirited auction led by our incredible duo of auctioneers, David and Trey Alley of Alley Realty & Auction whose energy kept the room buzzing.



We were honored to recognize some extraordinary individuals whose compassion and dedication inspire us all. This year we recognized our "Jazz Baby" Edie Kesterson (pictured left with her parents Maggie and Clay). Her mom shared the inspiring story of their journey as new parents of a child with special needs. The 2025 "Volunteer of the Year" award was given to Dr. Christa Froeling for her unwavering support and joyful presence behind the scenes especially with the hearing aid loaner bank. "The Zona Mayo Young Ambassador of the Year" award was presented to UTC Freshman Ellery Alm (pictured below with Events Coordinator Katie Ellis) whose advocacy and kindness toward the special needs community shines brightly. "The Bill Williams Hero of the Year Award" was presented to brothers Maximus, Hendrix, (and posthumously to Oakley) Montague who have exhibited incredible bravery through the unimaginable following a tragic accident (pictured left with their parents Jackie and Chip).

We extend a heartfelt thank you to our gracious host, Abby Ham of WBIR-TV and to every guest, donor, and sponsor. Your generosity fuels our mission, fills our hearts and gives us the privilege to do the important work we do. Jazz Baby 2025 wasn't just a fundraiser. It was a celebration of resilience, rhythm, and the remarkable families we serve.







# “The Bill Williams Young Hero of the Year Award”

From the day Jackie and Chip Montague were married on a sunny beach in 2020 they expected life to be full of happy times. Chip had retired, Jackie wanted to be a stay-at-home mom, and together they set about creating an idyllic life in Rocky Top, TN. By the summer of



2024, they had also been blessed with three beautiful, red-headed boys. The eldest son, three-year-old Maximus, was just beginning to ride a bike. Two-year-old Hendrix was busy tearing up the living room floor with his collection of race cars, and one-year-old Oakley who had been working hard on his mobility with Lacey, his early interventionist, had just taken his very first steps. On July 5, 2024, Chip and his three sons set out for a routine trip to the garbage collection center. The call came around noon. The car that held her whole family had somehow unexpectedly and shockingly burst into flames. Chip had worked frantically to free the boys from their car seats while sustaining third-degree burns on his arms. Maximus had burns from his thighs to his head. Hendrix was burned all up the right side of his body. And Oakley did not survive. What followed was months spent at Vanderbilt in the burn unit, multiple surgeries, countless therapies and treatments, all of which continue even today. On top of it all, the financial burden of this extensive ongoing medical treatment has fallen completely on this family. Maximus and Hendrix are now receiving therapy to help them cope with what they can remember and what may never be fully understood. There are still glimmers of normalcy even through the unthinkable adjustment this family has had to make. Hendrix enjoys dressing himself and just the other day as he was getting ready for his first day of school he said to Jackie, “You like my outfit? Take a picture!” The whole family knows all too well that recovery comes with a tremendous amount of physical pain, and that full healing might take a very long time. But there are bright spots, too. Last December the boys were asked to be the Grand Marshalls of the Rocky Top Christmas parade -- to ride in a fire truck and wave to the crowd. That’s a happy moment we hope they never forget.

Friends of Tennessee’s Babies honored Maximus, Hendrix, Jackie, Chip and Oakley posthumously for their heroism with the 2025 Bill Williams Young Hero Award at this year’s Jazz Baby event.

