

# Highlights & Headlines

JANUARY 2026



NEWS ♦ NARRATIVES ♦ NOTES ♦ NOTIONS ♦ NECESSITIES ♦ AND NONSENSE

## DSP Extraordinaire

*Linda Crisp is Hilltoppers, Inc.'s  
DSP of the Year*

Every September, Hilltoppers, Inc. celebrates National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Week. We pause to honor these extraordinary home-grown professionals who work with compassion, patience, and purpose because they are truly the backbone of disability services and of Hilltoppers Inc.

Celebrations of our DSPs at Hilltoppers, Inc. last all week and are meant to showcase the amazing and often unsung work of these individuals, and mark a small fraction of the recognition that they deserve throughout the year. It also serves as a platform to raise awareness about the DSP profession and inspire others to join the field.

In September, we celebrated our DSPs with food, accolades, and gift cards in an effort to say “thank you” to these valuable employees.

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Direct Support Professional  
RECOGNITION WEEK



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Direct support is a hard job, physically, emotionally and even spiritually. It is no wonder that the turnover rate is as high as it is. But there are a few individuals who view this profession as their life's vocation instead of just a job, and to those we are especially grateful. Each day can have truly challenging moments, but these professionals are prepared for that. It takes a unique and selfless person to choose this career path.

Linda Crisp is one of those people. She started at Hilltoppers in 1997 and readily admits there is no retirement in her near future. Early in her career, Linda worked for Oster (the appliance manufacturer) making decent money but missing something she couldn't quite account for. Later she realized that what she missed was the human contact of working directly with people.

She went to work at Life Care nursing home and while there, got to know several of our Hilltoppers folks and their caregivers because they would come into the nursing home to use their scale. The Hilltoppers, Inc. staff liked Linda and encouraged her



Linda with a couple of her favorite guys.

to apply at Hilltoppers. Eventually she did, and she has never looked back. "I found my home," she says.

The everyday role of a DSP varies. Linda understands the need for flexibility. She can be a friend, a mentor, an advocate, a coach, and a cheerleader. The bond that is created is authentic, fulfilling, and invaluable. "It's so easy to love these people. I feel like I really get to know them, almost like they are my kids, and I treat them as if they were." DSPs know better than anyone when a person they care for is out of sorts and they are a valuable resource to help get to the root cause of any distress.

A native Tennessean, Linda grew up right on the county line between Putnam and Overton counties. Today she makes her home in Mayland. Tragedy struck her family some time ago when one of her daughters died of cancer, leaving three young daughters without a mama. Linda and her

surviving daughter stepped up and took in the girls and raised them. Today they still live together and Linda is proud nana to three granddaughters and two young great-granddaughters!

Linda has been serving at Hilltoppers for 26 years and she slyly remarked that you can't work here that long without getting into at least a little mischief. Love of our folks is the first requirement of the job, she says, but the second requirement is a good sense of humor. Linda felt that way about her friend and co-worker, Michael Lowery. "He was a great care giver and we had lots of fun," she recalled, with a tear in her eye as she still mourns Michael's death over a year ago. "We had each other's backs," she said, and told of a time when she drove all the way from Mayland to Rockwood to give Michael rides to work when he was without a car. "Friends do that for one another," she said.

Michael and Linda worked closely together as DSPs and they often would pair up on outings. They became good



Hilltoppers, Inc. is governed by a nine member, volunteer Board of Directors who meet the 3rd Tuesday of each month. We are grateful to have these nine directors to review and guide us, and we thank them for their time, talents and governance.

**Doug Fields**  
*Chairman*

**Randy Bond**

**Gina Leary**  
*Vice-Chair*

**Michael Dalton**

**Michael Ingram**

**Melinda Swafford**  
*Secretary & Treasurer*

**Mark Witt**

**Perk Thornton**

## Highlights & Headlines

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**Mary Lampugnano**, *Editor*

**Kimberly Bristow Kemmer**, *Designer*

**CAM-Graphics**,

*Our benevolent printer*

[www.hilltoppersinc.com](http://www.hilltoppersinc.com)

## OUR VALUES

### RIGHTS, RESPECT & DIGNITY

A priority at Hilltoppers, Inc. is to teach and practice that all people have **Value**; that all people have **Rights**; and that all people will be treated with **Respect** and **Dignity**. Everyone should practice and facilitate **value, worth** and **respect** in their daily supports and communications to others.

### CHOICE & DECISION MAKING

It is also a priority for the staff of Hilltoppers, Inc. to support all people, their family members, friends, natural supports, and others to share, educate, and encourage the use of supported decision-making strategies. We encourage people to seek and research information that will assist them in learning to make good choices and informed decisions, and how to communicate their choices freely, including complaints.

friends, and good friends tend to know a thing or two about the other. Michael learned of Linda's profoundly irrational fear of snakes, no matter the size or kind. If it's a snake, Linda is off in the other direction. One time on an outing, they came across a rattlesnake (or what Linda thought was a rattlesnake) in the middle of the road. Michael ran over it with the van several times, assuring Linda that it was dead. He asked her to go look. "Oh no!" she exclaimed. Linda refused to exit the van. So Michael rocked the front wheel back-and-forth a dozen times to make sure the snake was dead. The folks inside were thrilled with the rocking motion of the van ("do it again" they cried!). Linda refused to get out of the van (or let any of the clients out either) until Michael got out and confirmed the snake's demise.

She recalled another incident where she and Michael brought their gang—in all, 12 of the Hilltoppers folks—to the Knoxville zoo (it was special needs day at the zoo). After an afternoon of fun and frivolity, they returned to the bus and counted 14 clients seated on the bus. Uh-oh, they had two more people than they had arrived with. They quickly ascertained that their visitors were not Hilltoppers, Inc. recipients. What to do, they pondered. Should we bring them home? Should we call the police? Well, the decision was made to bring their surprise guests back to the lost and found office at the zoo! Sure enough, they were greeted by their rightful, albeit frantic, caregivers and all was well.

Not surprisingly, Linda and Michael were both honored this year as award nominees at the Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO): Linda for Outstanding DSP of the Year and Michael (posthumously) for the Lifetime Achievement Award. TNCO recognized what Hilltoppers, Inc. already knows, that Linda's work ethic and many years of service is a credit to both herself and Hilltoppers, Inc. Thank you, Linda for your service.

# Fall Festival Carnival Fun

This year's Fall Festival was very original, mostly funny, a little scary, and definitely a great time! We started with a costume contest and ate some delicious chili for lunch. Then the whole day center was turned into carnival royale complete with games of skill and chance. We had a great adventure with the games and fun and even brought home goldfish! The day was not complete until we loaded up on sugar and sweets at Trunk and Treat and danced the afternoon away.



**FUNNIEST:** Brian



**SCARIEST:** Faron



**BEST AUNT BEE EVER:** Debbie



**Mikie "Elvis" and Cowboy Darrell**



**PEACE SISTER:** Jessica



**MOST ORIGINAL:** Sugar Daddy Doug



**PRETTY IN PINK:** The girls from hip hoppin' Harrison



**Grayson & the Shining Twins**



**GLAMOUR WITCH:** Donna



**BRIDE FROM BEYOND:** Susie

# EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

## Committed and Courageous

Stellar employees are hard to come by...but not at Hilltoppers, Inc.! Every month we are consistently amazed by the dedication and care given by our many direct care and auxiliary care professionals and know that we are lucky to have them in our work family. We give thanks to these individuals who chose a profession that not only helps the individuals we serve but also the communities we are a part of as well. We honor your commitment and courage to be the difference makers in people's lives. You are needed, valued, and admired. Thank you all!

*If you know a standout employee who exemplifies dedication to care and want to nominate them for employee of the month, please email our director at [jeanene.houston@hilltoppersinc.com](mailto:jeanene.houston@hilltoppersinc.com).*



AUGUST 2025  
**KRISTIN GIST**  
SCHEDULER



AUGUST 2025  
**CRYSTAL BOLES**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



AUGUST 2025  
**SONYA CANNON**  
LPN



AUGUST 2025  
**TAMMY MONTGOMERY**  
DAY CENTER MANAGER



AUGUST 2025  
**SHAUNA SMITH**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**TERESA CRAWFORD**  
BUSINESS CLERK



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**SHANNON KELLY**  
SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**DEBORAH HICKS**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**LINDA ANDERSON TODD**  
TRAINER



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**ROSE GARRISON**  
LPN



SEPTEMBER 2025  
**BRYAN SUTHERLAND**  
SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT



NOVEMBER 2025  
**BRYAN FARRIS**  
HOUSE MANAGER



NOVEMBER 2025  
**SARAH LANDERS**  
CUSTODIAN



NOVEMBER 2025  
**REBECCA MURPHY**  
HOUSE MANAGER



NOVEMBER 2025  
**TAMMY HARRIS**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



NOVEMBER 2025  
**LORIE PRESLEY**  
HOUSE MANAGER



NOVEMBER 2025  
**BETSY TINCH**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



DECEMBER 2025  
**AMBER LARISON**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



DECEMBER 2025  
**EVELYN TACKETT**  
LPN



DECEMBER 2025  
**SHAUNA SMITH**  
LPN



DECEMBER 2025  
**LEVI BRADY**  
LPN



DECEMBER 2025  
**DEBORAH HICKS**  
LPN



DECEMBER 2025  
**CURT OLSON**  
RN



DECEMBER 2025  
**KENDRA PENNER**  
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

  
**HILLTOPPERS, INC.**  
**WE'RE  
HIRING!**

We need **Direct Support Staff** and **LPNs** to work with adults who have intellectual and development disabilities. Download an application from our website ([www.hilltoppersinc.com](http://www.hilltoppersinc.com)) or stop by our office at **86 Duer Court** and fill out an application. We offer a new starting rate of **\$16.00 an hour for DSPs, \$20 an hour for LPNs**, plus paid training and opportunities for advancement.



**Missy Thompson, TNCO  
Community Leader of the Year**

# Exceptional Honors



*TNCO awarded  
Cumberland County  
community leaders  
at its annual  
award ceremony  
for 2025.*



**Glenda and Randy Bond,  
TNCO Volunteers of the Year**

Congratulations to our Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO) 2025 award winners, Missy Thompson, Community Leader of the Year and Randy and Glenda Bond, Volunteers of the Year.

TNCO is a professional trade organization for Home and Community Based (Disability) Services Providers. Their mission is to promote the growth and development of service provider agencies and to advance the quality of support for individuals with disabilities. Member agencies include 60 community organizations that support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, touching the lives of more than 74,000 people in Tennessee including employees and the people with disabilities that they support.

Missy Thompson, creator and director of the Special Needs Ministry at Cumberland Fellowship Church in Crossville, was awarded the Community Leader of the Year award and deservedly so. The mother of a special needs child, Missy is uniquely qualified to lead such a ministry and fully aware of the need for outreach programs to special needs persons and their families. The ministry is in its fifth year and going strong. It has attracted individuals and

families throughout the Cumberland County community.

Missy's vision for the Special Needs program initially began with children but soon expanded to include people of all ages. The children's program is over five years running and the adults' program is in its fourth year. And both programs are growing in size and reputation.

The ministry hosts four big events each year, each of them requiring weeks and weeks of planning: Spring Prom, Summer Cook-out, Fall Fest, and Christmas Bowling. All activities are free to participants and manned completely by volunteers. We are grateful to Missy and the steadfast work she is doing to support and advance opportunities for disabled people.

Tuesday morning activities are a favorite of Hilltoppers folks. Each week, day trips are made to the church which promise and deliver joyful, engaging outings for our gang. Sometimes Missy plans special events such as excursions to the park or Cumberland County Playhouse. One thing is certain: at every Special Needs gathering, song, prayer, food, crafts, and love are abundant.

Randy and Glenda Bond were honored as TNCO's Volunteers of the Year. They are fervent supporters of people with

intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Randy and Glenda have spent over five decades advocating for the rights of the disabled at every level, both personal and professional. Glenda was a Special Education teacher and Randy a banker...and together they know how to get things done! Friends, advocates, coordinators, fundraisers, and most important, as parents to Michael and Scott, they have devoted their life to protecting and enriching the lives of the disabled.

Randy has been a board member of Hilltoppers, Inc. for over 40 years. Glenda has been at The Arc Cumberland County even longer than that! Many would say that The Arc Cumberland County would not exist as we know it today without the dedication of the Bond family. Officially "retired" now, (*yeah, right!*) each one of this dynamic duo can regularly be seen at a Hilltoppers, Inc. board meeting or Special Olympics planning meeting, or any community event that serves the disabled. They are devoted to making our community a better place to live for us all.

# *the Magic of Giving*

Thank you to our friends and benefactors who have enriched the lives of so many by your good works.



**ABOVE:** Thanks to everyone who donated to Toys for Tots at the Hilltoppers, Inc. location (one of the largest contribution sites as far as collections), especially John "Mikie" Drake (left) and Doug Macreadie (right) for giving underprivileged children a Merry Christmas with your contributions! Thanks to the Marine Corp for all their efforts to give those children a Merry Christmas!

**LEFT:** Thank you, Santa, and all the members of the Knights of Columbus Council 16088, for an AWESOME Christmas party at the day center!

**BELOW LEFT:** Thank you, Barb Muzzey and Wendy Raver from the Fairfield Glade Rotary Club, for your generous donation that feeds our mission to enrich the lives of the disabled.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Thank you, Knights of Columbus and KIND Charities for your immeasurable generosity and support.



## *Hilltoppers, Inc. Annual Giving Appeal*

Hilltoppers, Inc. appreciates the generosity of others to accomplish our mission. In fact, a sizeable amount of our operating budget comes from individual and small business donations. Will you consider a contribution to our organization? Your generosity can help us provide essential services and support and enrich the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Did you know that \$50 will pay for...**

- **One tank** of gas for a handicapped equipped van
- **Two hours** of a basic residential service for one person who is not funded
- **Two hours** of a basic day service for one person who is not funded
- **One home meal** for those requiring specialized meal planning



Another way you can support our mission: while shopping at Kroger, you can register Hilltoppers, Inc. as your charity of choice when you use your Kroger grocery store card to donate. Register at [www.krogercommunityrewards.com](http://www.krogercommunityrewards.com).



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Visit us at <http://www.hilltoppersinc.com>

Questions? Call (931) 484-2535

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## SAVE THE DATE

### VALENTINE'S PARTY & DANCE

February 13 at the Day Center

### EASTER PARTY

April 2 from 11:00 am-2:00 pm at the Day Center



Remember to shop and donate at the **Thrift Store** located at **154 East First Street!**

**"Your Community Emporium" for Bargains!**

...our Community's Clothing, Furniture and Treasure Emporium

# Frosty and Friends

Frosty the Snowman stopped by Hilltoppers, Inc. this Christmas to catch up with some old friends.

