



*for your*

FALL 2024

# BENEFIT

NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT  
YOUR UNIVERSITY BENEFITS



# Building a Better You



HUMAN  
RESOURCES

# Understanding Your Role in Workplace Health and Wellness

WEL  
COM  
E

To thrive in today's environment and build a strong business case for workplace mental health and well-being across the University of Tennessee System, it's essential to emphasize the integration of well-being into the organization's culture, operations and leadership. A practical approach should be holistic, proactively addressing employee needs and removing systemic barriers to support mental and physical health.

The UT System recognizes the importance of mental and physical wellness, offering resources and support to promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle for employees. We are committed to fostering a culture of wellness and providing the necessary tools for employees to lead happier, more productive lives. Whether you want to improve your physical health, enhance your mental well-being, advance your career, or connect with your community, UT has something for you.

But are you aware of all the benefits and opportunities available to you? Do you know how to make the most of them? Do you understand how they can impact your overall health and performance?

In this issue, we will provide a blueprint for overall wellness by exploring the different aspects of well-being and how they relate to your work and life. We will also share some of UT's health care and general benefits to support your overall care, such as mental health interventions, wellness programs and financial education. We will guide you through the open enrollment process and help you choose the best options for your needs.

Investing in your well-being is good for you and UT. Research shows that employees who are well in all domains are more productive, engaged and loyal. These strategic investments also reduce health care costs, absenteeism and turnover. By promoting a culture of wellness, UT aims to foster an environment conducive to producing a happier, healthier and more successful workforce.

Join us on this journey as we uncover and explore the foundational rocks of well-being and discover new ways you can thrive in all aspects of life at UT and beyond.

**BRIAN K. DICKENS, Ph.D.**  
CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER  
UT SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION



**Produced by UT System  
Communications & Marketing**

**Editors**

Rob Reburn  
Melissa Tindell (Knoxville '93, Martin '21)  
Jennifer Sicking

**Designer**

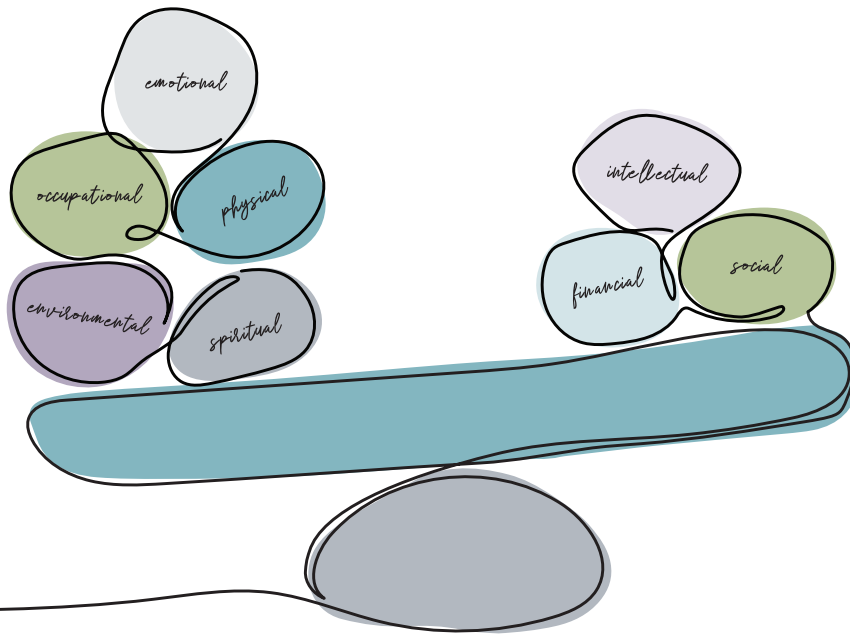
Michael Folkerth

*The University of Tennessee is an  
EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/ Section 504/  
ADA/ADEA institution in the provision  
of its education and employment  
programs and services.*

# IN THIS ISSUE



- 4 A Flourishing UT System is Built on the Well-Being of its Faculty and Staff
- 6 Need to Know Info: Benefits Changes
- 7 2024 W-2s: Check Your Mail
- 7 Navigating the Ins and Outs of Retirement Accounts
- 8 UT Employee Perks
- 9 Winners of the 2024 UT System President's Awards
- 10 Three-Peat: A Great Place to Work



Fall marks the beginning of a new academic year filled with new classes, students and opportunities. However, it also brings new stressors for faculty, staff and administrators. We don't talk enough about how work affects our employees, and we need to start.

# A Flourishing UT System is Built on the Well-Being of its Faculty and Staff

BY JESSI GOLD & MATT MATTHEWS

## **Our Joint Mission**

As the new chief wellness officer and associate vice president for academic affairs for the UT System, we have a joint mission to tend to the wellness of all UT employees. Wellness, broadly defined, includes at least eight domains. These interconnected domains must be prioritized before a crisis happens.

## **Creating a Supportive Work Environment**

Working for UT can be both rewarding and challenging. Our goal is to create a supportive environment where work has clear meaning and purpose. This helps us serve Tennessee's students and people while taking care of ourselves. We must work together to build a workplace culture that promotes health, safety and well-being.

## **Understanding and Addressing Your Needs**

To ensure employee wellness, we need to understand your needs. We will champion strength-building opportunities across the UT System while learning from your feedback. Knowing what has worked and what hasn't will help us better support your ongoing engagement and success.

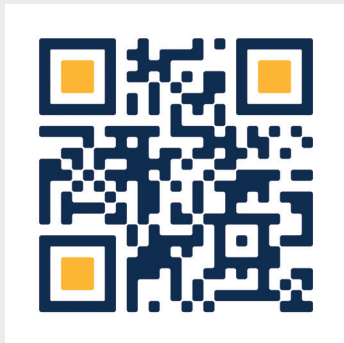
## SPOTLIGHT ON TOH@UTC

By Chris Cunningham, UT Chattanooga

Since January 2023, UT Chattanooga has been engaged in efforts to build and sustain an institutional culture that **protects and promotes the health, safety and well-being of all employees** through the Total Organizational Health at UTC (TOH@UTC) initiative.

Commissioned by Chancellor Steven Angle and facilitated by Chris Cunningham, who directs a top-ranked master's degree program in industrial-organizational psychology at UTC, this data-driven, evidence-based effort aims to transform campus culture.

TOH@UTC is a culture change initiative to create shared understanding, language, priorities and objectives regarding employee well-being across the campus. UTC employees are collaborating to enhance engagement, build a supportive workplace, strengthen institutional resilience and help UTC become an "employer of choice."



Responding to key focus areas, this initiative gathers and reviews extensive campus and employee data and engages with task forces representing UTC staff, faculty and administration. Various resources and actions have been developed and are accessible through campus-level programming, consultations with Cunningham and the TOH@UTC website.

Positive outcomes are evident in recent employee surveys, campus exit and stay interview data, and ongoing discussions within departments and employee groups. To learn more about TOH@UTC, scan the QR code to visit us at [utc.edu/total-organizational-health](http://utc.edu/total-organizational-health).

### An Important Faculty Survey

One way to share your insights is through regular surveys. This February, for the first time, faculty across all campuses can simultaneously participate in the **COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey**, providing valuable data on faculty experiences. While surveys take time, we assure you the results will shape future objectives to improve employee health, safety and well-being.

### Opportunities for Feedback and Engagement

Additionally, we plan to create more opportunities for conversations, both virtually and in person, and will visit each campus throughout the academic year. You can also provide feedback through campus mechanisms like supervisors or ombudspersons, or informally via email to either of us.

### Your Wellness Matters

We want to know how you are doing, truly, and how we can meet your needs. When our employees feel a sense of wellness, we retain their valuable skills and foster their professional growth. Cultural change takes time, but we are committed to partnering with you on this journey. We hope you share our excitement for the future of work at UT.



**Jessi Gold, M.D., M.S.**

Chief Wellness Officer, UT System;  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Psychiatry, UTHSC  
[jgold11@tennessee.edu](mailto:jgold11@tennessee.edu)



**Matt Matthews, Ph.D.**

Associate Vice President for  
Academic Affairs, UT System  
[matthews@tennessee.edu](mailto:matthews@tennessee.edu)

# NEED TO KNOW INFO: BENEFITS CHANGES

Open enrollment is right around the corner! Changes can be made by using the Edison link inside of IRIS.

## What is Open Enrollment?

Open enrollment is the two-week period when employees have the opportunity to choose insurance benefits or make changes to current benefits for the upcoming year. There are a few changes this year to be aware of in order to make the best decisions for you and your family:

### All member health plans:

- Health insurance premiums for 2025 will increase by an aggregated average of 5.5% for active members and retirees due to general inflation and the increased cost of delivering health care. "Aggregated average" means this percentage reflects the overall change across different plans and member groups, combining them into one average rate of increase. Specific premium increases will vary depending on the health plan and coverage you choose.
- Your pharmacy benefits through CVS Caremark currently have two cost-sharing tiers for specialty medications – generics and brands. Partners for Health is adding a third non-preferred brand specialty tier for 2025.

### Preferred provider organization (PPO):

- Under a PPO, copays for visits through *Talkspace*, the program that connects members with therapists virtually from a smartphone or computer, currently cost the same as an in-network primary care office visit. For 2025, the copay for PPO options will be lowered to \$15.

### Consumer-driven health plan (CDHP):

- Anti-obesity medications will no longer be on the preventive drug list for the CDHP plan option in 2025. Members enrolled in this plan will be subject to their plan's deductible before plan coverage begins for anti-obesity medications including, but not limited to, *Qsymia*®, *Wegovy*®, *Zepbound*® and *Saxenda*®.



## ANNUAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD: OCT. 1-18

Guides and information regarding plans and tiers can be found on the Annual Enrollment Materials webpage at [tn.gov/partnersforhealth](https://tn.gov/partnersforhealth).

Remember to use the Edison link inside of IRIS to make changes to your benefits coverages during the annual enrollment period, Oct. 1-18.

# 2024 W-2s: CHECK YOUR MAIL

In just a few months, 2024 will conclude and the 2024 tax season will soon be underway. Due to the University of Tennessee's transition from IRIS to DASH, all employees will receive printed 2024 W-2 forms via standard U.S. mail.

To ensure there are no issues receiving your 2024 W-2 forms, please verify your mailing address is up-to-date and correct within IRIS by the end of the calendar year. If your address is correct, you should receive your W-2 form in early February. In the event there is an issue with your mailing address, a request portal will be set up for you to request your W-2 from HR. However, this will not be available until after the initial mail-out date.

Be on the lookout for more communication on the W-2 issuing process as we get closer to tax season.



## NAVIGATING THE INS AND OUTS OF RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS

Some people can't imagine their lives without their careers. Others have been ready for retirement since high school graduation.

No matter in which camp you fall, planning for retirement can help ensure your golden years live up to their name. The UT System has two types of retirement programs—Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS) and Optional Retirement Program (ORP).

There are two forms of the TCRS: TCRS Legacy and TCRS Hybrid. The TCRS Legacy plan, available for employees hired before July 1, 2014, is a defined benefit plan, meaning the amount of retirement is determined by a formula rather than an account balance. Benefits are determined using the member's highest five-year average salary and years of service and there is no mandatory employee contribution.

The TCRS Hybrid plan, available for employees hired after July 1, 2014, has a defined benefit portion, comprised of two valuable components: a defined benefit plan provided by the TCRS and a 401(k)-plan offered through Empower Retirement. The employer's contribution to the TCRS account is 4% of compensation and 5% to a 401(k). Employees are required to contribute 5% of their compensation to the TCRS account.

The ORP is a defined contribution retirement plan, which means the amount of retirement benefits will be determined by the member's account balance. Like the TCRS, there are two forms of the ORP: Legacy and Hybrid. Unlike the TCRS plans, non-exempt staff (those eligible for overtime) are not eligible for the ORP plans.

Employees hired before July 1, 2014, are eligible for the Legacy ORP. It requires a fixed employer contribution of 10% of compensation up to the Social Security wage base and 11% of compensation above the social security wage base. There is no mandatory employee contribution.

Employees hired after July 1, 2014, are eligible for the Hybrid ORP which requires an employer contribution of 9 percent of compensation and a mandatory employee contribution of 5% of compensation. Employees who enroll in the Hybrid ORP are automatically enrolled in the state's 401(k) plan at 2% of their salary but can opt out. Employers are not required to contribute to the 401(k).

For more information on available retirement plans, visit [payroll.tennessee.edu/retirement](https://payroll.tennessee.edu/retirement), email questions to [retirement@tennessee.edu](mailto:retirement@tennessee.edu), or call **865-974-5251**.

# AN IMPACTFUL PERK: VOLUNTEERING

When you commit to being a volunteer, you are making a significant impact for the organization you're volunteering with as well as the demographic they serve. But did you know that as a volunteer, you too, are reaping benefits?

Research shows that volunteering offers significant health benefits, including improved physical and mental health, an elevated sense of purpose and enhanced relationships through increased social interactions.

And did you know as an employee of the UT System, you may be eligible to use up to eight paid hours each calendar year to participate in volunteer activities that benefit your community?

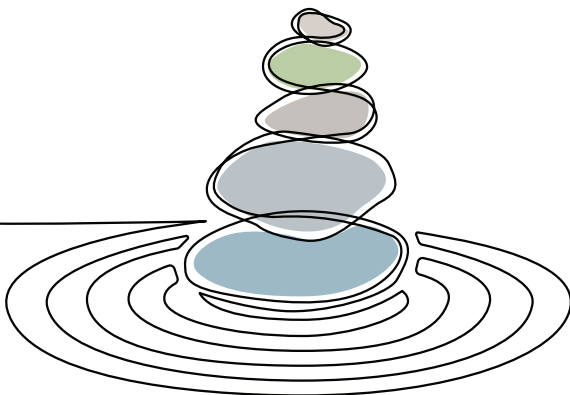
Learn more by reading policy *HRO446 - Volunteer Activities* at [policy.tennessee.edu](http://policy.tennessee.edu) or contact your respective human resources officer.

# ALEX: YOUR VIRTUAL BENEFITS GUIDE MADE SIMPLE

ALEX is our virtual benefits counselor who helps employees choose benefits that best suit them and their family. It provides personalized guidance and education during annual enrollment and ongoing engagement throughout the year to make benefits decisions as easy as possible.

The logo for ALEX, featuring the word "alex" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font with a registered trademark symbol (®) to the upper right.

ALEX is available anytime through a computer, tablet or smartphone. Employees can talk to ALEX to find out if they are saving enough to cover medical, dental and vision expenses and see how much they could save on taxes by possibly changing plans.



# MORE GREAT PERKS WE THINK YOU'LL LOVE

There are many perks to being an employee of the UT System, and we think these might be some of the best currently available:

- **Lodging and camping discounts at Tennessee State Parks:** Fall has arrived! Did you know that UT System employees can receive discounts of up to 50% on lodging and camping fees at more than 50 state parks in Tennessee? Learn more at [tnstateparks.com/about/policies](http://tnstateparks.com/about/policies).
- **Computer and software discounts:** All UT System employees receive educational pricing on computers, software and accessories through the VolTech Shop, available at [www.utvolshop.com/voltech](http://www.utvolshop.com/voltech). The web price displayed includes the educational discount and full-time regular employees are also eligible for interest-free payroll deduction payment options.
- **State of Tennessee Employee Discount Program:** The State of Tennessee posts information about discounts for state employees from approved vendors, including the latest tech, gym memberships and even automobiles, all through the PerkSpot discount portal at [pslogin.perkspot.com](http://pslogin.perkspot.com).

# SHARECARE: INCENTIVES FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

It pays to take control and be proactive about your health, and not just in the form of a happier, healthier version of yourself. With the Sharecare wellness program, you can actually get paid! Available to active higher education employees and their spouses enrolled in medical insurance with Partners for Health, Sharecare rewards users with cash incentives for completing activities like biometric screenings (\$50), annual physical exams (\$25) and quarterly wellness challenges (\$10 each quarter). To learn more about the Sharecare wellness program and sign up, visit [sharecare.com/tnwellness](http://sharecare.com/tnwellness).



# WINNERS OF THE 2024 UT SYSTEM PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

Earlier this year, University of Tennessee System President Randy Boyd announced the recipients of the 2024 President's Awards. These awards, established in 2016, recognize the accomplishments of faculty and staff from across the UT System.

Fifteen faculty and staff members were honored this year for their achievements and dedication to the Be One UT Values. These values, seven in total, are intended to shape culture across the system, build purpose, improve team cohesion and create a shared sense of commitment in the workplace.

The recipients were nominated by campus and institute leaders and chosen from a pool of candidates from across

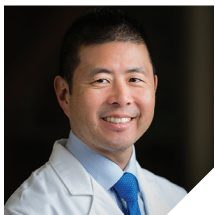
the entire system. They were honored by the president and his Be One UT cabinet at a special luncheon held in August in Nashville.

"The President's Awards highlight the exceptional work and commitment demonstrated by our faculty and staff throughout Tennessee," Boyd said. "Their contributions are invaluable in making this the greatest decade in UT history. It is an honor and privilege to work alongside them in serving the people of our great state."

The President's Awards are the highest honor a UT employee can receive from the University. Winners are presented with commemorative plaques and a monetary award of \$3,000.

## BOLD & IMPACTFUL

Serving the state by tackling grand challenges.



Dr. David Shibata  
UTHSC



Claire Paul  
UTS



Ammar L. Ammar  
UTHSC



Dr. Katy Chiles  
UTK



Angie Carrier  
IPS

## OPTIMISTIC & VISIONARY

Empowering courageous leadership.



Joseph Ostenson  
UTM



Kari Alldredge  
UTK



Brian Stevens  
UTK



Dr. Mina Sartipi  
UTC



Dr. Nicole Labbe  
UTIA



Brett Fuchs  
UTC

## NIMBLE & INNOVATIVE

Inspiring creative and transformational action.

## EXCEL IN ALL WE DO

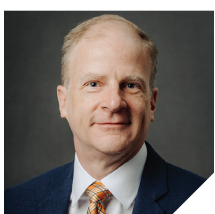
Committing to continuous improvement and outstanding performance.

## UNITED & CONNECTED

Collaborating internally and externally for greater collective impact.

## TRANSPARENT & TRUSTED

Fostering integrity through openness, accountability and stewardship.



Dr. Bruce Keisling  
UTHSC



Brad Harris  
IPS



Dr. Karen Derefinko  
UTHSC



Kaycee Edwards  
UTSI

# THREE-PEAT: A GREAT PLACE TO WORK



The University of Tennessee System has earned its certification as a great place to work for the third consecutive year.

The Great Place to Work Certification is determined by what current employees say about their experience working for the UT System. This year, 75% of employees rated the UT System as a great place to work—one point higher

than last year and 18 points higher than the average U.S. company. Additionally, 83% of UT System employees said that when new employees join the University, they are made to feel welcome.

Great Place to Work is the global authority on workplace culture, employee experience and the leadership behaviors proven to deliver market-leading revenue, employee retention and increased innovation.

“We are beyond proud to have earned our Great Place to Work certification for the third consecutive year,” said Brian Dickens, chief human resources officer for the UT System. “The distinction of being an ‘employer of choice’ is highly sought after and can only be given by our devoted employees, to whom we credit our ongoing success. We sincerely appreciate and celebrate their efforts in earning this remarkable recognition.”

According to a 2023 market study, companies certified as a great place to work by their employees are 15 times more likely to be chosen by job seekers and experience half the turnover of the typical U.S. workplace. They also report increased productivity, with 86% of employees at certified Great Place to Work companies reporting they give extra effort.



Staff and interns from the UT System Division of Communications and Marketing show off their UT pride at the Johnson Farm mural dedication event in Sparta, Tenn., on May 6, 2023. (Photo by Staci Fugate-Dernbach)



UT Chattanooga employees and faculty gathered to honor and celebrate each other at the UTC Service Awards in the Tennessee Room on Sept. 12, 2023. (Photo by Angela Foster)



RESEARCH SHOWS THAT COLORING PROVIDES MULTIPLE BENEFITS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, AND THE BEST PART IS, ANYONE CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE BENEFITS—NO ARTISTIC SKILLS NEEDED, JUST SOME COLORED PENCILS AND TIME TO RELAX!

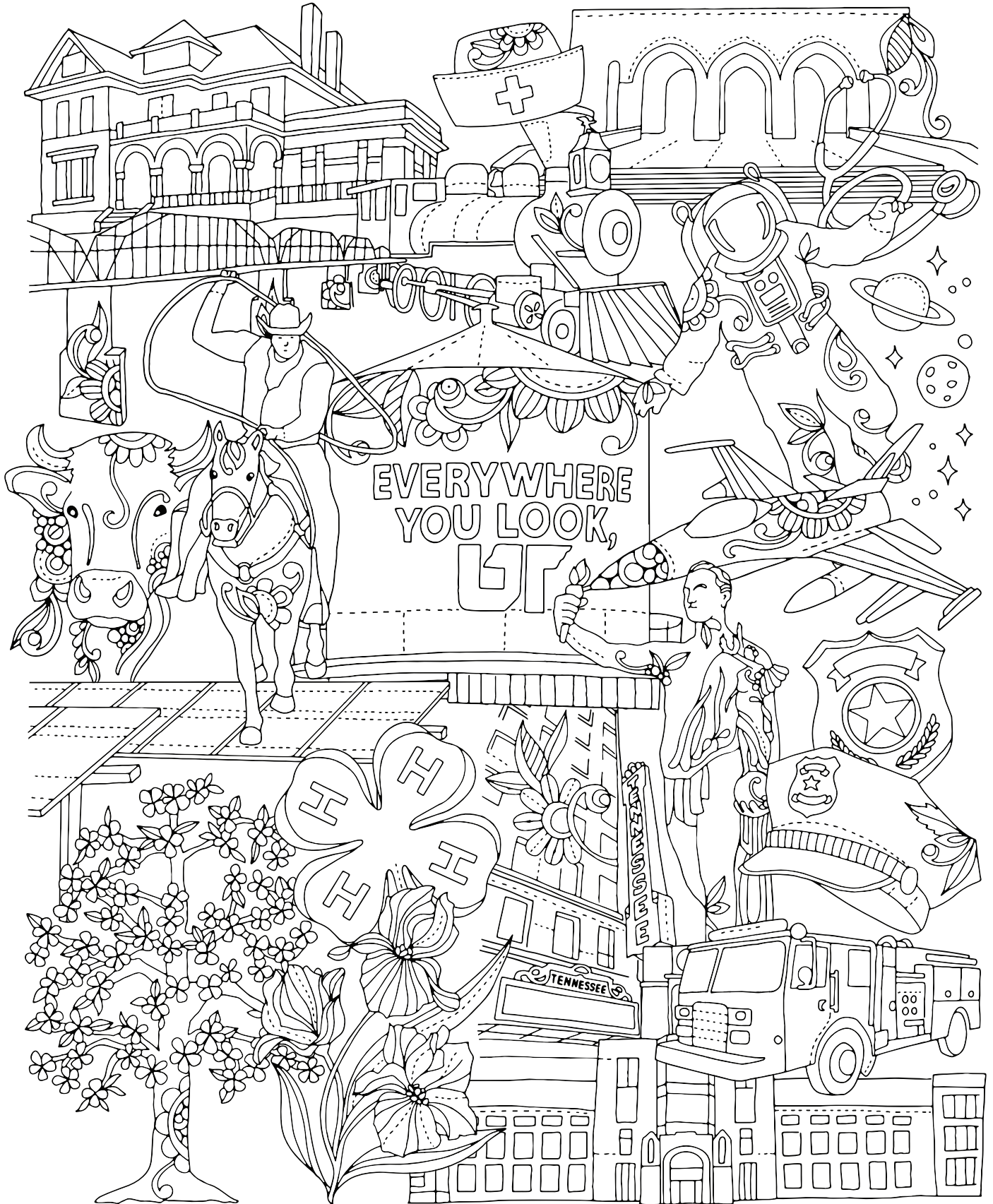


Illustration by Valentina Harper

 *for your*  
**BENEFIT**



Department of Human Resources  
1100 UT Tower  
505 Summer Place  
Knoxville, TN 37902

# DISCOVER THE ORIGINS OF UT SOUTHERN

AVAILABLE NOW AT THE UT PRESS

The acquisition of one university by another is rare, and even rarer still is when it involves a public university system and a faith-based institution. In *The University of Tennessee Southern: The Rebirth of an Institution*, learn about the historic story through the many steps taken to bring the new campus into being.

Orders may be placed online at [utpress.org](http://utpress.org), by calling **1-800-621-2736**, or by email to [orders@press.uchicago.edu](mailto:orders@press.uchicago.edu).



**THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE PRESS**

