



Betsey



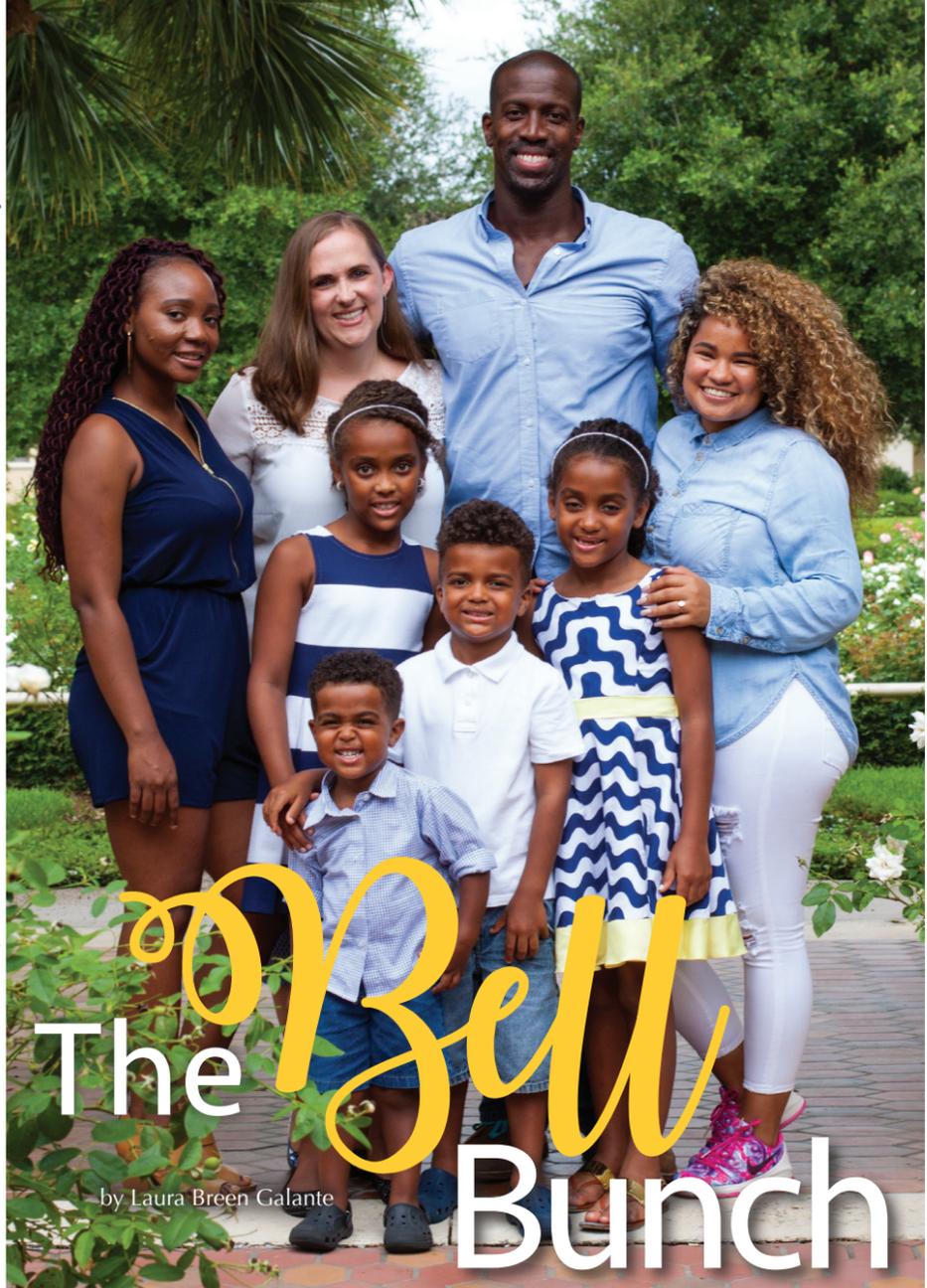
Emmanuella



Julia



Hanson



# The Bell Bunch

by Laura Breen Galante



Rechaud



Esperanza



Johanna



Britton

**With the executive director of the Foundation for Foster Children at the helm, this Altamonte family doesn't just promote foster care and adoption, they practice it every day**

**W**hen you see Betsey Bell and her husband Rechaud with their six children, and when you hear about her tireless work for foster youth in our community, you might mistake her for a superhero. But Betsey insists she's just a normal person performing her life's work – sharing love with kids who need it.

"Really, I don't even think of it as a job," says Betsey, executive director of the nonprofit Foundation for Foster Children. "It's really an honor to serve these kids."

Armed with a zoology degree, Betsey came to Central Florida from North Carolina to be an animal trainer and zookeeper. After a year working with animals at the Brevard Zoo, she realized that she wanted to study people instead. While pursuing a master's degree in social work, Betsey began her career in community relations at Darden Restaurants and Orlando Health. She then worked at the Orlando Magic to help develop funding opportunities through the Orlando Magic Youth Foundation (OMYF). While working with the OMYF, Betsey became aware of the Foundation for Foster Children.

"I was hesitant at first to go from being the funder giving away money to asking for it," says Betsey. "They were looking for an executive director and, at the time, with two small kids, the opportunity fit both my experience and my passion to help the community in a very tangible and grassroots way. I was excited to use my skill set to truly create opportunities to serve kids who, at

no fault of their own, have been placed in foster care due to neglect, abuse, or abandonment."

While the state works with community-based care agencies to provide kids with case management, place them in foster homes, and ensure their basic needs are met, the Foundation for Foster Children gives individual kids the personalized support they need to be successful.

"There is a need for additional support to help kids have the same opportunities as their non-foster peers," says Betsey. "Foster parents are given a limited amount of financial support."

That support leaves little room for things like tutoring, athletic leagues, dance lessons, field trips, summer camps, senior photos... simple but important opportunities that so many young people enjoy.

"If we can provide these outlets, we create an environment for that child to thrive," Betsey says. "At a time when kids in foster care already feel like so much has been taken away from them, being afforded those important opportunities can cause a child to feel cared for, worthy, and important."

The Foundation for Foster Children – which serves kids from birth to age 23 in Seminole, Orange, and Osceola counties – relies on community funding to meet real needs quickly and efficiently.

"We help ensure that our community's kids in foster care are just like your kids," Betsey adds. "These are *our* children. They are ours as a community to care for. They have the same need for love, and they want to experience the love of family. They are amazing, resilient kids who are navigating through a world that is often confusing and scary, but they are just kids who long to love and be loved."

Betsey's devotion to these children extends beyond her office walls, and she and her husband have a special place in their hearts for older foster youth who often live in group homes and age out of the foster-care system without being adopted.

"After a child in foster care turns nine years old, the chances of adoption are slim," says Betsey. "Most people have written them off, and many of these young people turn 18 without the love and support of a forever family."

Children who age out of the foster-care system face a unique challenge, Betsey explains. If they attend college or any other post-secondary school, they receive a stipend for living expenses, but they

often lack the support network and tools they need to be independent. The Foundation for Foster Children's Transition to Adulthood program addresses many of those needs.

"I meet the most amazing kids... It's really a hazard of the job," Betsey laughs before explaining how Emmanuella became part of her own family.

Emmanuella, who had been in foster care for years, was placed in a group home during high school. The Foundation supported her with tutoring and other opportunities as a teenager. Emmanuella had an excellent case manager who reached out to the Foundation in hopes that Emmanuella could receive funds for senior pictures, a right of passage for most kids, but something that her group home said they could not afford.

The Foundation made sure Emmanuella got her photos, but then turmoil struck the teen again. She was moved to a different group home just months before graduation. The next time Emmanuella came by the Foundation office, Betsey saw the look on her face.

"It was a look of total despair. She was just ready to give up," says Betsey.

Betsey went home and talked with Rechaud, and that's where the family's journey with Emmanuella began. After a year-long process, Emmanuella officially joined the Bell family and was adopted in 2016 as a 19-year-old college student.

"Many people say, 'Why adopt at this age?' But Emmanuella has 80 more years to live," says Betsey. "She needs a family, someplace to call home, and we are her family."

In late 2016, the Bells opened their home to another foster teen, 18-year-old Esperanza. After 16 years of abuse, Esperanza lived in three different group homes before aging out of the foster-care system.

"We are grateful God blessed us with Esperanza to join our already-big family,"



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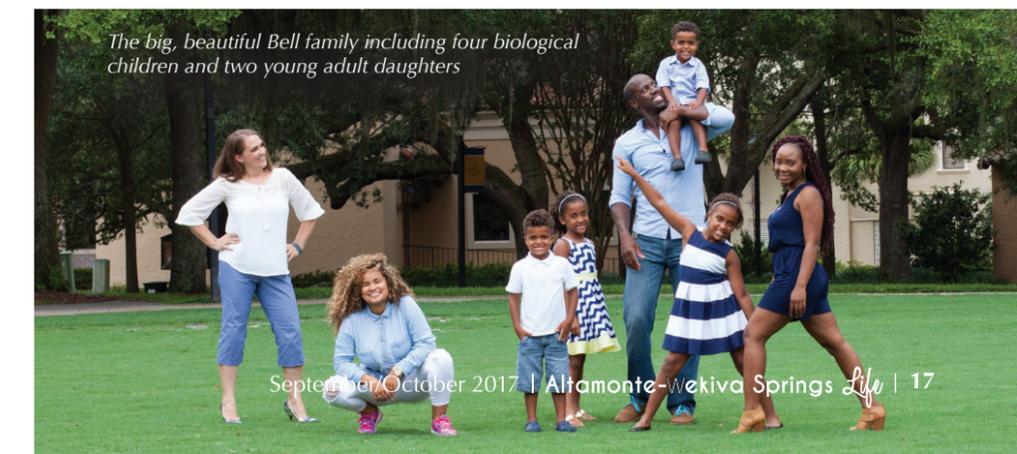
**– Betsey Bell**

says Betsey. "Watching the bonds develop among each of the siblings is so special. Both Emmanuella and Esperanza are amazing big sisters to the younger four."

Betsey admits that she and Rechaud have to manage their time carefully with six children all under one roof, "but we feel like we have enough love to share," says Betsey. "We are humbled daily and honored to be the parents of each of our unique kiddos. It's the most rewarding thing we could ever do, but it's also the hardest thing we've ever done."

"Not everyone can foster," Betsey continues. "But everyone can do something. We're not superhuman. We're just normal people who have found our 'something' by answering the call to turn fostering into family."

**For more information about the Foundation for Foster Children and how the community can help, contact Lauren Prekop at 407-422-4615.**



*The big, beautiful Bell family including four biological children and two young adult daughters*