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Eppes unites with new community

BECCA OWSLEY The News-Enterprise 17 hrs ago



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After a career as an engineer, a quest to work with a nonprofit brought Ron Eppes to Elizabethtown.

Born in Rockford, Illinois, he has five brothers. Eppes said he was the first in his family to earn a college degree with a double major in math and Bible. He married Peggy Sue and they moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where they lived for 13 years and had their three children, Rachel, Caleb and Joel.

He later received a master's degree in information systems.

Eppes and his wife decided they wanted to do something new. So they quit their jobs and moved to New Mexico.

He began an 18-year career with Intel Corp., first as an automation engineer and then public affairs. He knew some day he wanted to move into nonprofit management.

After the kids had all grown, he said it was time to make the career move.

He was passionate about United Way and what the organization did in communities. He found the Elizabethtown position online and the 54-year-old has been president and chief executive officer of United Way of Central Kentucky since October.

“We were very excited about the possibilities for the United Way leadership when we first met Ron Eppes and he has not disappointed,” said Jon Ballard, United Way board chairman. “Understanding our United Way communities is vital and Ron has made a conscious effort to not only understand our community, but become an active part of it.”

Ballard said Eppes has a “genuine passion” for people and can get things done.

“He has truly become an asset to the United Way and all of our communities,” he said.

Eppes said it was quite a leap to move from a structured company such as Intel to the nonprofit world. Everything in engineering has a predictive outcome that can be measured, he said. The nonprofit world isn't as predictable. You don't always see immediate impact, he said.

Measuring impacts is something he thinks he can bring to the role.

“It's a big adventure and fun to be doing something different along the way,” he said. “I'm enjoying the community.”

The community, he said, is willing to engage in the work United Way is doing.

“It's fun setting direction while stepping on the shoulders of people who came before,” he said.

Another United Way board member, Chad Sarver, described Eppes as a “sincere, motivated and genuine” community leader.

“He is dedicated to growing the nonprofit footprint in the United Way of Central Kentucky region,” Sarver said. “He has been an organic implant into our community and will continue to foster our well-being for the future.”

Outside of his work, Eppes said he enjoys spicy food and running. In New Mexico, he said green chiles go on everything.

“Once you’ve had a green chile cheeseburger, you’ll wonder why you’ve been eating regular cheeseburgers,” Eppes said.

He said he stocks up on green chiles when he can find them. He said they have more vitamin C than oranges.

Eppes also enjoys running marathons.

He will run the Boston Marathon in April. He also ran it in 2016, in bad weather against the wind.

“They bus you 26 miles west and tell you to run back to town,” he said.

Last time he ran it, Eppes said he took it too seriously. This time, he plans on enjoying himself more on the run and enjoying some of the things that happen along the race.

His favorite race is the Oklahoma City Marathon, which is in honor of the bombing memorial. When runners pick up their bibs, the first 168 numbers are taken and are displayed on the wall with the names of the victims on them, he said. The race also starts with 168 seconds of silence.

It’s not the best to run terrain-wise or weather-wise because it’s hot, but it’s the meaning behind it that he said is impressive.

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