

Stonecom Quarterly Issues Report

For First Quarter, 2023

January – March

As part of the company's on-going service to the community, Stonecom addressed these issues of significance to the Upper Cumberland during this quarter:

Issue 1: Homelessness in The Upper Cumberland

Homelessness on the rise in the Upper Cumberland. The face of the issue is changing. More single family moms. More children. Are the numbers changing? What is the impact on individuals? We explore the options and what can be done.

Issue 2: Aging Infrastructure

As communities grow, infrastructure needs change. At the same time, the United States is dealing with aging infrastructure. These two issues are face-to-face in the Upper Cumberland. We explore three different parts of infrastructure in our region to see how local leaders are dealing with the issue.

Issue 3: Childcare Challenges

Women are placing their names on the daycare waiting lists across the Upper Cumberland as soon as they become pregnant. It's hard to find a place to take care of children. We explore what day care looks like today and the options available to parents. What are the challenges that must be addressed

The stations sought out guests across our region to discuss these issues on our weekly public affairs program. "Today In The Upper Cumberland" airs each weekend:

Saturday at 6am on 96-9 Highway 111 Country (WUCH), at 7am on Rock 93-7 (WBXE), and 106-9 Kicks Country (WKXD), at 8am on Lite Rock 95.9 (WLQK), and 93-3 The Dawg (WKXD-HD2), at 10am on 101.9/AM 920 (WLIV).

Sunday at 5:30am on Sports Radio 104.7 (WKXD HD3), 7am on Rock 93-7 (WBXE) and on News Talk 94.1/AM 1600 (WUCT), at 12pm on News Talk 94.1/AM 1600 (WUCT), at 6pm on Lite Rock 95.9 (WLQK) and on 101.9/AM 920 (WLIV), at 7pm on 106-9 Kicks Country (WKXD) and 93-3 The Dawg (WKXD-HD2), at 9pm on 96-9 Highway 111 Country (WUCH)

In addition to these issues, Stonecom Cookeville offers more than 70 local news updates per day across its stations.

The stations air local community calendar announcements multiple times per day across all its stations. We also invite local community members to record public service announcements which air across multiple stations.

We also participate in the Tennessee Association Of Broadcasters Public Service Program.

Our stations serve the Upper Cumberland region of middle Tennessee:

WBXE 93-7 – Baxter

WKXD 106-9 – Monterey

WKXD HD-2/93.3 – Monterey

WKXD HD-3/104.7 - Monterey

WLIV 101.9/920 – Livingston

WLQK 95.9 – Livingston

WUCH 96.9 – Cookeville

WUCT 94.1/1600 -- Algood

Issue 2: As communities grow, infrastructure needs change. At the same time, the United States is dealing with aging infrastructure. These two issues are face-to-face in the Upper Cumberland. We explore three different parts of infrastructure in our region to see how local leaders are dealing with the issue.

Program Date:

January 21-22

Program Guest:

Upper Cumberland Regional Airport Director Dean Selby

Overview:

Infrastructure – it's something we deal with every day. Whether it's roads, whether it's the power plant, whether it's waterlines. And there's growing concern across the United States about the shape of our infrastructure. Money being put in place to try to expand, and improve infrastructure, much of it aging. One part of infrastructure is airports. Dean Selby directs the Upper Cumberland Regional Airport, and he joins us to talk about that.

Key Takeaways:

- In recent years, UCRA saw a shift in corporate-type traffic, as they can refuel quickly and efficiently in rural areas. In fact, jet fuel sales are the airport's primary source of revenue.
- Generally, 70% of the airport's traffic originates outside our area, with many flying in to conduct business. This generates revenue for the airport and our entire region
- The UCRA is currently in a transitional phase as it grows; lights, radio transmitters, and runways not only have to be maintained, but also improved. In the coming years, the airport expects to be one of the busiest airports in the state outside major cities.
- The increasing amount of air traffic at BNA is good business for UCRA, as many pilots want to avoid major cities and traffic.
- In order to make our aviation system work, all airports- regional and international- must work together to serve the aviation needs of Tennessee.

Issue 1: Homelessness on the rise in the Upper Cumberland. The face of the issue is changing. More single family moms. More children. Are the numbers changing? What is the impact on individuals? We explore the options and what can be done.

Program Date:

January 28-29

Program Guest:

Vivian Walker, Homeless Programs Advocate for the Homeless Advocacy for Rural Tennessee Group, or HART.

Overview:

Recently, volunteers canvassed the Upper Cumberland trying to figure out just how many people are homeless in our region. Vivian Walker of HART is one of those who led that work. Although the Upper Cumberland has always had a homeless population, there has been an increase in unhoused individuals in the past few years.

Key Takeaways:

- The rise in homelessness in our region is partly due to large cities breaking up encampments and forcing homeless people out to rural areas like the Upper Cumberland
- In rural communities, homeless people are not always in the public eye; the majority of homeless people are not seen on the side of the road- they are living in shelters, cars, or even barns.
- People facing housing insecurity often cannot easily access assistance programs- and many of these people are children. HART strives to connect unhoused individuals with locals who can help them navigate community resources, such as nonprofits, landlords, and churches. People grappling with homelessness can call 844-556-7626 for the HART referral line.
- In terms of immediate solutions, our community needs more low-barriers shelters that can quickly take in unhoused individuals while they find long-term housing.

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Program Date:

February 4-5

Program Guest:

CEO of Upper Cumberland Electric Jennifer Brogdon

Overview:

Much talk across our nation over the last several years about our aging infrastructure. Everything from roads to bridges, water and sewer pipes, and our electrical system. Today we go inside Upper Cumberland Electric – one of the biggest providers in our region.

Key Takeaways:

- With an increasing amount of weather events and natural disasters, issues related to our country's aging infrastructure are apparent.
- Supply chain issues and labor market shortages have also changed the way the UCEMC plans and responds to storms; for example, the co-op ensures its inventory is constantly stocked and vehicles fueled.
- UCEMC is served by one of the nation's largest public power providers, the Tennessee Valley Authority. As one of 23 cooperatives in the state of Tennessee, UCEMC distributes the power TVA supplies.
- Fortunately, UCEMC is at the bottom of the curve of change, so the organization has time to adjust to and prepare for an increasing demand in electricity for our growing region and electric-powered technology.
- The Inflation Reduction Act will provide new funding for electric cooperatives to adapt to new technology.

Issue 3: Women are placing their names on the day care waiting lists across the Upper Cumberland as soon as they become pregnant. It is hard to find a place to take care of children. We explore what day care looks like today and the options available to parents. What are the challenges that must be addressed?

Program Date:

February 11-12

Program Guest:

L.B.J. & C. Head Start Director Penny Meadows

Overview:

One of the biggest issues facing job seekers across the Upper Cumberland right now is a lack of childcare. Many daycares are reporting extensive waiting lists; to the point that UCHRA has stepped in trying to help expand childcare across our region. Also working to fill that need, is Head Start. Today, we take you inside L.B.J.& C. Head Start with its Director Penny Meadows.

Key Takeaways:

- Head Start Director Penny Meadows oversees family partnerships- not just an individual child's education. The entire family must work together to work toward their child's educational goals.
- L.B.J.& C. Head Start not only invests in children, but also their families. For example, if a family is facing food insecurity, they are welcome to eat meals with their child at Head Start at no cost.
- Head Start also strives to prepare children for kindergarten- when they graduate to kindergarten, Head Start, with the permission from parents, sends children's portfolios to their new schools to ensure educators are prepared to meet children's individual needs
- Overall, Penny Meadows believes Head Start's comprehensive, family-involved approach to child education is the key to success.

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Program Date:

February 18-19

Program Guest:

Randy Jones, Putnam County Roads Supervisor

Overview:

The state released a report this week that Tennessee needs some 62.9 billion dollars in public infrastructure improvements during the next 5 years. The biggest areas of increase – transportation. Much of that has to do with growth, and growing costs. In Putnam County, Randy Jones is responsible for the county roads, but so many residents aren't exactly sure what he's responsible for.

Key Takeaways:

- As the Upper Cumberland experiences rapid growth, our road infrastructure requires upkeep and upgrades. A new report finds that Tennessee needs nearly \$63 billion in public infrastructure improvement over the course of the next five years.
- Putnam County Road Supervisor oversees roughly 730 miles of county roads, which are primarily funded by the state's gasoline taxes.
- Currently, Putnam County's road budget does not cover its current needs. However, Governor Lee is currently working to pass a bill that would distribute \$300 million in aid to county roads across the state. This funding would significantly bolster local efforts to maintain and better county roads.
- As spring approaches, the county road employees will increase their output and work to improve our infrastructure.

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Program Date:

February 25-26

Program Guest:

Cookeville Vice Mayor Luke Eldridge

Overview:

Homelessness has always been a part of Upper Cumberland life, but over the last three years, the visible signs of homelessness have increased dramatically. We explore the issues behind homelessness, and how the Upper Cumberland is trying to solve the problem with Luke Eldridge. He has spent time over the last several years working with UCHRA and UCDD on the problem. He now serves as Cookeville's Vice Mayor.

Key Takeaways:

- Over the past few years, the number of unhoused individuals has increased dramatically. The COVID-19 pandemic, housing shortages, daycare fees, low wages, inflation, and increased rent prices contribute to homelessness in the Upper Cumberland.
- Vice Mayor Luke Eldridge encourages locals to donate to the Rescue Mission, Genesis House, and other local organizations trying to alleviate homelessness.
- Education on housing issues is also imperative, as the general public lacks a well-rounded understanding of homelessness in our area. For example, more than half of the students in Van Buren County are facing housing issues.
- Homelessness is a complex matter that requires communal and legislative efforts over a long period of time
- There is no cure-all to homelessness; however, city governments should push for more transitional housing to help those grappling with housing issues in our communities.

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Program Date:

March 4-5

Program Guest:

Cookeville Water & Sewer Director Barry Turner

Overview:

As the Upper Cumberland continues to grow, we face issues with infrastructure – making sure we have enough, expanding infrastructure, and replacing old infrastructure. So what about water and sewer infrastructure that dates back to The Depression? There's some of that in Cookeville, as we find out from Cookeville Water & Sewer Director Barry Turner.

Key Takeaways:

- As the Upper Cumberland continues to grow, we face issues with infrastructure – making sure we have enough, expanding infrastructure, and also replacing old infrastructure, including century-old sewers.
- Cookeville Water & Sewer Director Barry Turner oversees the rehabilitation of old sewers; in fact, the county spends more money improving existing sewers than installing new sewers.
- Because the county lacks the original records of the sewers, the Water & Sewer department faces challenges when updating our subterranean infrastructure.
- Cookeville's primary water source is Center Hill Lake, and the county is currently expanding its output to 22.5 million gallons of water per day.
- While homes typically use the same amount of water, large industries that require millions of gallons of water a day greatly affect the Water & Sewer Department's operations and projections, as the department cannot foresee what industries might come to the Upper Cumberland in decades to come.

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Program Date:

March 11-12

Program Guest:

Justin Veals, co-founder of the Recovery Kitchen

Overview:

Today we go inside the challenge of homelessness with someone who's been there. Someone who continues to help in our Upper Cumberland community. Justin Veals is the Co-Founder of The Recovery Kitchen.

Key Takeaways:

- In the wake of the March 2020 tornado, co-founder of the Recovery Kitchen Justin Veals and his wife began handing out hot dogs to locals displaced by the storms. Since then, they have founded the Recovery Kitchen in Cookeville, working to solve the basic needs of homeless individuals in our area
- Not only does the Kitchen feed locals, they also provide medical assistance, jobs, and short-term housing- often motel rooms.
- The biggest misconception about unhoused individuals is that they are criminals and addicts, but there are a multitude of reasons why people lack shelter- veterans struggling with PTSD, women and children escaping domestic violence, lack of daycare, formerly incarcerated individuals grappling with societal re-entry.
- Justin Veals believes our current system is not designed to cover and address many of the issues unhoused individuals face. For example, people with criminal records often fail to meet federal requirements for assistance.
- In order to address the homeless crisis, community organizations and governmental programs must work together, as unhoused individuals often need rehabilitation, care, second chances, and therapy. As someone who once struggled with abuse and housing insecurity, Justin is a testament to community-wide efforts to rehabilitate those in need.

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Program Date:

March 18-19

Program Guest:

Megan Choate and Rosa Smith of the Upper Cumberland Development District

Overview:

Unless you are the parent of a small child, or work in the industry, you may not realize just how severe the lack of daycare is, not only here in the Upper Cumberland, but around America. During the past two years, an estimated 16 thousand childcare programs across the country have closed. The industry has experienced a 9% decline in the number of licensed providers. We go inside the issues locally with Megan Choate, Director of Lending and Economic Development for the Upper Cumberland Development District, and Rosa Smith, an Economic Development Planner at UCDD.

Key Takeaways:

- During the past two years, an estimated 16,000 childcare programs have closed in the United States. The childcare industry has experienced a 9% decline in the number of licensed childcare providers.
- Megan Choate and Rosa Smith from the Upper Cumberland Development District are working to address child care challenges in our area, which include lack of childcare facilities for infants and affordable child care.
- Women are a vital part of the workforce and not only need childcare services, but also employers who understand that parents need workplace flexibility to balance work and family. In order to effectively address the lack of daycare in our region, UCDD expects larger businesses and industries to provide childcare for their employees in the future.
- Currently, there is legislation proposing tax revenue from sports betting go to early education scholarships, like the Hope scholarship for Tennessee college students.
- Overall, communities, non-profits, and the state must work together to create solutions to current childcare issues, as they affect every facet of our society.