

# Whitney Stover, Project 731 founder and small town crusader

Whitney Stover's fast pace was imprinted on her at an early age. Her family moved eight times before she was eight years old. Eventually Walter and Janet Ward returned to Martin, and Whitney began the active small town living that now has her on a mission.

"Project 731 is a crusade of Tennesseans who love the 731-area code region and want to invest in its prosperity, now and in the future," says the website for the nonprofit Whitney founded in July 2017. Project 731 specializes in free or low-cost event planning for businesses or organization, economic development for the 731 area that is focused on the young adult generation from which she comes, and selling apparel featuring messaging that reflects a pride in the community.

"In the future, I want people to think that Project 731 are the people who are making 731 cool again, who get what the future needs to be, who get our generation and understand why we love it here," she said of her social enterprise.

However, Whitney doesn't necessarily consider herself to be that "cool." She is a mom of three, married to Ryan, a financial



**Project 731 founder, Whitney Stover**

planner in Union City who she has known since high school. They have three daughters Kella, 8; Aubree, 7; and Sydney, 2. She

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gives 731 creative credit to Grant Harper who comes up with many of the ideas they pursue for apparel messaging. However, she does acknowledge a love of fashion and between the time she spends with sorority sisters and with her daughters in addition to a steady stream of podcasts, she feels she stays in touch with what is needed and wanted.

A graduate of UTM with a bachelor's degree in accounting as well as an MBA, Whitney is a certified public accountant whose "day job" is as the comptroller with Centerpoint Business Solutions. She says she and Ryan made a conscious choice to

live in Martin because they sought a balance between a style of living and the cost of living.

"I know so many people who have moved off to other cities for the activities but then can't afford to do any of it," she noted of her fellow members of the Millennial generation that, now in their late 20s and 30s, she says are looking for a work life balance. "I wanted to make this a place my kids could make the same intentional decision [to stay] in 20 years."

Convinced that attracting businesses has much to do with retaining talent, she took inspiration from other geographically focused efforts like Project 615, a nonprofit in Nashville that employs the homeless, and Choose 901, a Memphis initiative to create Project 731 as a community development initiative.

"We are not a nonprofit that is going to pull on your heartstrings," she readily admits. But the effort is taking hold. Via social media and a website, they are steadily growing an audience. Next up is a focus on people moving back to 731.

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