

MCLEAN

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inside *the issue*

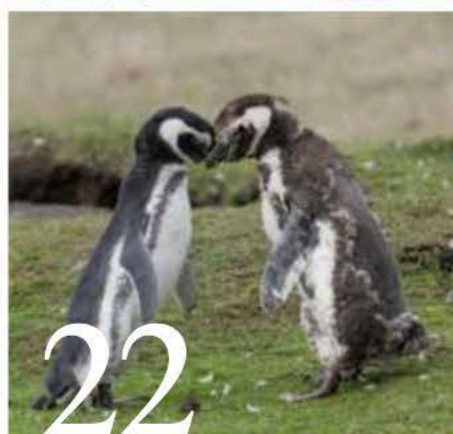
AUGUST 2026 | KIDS & PETS



12



18



22

Featured

12 Spotlight on the Artist

McLean resident Jessica Speckhard shares her artistic journey

18 Inspired by mom's strength

McLean teen turns family love into action

22 Capturing special subjects

Local photographer Gloria Freund, bridges worlds

Departments

- 4 Lifestyle Letter
- 8 City Scene
- 10 Business Monthly
- 12 Local Limelight LIFE + CULTURE
- 16 Culinary Creations FOOD + BEVERAGE
- 18 Inspired By HEALTH + WELLNESS
- 22 Travel Journal ARTS + CULTURE
- 26 How To FOOD + BEVERAGE
- 30 Family Care LIFE + CULTURE
- 32 Events

On the Cover

Untitled by local McLean artist Jessica Speckhard captures the sunny days of summer with her pen and watercolor depiction of a cat enjoying a warm, lazy day for this month's cover.

Photography: Jessica Speckhard



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Inspired by mom's *strength*

MCLEAN TEEN TURNS FAMILY LOVE INTO ACTION

Owen and his furry friend promoting Cancer Kicks



For 16-year-old McLean resident Owen Singer, watching his mom battle breast cancer wasn't just a family challenge—it was the inspiration for an idea to help others. Before every grueling chemo session, his mom, Sue, had a ritual: she would wrap herself in a cozy blanket and lace up her favorite pink sneakers. Inspired by his mom's fierce resilience, Owen turned his love into immediate action by founding Cancer Kicks, a nonprofit created to uplift patients and raise awareness.

Despite navigating high school, Owen leads the organization in creating custom apparel featuring messages of hope with 100% of the profits going directly to the *Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF)*.

"I'm deeply proud of Owen," says his mom. "To build an organization around his commitment, this kid has had to navigate it all." *McLean City Lifestyle* talks to Owen about his meaningful mission.

OWEN, TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR CONNECTION TO MCLEAN.

I go to Langley High School, and McLean is home in every sense— my neighborhood, my community, the place where my family has been through everything together. That "everything" very much includes my mom's cancer journey, which is what eventually led me to start Cancer Kicks.

WHAT INSPIRED THE IDEA FOR CANCER KICKS?

I'd watch my mom get ready for her chemo sessions, and she had this ritual, she'd put on her pink sneakers and wrap herself in a soft blanket. Those comfort items gave her something to hold onto. I kept thinking: I can't be her doctor. I can't cure this. But, I can do something.

ARTICLE BY MOLLY MACDERMOT | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE SINGER FAMILY

WHY DID SIMPLE ITEMS — SHOES, BLANKETS, AND APPAREL — BECOME THE FOCUS OF THE ORGANIZATION?

When you're going through cancer treatment, you lose a lot of your sense of agency. Being able to choose what you wear, to wrap yourself in something soft, to have something that says "I'm still me, and people are with me," that matters.

WHAT DOES THE NAME "CANCER KICKS" MEAN TO YOU?

It's a play on words, shoes kick, and we want to kick cancer. And it goes deeper. "Kicks" is slang for shoes, which ties back to my mom's pink sneakers she wore during treatment. There's something defiant about it, the name doesn't shy away from cancer, it goes right at it.

BUILDING A NONPROFIT AS A TEEN

WHAT WERE THE FIRST STEPS YOU TOOK TO TURN AN IDEA INTO A REAL ORGANIZATION?

I started by designing products. Then I built the website and started figuring out what I didn't know: how to set up a non-profit and handle the legal side.

HOW HAVE YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTED YOU?

My mom is both my inspiration and my product tester, if she loves something, I know it works. My dad helps me think of the big picture. My brother Liam has been incredibly supportive. I hope he might carry Cancer Kicks forward someday. McLean has been incredibly generous. Community members have bought products and shared our mission.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE SCHOOL, FRIENDS, AND RUNNING A NONPROFIT?

Not perfectly. But I've learned to treat Cancer Kicks like a job I enjoy, not just a passion project. I block time for it. I get ahead on schoolwork when I can.

CONTINUED >



Messages of hope on every item

"I'm deeply proud of Owen," says his mom. "To build an organization around his commitment, this kid has had to navigate it all."

“Kindness is the whole point. What I've found is that when you're doing something out of real love for someone, *like the way I am for my mom, it shows in a way that people can feel.*”



Owen's inspiration — his mom



A supportive family

SUCCESS STORIES

HAVE YOU HEARD FROM CANCER PATIENTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED CANCER KICKS PRODUCTS?

Yes. Hearing from someone that a blanket made their chemo session feel a little less clinical, or that wearing a pair of our shoes to treatment gave them a small lift, that's everything to me.

KIDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Start with what you have. I didn't have a business degree or a big budget or a network of donors. I had a story, a laptop, and a cause I cared deeply about.

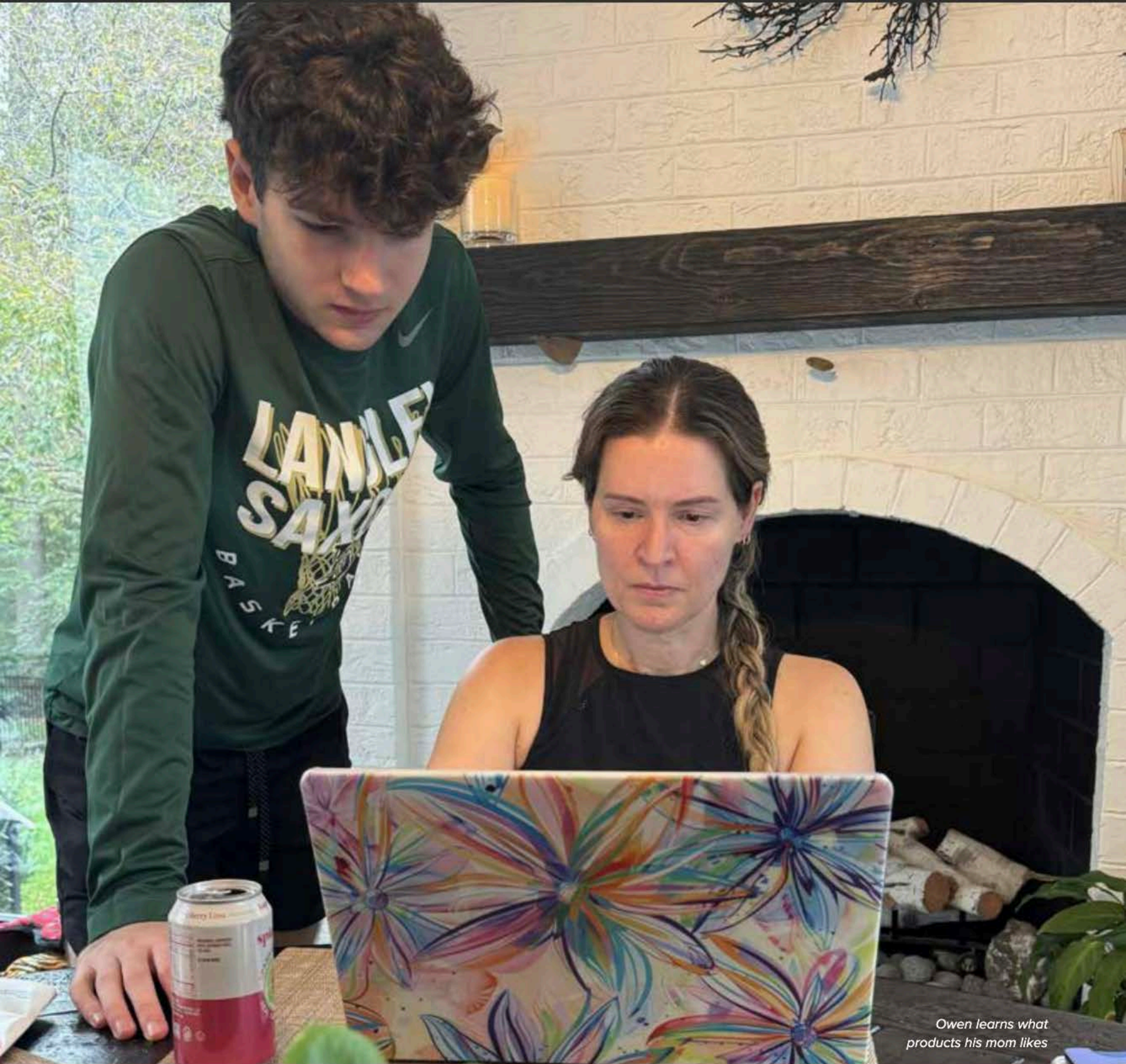
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

Community problems don't wait for us to grow up.

INSPIRATION FOR READERS: "HOW CAN I HELP?"

WHAT ARE SIMPLE WAYS PEOPLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can volunteer, buy from purpose-driven businesses, and show up, consistently, for something bigger than yourself.



Owen learns what products his mom likes

WHAT ROLE DOES KINDNESS PLAY IN COMMUNITY SERVICE?

Kindness is the whole point. What I've found is that when you're doing something out of real love for someone, like the way I am for my mom, it shows in a way that people can feel. Kindness isn't soft. It's actually the most powerful driver there is.

LOOKING AHEAD

WHAT DREAMS DO YOU HAVE FOR THE ORGANIZATION?

I'd love to see Cancer Kicks operating as a fully scalable platform, where schools, athletic teams, corporations, and

community groups can all run their own custom storefronts and direct their purchases toward research. The dream is to see it used by thousands of partners across the country. And somewhere in that future, I hope my brother Liam is part of it.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOUR STORY TEACHES PEOPLE ABOUT RESPONDING TO LIFE'S CHALLENGES?

The way you respond to something hard is a choice. Not always an easy one, but a real one. I think everyone, no matter their age or circumstance, has more power to respond creatively to hard things than they realize.