

More than 120 indictments released in county

Grand jurors handed down a total of 129 indictments on January 19, according to records in the Henry County Court Clerk's Office.

An indictment is not an indication of guilt, but a grand jury's determination that enough evidence exists to warrant a trial.

Those named in the indictments are:

Jamil I'Keem Mays, 16, of Martinsville, two counts use of a firearm in the commission of a felony, one count each second-degree murder, robbery, conspiracy to commit armed robbery, and possess firearm by violent felon, June 2, 2020.

*Jesse Ethan Bolt, 24, of Bassett, one count each grand larceny and possession of burglary tools, Dec. 23, 2019.

*Ronald Wayne Clifton, 49, of Bassett, grand larceny on May 19, 2020.

*Michael Eugene Cook, 57, of Axton, threaten to bomb, burn, damage, or destroy structure/vehicle, Jan. 15, 2020.

*Brian Keith Dawson, 31, of Ferrum, malicious wounding, March 20, 2020.

*Sandra Kay Dishman, 25, of Bassett, one count each grand larceny and possess burglary tools, Dec. 23, 2019.

*Sonya Marie Hodges, 40, of

Rocky Mount, shoplifting--3rd or subsequent offense, Aug. 14, 2020.

*Wesley Thompson Martin, 53, of Appomattox, grand larceny, Oct. 27, 2019.

*Sanford Gregory Millner, 57, of Bassett, one count each aggravated malicious wounding, use of a firearm in the commission of a felony, possess firearm by violent felon, Aug. 22, 2020.

*Daquan Deon Perkins, 24, of Martinsville, grand larceny of a motor vehicle, Sept. 2, 2020.

*Omega Doindre Porter, 21, of Martinsville, grand larceny of a firearm, April 8, 2020.

*Johny Allen Roberts, 34, of Axton, two counts abduction; one count each strangulation, endanger life of a child, attempted malicious wounding, attempted malicious wounding, destruction of property valued at more than \$1,000, Sept. 14, 2020.

*Jeral Max Sunderland Jr., 56, of Bassett, strangulation, May 31, 2020.

*Joseph Berkley Taylor III, 36, of Martinsville, grand larceny, Jan. 14, 2020.

*Makunda Madhava Walters, 34, of Sandy Ridge, N.C., shoplifting--\$200 or more, March 26, 2018.

*Kati Lynn Yopp, 26, of Salem, two counts felony fail to appear,

Aug. 14, 2020.

*Brandon Shane Mitchell, 34, of Eden, N.C., three counts each felony shoplifting--\$1,000 or more, and larceny with intent to sell/distribute--\$1,000 or more, between Aug. 17-20, 2020.

*Christopher Lee Eames, 29, of Bassett, one count each threaten to bomb, burn, destroy, or damage structure, and destruction of property more than \$1,000, June 28, 2020.

*Justin Dean Hurley, 20, of Martinsville, unlawful wounding, July 28, 2020.

*Brent Elliott Jervis, 33, of Bassett, malicious wounding, March 18, 2020.

*Richard Lee Putman, 67, of Fieldale, two counts assault and batter of law enforcement officer, July 29, 2020.

*Jennifer Lynn Pettit, 43, of Roanoke, possess methamphetamine, July 16, 2020.

*Matthew Alan Batty, 28, of Bassett, break and enter building with intent to commit larceny, Aug. 26, 2020.

*Kenneth Ray Lockhart, 43, of Patrick Springs, possess morphine, Sept. 14, 2020.

*Noah Hunter Kennedy, 19, of Bassett, three counts object sexual

See **Indictments**, page 2



PHOTO BY BRANDON MARTIN

The Rev. Tyler Millner (center), pastor at Morning Star Holy Church, moderated a community forum on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Also pictured are panelists (left to right), Lisa Millner, assistant superintendent in Henry County Public Schools; Jennifer Bowles, vice-mayor of the City of Martinsville; and Garrett Dillard, director of the Center for Community Learning.

Forum to honor MLK focuses on "beloved community"

Brandon Martin
Staff writer

In the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, community leaders in Martinsville-Henry County gathered for a public forum to discuss how to realize the late civil rights leader's vision of "the beloved community."

The event was hosted at Morning Star Holy Church by the Rev. Tyler Millner, pastor of the church, and it featured the panel of Jennifer Bowles, vice mayor of the City of Martinsville; Lisa Millner, assistant superintendent at Henry County Public Schools; and Garrett Dillard, director

of the Center for Community Learning.

Panelists spoke at length about King's vision of a "beloved community" and how racial relations can be improved in the local area.

"The intergenerational impact of Dr. King's legacy cannot be stated enough," Bowles said. "His tireless commitment to creating a better society continues to permeate the opportunities afforded to us today. Through his sacrifices, we are reminded how far we have come and how far we have to go to make his dreams and our hopes of a better society a reality."

See **Forum**, page 5

New company to be cornerstone for energy park

Brandon Martin
Staff writer

When the Henry County Planning Commission recently approved a rezoning application for property located at 20 Water Plant Road in Ridgeway, it paved the way for a new company to locate there and become the cornerstone of a new energy park.

Advance Energy Solutions, Inc., a Vinton-based Renewable Energy Technology company, announced Friday that it purchased a building that once served as a Henry County Public Service Authority water plant, with plans to locate its Solar & Wind Farm Protection control panel assembly operation there.

The project listed in the application could be the first step towards renewable energy manufacturing in Henry County. It is also expected to rake in \$1.6 million in additional revenue and 15 new jobs, according to data provided at the meeting.

The mind behind the project is Pugazhenth

"Pugal" Selvaraj, president of Advance Energy Solutions, a company that specializes in providing "design, development and deployment of the next generation smart grid solutions for solar and wind farms."

In his application package to the Planning Commission, Selvaraj said he plans to manufacture electrical control panels for solar and wind farms, instruments for measuring and testing of electricity and electrical signals, and solar meters to test.

"Basically, I'm trying to make a green energy technology park where a control panel for a solar panel or wind farm can be assembled there," he said, adding that he initially had the idea more than a year ago before delaying his search for a location because of the pandemic.

At the time, Selvaraj said there wasn't available space but "luckily this property came open and I knew instantly that I could do my research and development there."

Currently, research and development takes place



PHOTO BY BRANDON MARTIN

Ved Jain, application engineer with Advance Energy Solutions, displays a portable solar panel that is under development

in cohorts associated with Selvaraj. Some examples are educational institutes like Radford University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

"There are multiple reasons why the location (in Ridgeway) is perfect," Selvaraj said. "One

of the reasons is Henry County is very close to the Greensboro airport. It's used easily as an access for international travel. That's the primary one. Plus, it is closer to (U.S.) 220 and shipping is much

See **Cornerstone**, page 7

Laminate Technologies to create 42 new jobs in Henry County expansion

One of the largest privately held custom laminators in the United States, Laminate Technologies Inc. (LamTech), will invest \$4 million to expand its manufacturing facility at 775 Industrial Park Drive in Henry County, according to a release from Gov. Ralph Northam.

The company will install a new automated hardwood plywood press line to increase capacity and production to serve its East Coast market. Virginia successfully competed with Ohio for the project, which will create 42 new jobs.

"With our skilled workforce, competitive operating costs, and access to key markets, manufacturers like Laminate Technologies are finding opportunity in Virginia," said Northam. "Expansions in the advanced manufacturing sector will aid our economic recovery during this ongoing pandemic, and we look forward to partnering with the company on its next phase of growth in Henry County."

Headquartered in Tiffin, Ohio, Laminate Technologies Inc. was established in 1985 as a major supplier of laminated panel products, fabricated components, and globally sourced products for the kitchen cabinet, residential furniture, office furniture, and retail display markets. The company operates manufacturing facilities in Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. LamTech opened its Henry County operation in 2012.

"We are excited that Laminate Technologies will expand its production capabilities at its Henry County facility, creating 42

new, well-paid jobs," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball. "The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program is a great tool that enables businesses to adapt their workforce to evolving industry needs so that important employers like LamTech continue to succeed in the Commonwealth."

"We studied several of our East Coast production facilities for expansion but selected our Ridgeway, Virginia location for multiple reasons, including the solid workforce, proximity to customers, and supply chain logistics," said Randy Joseph, Chief Operating Officer at Laminate Technologies Inc. "Adding hardwood plywood production to our current lamination and fabrication capabilities provides a great product synergy. This, coupled with our neighboring supply partner, Southern Finishing in Martinsville, enables us to bring a lot of value to the market. A special thanks to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development teams for their incredible support and cooperation to make this expansion possible."

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) worked with the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation to secure the project for Virginia. Governor Northam approved a \$100,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund to assist Henry County with the project. The company is

See **New Jobs**, page 7

Parker joins McAuliffe in fight for stricter gun legislation

Brandon Martin
Staff writer

Andy Parker, a former member of the Henry County Board of Supervisors, joined former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, who plans to seek reelection, and other gun rights advocates for a virtual conversation about actions needed to prevent further gun-related violence in Virginia.

Parker, whose daughter Alison was slain in an act of gun violence in 2015, has been seeking stricter gun reforms in her honor.

"My beautiful and talented daughter, Alison, was murdered while she was doing a story on live television in 2015," Parker said. "It was different from so many tragedies caused by gun violence because around 60,000 people in the New River Valley actually saw this happen in real time. It became one of those moments that's indelibly

etched in people's memories."

After losing his daughter, Parker said he was distraught before realizing how he could make a difference.

"As I was reeling that day from this soul-crushing thing, the worst thing that could happen to a father, I was grappling with 'what do I do now with my shattered life,'" Parker said. "That afternoon, I had this epiphany that I had to do whatever it took to prevent another dad from experiencing that and going through what I was going through. This should not happen."

Parker said he received a phone call from McAuliffe shortly after the incident.

"It wasn't long after I had this epiphany that I got a call from you (McAuliffe) and you were the only elected official to call me that day," Parker said. "You weren't trying to score any political points. You were a dad, just like me, trying to offer com-

fort to another dad."

In preparation for his next run at the governorship, McAuliffe has released his plan to stifle gun violence throughout the state by calling for a "ban the sale of military-style assault firearms and high-capacity magazines; strengthening Virginia's background check law; prohibiting open carry of firearms in certain public spaces and allowing localities to intervene when there are public safety threats; preventing domestic violence abusers from accessing firearms; banning 'ghost guns' and all other undetectable firearms; closing the 'hate crime' loophole; treating gun violence as a public health epidemic;" and expanding awareness programs.

McAuliffe said that 1,000 Virginians are killed every year from gun violence, or about three deaths each day.

See **Legislation**, page 5



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Saturday, January 23

Join the Spencer Penn Centre for Paint and Barn Quilt classes. Genie will host a “winter love” painting class from 1-4 p.m. on Jan. 23 and again on February 27. Cost is \$20/members and \$25/non-members. Masks and social distancing are required for all in-person classes. Spots are filling up fast. Register by calling (276) 957-5757.

Join Piedmont Arts for a Virtual Family Day from 11 a.m., until 1 p.m. Led by Education Coordinator Sarah Short, this online-only event will feature story time, draw-

ing and an easy craft with items you can find around your house (paper, drawing utensils, scissors, toilet paper rolls), and a performance of the musical, The Little Red Hen, by Virginia Repertory Theatre. Virtual Family Day is appropriate for pre-K to third grade. For more information, contact: (276) 632-3221.

Monday, January 25

The Martinsville City School Board will hold a public hearing on the FY22 School Budget at 6 p.m., in the City Municipal Building. A copy of the agenda can be found

at <https://go.boarddocs.com/va/martinsville/Board.nsf/Public>.

The Patrick Henry Community College Board will meet via Zoom at noon. This is a public meeting, but the committee will not receive public comment. Information for joining the Zoom session will be posted on the PHCC website, www.patrickhenry.edu.

Tuesday, January 26

The Henry County Board of Supervisors will hold its regularly scheduled meeting in the Summerlin Meeting

Room at the County Administration Building beginning at 3 p.m.

Friday, January 29

Piedmont Arts is hosting an impressionist paint night with Instructor Karen Despot as she leads students in painting an impressionistic vase filled with pink roses. All levels welcome. Create a 16 x 20-inch acrylic painting on canvas. Advance registration is required. Social distancing and masks are required at all in-person classes. The class is \$40/members and \$45/non-members. For more information, call (276) 632-3221.

Ongoing

MHC Coalition for Health and Wellness offers no contact application assistance for Virginia’s free or low-cost Medicaid plans (Children’s Medicaid/FAMIS, pregnancy Medicaid and Adult Health Care (birth to 64-years-old). Applications completed by phone (no contact). Call or text Ann Walker (276) 732-0509 to see if you qualify.

Southern Area Agency on Aging: SAAA is offering series of “Fearless Caregiver Guides” free to caregivers. Call the SAAA at (276) 632-6442, 1-800-468-4571, or email info@southernaaa.org.

Indictments

from page 1

penetration, Aug.14, 2018 and Aug. 13, 2019.

*Raven Baylee Johanknecht, 24, of Patrick Springs, possess heroin, Sept. 5, 2020.

*Tonia Sue Barnes, 43, of Bassett, receive stolen property--3rd or subsequent offense, May 30, 2020.

*David Robert Cannaday, 52, of Martinsville, one count each possess methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possess marijuana--2nd or subsequent offense; possess buprenorphine and naloxone with intent to distribute, May 1, 2020; and felony fail to appear on Nov.

5, 2020.

*Jennifer Lynn Coleman, 36, of Martinsville, possess methamphetamine, Sept. 17, 2020.

*Jerri Jean Dehart, 50, of Ridgeway, one count each shoplifting--3rd or subsequent offense, Sept. 28, 2019; felonious violation of

the Habitual Offender Act--2nd or subsequent offense, March 11, 2020.

*Joey Edward Eanes, 55, of Axton, one count each possess methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possess oxycodone, possess hydromorphone, possess buprenorphine and naloxone, elude police--speed 20 mph or more over limit, Sept. 16, 2020.

*Bryan Dean Hill, 40, of Martinsville, one count each grand larceny of a firearm, Dec. 18, 2018 and felony fail to appear, Oct. 22, 2019.

*Douglas Peter Hopkins, 35, of Collinsville, DUI--3rd or subsequent offense within 10 years, July 26, 2020.

*Bobby Eugene Leagans, 40, of Bassett, grand larceny, Sept. 29, 2020.

*Samantha Ann Mays, 27, of Martinsville, shoplifting--3rd or subsequent offense, Feb. 8, 2020.

*Darol Eugene Meeks Jr., 45, of Martinsville, possess methamphetamine, Oct. 30, 2020.

*Joshua Andrew Moore, 30, of Axton, obtain money by false pretense--3rd or subsequent offense, July 26, 2020.

*Michael Paul Murray, 21, of Bassett, one count each shoplifting--3rd or subsequent offense, obtain money by false pretense--3rd or subsequent offense, and petty larceny--3rd or subsequent offense, Sept. 29, 2020.

*Donna Jean Nelson, 55, of Martinsville, grand larceny, Sept. 29, 2020.

*Joshua Shane Nelson, 33, of Martinsville, grand larceny, Sept. 29, 2020.

*Charncey Lamont Thomas, 39, of Bassett, one count each strangulation and aggravated malicious wounding, June 25, 2020.

*Robert Glenn Wagoner Jr., 37, of Bassett, one count

each malicious wounding and elude police, Oct. 6, 2020.

*Nakita Darchell Waller, 33, of Collinsville, felony fail to appear, Oct. 20, 2020.

*Douglas Peter Hopkins, 35, of Collinsville, operate vehicle after license revoked for prior DUI conviction--endangerment, July 26, 2020.

*Michael Thomas Brown, 45, of Bassett, one count each grand larceny and possess burglary tools, Dec. 23, 2019.

*Sheila Gay Dillon, 37, of Bassett, one count each grand larceny and possess burglary tools, Dec. 23, 2019.

*Oryan Deon Wimbush, 37, of Bassett, one count each possess methamphetamine and cocaine, Sept. 30, 2020.

*Dakota Christopher Foley, 22, of Bassett, one count each larceny of check, forgery, utter a forged check, obtain money by false pretense--\$500 or more, and identity fraud--\$500 or more, April 28, 2020; credit card theft, credit card fraud less than \$1,000, and obtain money by false pretense less than \$1,000, Nov. 15, 2020.

*Joseph David Woods, 51, of Axton, two counts indecent liberties with child, one count each aggravated sexual battery, carnal knowledge of child, forcible sodomy, and object sexual penetration, between Dec. 12, 2011 and July 19, 2020.

*Latasha Carter Palmer, 45, of Martinsville, one count each use of firearm in the commission of a felony, destruction of property more than \$1,000, assault, brandish a firearm, and break and enter dwelling while armed with deadly intent, June 19, 2020.

*Amy Jane Sherwood, 43, of Martinsville, one count

each hit and run, and drive without a driver’s license, July 5, 2020.

*Damian Scott Fontaine, 30, of Martinsville, worthless check--3rd or subsequent offense, Sept. 25, 2020.

*Jonathan Douglas Story, 35, of Rocky Mount, obtain money by false pretense, July 6, 2020.

*Mark Keith Hylton, 54, of Martinsville, one count each hit and run, fail to drive on the right side of the highway, and fail to wear seatbelt, Oct. 29, 2020.

*Desiray Denise Diggs, 28, of Martinsville, one count each hit and run, reckless driving, and endanger life of a child, July 14, 2020.

*Mada Maeling Smith, 53, of Martinsville, one count each false statement to firearm dealer and attempt to purchase firearm while subject to a protective order, Oct. 28, 2020.

*Dontra Lamark Penn, 33, of Martinsville, one count each possess marijuana with intent to distribute, and possess marijuana with intent to distribute within 1,000 feet of school, Nov. 28, 2018.

*Charles Andrew Bolling, 41, of Bassett, possess fentanyl with intent to distribute, Aug. 2, 2020.

*Timothy William Turner, 35, of Bassett, possess methamphetamine, Aug. 17, 2020.

*Jorge Luis Gomez-Vega, 40, of Collinsville, one count each false statement to firearm dealer and attempt to possess firearm by illegal alien, July 9, 2019.

*Lucas Aaron Stone, 27, of Bassett, two counts distribute fentanyl and one count each distribute tramadol and methamphetamine, between Aug. 11-20, 2020.

(Visit www.henrycounty-enterprise.com for more)

SUDOKU

		9			6			
					2			
1	6							9
		7	1			9		5
						3		8
		2	4					1
6			7		4		8	3
	7		2		3	1		

Level: Advanced

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

9	6	1	3	8	2	5	7	4
3	8	5	4	6	7	1	2	9
2	7	4	1	5	9	3	6	8
1	6	7	9	3	4	2	8	5
8	4	3	7	2	5	6	1	9
5	2	6	8	9	1	7	4	3
6	3	2	5	7	8	4	9	1
4	5	9	2	1	6	8	3	7
7	1	8	9	4	3	6	5	2

ANSWER:

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13						14				15			
16						17				18			
19					20					21			
				22					23			24	
25	26	27		28				29			30		
31			32		33		34					35	
36				37		38				39			40
	41				42				43		44		
		45					46		47		48		
49	50		51				52			53			
54		55				56					57	58	59
60					61					62			
63					64					65			
66					67					68			

CLUES ACROSS

- Correct code
- Foundation
- A pulpy condition
- Venezuelan river
- Orange-red chalcidony
- The shallowest Great
- Floating ice mountain
- Japanese cervids
- Special Interest Groups
- Divertimentos
- Indian wet nurses
- Flatfishes
- Haitian currency (abbr.)
- Southeast
- One point N of due W
- 10 decibels
- Wild oxes of SE Asia
- Ancient Greek City of SW Italy
- A passing glancing blow
- Marriage announce-

CLUES DOWN

- Strikes lightly
- Fencing sword
- Hooked pericarp
- Entreats
- Edison's Corp.
- Cooks in an oven
- Amounts of time
- Tooth caregiver
- Spellbind
- Solo opera piece
- Audible exhales
- Siddhartha author
- Coach's game area
- Gross revenue
- Toff
- 1896 Italian defeat (alt. sp.)
- Auto fuel
- A woven structure
- Reveal a secret
- Hawaiian geese

CLUES ACROSS

- ment
- Tandoor bread
- Mag____: Time
- Portended
- Alicante's 7th city
- Gulf of, in the Aegean
- Strike
- Hill (Celtic)
- Stuart Little's author
- White
- Male sheep
- Indian dresses
- Pears
- Tardy arriver
- Smudge of ink
- Youngsters
- About aviation
- Small ornamental ladies' bag
- Unreturnable serves
- Fante and Twi peoples
- Round shape
- Of she

CLUES DOWN

- Brings into being
- Displaced liquid
- Frigid Zone
- Newsman Rather
- Prefix for inside
- Short-billed rails
- Sensory receptor
- Egyptian temple ____-Ombo
- Challenges
- Photograph (slang)
- Declined gradually
- Tilapia nilotica
- One-edge sword
- Wets
- Small coins (French)
- Twine together
- The middle point
- Sea eagle
- Activist Parks
- Humbug
- Atomic #79

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Bassett announces regular quarterly dividend

Bassett Furniture Industries, Inc. (Nasdaq: BSET) recently announced that its Board of Directors has declared a regular quarterly dividend of \$0.125 per share of common stock, payable on February 26, 2021 to share-

holders of record at the close of business on February 12, 2021. Bassett Furniture Industries, Inc. (NASDAQ:BSET), is a leading manufacturer and marketer of high quality home furnishings. With 97 company-

and licensee-owned stores at the time of this release, Bassett has leveraged its strong brand name in furniture into a network of corporate and licensed stores that focus on providing consumers with a friendly environment

for buying furniture and accessories. Bassett's retail strategy includes stylish, custom-built furniture that features the latest on-trend furniture styles, free in-home design visits, and coordinated decorating acces-

sories. Bassett also has a traditional wholesale business with more than 700 accounts on the open market, across the United States and internationally and a logistics business specializing in home furnishings. For more information, visit the Company's website at bassettfurniture.com. (Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com)

Uptown partnership receives planning grant

The newly formed Uptown Partnership (UP) received a two-year \$350,200 planning grant to support the organization's development.

Uptown Partnership was established to drive the revitalization of Uptown Martinsville by creating a vibrant business district filled with high quality residential, entertainment and cultural spaces that meet the diverse needs of the greater Martinsville – Henry County region.

"Partnerships are key to a sustainable Uptown," said Beverly Pitzer, community reinvestment act officer for Carter Bank & Trust and treasurer of Uptown Partnership. "We are adding fuel and energy to help us all succeed. We aren't looking to reinvent the wheel. The area has had at least a half a dozen studies over the years that have all said that the success of the Martinsville – Henry County region depends on the success of Uptown. We have been working with the Chamber, the EDC, and the City in this first, truly unprecedented, year. We want to expand our partnerships regionally as success for one is success for all."

UP is currently working towards becoming a Designated Virginia Main Street program which will allow the organization to have access to resources and funding at the state level. It also will hire an executive director that will assist volunteers in implementing the Main Street 4 Point Approach that focuses on organization, promotion, design and economic vitality.

Through a series of visioning sessions, the UP board has identified two thematic strategies that align with the National Main Street Approach: "Uptown



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Uptown Partners board is pictured on Main Street.

Living" and "Hand-made; Craft-made & Artisan."

"Uptown Living" aims to improve amenities and home furnishings that make living in Uptown attractive. One key to revitalization of districts like Uptown is to increase the number of people living directly in the district and in nearby areas. While there are several residential projects in the works that should make nearly 100 new housing units available in the next 18 months, filling them will require the creation of an attractive and pedestrian friendly atmosphere.

"Our goal is to increase the population of the Uptown district, including the surrounding residential neighborhoods from Five Points east to Starling, and Commonwealth south to Memorial, by at least 500 people in the next couple of years," said Leutisha Galloway, an Uptown Partnership board member and director of the Fayette Area Historical Initiative. "Projects like the Chief Tassell and BB&T are big and obvious, but there are a lot of smaller investors putting in a couple units here and there. We want to support them in getting those built

and filled."

A focus on the "Hand-made; Craft-made & Artisan" approach means local makers specializing in food, art, furniture, jewelry, or beer will be welcomed and marketed to UP residents and visitors.

"Martinsville was built with the minds and hands of our parents and grandparents in our local factories. We have always created and now we want to rebuild our future as a place where people can come and create viable businesses with both their intellectual expertise and the sweat of their efforts," explained Natalie Hodge, Vice President of Uptown Partnership.

"The Harvest foundation is focused on creating a vibrant Martinsville/Henry County," said president, Kate Keller. "A thriving Uptown is central to the success of our region. We believe the Uptown Partnership is a diverse group of residents and business owners that can bring our shared vision to life."

For more information about UP and its programs, visit www.martinsvilleup.com.

(Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com)

Dashboard launched to include COVID-19 outbreaks in higher education

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) launched a COVID-19 Outbreaks in Virginia Higher Education dashboard.

This dashboard includes confirmed outbreaks reported to VDH among public and private colleges and universities since August 1, 2020 and helps to provide awareness of the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in colleges and universities statewide.

Only distinct confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks investigated by VDH local health departments, and the associated cases and deaths related to an outbreak are included. A confirmed COVID-19 outbreak means that there were two or more confirmed COVID-19 cases

associated with a particular setting.

VDH collaborates with Virginia colleges and universities to investigate and report outbreaks. Accompanying the VDH COVID-19 Outbreaks in Virginia Higher Education dashboard is a separate website hosted by college and universities that presents the number of COVID-19 cases reported at their institutions, www.covid19.va.education. VDH is not involved in collection of the data presented or the maintenance of this website hosted by colleges and universities.

For clarification, VDH will present only outbreak-associated COVID-19 cases and deaths on the COVID-19 Outbreaks in Virginia Higher Education dash-

board. The dashboard does not include the total number of cases at the college or university. Some colleges or universities separately track and report the number of cases associated with their school or community and may use different methods than VDH. Therefore, it is not expected that the numbers on the VDH dashboard and numbers reported on individual dashboards created by the colleges and universities will match.

If you have questions about the data on the separate website hosted by the colleges and universities, please direct those inquiries to the specific college or university.

(Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com)

Fair sponsor announced, registration for pageant underway

County officials announced that Visit-Martinsville has signed on to be the 'Presenting Sponsor' of the Henry County Fair, as registration gets underway for the Miss Henry County Fair Pageant.

The pageant will be held on Saturday, June 5 at the Henry County Recreation Center, 395 John Redd Blvd., Collinsville. It is presented by B99.9 radio, Southern Virginia's Country Station.

"We are excited to have B99.9 as the sponsor of the pageant. Their station has been a very popular fixture in our community for decades and their sponsorship will be vital to promoting the pageant and the fair," said Roger Adams director of Parks and Recreation for Henry County and also the director of the Henry County Fair.

The winner of the "Miss Category," which is for ages 17 – 22, will be the official pageant representative of the Henry County Fair.

There also are eight other age categories, from "Beautiful Baby" through Adults.

In addition to awards and prizes, the Miss Category Winner will receive a \$500 scholarship and will compete in the 2022 Miss Virginia Fair Competition at The Omni Homestead Resort.

Each contestant in all the age categories will receive a tiara and gift, and the winners will receive additional prizes.

More information can be found out about VisitMartinsville at www.visitmartinsville.com, on Facebook @visitmartinsville and on Instagram @visitmartinsville.

The Henry County Fair will be held September 22 – 25 on the grounds at Martinsville Speedway, and will lead into the ValleyStar Credit Union 300 race at Martinsville Speedway on September 25. A

Anyone seeking more information about the pageant can contact the Henry County Parks and Recreation Office at (276) 634-4640 or visit the fair website at www.henrycountyvafair.com.

(Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com for more)

Partners sought for summer meals program

The Virginia Department of Education is seeking partners to participate in the commonwealth's Summer Food Service Program this year to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals during months when school is not in session.

The department reimburses approved organizations for meals served and for associated administrative costs. In addition, all participants receive training and technical assistance from VDOE.

The Summer Food Service Program operates at sites such as schools, public housing centers, community centers, playgrounds, camps, parks and churches. Organizations that may qualify to participate in the program include public and private schools, local governments, public and nonprofit private residential summer camps, and nonprofit faith-based and community-based organizations.

"Summer meal programs play a critical role in bridging the gap between school years and ensuring that children have access to nutritious meals during the summer months and are ready to learn when

the new school year begins in August or September," Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane said. "I'd also like to express my gratitude to our 2020 summer food service partners for their amazing and heroic efforts to keep children fed during the pandemic."

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, Virginia's 139 Summer Food Service Program partner organizations served more than 14 million meals to children between June and August

last year.

The program — which is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture — allows organizations to combine a feeding program with another activity in communities where at least 50% of the children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Information for organizations interested in applying to participate in the Summer Food Service Program — including details on application deadlines — is available on the VDOE website.

New partnership offers health insurance help

The COVID-19 pandemic has left hundreds of thousands of Virginians without jobs and health insurance coverage. Project Connect, a special new partnership among the Virginia Health Care Foundation (VHCF), the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC), and the Harvest Foundation (HF) has just been launched to help many local residents obtain needed health insurance from the state.

The Commission and HF have provided funding to VHCF for an Outreach Worker who will provide 1:1 application assistance to families and individuals interested in obtaining state coverage. Effective immediately, Ann Walker at the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health & Wellness is available to provide information about Virginia's Medicaid program and to help people apply. She can be reached at (276) 732-0509.

"Many of those newly unemployed or whose hours have been cut by the pandemic may not realize they now qualify for Medicaid coverage. VHCF's Outreach Workers are specially trained to assist local citizens with the application and enrollment process to ensure they have coverage for the medical care,

behavioral health services, and prescription medicines they need," said Deborah Oswalt, VHCF's Executive Director.

"We are committed to helping area residents navigate the Medicaid application process to get needed coverage and to do so safely in a remote or socially distanced way," stated Barbara Jackman, Executive Director of the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness.

Tobacco Commission Chairman, Edward Owens said, "There is nothing more important than the health and wellbeing of our communities and I am proud that the Commission is supporting this effort to ensure that as many people in Southern and Southwest Virginia have access to care as possible. While the Tobacco Commission is usually associated with job creation efforts, it is important that we have a healthy workforce if we are to realize the Commission's vision of developing a diverse economy in the regions we serve."

"We're delighted to partner with the Tobacco Commission and VHCF to bring Project Connect to Martinsville and Henry County during these unprecedented times. Comprehensive health insurance

provided by Medicaid will not only improve the health of those covered, but is critical to this area's economic health," said Kate Keller, President of the Harvest Foundation.

There are multiple ways to apply for Medicaid health coverage. In addition to the newly funded Outreach Worker, a person can visit coverva.org or call Cover Virginia at (855) 242-8282 for additional information about Medicaid or assistance applying for coverage.

The Virginia Health Care Foundation is a nonprofit public/private partnership with a mission to increase access to primary health care for uninsured and medically underserved Virginians. The Foundation was initiated by the General Assembly and its Joint Commission on Health Care in 1992. Since its inception, it has funded 437 community-based initiatives across the Commonwealth, and its programs and partnerships have touched the lives of more than 700,000 uninsured Virginians.

For more information about VHCF and its programs, partnerships, and initiatives, visit www.vhcf.org or call (804) 828-5804.

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OPINION

I can't believe people are boycotting my business just because I'm The Flatwoods Strangler

More than 25 years ago, I had a dream: a dream of owning my own restaurant, a simple sort of place where families could come and enjoy a great-tasting, reasonably-priced hamburger, a basket of endless fries, and the best dang milkshake in town.

It took a lot of hard work to reach my goal. I cleaned out my savings account. I worked day and night to renovate the restaurant. I think I still have paint under my fingernails from that mural in the Kidz Zone! But I saw it through, and over the decades, I've watched my business grow.

Yes, for 25 years, Big Bud's Burgers has been a pillar in this community, a place where everyone knows their dollar will stretch and no one leaves unhappy.

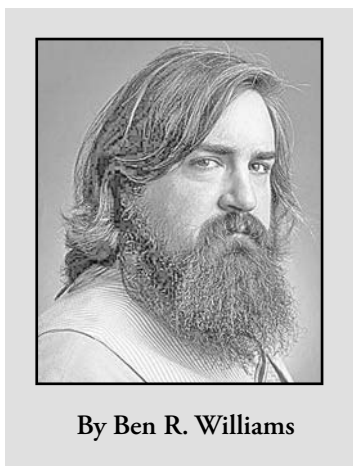
But now, after all this time, I'm starting to worry that I'm going to have to shut my doors. People just aren't coming in like they used to.

I've seen hurtful threads on Facebook encouraging people to boycott my business. Just the other day, someone wrote a very foul message on the front window. It's an absolute travesty.

All this, just because the police recently outed me for being The Flatwoods Strangler.

Listen: everyone has a part of their life they keep to themselves. We shouldn't boycott people just because of what they do or think in private! Maybe your aunt doesn't like dogs, or your grandpa voted for Lyndon LaRouche, or your cousin was discovered to be responsible for more than 70 strangulations occurring in and around Flatwoods township between 1981 and present. That doesn't mean you should just cut that person out of your life. That seems pretty judgmental to me.

It seems like about half this country believes that the other half



By Ben R. Williams

isn't entitled to their own opinion anymore. They aren't willing to simply "agree to disagree." No, it's "my way or the highway" for them! Well, I'm tired of it. We could all stand to be a little more accepting around here.

Just a few months ago, a fellow came into the restaurant wearing

a shirt with one of those rainbow "Pride" flags on it. Did I agree with that shirt? No. But did I kick him out of my restaurant? Of course not. Part of being a bigger person is simply accepting someone even when you don't agree with them.

But of course, when I was getting shoved into a squad car after a grizzled, long-retired detective finally connected me to the series of horrific stranglings that had plagued the town of Flatwoods for forty years, who was right there shouting hurtful things such as "MURDERER!" at me? Yep, you guessed it, ol' rainbow shirt.

The hypocrisy is just amazing. Just because I strangled his brother, that doesn't give him the right to judge me.

My whole life, nothing has brought me more joy than serving delicious, home-cooked meals to the fine folks of this community, and also strangling people. Now,

it seems as though I'm a victim of "cancel culture." I've been ostracized by the very community that I have come to love and terrorize. This has all just gotten so far out of hand.

You know, our Founding Fathers were pretty smart. They came up with a little something called "The First Amendment." Maybe you've heard of it. If you haven't, let me break it down for you: The First Amendment gives me the right to say and do whatever I want and strangle whomever I want without ever having to face any kind of consequences, ever, for the rest of my life. Maybe you ought to read your Constitution, it's right there in black and white.

To all those who still support me and my business, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And to all those who have tried to cancel me, well, you'd better check your locks.

Strides in closing the digital divide

Morgan Griffith
9th District U.S. Rep.

Closing the digital divide is a challenge for American society in the 21st century that must be met. Internet connectivity brings with it economic growth, educational opportunities, individual quality of life, and many other assets, but rural areas lag behind urban ones in access to reliable internet service. Making the American dream available to all citizens requires building out internet infrastructure from sea to shining sea.

Fortunately, great strides in this effort have been made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under the leadership of outgoing Chairman Ajit Pai. The FCC has paid attention to the needs of rural communities such as those found throughout Virginia's Ninth Congressional District, targeting funding and supporting creative initia-

tives that will help more Americans obtain reliable and fast internet access.

One of these initiatives in our region has captured significant attention recently.

Wise County Public Schools will be the beneficiary of a program that uses low-orbit satellites to provide high-speed broadband in rural and isolated areas. Forty-five families in the county will receive free internet access through this technology.

The FCC has approved applications from various companies planning to use satellites to provide broadband access and has also awarded money to help these providers serve rural areas.

The difficulties of connecting Southwest Virginia are representative of the problems satellite broadband connectivity aims to fix: the traditional method of laying fiber optic cables

is expensive in isolated areas with difficult terrain. Satellites present an alternative for getting these areas online.

I have supported the FCC's move in this area, and I am pleased that some residents in our area will benefit directly from them in the immediate future.

The FCC has not only advanced innovative ways to close the digital divide, but it has supported them with unprecedented levels of funding.

Last year, the FCC held its Phase I auction for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which will ultimately total a \$20.4 billion effort. Phase I targets 10.4 million Americans in rural areas with no broadband access, and it prioritizes service at higher speeds.

In the jurisdictions of the Ninth District, 31,038 locations will be served and a total of \$23,405,973.49 funded. These investments

will make a substantial difference. Out of the 29 cities and counties making up the Ninth District, 22 of them received money, including \$7,718,764.40 to Patrick County, \$306,730.16 to Lee County, \$256,562.20 to Montgomery County, and \$33,632.30 to Craig County.

Phase II will focus on areas that are deemed partially served as well as any unserved areas left over from Phase I.

The FCC has also encouraged the use of telehealth, which has great potential to expand access and affordability in rural health care.

Since 2017, funding for the FCC's Rural Health Care Program increased by 43 percent. The commission also allowed funding from previous years to carry forward, so the overall result was that funding for the program doubled from \$400 million in 2017

to \$802.7 million for the 2020 funding year.

The FCC also moved forward with the Connected Care Pilot Program, a step announced by FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr at the Tri-Area Community Health Center in Laurel Fork in 2019. The program is a \$100 million initiative to support telehealth services to low-income Americans, including those in rural areas.

Quick action and flexibility provided by the FCC during the coronavirus pandemic has also been invaluable. In March, Chairman Pai launched the Keep Americans Connected Pledge asking providers not to cut broadband and telephone service during the pandemic. Over 800 companies made this commitment, including providers serving the Ninth District.

As hospital facilities turned their focus to responding to the coronavirus, the FCC launched a \$200 million COVID-19 Telehealth Program so patients could receive health

care in their homes or at mobile locations, ensuring they did not go without the care they needed.

Additional FCC actions during the pandemic included more funding and waiving regulations to assist schools and libraries with connectivity to continue providing services to students. As schools shifted to remote learning, these measures gave them a lifeline so students would not completely miss out on further education.

There is much to do still to close the digital divide. I know too many Ninth District residents lack the reliable broadband service they need. To get there, I hope the next FCC Chair adopts the same forward-thinking and innovative approach as Chairman Pai during his time leading the commission.

If you have questions, concerns, or comments, call my Abingdon office at 276-525-1405, my Christiansburg office at 540-381-5671, or via email at [www.morgangriffith.house.gov](mailto:morgangriffith.house.gov).

Salvation Army thankful for partners

The Salvation Army is thankful to Red Kettle partners that stood by us

and even stepped up their support despite the challenges of COVID-19 in

2020.

In November 2020, the Salvation Army of Martinsville made a call for help to #Rescue Christmas for those facing poverty, and our community answered at the Red Kettle. In a year of unprecedented need, we expected a possible 50 percent decrease in

fundraising at the Red Kettle. Instead, we were able to exceed our goal and provide help to so many in need. That is because of partners, donors, and tireless workers who stepped up amid the affects by #COVID19 in 2020.

If you donated to The Salvation Army in

2020, your help Rescued Christmas for more than 1,000 local families as well their children.

"But we cannot afford to forget the need continues in 2021. Like everyone else, we are also making adjustments to make sure we can help serve the community safely and effectively as long funding and resources are available. We help with electric and rental assistance, food and clothing. It is

our goal to make sure hope is restored in the household here at The Salvation Army" said Lt. Bradley Mumford.

If you missed your opportunity or would like to continue helping us with our mission to serve the community, consider donating to us at P.O. Box 551 Martinsville, VA 24114 or visit us online at: <https://salvationarmypotomac.org/martinsvillecorps/>.

RELIGION VIEWPOINTS

Call to action: Be a doer, be a risk taker

The 2021 Celebration of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in Martinsville and Henry County was tremendous, with activities intentionally designed to focus on citizens picking up the torch and committing to work cooperatively to fulfill the dream.

Given what happened at the Capitol on Jan. 6, there is the temptation to fight back and meet violence with more violence. In all quarters and with each presenter, the message King profoundly taught and demonstrated was that we are to protest, but always through nonviolence.

A concerted effort was made to let King's words be heard. Words such as, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear;" "The time is always right to do what is right;" "Constructive ends can never give absolute moral justification to destructive means, because in the final analysis, the end is pre-existent in the mean;" "For while the nonviolent resister is passive in the sense that he is not physi-

cally aggressive toward his opponent, his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponent that he is wrong."

A message from the King celebration to the community is that we are to embrace nonviolence, both with social change and to impress upon our government the change required to have a just and equitable society.

A second message is this: Citizens are encouraged to read the Constitution, both to have a refreshed knowledge of our form of government and to know what happened in Washington a couple weeks was un-American. Such action is a crime and detriment to our democratic way of life.

It would be to our advantage, as concerned and active citizens, to subscribe to the ethics and morals exemplified by Dr. King: Nonviolence, love instead of hate, and do what is right.

Another emphasis is that of engagement, getting involved and contributing to building the be-

loved community.

Again, the words of Dr. King should be a guide: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle, the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

Two other key points are be truthful and always be guided by truth – not falsehoods or a fake narrative.

A final point to emphasize is all the things that need to be done with a range of options and diversity of roles.

"Each person can serve." Again, hear the words of Dr. King, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

By the Rev. Tyler C. Millner, Morning Star Holy Church

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HENRY COUNTY ENTERPRISE

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Weekly Publication

Published Each Saturday

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(276) 694-3101

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Give us your view:

The Henry County Enterprise encourages letters from our readers on topics of general interest to the community and responses to our articles and columns. Letters must be signed and have a telephone number where you can be reached to be considered for publication. All letters will be verified before publication. The Henry County Enterprise reserves the right to deny publication of any letter and edit letters for length, content and style.

If you have news about or an upcoming event for your organization, company or church, email dhall@theenterprise.net and/or call (276) 694-3101

from page 1

"When we talk about a beloved community, it's not just a community of my friends, my neighbors. It's everybody that has to be involved," she said. "Despite the differences we may have, everyone in Martinsville and Henry County has a responsibility to each other to ensure that we are doing our part to make our community a better place. Now is the time to have difficult conversations with others that are genuine, respectful, and productive. Even when these conversations

"When I think about love, I'm thinking about children that come to school and they form those relationships with teachers, cafeteria workers, janitors, and bus drivers," she said. "When they come, they need to know that people care about them. If they come and feel more loved, they will be more apt to

Before that can happen, there are issues that must first be addressed.

"We are just being asked to be respected and have the same opportunities and privilege that was granted to you," Bowles said. "A

"It's our job to ensure we are providing equitable opportunities for our students," Lisa Millner

See **Forum**, page 8

from page 1

"Certainly, not all owners of these AR-15s are involved in mass shootings but there's an awful lot of them that like to parade around publicly claiming they are protecting people when really the only thing they want to do is make up for their shortcomings by displaying their big assault weapon," Parker said.

Other advocates on the virtual conversation also reiterated the need for more legislation.

These minority communities have been shaped by the presence of guns for a long time, according to the Rev. Emanuel Harris.

He signed an executive order banning guns in most state buildings, proposed numerous bills, vetoed 15 bills that would have further weakened Virginia's gun laws, and passed a bipartisan gun safety law which required the Virginia State Police to be present at every gun show in the Commonwealth to run voluntary background checks on private sales.



Andy Parker (top left), of Collinsville, was among those to participate in a roundtable discussion Tuesday about stricter gun legislation. Former governor Terry McAuliffe (bottom left) is seeking a second term. Lori Haas (top right), director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence in Virginia, and the Rev. Emanuel Harris (bottom right), also participated.

"I think the way that all of these initiatives can get done starts with we've got to get you (McAuliffe) elected to be our next governor and Democrats have to keep control of the General Assembly because if we don't, you know what the other side is going to suggest – thoughts and prayers – and that doesn't get it done," Parker said.

(Visit www.henry-countyenterprise.com for more)

Douglass Otto Moore

Douglass Otto Moore, 68, of Martinsville, Virginia passed away Monday, January 18, 2021, at SOVAH Health of Martinsville. He was born May 28, 1952, in Maryland to the late Otto and Dorothy Mae Copeland Moore. He enjoyed reading the Bible and working puzzles. Mr. Moore attended Highland Baptist Church.



Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at www.wrightfuneralservice.com.

John Wayne Davidson

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by a son, Darren Davidson; sister,



Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at www.wrightfuneralservices.net.

Shirley Lorene Hairston Benton



The funeral will be at 1 p.m. on Friday, January 22, 2021, in the Wright Funeral Service Chapel, 1001 E. 11th St.,

Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at www.wrightfuneralservice.com.

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Charles Poindexter
Delegate

Week 1,
Jan. 13, 2021

The 2021 Session of the Virginia General Assembly began on Wednesday, January 13. The Speaker, Clerk, and historic Speaker's Podium were in the House Chamber. We other 99 Delegates were virtual attendees from our local offices, homes, or locations nearby that usually have a decent internet connection. This arrangement exists because the NoVA-based Speaker and her Democrat Majority ruled we cannot meet in the Capitol building, in the huge VCU gymnasium, or elsewhere in Richmond, even though the Senate is doing so safely.

While the start of Session is always exhilarating, the thrill and anticipation of representing you is smothered by the barrier of a remote computer screen. Unfortunately, the many issues we experienced with virtual governance during the 84-day Summer Special Session remain: members of the public unable to speak to legislation, inability of legislators to meet with one another, technical failures, bills rushed through by the Democrat Majority with little or no real debate, and other undesirable elements remain a hindrance to our democratic and historical process of governance.

Foremost in our minds is wondering when our citizens will receive virus vaccinations. While the good news is Virginia has received roughly one million doses, our primary concerns regard the plan and infrastructure to carry out the vaccination program. Virginia is near the bottom of the list in getting shots into arms. Eleven Health Districts in Virginia are entering Tier 1b (essential workers and people age 75 and older) while we in the West Piedmont District (Franklin, Henry, Patrick, and Martinsville City) are still in Tier 1a (health providers, nursing homes, etc.). This is inexcusable.

For months, the CDC, the American Pediatrics Society, and parents statewide have been saying to open the schools to in-person K-12 education, as the evidence is overwhelming that virus spread is negligible in schools.

School boards have been reluctant to comply, likely due to pressures from the VEA, labor unions, and similar groups to reopen. Late last week, the governor flipped positions on this subject, and is encouraging the reopening of our schools. It is past time. Virtual school districts personnel are reporting student achievement and failure rates statewide are abysmal and discouraging.

In the House of Delegates, the other side of the aisle doesn't appear to be listening. Their focus appears to be on legislation to coddle or release criminals; restrict our police; ignore or subject families and victims of crime to traumas associated with early release or retrials of criminals; further increase your electricity and transportation costs by conforming Virginia's laws to radical California-based laws; forcing Virginians to join a union to have a job; raising taxes on the middle class; legalizing marijuana; additional gun control restrictions.

Regardless of one's opinion or position about recent elections fairness, accuracy or fraud allegations, with half of the electorate highly concerned, my position is Virginia, the federal government, and all states should take steps immediately to restore public confidence in our election processes. That's why my Republican Caucus is sponsoring bills to disallow ballot harvesting, reinstate voter ID, assure poll and vote count watching, and more. One of our bills would change the State Board of Elections composition from 2-1 membership (with two from the sitting Governor's party) to equal numbers with the chair selected by the Board, thus removing potential political influences in the state election apparatus. We are also introducing bills to curb or limit the Governor's ability to issue long-lasting states of emergency without the People's Representatives' oversight; use federal stimulus funds to help parents and children to adopt and use virtual education and force the State Parole Board to follow the law as regards paroling criminals.

To contact me during Session, call (540)576-2600 or email delcpoindexter@house.virginia.gov.

Bill Stanley
State Senator

January 19, 2021

The Virginia General Assembly opened its 2021 regular session on Wednesday, but for the first time, we are not in the Capitol. While the Senate convened in a large auditorium at the Virginia Science Museum, the House of Delegates' Democrat leadership decided that they would stay home and hold their sessions by Zoom.

The space in this new Senate Chamber allows everyone to practice safe social distancing – and then some. Senators wear masks, our temperatures get checked, and each of our desks have our own bottle of hand sanitizer. Every precaution has been taken so that Senators can conduct committee work and meet in-person during Session to fulfill their duties as the Virginia Constitution requires.

You might wonder why the Senate has gone to such great lengths to meet in person, especially since the House of Delegates is meeting remotely. The Senate prides itself on being more deliberative than the House. Our debates and discussions over bills can be longer, often going into detail. And although partisan leanings may lead to some predictable results, it is not unusual for our debates to lead to significant changes to legislation and even bipartisan consensus.

A remote conferencing platform like Zoom simply cannot replicate this process. While individual senators are permitted, for health reasons, to participate in session remotely on occasion, the overwhelming amount of our legislative work is done in person. It makes a real difference.

The Constitution of Virginia sets the length of sessions held in odd-numbered years at 30 days. On Wednesday, we set the schedule for the 2021 at 30 days. Democrats are not happy about this, but the Constitution requires a super-majority to extend session beyond the 30 days. Republicans committed to adhering to the Constitutional session length back in November, a week after the 84-day special session ended.

That special session

See more at
www.henrycountyenterprise.com

ended with the General Assembly completing its work on amending the 2020-2022 Biennial Budget, which is the primary purpose of session in odd-numbered years. But since we completed that objective just two months ago, it shouldn't take so much time to repeat the process. The Democrats disagree.

I must tell you that this Session is not turning out to be "regular" in other ways; the most significant is that the opportunities for constituent input and our local residents' ability to visit Richmond during session have been seriously curtailed by pandemic safety measures. Although we've made several changes to increase the avenues for citizens to weigh in on legislation being considered, COVID restrictions preclude the kind of interactions to which lawmakers and their constituents have become accustomed.

Making a shorter short session more manageable, the House and Senate have placed limits on the number of bills legislators can submit for consideration. Delegates can submit seven bills and senators are permitted twelve. That caps the maximum number of bills under consideration at fewer than 1,200, 40 percent fewer than were permitted in 2019, our last short session.

A shorter session with fewer bills will encourage legislators to focus on issues requiring the most immediate attention. Ending Virginia's vaccine distribution backlog, getting public schools open and children back in the classroom, and reviving our economy are urgent priorities. Republican senators are committed to making progress on these and other important issues.

Because our Senate office building has been essentially closed to the public, I moved my Senate operations to my law office in Richmond, which has the space to accommodate both my staff and any visitors. You can contact us at the following number, to voice your opinion, or set up a meeting: (804) 225-0528. We are located at 26 N. 8th Street, right across from the Virginia Supreme Court/Court of Appeals building.

Les R. Adams
Delegate

16th House District

On Wednesday, January 13, the Virginia General Assembly was obligated under the state constitution to convene. Although the Virginia Senate did so in person at the Science Museum of Virginia in Richmond (close to the actual Capitol building) to comply with safety protocols related to the ongoing pandemic, the leadership of the House of Delegates made no similar arrangements. Instead, all Delegates met "virtually," on Zoom technology, as mandated by the House Speaker and approved by her Democrat majority over Republican objections.

This technological approach to conducting the people's business, which is not contemplated under our state constitution and is not employed by many other Democrat governed state representative bodies, including those in nearby Maryland and even the one-party state of California, presents its own serious challenges to basic lawmaking functions. These Zoom meetings follow the course set last year with the unprecedented special session called by the governor that went as long as a regular session but accomplished a fraction of the work normally achieved in that timeframe. As you might imagine, this "new normal" the political left is so eager to cement in our civic life, limits public involvement and facilitates the majority's efforts to fundamentally change our Commonwealth with as little opposition as possible.

Fortunately, Article IV, Section 6 of Virginia's constitution requires "the concurrence of two-thirds of the members elected to each

house" to allow the customary extension beyond thirty days of regular session during odd numbered years. Of all the years to withhold that concurrence, this is the one, especially since pressing state budgetary concerns were recently addressed. And in consideration of the governor's stated objectives to repeal longstanding and demonstrably successful policies that protect the public safety, the fewer days available, the better.

Most regrettably, however, for all of us concerned about not just our Commonwealth, but also our place within the nation, is the truly sad state of affairs at play in Washington D.C. where the bitter political divisions that separate our countrymen have been made vividly manifest following the federal elections held several weeks ago. And now, as became the case in Virginia following the 2019 state elections, one party dominance over all our governing institutions is about to commence. Amidst the ongoing national turmoil is the daunting prospect of this reality: that the views of most voters in our Southside region, and indeed in all of rural Virginia, are now subject to an increasingly authoritarian approach to governing at every level that is hostile to our values. It is a troubling backdrop made worse by the unrelenting censorship and propaganda pressed by major corporations and social media platforms that work in concert with those in office to achieve their objectives, cancelling voices of dissent and distorting political reality.

That is the challenge we now face. As your state representative, I intend to meet it head on, with professionalism, and in constant remembrance of the privilege it is to act on your behalf.

Senate offers toll free number

The Senate of Virginia will operate a toll-free message center to take calls from Virginia residents who want to express an opinion on legislation.

The Message Center can be accessed at 1-833-617-1821, Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday 8:30

a.m. to 2 p.m.

Operators will record the name, address, Senate District, designated senator to receive the message, opinion, and the issue. Messages will be forwarded daily to the respective senator for their review and information. No calls will be transferred.

Health district enters phase 1b, but vaccine is in short supply

The West Piedmont Health District entered COVID-19 vaccination Phase 1b Wednesday and has been working hard to get the vaccine to residents. Our health district, along with the rest of the state, is seeing much higher demand for the vaccine than the doses the Commonwealth is receiving from the federal government.

"We are working on as many alternatives as possible to make the vaccine available," said Kerry Gateley, M.D., MPH, CPE, director of the West Piedmont Health District. "The health district will continue to request COVID-19 vaccine weekly, but how many doses actually will be received is uncertain. We ask for patience as we gather more information about how much vaccine we can anticipate in the weeks to come."

Once the vaccine is

available, those eligible to receive it include police, fire, teachers, mail carriers and other essential workers whose jobs ensure continuity of government operations. Also, anyone age 65 or over or 16-64 with a documented medical condition putting you at risk of severe infection is included in Phase 1b. Individuals who qualify for the vaccine will be notified of the time and place they will be vaccinated, but a significant wait time may occur until the supply of vaccine available increases.

"Many Phase 1b recipients will get their vaccine through their workplace and do not need to seek vaccine independently," Gateley said. Smaller and independent businesses, individuals 65 years old and up, and anyone not affiliated with a workplace clinic may add their names to the vaccine list. Instructions on

how to do so will be released next week.

In the meantime, it is important to remain vigilant in COVID-19 prevention. Continue to protect yourself and others: cover your mouth and nose with a mask, wash your hands often and well, stay at least six feet away from others, avoid gatherings with anyone who is not a member of your household and get a flu shot.

Information about the vaccine and when it will be available locally will be available on the West Piedmont Health District's webpage and Facebook pages and by recorded message on phone lines at each health department.

Franklin County Health Department – (540) 484-0292; Henry Martinsville Health Department – (276) 638-2311; Patrick County Health Department – (276) 639-2070.

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WEDDINGS

New Jobs

from page 1

eligible to receive benefits from the Port of Virginia Economic and Infrastructure Development Zone Grant Program, as well as the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

Support for Laminate Technologies’ job creation will be provided through the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program, a new workforce initiative created by VEDP in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System, with funding support from the Northam Administration and the Virginia General Assembly. Launched in 2019, the program accelerates new facility start-ups

through the direct delivery of recruitment and training services that are fully customized to a company’s unique products, processes, equipment, standards, and culture. All program services are provided at no cost to qualified new and expanding companies as an incentive for job creation.

“Henry County is proud to have Laminate Technologies among our corporate partners,” said Chairman of the Henry County Board of Supervisors Jim Adams. “LamTech has been a part of our team since 2012, and it continues to play an essential role in our resurgence. We are thrilled that this expansion is happening right here in Henry

County.”

“It is always welcome news when a business invests in Virginia,” said Virginia Port Authority CEO and Executive Director John Reinhart. “It’s doubly satisfying when it’s a Virginia-based company choosing to reinvest because of the positive business climate, strong workforce, and good transportation infrastructure here. We’re excited to continue to serve as the international trade gateway for Laminate Technologies and congratulate both the company and Henry County on this announcement.”

“When private and public interests collaborate on economic

development here in Henry County, good things happen—jobs happen,” said Sen. William “Bill” Stanley, R-Moneta. “LamTech has been a wonderful community partner in Southside, and has once again proven its commitment to the continued economic vitality of Martinsville and Henry County with its expansion of its business here. I, along with the citizens of this area, are grateful to the Governor’s Office, VEDP, and our local economic development partners for helping make this great expansion of this great company possible. This is just more good news that our region is returning to prominence as an industry leader in

advanced manufacturing in the 21st century economy.”

“Every job created in our region is welcome news and 42 new jobs during this very challenging time is an exciting announcement,” said Del. Daniel Marshall, R-Danville. “We are especially appreciative that Laminate Technologies, with divisions in five states, chose to expand its Henry County plant where it has been providing jobs since 2012. We have a great workforce, and LamTech has a great product, so it is a win-win situation.”

(Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com for more)

PET OF THE WEEK



Catherine Gupton, director of operations at the SPCA of Martinsville-Henry County, holds Stewie, a male domestic shorthair mix that is available for adoption. Stewie is a shy and anxious cat who does not handle stress or cages well. He needs to be introduced to a home slowly as his fears and anxieties can cause him to act out with aggressive or self-destructive behaviors. Stewie needs a home with no children because he will bite in self-defense. He has always been an indoor cat. For information, call (276) 638-7297.

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Cornerstone

from page 1

easier. I can keep on adding for reasons why it’s a good spot, but I’d go on all day.”

Some of those reasons are opportunity-driven, according to Selvaraj.

“This is a part of Virginia that is not covered enough” with renewable energy products, he said. “We are in the race for solar energy. Currently, North Carolina is leading the race and Virginia is slowly behind it. When I researched, I found that Virginia doesn’t have very many solar or wind energy development companies.”

Selvaraj said he also chose the location due to its proximity to nearby universities.

“I wanted to be in Virginia, mainly because I graduated from Radford University,” he said. “I have a very long-standing relationship with them. We are planning on doing some research and development projects so I was looking for a place, wherein, I could have sustainability and access to other research.”

Not only will research and development take place at the former water plant, Selvaraj also wants the building to double for tourism.

“This is going to be called a Clean Energy Technology Park,” he said. “It’ll have the very concepts of solar and wind energy for customer awareness purposes. It’ll be modeled there and displayed for the customers to visit and see.”

Before proceeding, Selvaraj will have to wait for a final decision on his rezoning application from the Henry County Board of Supervisors, who are set to hold a public hearing on the matter in their upcoming Jan. 26 meeting.

“There’s still a lot of work to do. My plan is to start the technology park right away,” he said. “It’ll serve two functions. One is customer promotion and education awareness for customers in the area. Anybody looking for a carbon-free emissions building, this is one they will look to as an example. The second is the actual production of the control panels.”

He said he hopes to have all phases of the project completed by June. The following month, Selvaraj said he plans to hold “a small function” at the park with renewable energy developers throughout the state and country to bolster more development in the area.

“It’ll be after the July 4th celebration,” Selvaraj said. “My products like the control panel will be going out starting in August of the coming year. It’s going to be a lot of movement and a real challenge.”

In the beginning, Selvaraj said he would be looking to hire 10 operators and five support staff to serve management and maintenance functions.

“I’m looking for people that have a basic electrician’s background,” he said. “Basically, like a journeyman. If they are at that level, then great. If not, if they at least have the ability to obtain a journeyman certification, then I’ll have a training plan for them. It is very difficult to get a journeyman certification in Virginia, so I have a plan of my own where I can double up the team and train them to support the company’s needs.”

Spurred by excitement for his project, Selvaraj praised county officials and the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation for their help through the application process.

“I have never seen as many good people as the county people that I’ve come across,” Selvaraj said. “When I was exploring the project, I wasn’t really sure what I was doing. All the people like Mark Heath at the Economic Development Corporation. They made it seem like somewhere I could make my home. That’s the feeling I had. Their responses were unbelievable.”

During the planning commission meeting, Lee Clark, director of Planning, Zoning, and Inspections for the county, said that Selvaraj would become an “asset to the community both as an employer and as an entrepreneur.

“He’s intending on spending quite a bit of money to retrofit this building into a facility where they will assemble the final products,” Clark said. “In my conversations with him, he has lots more ideas for other products. The developer (Selvaraj) is spending his own money for this. The county doesn’t have any incentives or money invested in this. He is doing it on his own.”

According to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the state generates about seven percent of its electricity from renewable energy.

In 2019, Gov. Ralph Northam established three objectives for statewide energy production. The objectives were “By 2028, Virginia will achieve 5,500 megawatts of wind and solar energy. At least 3,000 megawatts of this target should be under development by 2022; By 2030, 30 percent of Virginia’s electric system will be powered by renewable energy resources; By 2050, 100 percent of Virginia’s electricity will be produced from carbon-free sources, such as wind, solar and nuclear.”

Dominion Energy is currently making large investments to achieve these goals through the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project. The project will “deliver up to 8.8 million megawatts per year of clean, renewable energy to the grid — powering up to 660,000 Virginia homes — and will avoid as much as five million tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually — the equivalent of planting more than 80 million trees,” according to the company’s website.

To have employees for the project, Virginia has created the Mid-Atlantic Wind Alliance, of which New College Institute in Martinsville will play a critical role of providing training in courses certified by the Global Wind Organisation (GWO). The courses are GWO Basic Safety Training and GWO Technical Training.

“Anybody that works on a wind turbine has to have these courses,” said NCI Interim Executive Director Karen Jackson. “With these two courses they have the basics to qualify for a job anywhere in the wind industry. To have NCI positioned to be the first place in the state (to offer the certifications) is a great spot to be in. I’d rather be on the cutting-edge of something instead of trailing the pack and the ground floor of the renewable energy industry is an exciting place to be. There is a need.”

In contrast to Virginia’s development of renewable energy through wind energy, North Carolina has made strides in solar production.

According to the 2018 North Carolina Clean Energy Industry Census, a total of 6,457 jobs were related to solar energy production in the state. The jobs span 553 firms and generated \$2,939,070,419 for the state. The state is making advancements in both customer-sited and utility-scale solar.

The North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association describes customer-sited solar as “technologies and services that convert sunlight directly into electricity through photovoltaic cells with a total generating capacity of less than two megawatts. This sector also includes solar thermal technologies that harness sunlight to meet thermal requirements for water or heating and cooling or create heat energy used to generate electricity for residential purposes. Customer-sited solar can be owned directly or purchased in part through a community resource or third party.”

Utility-scale accomplishes the same task but with a total generating capacity greater than two megawatts.

“Virginia is a little behind on the race for renewables compared to places like California, New York, or Massachusetts,” said Ved Jain, application engineer for the project. “Boston has really good policies for solar. Pretty much every house on one street will have solar panels

going on. The concept isn’t as new to them as it is to this part of the country.”

Jain said that the project is forward thinking “where every house or business is actually a power generator and not just a consumer.

“Even if it’s just a simple mailbox office,” he added. “It’s going to produce power because the roof it has can absorb sunlight.”

During a tour of the facility, Jain demonstrated a few of the technologies that will be developed and how the building will be retrofitted to eventually become net-zero for consumption.

One item was a portable solar panel that comes with a USB connection.

“You have a charger on you pretty much all of the time,” Jain said. “The use of this isn’t for people like you and me. It’s used for someone on a deployment schedule. The use is for countries that have a lack of energy connection to the grid. It can even be used if you are going on a trip, and you’re going to a place where you don’t know if you’ll get electricity or not. A couple of these put together can charge your laptop.”

Jain said the portable line has the ability to charge an object at the same rate as household adapters.

“It’s more for active use than to act as a storage itself,” Jain said. “The thing is if we put a storage unit on it, it’ll be heavy and more expensive.”

If households access solar technology, Jain said that consumers could see a dip in their electricity bill each month.

“The grid offers this sort of deal and you can sell them back the excess electricity, so you don’t really need to store anything,” he said. “The need for storage comes when you are doing something on a really massive scale. Households don’t need as much. A couple of solar panels, in the afternoon, will produce electricity that you cannot use. So, you sell it back to the grid. What the grid does is they give you credit for the electricity that you just gave it back. And in the nighttime, when you are taking in excess, it’s going to take away from that bill.”

These types of technology will be implemented at the park as well, according to Jain.

Land immediately around the water plant will be used to erect “solar trees. What we are trying to do is make this building a net-zero building so whatever it takes is what it gives back,” Jain said. “We are going to balance all of those aspects like electricity, heating, and cooling. We are trying to make it a little dramatic, not like the ones you’d have on a solar farm.

“The thing about solar is it is just a little off from being ergonomically pleasing to the eye,” he said. “Imagine if we could put solar panels on a structure that would look like a tree. That would look a lot more appealing than just having a solar panel there. We are working on that design.”

Jain said the team would also be working on development of technologies to generate energy from parking lots.

“What a lot of people don’t recognize is the land below the parking is also a powerhouse,” he said. “How that happens is with a geothermal system. You have these pipelines, which are really thick pipelines, and they run deep into the ground. Probably less than 30-40 feet deep. The government provides incentives on the diggings normally. In doing that, your land would look just like it is right now, and you won’t know it, but your bills would go down.

In addition to the parking lot at the park, Jain said they would be creating a solar roof and attaching panels to streetlights.

With a research and development park along the border of the two states, Selvaraj is hoping to make Henry County integral to the future renewable energy development in both.

(Visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com for more)



PHOTO BY BY BRANDON MARTIN.

Collinsville native Andrew Palmer will seek the district's seat on the Henry County Board of Supervisors.

Brandon Martin
Staff writer

A Collinsville man is throwing his hat in the fray for the November election, and pursuing a childhood dream.

Andrew Palmer, a Collinsville native, said he will seek the district's seat on the Henry County Board of Supervisors against incumbent Joe Bryant, who plans to seek another term.

"I recall when I was in the Boy Scouts and I had to do my citizenship for the community badge, one of the requirements was you had to attend a city council or board of supervisors meeting," Palmer said.

"When I went to that meeting then, I said, 'one day, I'm going to run for the Board of Supervisors,'" Palmer, 29, said. "It's been on my mind since I was about 13 years old. I think I've always been kind of politically motivated."

Between classes at Bassett High School and Patrick Henry Community College from 2008-2013, Palmer ran his own business, Palmer's Golf Cart Sales and Services on Figsboro Road.

Following his early business ventures, he decided to become a franchisee of the Sears hometown store in Collinsville.

"I was the local franchisee from December 2013 until December 2016. I got to meet a lot of people in the Collinsville District that way," he said.

Currently, Palmer works for the Lester Group to attract businesses to real estate in the area. He also serves as president of the Martinsville-Henry County (MHC) Lions Club.

"We provide eyeglasses for people that cannot afford them," Palmer said. "We raise funds by selling brooms, radio ads, and if someone is unfortunate and cannot afford a pair of glasses, we refer them to an eye physician and we pay for an exam and a pair of glasses for them."

While he said he respects current supervisor members, he thinks some new blood would be beneficial. If elected, Palmer would be the youngest member on the board by 11 years, second to Ryan Zehr, of Ridgeway.

"The Board of Supervisors tend to vote in favor of whatever the county administrator puts in front of them. Every meeting you go to, they all vote 6-0, 6-0, 6-0," Palmer said. "I think there should be more debate. There should be more discussion and there should be more opinions being shared. Especially if you are working on taxpayer's money being spent. I don't think you should always have a clawing match, but I think having some discussions is a good thing."

Palmer said he had discussions with some

Palmer announces bid for Collinsville seat

of the current supervisors, including sitting Collinsville representative Joe Bryant, before announcing his run.

"I picked up my packet last Tuesday, Jan. 5, and I've got about 50 signatures already," Palmer said. "I've got to have 125 and I want to get it done by the end of January," even though the actual deadline isn't until June 11. Palmer said he wants to "go ahead and get it done early."

Early voting was another factor Palmer considered.

"I'm assuming early voting is probably going to be a factor this fall. I thought that it was better to get my name out sooner than later," Palmer said.

To garner the number of necessary signatures, Palmer will focus on the issues he believes are most pressing in the coming years.

Economic Development

"After I joined the Lester Group in 2017, I got involved with the local economic development and property leasing. I think there are some things that can be changed in the county to make business easier for people," Palmer said. "I think being someone that has worked for themselves, who has run a business—I've got rental property, I've got real estate, I buy houses, I rent them, I sell them—I would look at being on the Board of Supervisors just like I'm running a business. I would want to take my experience and run the county the same way."

According to Palmer, the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp. (EDC) could benefit from rethinking priorities.

"Mark Heath and the EDC do a good job on trying to attract large manufacturing facilities. I give them credit there," Palmer said, but added he thinks the agency needs to prioritize "retail, restaurants and small shop businesses."

For instance, when he initially franchised Sears, Palmer said the EDC wished him well but was unable to provide more assistance.

"They were nice and basically said that they were glad I was doing it, but there was nothing else they could really do for me," Palmer said.

The agency's job, he said, "is to look for the large manufacturing facilities or industrial facilities that's going to add more revenue to the tax base of Henry County. The problem is the majority of the United States is built on small businesses. I think the EDC should be more business-friendly to not only the industrial and commercial but retail, restaurants and small shops."

Housing

To attract more people to the area, Palmer wants to see more housing development.

"There hasn't been anybody that has built a new sub-division. The last one was probably Farmingdale about 20 years ago," he said. "We need new housing. People in the millennial generation don't really want the single-family house, with a yard to mow and get trash hauled off. They want something like a Homeowner Association. They want townhomes. They want to be able to do maintenance. They want a dumpster onsite and a single car garage to go in. We need more appealing housing for our generation."

By primarily focusing on housing and small business creation, Palmer thinks large manufacturers will later focus on those demographics.

"In order to get a large manufacturer, they want to see where an employee is going to live, eat, and shop," he said. "In my opinion, if you can push residential development, retail, and restaurants, then the bigger ones will come. That would be where I think we need to change our path a little bit."

I-73

Another project that could spur economic development is the extension of Interstate 73 from North Carolina.

"We need to talk to our state legislators and congressmen to get I-73 a reality," Palmer said. "If you look at any large city or town that's got good employment, good jobs—they've got an airport and an interstate. Martinsville-Henry County doesn't have either one."

During property negotiations, Palmer said land purchasers evaluate "how many people live here; how many people pass by that property in a day; what the average income is; where the closest interstate is and where the closest airport is."

While the county does have the Blue Ridge Airport, he said "getting I-73 coming through will be a huge factor to bringing more jobs automatically."

"Look at what North Carolina has done for I-73. We've been talking about doing this since the late 80s. It's been 30 years. I don't think Northern Virginia is going to give us too much money, but we need it," he added.

Relations with Northern Virginia

In his capacity as a supervisor, Palmer said he would reach out to legislators to be more included in the finances come budget season.

"It does seem like the Virginia legislators tend to vote and pass and give the money to the larger populated areas," Palmer said. "That makes sense because there are more people, but the people in Martinsville-Henry County built those cities of Richmond and in Northern Virginia when we were the powerhouse in revenue from our textile and wood manufacturing that took place all the way up to the end of the 1990s. Sometimes I feel like we are left behind."

Budget

Locally, Palmer thinks the purse strings could be tightened.

"I think there is a lot of wasteful spending," he said. "We took on a big debt load with the new jail and new school. It's my understanding that there is land around the jail that the county owns. I don't see why they couldn't have renovated the existing jail and built onto it, using the same location right beside the courthouse, versus putting it down at the old DuPont facility."

While he acknowledges the need for more space in the jail, Palmer said the land of the former DuPont facility could have been used for another project.

"I understand they donated the land, or we bought some land, but I didn't understand why the current jail couldn't have been renovated, brought up to code, and expanded," Palmer said. "What's the plan when the new jail is built? What are they going to do with the old one?"

With the new debts, Palmer sees another looming financial consideration.

"Then, the city reverting to a town is go-

ing to make it even worse," he said.

Reversion

Palmer said if he were on the board in 2019, when the city officially announced their intent to revert, he would have been quicker to act to prevent a full reversion.

"I was disappointed when the mayor, Kathy Lawson, mailed two letters to the Henry County Board of Supervisors asking to meet to have a joint session to discuss the possible reversion of the City of Martinsville," he said.

"All they wanted was to get together, talk and maybe find a common ground to avert going down the reversion path. It is my understanding that the county would never respond to the letter. The Board of Supervisors" took a wait and see stance in response.

"I think if someone from the board would have been willing to sit down with the city council, maybe reversion could have been diverted," he said.

Given his relationship with city officials and leaders, Palmer believes he would have been able to find common ground without the city reverting.

"Maybe the county could absorb the city school system and leave everything else the same way," he said. "I feel with my position at the Lester Group, with the amount of real estate holdings that we have in the city, I feel like I've built a pretty good relationship with the city officials and a couple of members on the city council. I'd like to work with them. That's something I'll bring to the board that's not there now."

While taking on the biggest debt items would have been costly, Palmer thinks the consequence of a full reversion would be worse, and he fears city annexation of county land.

"That's the city's plan," he said. "A lot of residents don't realize this, but they are going to be paying two real estate tax tickets. One to Henry County and one to the Town of Martinsville. That is job killing. If a business could relocate somewhere else in the county without having to pay double taxes, they probably would. I would."

Broadband

Palmer thinks the city and county can work together to solve connectivity issues.

"There's got to be advantages of consolidating the school systems," he said. "In the county, the internet is a problem. The city has MiNet. The biggest hindrance the county has had is not being able to provide internet services to all the students in the county."

Palmer believes the county missed out on the initial investment of MiNet.

"I had heard when it was first coming about that they (county) had the option to partner with them (the city) to do that, but they declined," Palmer said. "From my understanding of the city's internet, it's the fastest that you can get."

According to Palmer, bridging that connectivity gap could be an area of partnership in the future, if his voice is on the board.

"That may be something that takes place in the reversion process," he said. "We are stronger together. I think the county should work with the city to expand that into the county. The county just renewed a contract with Comcast. We either need to be working with them or the city to expand broadband into the county."

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Forum

from page 5

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said. "I may need one thing, but you may need something else to be successful. It's giving students what they need individually to be successful." Bowles added that "if we all came together and focused on economic justice and economic reform in our entire community, then we would

have the leverage." Another aspect of creating a more loving community is political activism by marginalized groups, according to Dillard. "One, we have to admit that we have a race relations issue. The other thing is, we need more diverse representa-

tion in our decision-making entities," Dillard said. "This is a charge to minority communities. Put yourself in position to run for some of these elected positions because if you don't run then you can't complain that the boards aren't diverse enough." Dillard cautioned against remaining passive in the midst of racism.

"The last thing I will say is standing firm against racism, unfair biases and publicly speaking out against those who promote racism," he said. "Give them the chance but let them know that you are not going to accept that."

Bowles said part of the problem is some people still aren't listening.

"One of the most problematic statements that I hear, even though I know it comes from a good place, is 'I don't see color,'" she said. "By saying that you don't see color, that's saying that you are ignoring the issues and the problems that we face."

True healing will require two-way communication, Lisa Millner said.

"To have that beloved community, we have to be willing to communicate freely and feel safe in our schools," she said. "Sometimes that may not happen because of negative experiences they may have experienced. We need you to communicate with us so we can make things better for your children."

But achieving a "beloved

community" won't come without opposition.

King "spoke love, he spoke unity and he spoke equality. Ironically, the people of his time called him a communist, a socialist, a hater, a monger, but he is seen by history as a great man of love and peace," Dillard said. "That's something that we have to remember. Many people, during their time, were labeled one way or another, but once all the facts come out and the information is uncovered, you get a true definition of who that person was."

While he was originally demonized, "Dr. King is more beloved today than during his lifetime," Bowles said. "It is important for us to objectively reflect on how America's treatment towards Dr. King is a microcosm of its treatment towards historically marginalized groups."

To acknowledge the accomplishments of King, Dillard is calling for more celebrations on MLK Day.

"I would like to encourage everyone to celebrate this day," Dillard said. "We have many holidays on the American calendar and we celebrate every holiday. Let's make Dr. King a day that we celebrate. You celebrate Dr. King Day by doing some kind of community service."

(For more, read Religious Viewpoints on page 4 and visit www.henrycountyenterprise.com)