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### **John Barber ('99) & Becky Ellis ('08) (Helping those impacted by disability)**

Kiki Schleiff Cherry

Office of Communications & Marketing

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**OUACHITA**  
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

**NEWS**



For immediate release

**John Barber ('99) & Becky Ellis ('08) (Helping those impacted by disability)**

*By Kiki Schleiff Cherry*

May 24, 2022

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at [comm-mark@obu.edu](mailto:comm-mark@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5206.

Alumni John Barber and Becky Ellis will tell you that life can lead to unexpected places.

They both work for Joni and Friends, an international ministry founded by Joni Eareckson Tada, seeking to communicate the gospel and mobilize the global church to evangelize, disciple and serve people living with disabilities.

"I consider it an honor to work with the exceptional men and women who serve special-needs families through Joni and Friends, but I enjoy a special delight in laboring alongside John Barber and Becky Ellis," Tada noted. "I love their passion for what they do! Both have quickly risen to places of great influence and leadership in their positions as area directors in their states.

"Gracious, talented and possessing a true zeal for the gospel," Tada added, "it's obvious that Ouachita Baptist University went the extra mile in shaping their solid characters."

For Ellis, what started as a middle school volunteer opportunity turned into a lifelong calling.

"My mom's best friend had a son with Down syndrome," Ellis said. "We grew up together."

When they were invited to accompany their friends to a Joni and Friends family retreat to serve as volunteers for those living with disabilities, they did not hesitate.

“Our lives were changed,” Ellis said. They have returned as volunteers every summer for the past 22 years.



In 2012, Joni and Friends approached Ellis with a job opportunity. Ellis, who was a sociology major at Ouachita, prayed long and hard before accepting the position. She is now the senior director at Joni and Friends Texas.

Barber's journey took a more winding path. After working in corporate, nonprofit and church positions for two decades, he joined Joni and Friends just over a year ago as the area director for Tennessee.

“We have a son with autism,” said Barber, who wasn't aware of the Joni and Friends ministry when his son was growing up. “That was my big connection with Joni and Friends. I'm able to see what we missed out on, advantages we didn't have.”

He said he wished he had known about things like family retreat and marriage getaway, which offers parents of children with disabilities an opportunity to get away for a weekend to be alone and relax.

One of his favorite moments in the ministry so far came this past year at family retreat.

“There is a guy named Bruce who is in his mid-40s and has severe cerebral palsy,” Barber recalled.

“Someone held the mic up for him, and he led us in this incredible time of worship. In that moment, the overwhelming feeling in the room was, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like.’”

Ellis said that there have been so many special moments with Joni and Friends that it's hard to choose one favorite.

“You learn things about God and about yourself and how He created us all unique,” Ellis said. “And how the body of Christ is not complete until those living with disabilities are also serving within the church and within community.”

To hear more of John's and Becky's stories, check out the Tiger for Life podcast at [obu.edu/tigerforlifepodcast](http://obu.edu/tigerforlifepodcast).



*By Kiki Schleiff Cherry, marketing manager for graduate and online education*