



**Jackson Jones**

On a Saturday in August 2010, Patty Lankford, who works in personal care for the elderly and is studying to be a psychiatric nurse, met Hunter Jones, a lifelong Buckingham County resident and short distance logger.

Two weeks later the pair, who were 18 and 22 years old at the time, snuck off to the Prince Edward County Courthouse and married without telling their friends or families. Shortly after that, Lankford, now Jones, learned she was pregnant. But the joy was short-lived.

Jones was told her baby would be born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, a congenital bone disorder. She was put on bed rest and was expecting the worst for her baby girl. An ultrasound late in her pregnancy revealed that the baby was actually a boy, just in time to "avoid having to return a lot of pink things," but the whirlwind and surprise didn't end there.

"I went way past my due date, and when I finally went into labor, it happened fast," Jones said. "After the baby was born, they whisked him away because he wasn't breathing. When I finally came around, my husband's eyes were just huge, and I thought our son didn't make it."

But the baby boy, who they named Jackson, survived and didn't have Osteogenesis Imperfecta after all. He had Down syndrome. Jones said the first thing she did was Google it.

"When you have a child with special needs, especially if you didn't have the entire pregnancy to prepare yourself, you grieve for the baby you thought you'd have," she said. "At first I hurt for him. I was mad for him. He probably won't have all the simple childhood things I had, and it was heartbreaking."

Jackson's first few months were filled with visits to doctors and specialists, and despite having a mild form of Down syndrome, Jackson's physicians painted a bleak picture. Children with Down syndrome typically have physical growth delays and a severe degree of intellectual disability.

"We were told to not expect anything normal," Jones said. "No walking until he was 2 or 3, no talking. Don't expect babbling until he was 1 or for him to even be able to move or hold up his own body weight. I tried to put on a brave face, but I was dying inside."

When Jackson was two months old, the family was referred to the Infant and Toddler Connection (ITC) of the Heartland for help with Jackson's developmental delays. The program provides early intervention services to children ages birth to 3 years and is part of Longwood University's Speech, Hearing and Learning Services, which offers professional speech-language, educational and early intervention programs to children and families in Southcentral, Va.



"They come to the house, and we go over his latest accomplishments and talk about goals," Jones said. "With their support, I've learned ways to work with Jackson in the every day things we do. They have such high expectations for him that sometimes I think they're unrealistic, but Jackson meets them every time."

After undergoing heart surgery just after his first birthday, Jackson is hitting milestones faster than most children with Down syndrome. He's rolled over, "army crawls" his way around and is babbling "with just about anyone who will listen." Next up is getting Jackson to stand while holding on to something and to start connecting words with people and things.

"If there was no Longwood, our son would still be on his back, motionless," Jones said. "The staff have become part of our family, and Jackson loves them. He knows to show them his best stuff and to butter them up with lots of kisses. I've realized that this is Jackson's life, and he's gonna love every small spec of dust in it."

Longwood University's Speech, Hearing and Learning Services will open in a new facility, located at 315 Third St. in Farmville this October. The off-campus facility will have eight individual therapy rooms, two group therapy rooms, a large pre-school room and ample parking. Expanded programs and technology will include swallowing evaluation, a child feeding clinic, support groups for families and audiology services. For more information, call 434.395.2972 or visit [longwood.edu/lccll](http://longwood.edu/lccll).