

## HENRY COUNTY ENTERPRISE

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## School board addresses controversy over increased sales tax use

**Brandon Martin**  
Staff writer

Members of the Henry County School Board are feeling “blindsighted” after the Board of Supervisors decided to move forward with County Administrator Tim Hall’s decision to use part of the funds gained from the most recent sales tax increase to cover school debt rather than for new construction or major renovations of schools.

The county estimates that approximately \$5.2 million will be generated by the one percent tax increase.

The budget approved by the county included a recommendation “that \$2.6 million be used to pay towards existing school con-

struction debt, and the remaining \$2.6 million be set aside for the school system’s use on current and future construction/renovation needs.”

Hall said the decision to split the amount was to address the \$2.6 million gap after the state stopped distributing the state recodation tax to the county.

Feeling it was inappropriate to take funds from other agencies, like law enforcement and public safety to address the gap for schools, Hall said it was the best option available.

“It’s not something we want to do but knowing that a gap of that size” could only be made up with increased taxes or spending cuts in other areas, “we didn’t want to burden law enforcement or public

safety,” Hall said.

Dr. Merris Stambaugh, of the Collinsville District, said he was unaware that this decision was under Hall’s purview.

“I was apparently misunderstanding about the one percent sales tax that Henry County voted for itself,” Stambaugh said. “I was under the impression that this board was going to be the ones making decisions about how that money was spent.”

He asked for further clarification from school administrators and Mike Gardner, the school board attorney.

Schools Superintendent Sandy Strayer said that Hall originally presented the tax increase propos-

See School Board, page 6



Henry County Schools Superintendent Sandy Strayer was recognized as a Superintendent of the Year for 2020-2021.

## Second degree murder indictments among hundreds handed down in county

**Staff Reports**

Grand jurors in Henry County handed down 166 indictments on May 17, including six in connection with a June 2020 death.

According to records in the Henry County Court Clerk’s Office, three people - Daniel Adam Fish, 38, of Martinsville; Douglas Hampton Gillespie, 26, of Bassett; and Ashleigh Nicole McCallister, 24, Martinsville, each were indicted on one count each second-degree murder and use of firearm in the commission of a felony in connection with Williams’ death on June 5, 2020.

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

Also among those named in certified indictments are:

\*Makayla Danae Draper, 20, of Collinsville, malicious

wounding, Nov. 1, 2020.

\*Thad Edward Hailey, 42, of Ridgeway, possess cocaine, Aug. 9, 2020.

\*Bobby Joe Mullins, 48, of Bassett, elude police, Nov. 14, 2020.

\*Raed Abdel Madi, 38, of Martinsville, indecent liberties with child, Nov. 1, 2019-Sept. 5, 2020.

\*Travis Lee Bradner, 33, of Collinsville, endanger life of a child, Oct. 15, 2020.

\*Conis Lamonte Callaway, 56, of Bassett, malicious wounding, Nov. 19, 2020.

\*Fallon Michelle Patrick, 26, endanger life of a child, Oct. 15, 2020.

\*Willie Lee Turner, 62, of Martinsville, two counts strangulation; one count each aggravated malicious wounding and grand larceny of a motor vehicle, Nov. 19, 2020.

\*Brian Eugene Finley, 44,

See Indictments, page 8

## Delays and rising construction costs jeopardize the intent of Five Points project

**Brandon Martin**  
Staff writer

As the Martinsville-Henry County area continues to struggle with providing affordable workforce housing, one of the recent projects to help solve the issue could potentially be out of the price-range for prospective buyers once completed.

Martinsville City Manager Leon Towarnicki said the Five Points Neighborhood project is being affected by delays with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

“There are some time issues involved with how long it is taking to get permitting issues through DEQ,” he said. “Due to some permitting issues that we ran into with DEQ, we then



Rising construction costs and delays are jeopardizing the intent of Five Points project, Martinsville City Manager Leon Towarnicki said. The city is partnering on the construction project with Henry County, the United Way of Henry County and Martinsville, the Harvest Foundation, Nationwide Homes, Silverpoint Homes, the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, and Virginia Housing.

had to do an entire new set of plan development related to stormwater issues and managing it in accordance with DEQ regulations.”

The project is slated to

construct 27 units on both sides of W. Church Street, near Uptown Martinsville. Twelve of the units will be single family homes on the southside of the street and

the other 15 homes will be townhouses located on the northside of W. Church Street.

See Five Points, page 3

## Williams fights to be the new face of the GOP in Virginia’s Ninth



Wren Williams

**Brandon Martin**  
Staff writer

Wren Williams, the former unit chair of the Patrick County Republicans, is taking aim at the Ninth District House of Delegates seat currently held by Del. Charles Poindexter, R-Glade Hill in the June 8 primary.

Williams, 32, said he is a man of the people of the Ninth District.

“My campaign is supported by constituents throughout the community that are concerned about the direction of our community, the direction of our state and the direction of our country,” he added.

Hoping to change that direction, Williams said it’s time for “some new, fresh ideas.”

**Infrastructure**

“This infrastructure is easily one of the most important things when it comes to our attractiveness to outsiders as far as potential residence and business,” he said. “Every time that I’ve done some sort of real estate closing or that I’ve talked to some business leader or entrepreneur, some

of the first things they are looking at are healthcare, emergency rooms, emergency services, internet and real estate prices.”

Compared to other areas, Williams said the Ninth District has fallen behind.

“We are having to compete with that very much so it’s important for us to make sure that we cut wasteful spending in order to be able to afford some of these infrastructure investments in order to attract more businesses, more residents and things like that,” he said. “The last thing you want to do is raise taxes in order to fund these things, because when you are raising taxes, you are disincentivizing these people.”

If taxes are raised locally to pay for such projects, Williams said potential investors and residents will choose to live in areas like Floyd or Pulaski counties, which offer lower taxes and more services.

“That’s important for me to make sure we are cutting wasteful spending, pet projects and prioritizing these infrastructure needs to provide for our citizens and for

See Williams, page 7

## Poindexter battles to fend off intra-party challenge

**Brandon Martin**  
Staff writer

Incumbent Del. Charles Poindexter, R-Glade Hill, is leaning on his leadership experience in the General Assembly to edge out his challenger Wren Williams amongst Ninth District voters in the June 8 Republican primary.

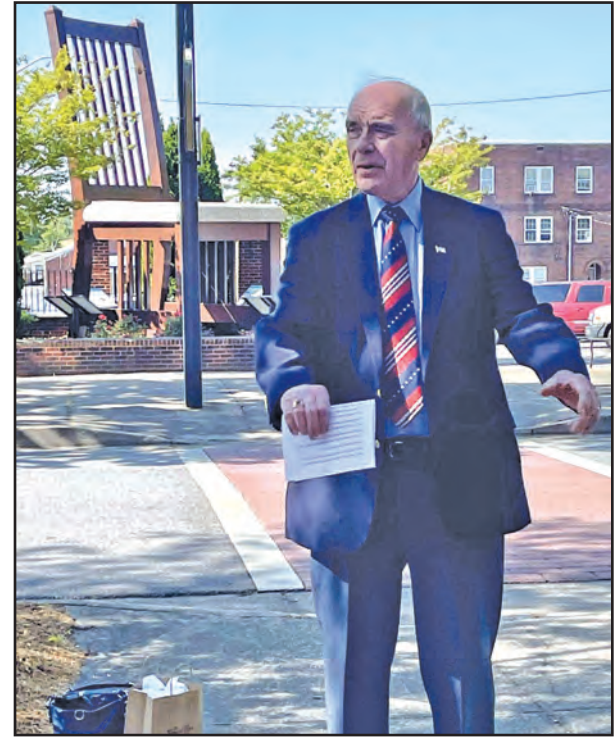
Poindexter, 79, was first elected to the seat in 2007 and has served in several leadership posts during his tenure.

“I have a very broad background,” he said. “I have a background in business, computers, agriculture and forestry, water quality, and education. I serve on two or three education boards. I bring a background, I think, that is superior.”

Part of that background includes fighting for key issues on committees and subcommittees.

“That is where bills are passed, vetted, killed and approved,” Poindexter said. “I have served in positions of leadership for various subcommittees, and I’ve been the vice-chair of committees.”

During his tenure on committees like the Finance Committee and



Charles Poindexter

the Agriculture and Natural Resources and Chesapeake Committee, Poindexter said he set out to pass policies beneficial to rural Virginia.

“What we did from 2010-2019 is move money to rural Virginia for economic development, education, and everything else, to the point where we were much better treated,” he said.

Poindexter cited a leg-

See Poindexter, page 7

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## Wednesday, May 26

GO Virginia Region 3 will hold a series of Stakeholder Input Sessions as part of the 2021 update of its Growth & Diversification Plan. The public is invited to participate in Zoom sessions and offer input for the 2021 update to the GO Virginia Region 3 Growth & Diversification Plan. Session 1 – Talent & Workforce will be held at 10:30 a.m. Session 2 – Business-Ready Sites will be held at 2:30 p.m. To register, go to <https://govirginia3.org/growth-diversification-plan-input-sessions/>.

## Friday, May 28

Pop's Farm will host two nights of the legendary jamband moe. Moe.morial Day Weekend: A Rooster Walk Family Gathering will feature two nights of moe., as well as two opening bands on Friday, and four opening bands on Saturday. The event will also feature on-site camping, libations and food vendors. No outside alcohol will be allowed, and social distancing, as well as mask wearing, will be required of all in attendance. Gates open to campers on Friday at noon and 3 p.m. for non-campers. Music begins at 5 p.m. On Saturday, the gates open to campers at 10 a.m. and noon for non-campers. Music begins at 2 p.m. For more information, contact: (276) 650-1583.

GO Virginia Region 3 will hold a series of Stakeholder Input Sessions as part of the

2021 update of its Growth & Diversification Plan. The public is invited to participate in Zoom sessions and offer input for the 2021 update to the GO Virginia Region 3 Growth & Diversification Plan. Session 3 – Scale-Up/Commercialization will be held at 9 a.m. To register, go to <https://govirginia3.org/growth-diversification-plan-input-sessions/>.

## Saturday, June 5

The Infinity Acres Ranch 6th Annual Spring Carnival will be held from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. Admission is \$5 per person. An additional \$3 kids activity band will also include face painting, the dunking booth, the Critter Train, games and prizes. Music and entertainment will be provided by Pirates of the Piedmont. Masks and social distancing are recommended. For more information, contact (276) 358-2378.

## Thursday, June 10

GO Virginia Region 3 holds a series of Stakeholder Input Sessions as part of the 2021 update of its Growth & Diversification Plan. The public is invited to participate in Zoom sessions and offer input for the 2021 update to the GO Virginia Region 3 Growth & Diversification Plan. Session 4 – Entrepreneurship will be held at 10 a.m. To register, go to <https://govirginia3.org/growth-diversification-plan-input-sessions/>.

# Supervisors to consider waiver request Tuesday

**Debbie Hall**  
[dhall@theenterprise.net](mailto:dhall@theenterprise.net)

The Henry County Board of Supervisors will consider a waiver request to maintain split voting precincts, pending redistricting, at its meeting Tuesday.

The Virginia General Assembly recently passed legislation requiring each voting precinct to be wholly contained within a single congressional district, Senate District, House of Delegates district, and local districts.

However, a locality may request a waiver to delay this action pending redistricting.

Henry County has three split precincts in need of a waiver: #203 Horsepasture #2, which is split between House District 14 and 16; #304 Mount Oliver, which is split between Congressional District 5 and 9; and #505 Dyers Store, which is split between Congressional District 5 and 9.

Henry County Registrar Dawn Stultz-Vaughn is asking the board to approve the waiver request until redistricting can be completed.

In other matters at its 3 p.m. meeting in the Summerlin Meeting Room of the Henry County Administration Building, supervisors will:

Hear an update on a Broadband Planning Study that is being conducted by ECC Technologies, which is helping develop a broadband plan for the county. Christian Youngblood, Director of Information Services, will provide the progress update.

Hear a report from Mark Heath, Presi-

dent and CEO of the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp.

Hear an update from the Pittsylvania County Community Action Board from Everlena Ross, Executive Director of Pittsylvania County Community Action, Inc. (PCCA). The PCCA is the designated community action agency providing comprehensive services to low-income families in Pittsylvania County, Danville, Henry County, and Martinsville.

County Treasurer Scott Grindstaff will present his monthly report on delinquent tax collection efforts.

Consider a proclamation honoring the life of Elizabeth "Liz" Stone, who served as the county's General Registrar from 1979 until the time of her death in 2020. Stone was the longest serving General Registrar in Virginia.

Consider meeting in closed session to discuss appointees to Blue Ridge Regional Library Board, Parks and Recreation Board, Planning Commission, Community Policy and Management Team, Piedmont Regional Community Services Board, and Southside Community Action Board; pending legal matters; the acquisition/disposal of real estate; and to discuss as-yet unannounced industries.

The board also is slated to meet at 6 p.m. to hear matters presented by the public and general highway matters.

A public hearing on the Six-Year Secondary Road Plan will be held from 6 to 6:30 p.m. in Meeting Room #1.

# Success continues during trying times for Magna Vista JROTC Raiders



**Names left to right: Kneeling – Markus Dailey and Jose Alvarado-Angeles. Second row standing – Annie Frias, Tiffany Dennis, Trinity Davis, Marco Duarte-Saucedo, John Surrat, Nolbert Luviano-Bustos. Third row – Damien Dennis, Hunter Wade Amos, Jonathan Adams, Caleb Motley. Back row - Chris Ayers, Nate Roland, Lewis Markham, Aryanna Abbott.**

In a shortened season, the Magna Vista High School Raiders continued winning.

Under current conditions, the JROTC Cadet Command cancelled all brigade championships for the year, but with restrictions starting to ease, the Raider team had an opportunity to compete in two events: on 20 March 2021 at Magna Vista High School and on 10 April 2021 at Buckingham High School.

The Warrior Raiders fielded two teams in each meet, a Male and a Co-Ed team. Due to JROTC restrictions, the teams consisted of 5 members. The Co-Ed team must have at least three females compete in each event.

The first meet was the Magna Vista Raider Meet. A total of 18 teams competed at this meet. The Magna Vista male team, led by Commander Marco Duarte-Saucedo, brought home the Raider Meet Championship in the male division. The

team had an outstanding performance on the day. They took first place in the Rope Bridge and Litter Carry events and third place in the Logistics Relay, Team Physical Fitness Challenge and the 5 x 400 Relay. The Male Raider Team had strong performances from seniors Jose Alvarado-Angeles, Caleb Motley, Marky Martinez and John Surratt. The lone underclassman, Junior, Nolbert Luviano-Bustos, also had a strong contribution.

The Co-Ed team, led by commander Trinity Davis, took second place overall. The team finished in first place in the Litter Carry and Logistic Relay Events, second place in the 5 x 400 relay and 3rd place in the Team Physical Fitness Challenge. The Co-Ed Raider Team had a strong performance from lone senior Markus Dailey. The remaining team members will be returning next year: Hunter Wade Amos, Annie Frias-Alvarez, Damien Dennis and lone

Freshman Tiffany Dennis.

During the second meet at Buckingham High School, the Co-Ed team came away with a first-place finish. They completed the day with first place in the Logistic Relay, 5 x 400 relay, and the Litter Carry events. They finished in second place in the Obstacle Course and the Team Physical Fitness Challenge.

The male team brought home 2nd place finishes in the Logistic Relay and Rope Bridge events.

"Of course, this was a very unusual year. It was trying times for all. Our kids were grateful just to have the chance to practice and compete. The cadets came a long way in a short very short time. I am proud of the way they bonded as a team in a short span. They truly did hold up the strong tradition of the Magna Vista JROTC Raider Team. Due to COVID, there was no State or Regional competitions this school year," said instructor John Truini.

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

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| <p><b>CLUES ACROSS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation mark</li> <li>Married woman</li> <li>Nocturnal rodent</li> <li>Suffix</li> <li>A way to disappoint</li> <li>Saddle horse</li> <li>West African country</li> <li>Philippine island</li> <li>"Girls" creator Dunham</li> <li>A type of twin</li> <li>Groans</li> <li>Infections</li> <li>What a beaver makes</li> <li>Thou</li> <li>Make a mistake</li> <li>Receive</li> <li>Dresses</li> <li>Burn the surface of</li> <li>Where coaches observe</li> <li>Ceremonial offices</li> <li>Paddle</li> <li>The body's main artery</li> </ol> | <p><b>CLUES DOWN</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loose-fitting undergarment</li> <li>Western Romanian city</li> <li>Unit of length</li> <li>Type of electricity</li> <li>Article</li> <li>Mothers</li> <li>Monetary unit</li> <li>Single Lens Reflex</li> <li>Tan-colored horses</li> <li>Region</li> <li>Cautious in spending money</li> <li>Belittle</li> <li>Sarcastic</li> <li>Fathers</li> <li>Clothes</li> <li>Opera's Callas</li> <li>Lentil dish</li> <li>Energy-saving module</li> <li>Make sense of a language</li> <li>Hurries through</li> </ol> | <p><b>CLUES ACROSS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Songs to one's lover</li> <li>Name given to plant groups</li> <li>Improves</li> <li>Patriotic women</li> <li>Inflamed swelling on the eyelid</li> <li>Instrument in Indian music</li> <li>Request</li> <li>Make into leather without using tannin</li> <li>Defies</li> <li>Neither</li> <li>Flower cluster</li> <li>Phonological unit</li> <li>Leaves in water</li> <li>Cavalry-sword</li> <li>Famed American cartoonist</li> <li>Messenger ribonucleic acid</li> <li>Scarlett's home</li> <li>Make</li> <li>Stony waste matter</li> <li>What to do at auction</li> <li>Incorrect letters</li> </ol> |
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## SUDOKU

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**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!

Level: Advanced

**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!

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**ANSWER:**

# PSA to begin utility disconnections for unpaid bills this month

## Staff Reports

Utility disconnections for unpaid bills are set to begin this month, according to Tim Hall, Henry County Administrator and General Manager of the Public Service Authority (PSA).

Hall told the PSA board that he expects the list to be "huge."

The PSA board also learned that a new contract was negotiated for online payment fees. The agency has waived online payment fees for customers and absorbed the associated costs since the beginning of the pandemic.

Richard Stanfield, deputy finance director, said that in April, the PSA paid \$7,855 for online payments. Under the new terms, the PSA would pay \$1 less per payment, for a savings of \$2,655 per month. He said the savings would amount to \$32,000 per year.

Stanfield noted the PSA would save \$1 per payment if customers pay with a check.

Tim Pace, director of engineering, said he is concerned about the future costs of projects which are planned but have yet to go out for bid given the rising cost of materials like lumber.

"We built a budget around these projects several years ago," Pace said. "Contractors are very busy. Material costs are way up and that usually does not bode well for projects that we are bidding."

Pace said the main projects of concern are related to the Philpott Water Plant expansion.

He also noted that the PSA is currently seeking part-time workers to assist with fire hydrant painting over the summer.

The board also heard a report at its May 17 meeting on 2020 water and sewer operations pertaining to

the 1991 Master Trust Agreement between the authority and Crestar Bank.

The Lane Group, Inc., which prepared the report, recommended no changes, and found the authority in compliance of all six sections pertaining to revenues and funds.

The PSA provides service to approximately 12,306 customers for water and 7,041 customers for sewer, according to the report.

"The authority's system is well maintained and has responded favorably to financial adversity resulting from significant industrial customer losses and economic downturn in recent years," the report stated.

The adopted fiscal year 2021 Direct Operating Expense Budget amount was about \$8.7 million. Of that amount, approximately \$867,799 was for debt service interest and the remaining \$7.8 million

was for operating costs. Compared to the previous fiscal year, the operating expense budget was 7.2 percent higher.

As part of the replacement reserve requirement, the PSA is required to maintain no less than \$400,000 in a reserve fund to have available for extraordinary operating expenses and unusual losses or damages. The current fund balance of the reserve fund is \$572,251.

The PSA has not had a rate increase since 2013. The average growth rate for water production was about 3.2 percent per year over the last five years. Additionally, the sewer growth rate during the same period was approximately 1.8 percent per year.

Based on the adopted FY 2021 budget, the PSA anticipates a surplus of about \$1.2 million. The report noted the surplus is significant in comparison to a sharp decrease

in customer billing revenues due to the pandemic.

The PSA is required to maintain a debt service coverage ratio in excess of 1.2. The adopted FY 2021 budget's debt service coverage ratio was predicted to be about 1.782, which meets the minimum requirements without transfer of funds from other reserves. Unrestricted cash reserves for the PSA sit at about \$17 million as of June 30, 2020.

As part of the 1991 Master Trust Agreement, the PSA is required to maintain not less than two months' direct operating expenses in reserves. The PSA established a \$1 million operating reserve fund in FY 2004. Currently, the balance sits at \$1.6 million. Two months of direct operating expenses for the adopted FY 2021 budget would equate to about \$1.4 million, meaning the current balance exceeds the requirement.

# Godwin presents final report to PHCC board

## Taylor Boyd Staff writer

Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC) President Dr. Angeline Godwin gave her final report to the board at the May 17 meeting.

"It takes more than a global pandemic to stop Patrick Henry Community College from maintaining and moving forward in its number one goal and vision, and it is always about student success," said Godwin, who became the college's third president in 2012. She will retire July 1.

Given all the challenges and all the circumstances of this year, "I think you're going to see that while the world somewhat froze and paused, our college realized that we had students to take care of. We had a community to serve, and that we could not be stopped or halted in anyway because we were in the middle of a pandemic," Godwin said.

As the campus was closed last year, Godwin said she expected it would take about two weeks for classes to fully transition to virtual instruction.

"Within less than four days, our faculty stood up a 100 percent remote environment, even in the most challenging, hands-on classes," she said.

Since announcing her retirement earlier this year, Godwin said students have shared amazing stories about the impact of PHCC on their lives.

"You really may not realize that this college is not just a part of getting an education or degree, or something that you put on the wall, and it's not about just getting a certificate," nor is it about getting a job or starting a new career, she said.

Rather, Godwin said PHCC represents a life change and a complete transition for an entire family by providing one person in a family the opportunity to see "Patrick Henry Community College as the tool they can use to put that family on another" level.

In many cases, the college becomes the pivot point for an entire family as "one person's education changes the course of that family," she said.

As she prepares to step down, Godwin said her mother always said two things about retirement.

"Number one, retire when you absolutely love what you're doing. Retire when you still have that passion burning for you of what you're doing," Godwin said.

"She also said you'll know when it's time, and now it's time. Serving as your president has been the greatest honor of my life. I love it. I love this community, and I love this college. Nothing's going to change about that, I'll always be your greatest cheerleader," she said.

To commemorate her retirement, the PHCC board of directors issued a resolution and recommendation "to the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System and to the State Board of Community Col-



PHCC President Dr. Angeline Godwin presented her final report at the May 17 PHCC board meeting.

leges that effective upon her retirement," Godwin be honored for her "meritorious service and significant contributions with the distinction of the title President emeritus of Patrick Henry Community College with all rights and privileges as established and conveyed by the chancellor and the state board."

In other matters, the PHCC board:

\*Approved the local funds budget for FY 2022.

\*Approved an additional \$500,000 be given to for the renovation of PHCC Manufacturing and Engineering Technologies Complex.

John Hanbury, vice president of Financial and Administrative Services, said

\$3.8 million was the initial estimate years ago.

"We secured a grant from The Harvest Foundation, \$3.2 million, and that grant from the Tobacco Commission was \$600,000," he said. Last year, the board also approved an additional \$500,000 in local funds be added to renovation project.

"In April we opened bids for the project, and we were somewhat stunned that the low bid was about \$800,000 more than what we had budgeted, including the \$500,000 in local funds," he said.

The increase, Hanbury said, was primarily due to the increase in material and labor costs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



President Dr. Angeline Godwin was presented with the title of emeritus president. PHCC board chair Janet Copenhaver (right) presented the award to Godwin

"If we don't inject additional funding into the project, we have to rebid the project, and the labor costs will go up about 30 percent. Second, we value-engineered about \$300,000," which still leaves the project \$500,000 short, he said.

The MET project will be for the welding program, which has become a popular department in its more than 40 years of activity.

Dr. Colin Ferguson, Dean of STEM-HAP, said the center's design would have 45 stations and have a double-horseshoe layout, which would allow for two classes of 20 students each. The additional five stations would be space would be used for specialty training.

\*Discussed PHCC's enrollment. Dr. Greg Hodges, vice president of Academic and Student Success Services, said enrollment was down 9.7 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This keeps "us under the national average of just over 10 percent," he said, adding enrollment for summer and fall semesters is currently underway.

PHCC Foundation Executive Director Tiffani Underwood said Patrick Henry Scholars received a record number of applicants. Ten scholarships are usually offered, but Underwood said the school will offer 12 this year. The scholarships provide "tuition, books, and fees for two years."

## Five Points

from page 1

A virtual groundbreaking ceremony was held for the project in November 2020.

"We were ready to begin signing contracts for the construction of those houses in December," Towarnicki said. "We submitted that information to DEQ in January. We still have not gotten approval. Here we are in May and we are still awaiting that to happen."

Towarnicki said the houses were originally supposed to cost approximately \$120,000-130,000. He said the city recently signed contracts to construct five houses that were priced at \$156,000.

"So, in that period of time that we have been waiting for approval, the price of those houses has escalated that much," Towarnicki said. "We are going to have to find ways somehow to plow money back into those houses to reduce that cost because it's pushed it beyond being affordable for somebody that is making \$15-20 an hour which was the intent all along."

He added that if the project weren't delayed so long by DEQ, then "we wouldn't be in this situation."

The Harvest Foundation received approximately \$500,000 in grant monies from Virginia Housing to start the project.

"The intent of that grant was to pay down the de-

velopment costs related to grading, utility installation, and foundation work," Towarnicki said. "Basically, to pay all of that down so when a prospective buyer decided to buy a house or a townhouse, their only cost was going to be the cost of the house."

According to an analysis by the National Association of Home Builders, lumber prices have tripled over the last year, pushing the price of an average new single-family home to increase by \$35,872. The calculation was based on the softwood lumber that goes into the average new home. Included is any softwood used in structural framing, sheathing, flooring and underlayment, interior wall and ceiling finishing, cabinets, doors, windows, roofing, siding, soffit and fascia, and exterior features such as garages, porches, decks, railing, fences and landscape walls.

"The price escalation is nothing unique to this project," Towarnicki said. "If you've gone to Lowe's in the last 2-3 months, you've seen what has happened with the price for a sheet of plywood. The prices of materials have just gone absolutely through the roof."

This wouldn't have been an issue if the Five Point homes had been under contract six months ago, To-

warnicki said.

"We are hoping if we can achieve some savings elsewhere in the project, that some of that savings can be plowed back into the price of that house and bring it back to what our original intent was and that's a house somewhere in the (\$120,000-130,000) range," Towarnicki said. "This was intended to be workforce housing."

Martinsville, Henry County, the United Way of Henry County and Martinsville, the Harvest Foundation, Nationwide Homes, Silverpoint Homes, the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Develop-

ment, and Virginia Housing are partnering on the project.

During a groundbreaking ceremony in November, Philip Wenkster, executive director of the United Way of HCM, said his organization would be responsible for guiding individuals through the process of homeownership.

"At the United Way, we firmly understand the importance of homeownership. Both in terms of improving one's net worth as well as conferring true stability on one's family," he said. "The United Way's primary role in this project is going to be helping individuals enter the pipeline for this homeownership program."



## PRIMLAND

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Wenkster also highlighted the United Way's Individual Development Account Program.

"This program provides max saving accounts for individuals that are interested in purchasing a home," he said. "It also provides financial education training, so they are better able to manage their finances

and be more successful once they actually own the home."

Wenkster said individuals will be able to save \$500 and have their savings matched at a rate of \$8 for every \$1 saved.

"So, potentially up to \$4,000 in grant funds going to help with down payment assistance," he added.



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# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Consider issues before voting

Things to think about from our federal government and especially from our state government in Richmond. The agenda of the Democrats should be of concern to all of us. Over 70 million people voted for Trump for a reason. They could see the direction that things were headed.

Let's take a look at our state level. Based on the policies, decisions, choices, and

statements that our Governor has made, it appears that he is still in damage control from his blackface scandal.

To me as a Christian, a lot of the changes that are coming out of Richmond are wrong and immoral. We should all feel that way.

For instance, abortion, it appears that saving animals has become more important than saving unborn ba-

bies. Legalizing marijuana, which can and will lead to other issues. Legalizing all types of gambling. It appears that anything goes to bring in more revenue and to keep the Democrats in power. That's a scary thought.

Making voting less restrictive, which can lead to more voter fraud. Erasing and removing our history. You learn from history,

good or bad, you don't rewrite it or hide it away.

Being politically correct has become even more absurd in this world we live in.

More gun control, less police protection, bigger government, more spending, higher taxes, more debt, and wide-open borders everywhere, especially at the federal level. It goes on and on.

It appears that criminals have more rights than their victims, and police have less rights in dealing with the

criminals.

Expanding gay rights, it went too far with same sex marriage. From a biblical point of view, there is no such thing, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah from this kind of behavior. This kind of lifestyle is sinful, immoral, and unnatural, especially from God's point of view.

The political climate has changed, that's for sure, but not for the better. All of us need to pay attention to what's really going on with

our government at all levels before it's too late.

This is not the Democrats that our parents and grandparents voted for. If we continue down this path, this country won't be the same either and all of us will pay a stiff price for it.

Please consider all of these things before you vote the next time. Please pray for our leaders and our nation.

James Joyce,  
Collinsville

## OPINION

### To the class of 2021

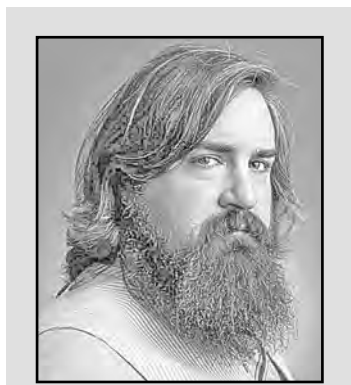
Note: A friend of mine is having a small get-together for a few folks who graduated from college last year but weren't able to have the full graduation experience due to the pandemic. He asked me if I would deliver a commencement speech. An edited version of that speech that is safe for print in a family newspaper follows below.

Greetings, graduates! Webster's dictionary defines "college" as "a piece of art made by sticking various different materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric onto a backing." That definition may seem confusing, but then again, so is college.

College was invented in the early 1970s when people realized that it was way too easy to get a good job. Since then, tens of

thousands of people have graduated from college. Some of them studied business or finance, while others studied fields that brought them joy and fulfillment. But no matter your major, one thing is certain: you'll never forget your college experience. Because for the rest of your life, someone in the alumni office will call you every couple of months to shake you down for even more money.

Of course, college is about more than just studying. It's about driving around in an old jalopy while wearing a raccoon fur coat and a straw boater. It's about taking your best gal out for a cherry phosphate. It's about disassembling the crusty old dean's beloved 1914 Stutz Bearcat, reassembling it on the roof of the chemistry building, and then framing him



By Ben R. Williams

for murder. You know; good, innocent fun.

But now you have graduated from college, and immediately following this speech, you will be members of the real world. Assuming you don't go on to pursue a Master's degree or a Ph.D., which I highly recommend be-

cause we're on the cusp of either college loan forgiveness or the complete collapse of the system. Either way, the bill ain't your problem anymore, so I encourage you to try to ride this thing out.

Many of you, I'm certain, are still trying to figure out what you're going to do now that you've graduated from college. Will you pursue a career in your field? Possibly, unless you majored in interpretive dance. Will you make a lot of money? Possibly, unless you majored in interpretive dance. But whatever you end up doing, the important thing is that you pursue your passion, unless you majored in interpretive dance.

But I think you'll agree that the most important thing from your college experience is this commencement speech. It's a universal truth that students never forget their commencement speech, and they never forget their com-

mencement speaker. Years from now, you'll remember this entire speech verbatim. I still remember my commencement speaker. He had a hat on, and he talked about the Lutheran church or something. I tear up just thinking about it.

Of course, I realize that graduating is scary. Shortly after I graduated from college, our nation was rocked by a once-in-a-lifetime economic crisis. And then a few years later, it happened again. And we're probably due for another one. And so, over the course of your lives, you may find yourselves experiencing a dozen or more once-in-a-lifetime economic collapses. But just remember this: the connections you make will open many doors, and a good set of bolt cutters will open the rest of them.

Good luck out there, graduates! You'll need it.

## Now is the time to stand with Israel

**Morgan Griffith**  
9th District U.S. Rep.

Israel has faced many crises since its establishment as a modern state. In fact, it faced war at the hands of neighboring Arab countries immediately upon declaring independence from British control on May 14, 1948.

In the 73 years since, conflict and strife have recurred. Fortunately, so has progress, from the Camp David Accords forging peace between Israel and Egypt in 1978 to the Abraham Accords of last year establishing relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

and Bahrain.

Now Israel faces another crisis. Militants based in the Gaza Strip have fired thousands of rockets into Israel. These rockets fall upon civilians in their homes and on the streets. As of May 17, ten people have been killed in the attacks, and Israelis are forced to seek refuge repeatedly in bomb shelters. The Israeli Defense Force has responded with airstrikes.

The Gaza Strip is controlled by Hamas, a militant organization that denies Israel's very right to exist. Tensions between Hamas and Israel have led to broader

hostilities repeatedly over the years, but the current conflict is the most serious since 2014.

Self-defense is the right of a country. It is a primary reason why countries have governments at all. Israel is no exception, and as a friend and ally of the United States, Israel deserves the support of the U.S. government during its time of need.

American-Israeli partnership has already demonstrated its importance to saving lives in the region during this crisis. As Hamas launches rockets at Israel, many of them are intercepted by Iron Dome, a defense system that uses targeting systems and radar to identify and missiles to destroy incoming rockets targeted at sensitive areas, including population centers.

While missile defense has long been an objective of U.S. military policy, systems such as President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative aimed at intercepting long-

range missiles. Israel, however, is a small country just over 70 miles across at its widest, and adversaries such as Hamas border it. Defense systems thus need to protect against rockets fired at much shorter ranges. An Israeli company took the lead on developing Iron Dome, but the United States provided financial support. Our country in return later gained access to proprietary Iron Dome technology, and parts for the system are produced here in the United States.

Iron Dome came online in 2011 and proved successful. During a conflict in 2012, it intercepted 85 percent of 400 rockets fired at Israel. The 2014 hostilities with Hamas once again saw Iron Dome successfully play a major role in keeping Israelis safe, with accuracy apparently around 90 percent. The U.S.-Israeli partnership produced a system that keeps Israelis safe and re-

duces the outbreak of more widespread violent conflict.

The present conflict has tested Iron Dome once more. The night sky over Israel lights up with rockets and interceptors. Hamas has attempted to overwhelm the defense system by firing barrages of rockets quickly. Although Iron Dome has largely risen to the challenge, Hamas' current tactics highlight a potential vulnerability in the system.

More broadly, the current crisis also highlights why efforts to secure peace between Israel and its neighbors are important, and why the achievements of the Trump Administration in the Abraham Accords were remarkable.

Critics of the Trump Administration liked to point out that parties to the agreement such as the UAE and Bahrain were not at war with Israel. They ignore the fact that anti-Israel groups such as Hamas and Hezbol-

lah depend on support from countries in the region, and engaging more of Israel's neighbors dries up support for these militants to conduct their cruel crusades against civilians.

The most important state backer of anti-Israel violence is Iran. Any Middle East policy that respects our historic partnership with Israel must not enable Iran to devote more of its resources to violence against Israel.

At the time of this writing, no ceasefire has been agreed upon, but I hope to see one soon. Until then, it is time to stand with Israel. As it fights enemies that deny its right to exist, the United States must be clear in condemning Hamas and supporting our ally.

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.

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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](mailto:dhall@theenterprise.net) and/or call (276) 694-3101

## Summer Discovery Institute returns for high school students

This summer, the Summer Discovery Institute (SDI) will return to Patrick Henry Community College. SDI is a free college prep and leadership camp for area high school students rising ninth through twelfth grades. The camp runs June 14 through July 23 from 9 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. on weekdays. The camp is made possible through a partnership between Patrick Henry Community College, MHC After 3, Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Upward Bound Math & Science programs.

The Summer Discovery Institute is an intensive College and Readiness and Leadership camp designed specifically to increase high school success and college admissions. The institute combines hands-on leadership, career, and college prep courses Monday through Thursday in virtual or hybrid formats. On Friday, students can attend field trips to visit college campuses and participate in volunteer and cultural enrichment experiences. Eligible

students will be invited to attend overnight trips to explore college campuses and enjoy cultural enrichment experiences.

All camp activities and trips are offered at no cost to families. Transportation to and from camp will be provided throughout the city and county. Breakfast and lunch will be provided daily to students.

"This program just keeps getting better. Each year at SDI, students learn new passions, skills, and talents in areas that pique their interests – things like BioMed, Dance, Graphic Design, or Sports Management to name a few," said Shanna Francisco-King, Project Director of Pre-College Programs. "Our mission is to make connections and to cultivate students' success in high school, college, and life."

Rising seniors also may take classes on completing college applications, admissions and scholarship essays, resumes, and SAT/ACT preparation. Through these courses, seniors will craft a per-

sonalized plan to navigate the admission process for the college of their choice.

Camp orientation for students will be held on June 10 at PHCC's main campus from 9 until 11 a.m. Applications and additional information for course registrations are available at <https://form.jotform.com/211093653026146>. For more information call MHC After 3 at (276) 656-5489, Opt. 1 or Opt. 3 or email [mhcafter3-phcc@patrickhenry.edu](mailto:mhcafter3-phcc@patrickhenry.edu); or call Upward Bound at (276) 656-5488, Opt. 1 or email [upward-bound@patrickhenry.edu](mailto:upward-bound@patrickhenry.edu)

The Summer Discovery Institute is provided through a partnership of programs that are generously funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers in the amount of \$692,143 for MHC After 3 and the United States Department of Education in the amounts of \$277,375 for Talent Search, \$312,480 for Upward Bound and \$312,480 for Upward Bound Math and Science.

# Stambaugh to step down, as field of school board candidates takes shape

The field of candidates is taking shape for the three seats on the Henry County School Board.

Dr. Merris Stambaugh, of the Collinsville District, has informed the Henry County Enterprise that he will not seek reelection in November.

This leaves local businessman and former school photographer Ray Reynolds as the only candidate who has publicly announced his intent to seek the Collinsville seat.

Incumbents Thomas Auker, the Blackberry District, and Ben Gravelly, of the Iriswood District, both said they intend to seek reelection.

Currently, all candidates are unopposed.

The deadline to complete and turn in the required paperwork to run is June 8.



Dr. Merris Stambaugh



Ray Reynolds



Thomas Auker



Ben Gravelly

# DMV to expand appointment opportunities as COVID-19 restrictions are eased

In line with Gov. Ralph Northam's announcement to ease current COVID-19 restrictions, the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) will open more windows in its customer service centers beginning June 1, creating 184,000 additional appointment opportunities across the Commonwealth.

Customers can begin to schedule these new appointments next week. Additional windows will open in stages on June 1, June 15 and in July as DMV continues to hire and train new employees to expand appointment availability, adding to the more than 530,000 appointments Virginians already have

scheduled over the next three months.

"Virginians have told us they appreciate the convenience and high quality service the appointment system affords," Commissioner Richard D. Holcomb said. "The Governor's announcement today enables us to open more windows so customers

can secure appointments sooner, but we are still taking great care to offer service that is safe for everyone."

Customer service centers and mobile operations teams continue to operate by appointment only for specific services which generally necessitate an in-person visit. Appointment opportuni-

ties are currently available for a 90-day period.

DMV is conducting more transactions across all service channels now than pre-pandemic. The vast majority of the 15 million transactions conducted since DMV started reopening customer service centers in May 2020 have been completed by service delivery

methods other than at an office, such as online or by mail. Prior to the pandemic, DMV conducted an average of 309,000 transactions per week statewide across all service channels. Last week, the agency completed more than 365,000; of those, only about 73,000 were done in a customer service center.

# Graduation schedule set for Martinsville High School

Martinsville High School will hold its graduation Saturday, May 22, at 10 a.m., outside, in the football stadium. The ceremony will be held with social distancing and pandemic-re-

quired capacity limits in place. Upon arrival, temperatures will be taken before entering the stadium.

For the safety of families and school personnel, congregating

before or after graduation is prohibited.

The event is open to ticket holders only. If you do not have a ticket, you will not be admitted or allowed on school premises.

Seniors will receive their tickets Friday during graduation rehearsal.

Thirty minutes after graduation, a "Senior Victory Lap Drive Thru" will be held through

Uptown Martinsville. Family members are encouraged to make their way to Main or Church street to watch the drive thru. Seniors are encouraged to decorate their cars.

# Bill to spur investment in rural areas reintroduced

The City of Martinsville, Henry and Patrick counties and dozens of other localities may benefit from legislation to encourage greater private investment in rural and underserved areas, which have been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. Seeking to build on the proven success of the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTTC) program the bipartisan Rural Jobs Act would increase

the flow of capital to rural areas and will serve as an important tool in U.S. economic recovery efforts.

U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner, D-Alexandria, along with several other senators, reintroduced the legislation.

"The New Market Tax Credit program has a proven track record of reviving local economies and creating needed jobs in communities around the country. Unfortunately, less than one in

four jobs created by this program have been in rural communities," said Warner. "This legislation will bridge this job creation gap by earmarking additional tax credits specifically for rural and underserved regions, which are suffering tremendously due to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis."

The NMTTC program currently provides a modest tax incentive to private investors to invest

in low-income communities. The Rural Jobs Act would build on the success of this program by designating, for two years, \$500 million in NMTTC investments for "Rural Job Zones" – low-income communities that have a population smaller than 50,000 inhabitants and are not adjacent to an urban area. Under this new definition, Rural Job Zones would be established in 342 out of the 435 congressional districts

across the country.

Since the creation of the NMTTC, a total of 77 businesses and economic revitalization projects in Virginia have received financing, contributing to \$1.5 billion in total project investments.

Under this legislation, Virginia would have more qualified census tracts than almost any other state, providing greater investment opportunity to support and grow businesses and create jobs in

communities across the Commonwealth. The bill would also require that at least 25 percent of this new investment activity be targeted to persistent poverty counties and high-migration counties. There are approximately 400 persistent poverty counties in the United States, 85 percent of which are located in non-metro or rural areas.

Companion legislation also was introduced in the House of Representatives.

# First Health Equity Dashboards launched in Va.

Providing a snapshot of Virginia's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and making key data more accessible to Virginia residents are goals of the recently launched statewide health equity dashboards.

"The pandemic has placed a spotlight on longstanding health inequities and the harm caused by structural racism," Gov. Ralph Northam said when announcing the new tools. "Virginia continues to embed equity into every part of our COVID-19 response and recovery and while we have made great strides, there is still important work to be done. These dashboards will bring additional visibility to our most pressing challenges, allowing the Commonwealth to better serve vulnerable populations and ensure the equitable distribution of resources."

The two dashboards—Equity in Action and Equity at a Glance—were created by the Virginia Health Equity Leadership Taskforce (ELT) in partnership with several state agencies. The dashboards are being launched as a part of Virginia's commitment to operationalizing equity, and in response to two

key pieces of legislation. "Our equity dashboards serve as a national exemplar for increasing transparency and making data more accessible," said Dr. Janice Underwood, Virginia's Chief Diversity Officer. "The launch of these two dashboards reinforces Virginia's leadership position, highlights the equity work being done across the Commonwealth, and serves as a call to action in closing gaps and improving the health and well-being of all Virginians."

The Equity-in-Action dashboard is a snapshot of the progress Virginia has made across its COVID-19 response and recovery and other initiatives that advance the equitable distribution of resources and services. The Equity-at-a-Glance dashboard is a

transparent assessment of social determinants of health and other factors contributing to health equity. Future versions of these dashboards will include an expanded set of topic areas, such as workforce diversity and criminal justice.

"These dashboards enable the Virginia Department of Health and other leaders to get the information we need to confront inequity across social determinants of health," said State Health Commissioner Dr. Norman Oliver, MD, MA. "Public health officials, community leaders, and policy makers can use these resources now as we work to recover from the COVID-19 public health crisis and beyond."

"This interagency project shows us how data can be used to mea-

sure Virginia's standing in many areas including COVID resources, health care, unemployment, education, food access, and broadband across 133 localities," said Chief Data Officer Carlos Rivero. "This is a best practice

in data sharing and sets a positive precedent for increased collaboration across state agencies."

An overview of the dashboards and underlying data is available at [governor.virginia.gov/diversity/equity-dashboards/overview](http://governor.virginia.gov/diversity/equity-dashboards/overview).

To learn more about the Health Equity Working Group, visit [governor.virginia.gov/diversity](http://governor.virginia.gov/diversity). For more information about the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, visit [governor.virginia.gov/diversity](http://governor.virginia.gov/diversity).

## MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

FRIDAY MAY 28, 2021  
5:30 PM - 10:00 PM

*The Primitive Quartet  
Chuck Wagon Gang  
Deeper Shade of Blue*

SATURDAY MAY 29, 2021  
5:30 PM - 10:00 PM

*The Churchmen  
The Harvester's Quartet  
Brian Free & Assurance*

*Sunday May 30, 2021 10:30 am  
Music by The Churchmen  
Message by Curt Ashley*



May 29

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# OBITUARIES

## Paul Theodore Sites

Paul Theodore Sites, 89, of Fieldale, Va. passed away on Wednesday, May 12, 2021. He was born April 13, 1932 in West Virginia to James Michael Sites and Mary Catherine Riggelman Sites. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife, Freda Leona Edens Sites.

He is survived by his daughter Jennifer Bennett; grandchildren Jennifer Utter (Frank); Veronica Snoddy, LeeAnna Sites and Melinda Sites; grandsons, Theodore Crouch, William Crouch, Mark Bennett, Jeffrey Sites; and numerous great and great-great grandchildren; sister, Helen Flowers and brother Harold Sites.

Paul proudly served in the U.S. Army and was captured and held as a prisoner of war during the Korean War. He was



detained in China at the age of 18 for two years and three months. He was honorably discharged on October 9, 1953.

He later worked as a carpenter for the U.S. Government. He loved hunting, fishing, reading the Bible, being with his family and spending time with all of his K-9 friends, especially Lilly.

The family is especially appreciative to Frank Utter for his many years of providing special care to Paul.

A graveside service was held Saturday, May 15, 2021 at Henry Memorial Park.

Arrangements are by Collins Funeral Home, 30 Riverside Drive, Bassett. To express condolences online, visit [www.collinsmckeestonebassett.com](http://www.collinsmckeestonebassett.com).

## Douglas Morton "Sammy" Thompson

Douglas Morton "Sammy" Thompson, 77, of Axton, Virginia, went home on Thursday, May 13, 2021, at his home. He was born February 9, 1944 in Axton to the late William Henry Thompson, Sr. and Irene Helen Shelton Thompson. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by a brother, William "Buddy" Thompson, Jr. Sammy was known as Silver Fox on the C.B.

He had been employed by E. I. Dupont for 40 years. He was a graduate of Brosville High School, and enjoyed hunting, and fishing, football, and racing. He loved fast cars and faster women. He had a music and art scholarship, and had his own gospel music group.

Sammy is survived by daughters, Samantha Joyce Thompson Taylor (Brian),

Tamatha Thomas (Robert) and Reba Dawn Thompson (Danny); brothers, Donald Wayne Thompson (Adrian) and James Edward Thompson; grandchildren, Cody Rainyn Crews (Casey), Hannah Noel Taylor, Angel Dawn Crews, Flip Dillion Crews, Faith Nicole Crews, Ariel Carter, and Roberto Thomas; and great-grandchildren, Brentley Wayne Wilson and River Merlin Thompson.

The funeral was May 20, 2021 at Wright Funeral Service Chapel with Minister Tom Blair officiating. Burial was in Thompson Family Cemetery, 1380 Thompson Road, Axton, Virginia.

Wright Funeral Service and Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at [www.wrightfuneralservices.net](http://www.wrightfuneralservices.net).

## Marie Koger

Marie Koger, age 93, of Patrick County, passed away Friday, May 14, 2021. She was born on November 9, 1927 in Patrick County to Hudell Adams and Mattie Oliver Adams.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by her husband, Eugene Davis Koger; son, Johnny Koger; and brother, Cliff Adams.

Marie is survived by one sister Inez Dooley; son Bill Koger (Linda); daughter Tammy Martin (Mike); grandchildren, Barry Koger, Kristy Walker, Kerry Wright (John), and Kami Spencer (Brandon); five great grandchildren; one niece Gail Fallin; and one nephew Mark Adams.

The family is especially appreciative of Marie's caregivers: Georgia, Frances, Alice and Teresa for their dedicated time, commitment and compassion for their mother.



Marie was an avid baker and enjoyed cooking. She enjoyed canning, gardening and working with her flowers. She loved her family and enjoyed being with family and friends.

She was a member of the Mt. Herman Church of the Brethren. Marie was close to her Lord and Savior and felt comfort knowing him. She thoroughly enjoyed a group of

singers that came to her house to sing. They were named the "Kitchen Pickers," and they always brought a smile to her face.

She was a wonderful mom and a very sweet lady to the community, church and family. She will be missed by many.

A private service will held at a later time.

Arrangements are by Collins Funeral Home, 30 Riverside Drive, Bassett. To express condolences online, visit [www.collinsmckeestonebassett.com](http://www.collinsmckeestonebassett.com).

## Carol Lawson Cochran

Carol Lawson Cochran, 80, of Axton, Virginia, passed away Monday, May 17, 2021 at SOVAH Health of Martinsville. She was born March 2, 1941 in Richmond, Kentucky, to the late Walter Lawson and Lois Lawson. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, George Cochran, and her brother and sister.

She had been employed at American Furniture for over 40 years. She enjoyed the beach and shopping at Belk's.

Mrs. Cochran is survived by her daughters, Debbie Cochran (Vincent Riggs), Lisa Merriman (Danny) and Lakyn Cochran; sons, Ronnie Cochran (Jenny), Ricky Cochran and Steven Cochran;



grandchildren, Robert Cochran, Zack Cochran, Michelle Evans, Amber Cochran, Jessica Wood, Daniel Smith, Alyssa Cochran and Christine Cochran; and great-grandchildren, R. J., Christian, Kendall, Zoe, Waylon, Tyler, Aiden, Aniyah, Aleah, Tanner, Camryn, Santana, David and Caitlyn.

The funeral will be Friday, May 21, 2021 at 2 p.m. at Wright Funeral Service Chapel, with visitation one hour before the service. Burial will be in Roselawn Burial Park.

Wright Funeral Service and Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at [www.wrightfuneralservices.net](http://www.wrightfuneralservices.net).

## School Board

from page 1

al to the school board in October 2020, quoting him as saying the school board "would be solely responsible" for the revenue gained from the increase.

"At that point, we were told that that was the understanding that the board would do it, but further along the line somewhere down the road, Mr. Hall realized they could use the money to bridge the gap in the county budget," Strayer said. "At that point, that's when we talked to Mr. Gardner about that."

Gardner said the statute that allowed for the increase in sales tax limits the use of the funds to new construction or major renovations.

"The hard question is does that apply to debt service for construction projects that were completed prior to the referendum passing, even though it was completed close to it," Gardner said, adding that Gloucester County is currently awaiting a decision on the same matter from Attorney General Mark Herring.

"Until we get that opinion from the attorney general, you cannot conclude that the money can be used for debt service when that debt was incurred prior to the passage of the referendum because we don't know if that is going to be defined as new or major renovations," Gardner said.

While that question is yet to be answered, Gardner said that the county could use the money for purposes without the school board's approval.

"Nothing in the statute requires school board approval," Gardner said. "It is county money raised through their taxing authority and the school board doesn't have taxing authority. But that doesn't change the representations that were given."

Teddy Martin II, of the Reed Creek District, said he has been actively involved with the state board on the issue.

"I can't rationalize that a school approved in 2016, built in 2017 and opened in 2018 applies to a referendum that we adopted in 2019, passed in 2020 and money that is coming in 2021 forward," Martin said. "That's supplanting to me, and it was very clear when they came to us and made representations that this was going to be solely your decision to campaign for it."

Martin said he also was struck by the fact that the school board wasn't even consulted first.

"To me the problem also is that's what you said, and you didn't come to us and say as a team or collaborative effort 'here is the situation, how can we work together,'" Martin added.

Chairman Thomas Aufer, of the Blackberry District, said he had a private discussion

with Hall following the decision.

"I told him that I felt that his remarks in October kind of blindsighted our board," Aufer said. Hall "assured me that he did not lie but that he had to make that decision because he had to balance the budget."

Martin said that "even if he (Hall) did not lie, he did not correct his remarks to this board. He did not include this board."

Given that the board "is one of the lowest funded," Martin opted to abstain from voting to adopt the school budget for fiscal 2022.

The remaining board members voted to adopt the budget as presented.

In addition to not receiving the full amount from the sales tax increase, David Scott, assistant superintendent for operations and administrative services, said the division received less from the county than what was requested overall.

"There is a reduction in local funding. We had requested \$507,000," he said. "What the board of supervisors has approved is \$448,345 over level funding. There were no changes in the local required effort but there is a change in the local leeway funding, or the discretionary funding."

To account for the difference, Scott said the Instruction Fund was reduced by \$50,000 and the technology fund was cut by \$9,000.

"During the preceding months, we had talked about a GoTech initiative and expanding it from Laurel Park to Fieldale-Collinsville Middle School," Scott said. "For reasons beyond our own budgeting purposes, that program is not going to be expanded there right now. That is money that we would have had as extra flexibility in the budget, but we are able to do without at the moment."

Additionally, Scott said the reduction in technology will be targeted for renting and leasing equipment.

"We are hoping that any adjustment we need to make there can be taken care of by the CARES Act or ESSER Part III funding," he said. "The priority for our budget this year was to try to capture the compensation adjustments for our employees. We've been able to do that so that was not sacrificed in this minor adjustment."

While the division received increases in its accounts for Standards of Quality, incentives and lottery funds, it had a \$1.2 million cut to discretionary spending from the county.

According to data from a comparison of expenditures per pupil by local governments for regular school operations between FY 2004 and FY 2020, the county ranks second to last in local per pupil

funding.

In FY 2020, Henry County spent \$1,734.02 per student. Compared to surrounding localities, Martinsville spent \$3,366.14 per student and Patrick County spent \$2,148.15. The average of all of the school districts was \$5,342.77. Henry County only spent \$105.12 more than the minimum.

In other matters, the school board:

\*Recognized numerous students with awards.

\*Recognized Strayer as a Superintendent of the Year for 2020-2021.

\*Heard proposed revisions to school board policies and regulations.

\*Adjusted summer work hours for all maintenance, transportation, central office, and other twelve-month employees to a four-day work week, Monday through Thursday, beginning May 28 through August 6, 2021.

\*Approved the purchase of interactive boards from Clinton Learning under the RFP # 16-06203-A177 and awarded RFP # 21-04293-A241 to Clinton Learning to purchase interactive panels with the option to renegotiate and extend the contract for four sequential 1-year terms starting July 1, 2021.

\*Approved the purchase of Apple devices, software, and accessories for staff pending availability of year-end funds and/or FY2022 Technology Budget.

\*Approved and appropriated the 2021-22 Special Education Annual Plan/Part B Flow Through Application and Section 619 Preschool Grant Application.

\*Approved the transfer requests of \$175,000 from the "Pupil Transportation" category to the "Instruction" category and \$140,000 from the "Administration, Attendance, and Health" category to the "Facilities" category. The requests will have to be approved by the Board of Supervisors.

\*Approved the bonus for employees and forwarded the appropriation request of \$145,031.04 from the Transportation Budget to the School Nutrition budget to the Board of Supervisors.

\*Approved the proposal for Stop-Loss on health insurance coverage with Sun life for FY22 starting July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.

\*Awarded a \$197,700 change order for a contract with Steve Martin's Trenching, Inc.

\*Awarded a \$549,850 bid to Daniel Builders, LLC from Danville.

\*Awarded a contract for custodial services to SSC Services for Education of Knoxville, Tennessee.

\*Agreed to purchase eight 65 passenger buses and two 35 passenger special needs buses from Kingmor Supply.



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# Williams

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our potential businesses, which in turn provide for our citizens," he said.

Williams said there are many ways to accomplish the goal of enhancing infrastructure, and cited a bill proposed by Del. Will Morefield, R-Tazewell.

"Essentially what it would do is if a business chose to move to this area and there were some stipulations on it but, if they chose to move to this area then it would receive tax breaks in no Virginia income tax for 10 years," Williams said. The proposal also called for granting a 10-year exemption from Virginia income tax to employees who moved to the area with the company.

Williams said the bill would have resulted in approximately \$10,000 to \$20,000 in avoided taxes, but "unfortunately, that bill didn't pass." He added that he favors tax cuts, because they offer more control of the financial future of the area to local residents.

"The main thing that we have to do is that we have to stop sending all of our money in taxes to northern Virginia and sending all of our money to attract businesses to northern Virginia," Williams said. "The people of Patrick, Henry and Franklin counties should not be sending money for generations just to fund another bridge over into D.C. from northern Virginia suburbs."

Instead, Williams said he would like to see to it that projects like the expansion of U.S. 58 are completed to stimulate the local economy.

"Essentially, right now you have U.S. 58, and I call Patrick County an economic cul-de-sac because you can't get there from here," Williams said of the attempt

to connect the route to I-77. "Basically, what we have is a four-lane road that stops at the bottom of the mountain, and then we have another four-lane road at the top of the mountain. Tractor trailers can't come through here without a permit, so they are having to go up through Roanoke."

Williams said this creates a problem for northern Virginians as well since it creates traffic elsewhere in the state.

Expanding the road "would reduce traffic and help us continue to build economic development along 58," he said. "I want to see U.S. 58 be just as economically productive as I-81. That's important to me and I think that is important to all of the counties along Southside and Southwest Virginia."

**Healthcare**  
"I would love to have a hospital. I'm going to push for that going forward, but we need to make sure that we prioritize emergency care so that we can get people safely stabilized and out to these other communities as soon as possible," Williams said, and added that a hospital may not be the most feasible initial option.

"That doesn't mean that we can't push for a stand-alone emergency room that would provide 24-hour access to triage and stabilize patients in our community before we can transport them to places that can provide those services sooner," Williams said.

"When somebody has a stroke or a heart attack, seconds matter. Right now, if you are standing in the middle of town, the closest hospital is 35 minutes away. Response time might be upwards of 10 minutes. Think about the amount of brain damage that you

may have while waiting to get to that hospital instead of the center of town and five minutes from an emergency room," he said.

With the overall goal of getting the patient to a hospital, Williams said he's a proponent of taking care of the basics first.

However, "I personally don't think that at this moment that we would be able to reopen the Patrick County hospital," he said. "It has now been shut down for several years, and there is quite a bit of restoration that would need to occur, and there are large tax liens still on the property."

**Jobs**  
As the youngest member ever elected to the Patrick Henry College Board of Directors, Williams said he's pushing for more trade careers in the area.

"These Patrick County folks love to work with their hands, they are interested in seeing something important, and they want to make sure they can do their jobs well," Williams said. "We have pushed very strongly to make sure that we have successful welders, that we have successful HVAC men, that we have successful plumbers, electricians -- all of these things that everybody says that we are going to have a huge shortage in the coming years as more and more individuals retire. I want to see those jobs filled with hard working Americans from my community."

Instead of classes in sociology and recreation, Williams would like to see more shine on the "dirty jobs" that keep the nation running.

"We have to end that stigma that dirty jobs are lesser than others," he said. "I appreciate the work that these people do. They

work harder than most individuals can work, especially our linemen that go out and work in the weather to get our power back up. Those are good paying jobs that our community loves and can continue to succeed in and have good lives. I want to continue to support that."

**Election Security**  
Having spent time litigating potential voter irregularities in the past election, Williams said his main focus moving forward will be to secure elections in the state.

"My number one objective, if elected, is to make sure that our elections are secure," he said. "I spent a month and a half in Wisconsin on Donald Trump's legal team fighting election fraud."

As a former organizer for the Patrick County Republican Committee, Williams said the last election was "incredibly frustrating."

"I have worked my tail off as the chairman of the Patrick County Republican Committee to register hundreds of first-time voters before the 2020 election. People reached out to me left and right and said, 'we wouldn't have voted but for you. You encouraged us. You got us engaged. We thought our vote didn't count,'" Williams said.

After the election, "those same people are looking at me and saying 'Wren, why should we vote again,'" Williams said. "As hard as I worked, it's disheartening. I want to make sure that those people can know and trust that when they cast their ballot, that it is counted and that it is not diluted by illegal ballots cast elsewhere."

Given the history of a strong democracy in the United States, Williams said that election security is an ever-pressing issue.

"These are huge, important things for us to know, for us to trust the foundational pillar of our United States of America," Williams said. "I'm going to work my tail off and help the Republicans take back the majority."

Relations with Democrats  
If elected, Williams said he is willing compromise with legislators across the aisle on some issues.

There also are areas he is unwilling compromise, Williams said.

"I'm not willing to compromise on the Second Amendment. It says in the Constitution, 'shall not be infringed.' It's troublesome to me that people don't understand that phrase."

Williams said he will be resolute against encroachments on the First Amendment as well.

"I'm not willing to compromise on religious freedom," he said. "I think everybody under the Bill of Rights should have the opportunity to worship their god. That's important to me, and clearly it was important to the founders of our country. And I'm not willing to compromise on free speech. In fact, I'm going to push back on those that continue to trample on us if they don't like what we have to say. This is something that I've fought back against for years."

A Stuart native, Williams graduated from Patrick County High School and then attended Hampden-Sydney College as a Patrick Henry Scholar. He then attended Samford University's Cumberland School of Law where he met his wife, Britt. The two own Schneider & Williams, P.C. law firm in Stuart.

# Poindexter

from page 1

isolation that allocated money for the expansion of U.S. 58 through Patrick County as a recent example.

"As far as roads are concerned, I've already taken that major step to get 58 to four lanes from Stuart up to (I-77) and I-81," Poindexter said. "The segment between Stuart and Vesta is under contract. That is going to take 3- to 4-years to build, but that is infrastructure that would open the door for Patrick County."

By improving the road, Poindexter said more businesses will flock to the area to take advantage of the route's position between the coast and the rest of the United States.

"Also of importance is the Port of Virginia," he said. "That gives a community evacuation route for the cities down there, but for the port, it means greater imports can flow out to I-77 and further through the United States west. It also means the products from Patrick and Carroll (counties) can flow to the port a lot better."

Poindexter said his bill will provide full funding for the expansion all the way to I-77.

"It's just that it (road) is going to be built in pieces, but the bill covers the whole road," he said. "It's \$592 million of General Fund money. This is the only road that I know of in the state of Virginia that is funded by General Fund money."

He explained the expansion competed for funding "with schools, higher education, health and human resources, public safety and everything that Virginia spends money on. It's not paid for by the roads and gas tax, diesel tax and car tax."

Poindexter said the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) will schedule the construction of the four-lane road up and over the mountain in segments, beginning with the portion up to Lover's Leap.

"You'll see the others come along in 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026," he said. "Then we will start contracting out the others, but the money is in the bank."

In addition to infrastructure, Poindexter said he is also working on plans to provide hospital access to Patrick County residents.

"I have two initiatives currently, with two different hospitals, to get them interested in opening an acute care hospital in Patrick County," he said. "One of them right now doesn't look too good. The other is still under discussion."

Poindexter said he intends to use some of the federal COVID-19 funds to apply to the opening of a new hospital.

"That will be a very difficult task maybe, but if that fits the definition of how you can use the federal money, then I'll make a run for that, if not this summer, then in the next session," Poindexter added.

Regarding issues that go beyond Patrick County, Poindexter said he is concerned about the direction the state is taking towards revamping the economy towards renewable energy.

"Our electricity rates are going to skyrocket as a result of legislation passed in 2020 and 2021," he said. "There is another proposal called TCI (transportation climate initiative) which will force all of our cars off of gasoline and raise the price of it. So, they are trying to force us into electric vehicles, which is going to destroy our economy as well as our standard of living. We just can't run everything off of solar and wind. It's just not going to happen."

One way Poindexter intends to shape the local economy is through changes to promote more trade jobs.

"What we need is more trade jobs with apprentices and licenses in the different trades of advanced manufacturing, computer science and so forth," Poindexter said.

This has been an interest of Poindexter's in working with partners like New College Institute and Patrick Henry Community College.

"My concern here is that we need to align the high school career and technology programs with the community colleges, or even four-year colleges, so they are taking the right courses in high school and feeding into the two-year colleges, and/or four-years," Poindexter said.

To keep the ball rolling on such initiatives, Poindexter said Republicans like himself need to be elected to the General Assembly. This won't happen without secure elections, he added.

"I helped Gov. (Bob) McDonnell to pass the photo ID bill back in 2012-2013 to require photo ID at the polls. I want to totally reform Virginia's election apparatus," Poindexter said. "Right now, it gives a 2-1 rule to the governor. It should be even steven and bi-partisan."

If he is reelected, Poindexter said there are certain steps to accomplish that he will support in his next term.

"We've got to get the voter purge going on rolls, looking at deaths and checking on deaths," he said. "Very importantly, the state board of elections needs to cross check voters on the e-verify Homeland Security database for illegal aliens and criminals."

These issues weren't always a problem, according to Poindexter.

"It was fair before 2020, when Democrats totally dismantled it, but I think the right thing to do is to revamp the major things," he said. "There are things that you look at and say 'well, it shouldn't be that way.'"

Poindexter said there are underlying issues behind simply finding instances of actual fraud.

"I haven't seen any documented evidence of what you may call fraud or something like that," he said. "The issue is there is a public perception that there could have been or that there was. With a close election, where half of

the people feel one way and the other, I believe it is the duty of legislators to take on the issue and restore confidence in the elections."

Another way of doing this could be instituting term limits, but Poindexter said the concept is more complicated than it seems at face value.

"At the federal level, I would definitely go for, support and have supported, term limits," he said. "There is a big difference in terms of the structure of state and federal government. Federal government does not have to have a balanced budget. If we do term limits, then we ought to probably do a balanced budget at the same time. At the Virginia level, we have a requirement for balanced budgets, so if one is in office for a long time, you can't just keep borrowing money."

Poindexter said the General Assembly already does a fair amount of self-correcting against long-serving politicians.

"We have a lot of turnover in the state government, especially the House of Delegates," Poindexter said. "I started in seniority 90 out

of 100. Today, I'm 17 out of 100. That happened over the course of 12 years, so that is a huge turnover. There are retirements, there are people that find that they can't afford to serve as delegates, people have to work. There are many different reasons that people have to leave the house. The turnover in the House of Delegates, at least to me, is not an issue because of the turnover. I'm open for discussion on term limits in Virginia, but when I look at the actual turnover, I don't really see that it is a real urgent matter at this time."

In the meantime, Poindexter said he will continue to work to find common ground with Democrats.

"I have worked across party lines," he said. "I obviously worked across party lines to get the 58 bill through" and secure funds for the project. "If you look at the votes on the House floor, you see good bills pass 100-0, 98-2 or 90-10. I already work across the aisle. All legislators do."

This doesn't mean that Poindexter won't stand his ground on some key issues, he said.

"I will not agree to gutting the Second Amendment and I will not agree to any more gun control," Poindexter said. "I have fought those in existence. I am pro-life. I do not agree with the governor standing up and saying 'well, we are going to deliver the baby and then have a discussion on what we are going to do with it.' That is unconscionable."

Poindexter is a native of Franklin County. He and his wife, Janet, have six children and 10 grandchildren. Poindexter holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from Lynchburg College and a Master of Science in Computers and Management from George Washington University. His hobbies include hunting and reading.

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# Board approves appointment

The Henry County School Board approved a recommendation to fill one administrative position at its May meeting.

Melissa Broadstreet will join the staff of Magna Vista High School as assistant principal for the 2021-2022 school year. Broadstreet has supported students as a teacher and administrative intern in Franklin County since 2008 following her work as a teacher in Florida and North Carolina.

"I am both honored and thankful to be joining the Magna Vista family, and I am looking forward to working with the entire school community to help Magna Vista continue its history of excellence. My passion for education lies in building strong relationships with

students and their families, fostering high expectations, and facilitating student growth as they strive to attain all of their goals for the future. I feel truly blessed to be joining the amazing Warrior team!"

Broadstreet will fill the vacancy left by Katrina Perry, who will be principal at Rich Acres Elementary.

The appointment was approved after the board reconvened from closed session.

"I'm pleased to welcome Ms. Broadstreet to Henry County and to have her join the administrative team at Magna Vista as they continue the critical work of supporting students in exceeding their goals," Schools Superintendent Sandy Strayer said.



# Clark to deliver keynote address at Carlisle School commencement

Judge Martin Clark will serve as the keynote speaker at Carlisle School's 48th commencement ceremony. The private ceremony will be held at Carlisle on May 28 at 6 p.m. The ceremony will be live-streamed on the school's website for those unable to attend in person.

A retired circuit court judge from Patrick County, Virginia, Martin is a cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa gradu-



ate of Davidson College and attended law school at the University of Virginia. When he was appointed to the bench in 1992 at age thirty-two, he became one of the youngest judges in the commonwealth's history. Martin received the Patrick County Outstanding Community Service Award in 2016 and the Virginia State Bar's Harry L. Carrico Professionalism Award in 2018.

Martin is also an accomplished author. Entertainment Weekly called Clark "hands down, our finest legal-thriller writer." The New York Times stated that he is "the thinking man's John Grisham." The Winston-Salem Journal declared that he has set "the new standard by which other works of legal fiction should be judged," and David Baldacci praised him as "a truly original writer." His novels have appeared on numerous bestseller lists, and the audio version of The Substitution Order was a number one national bestseller. Additionally, his novels have been chosen as a New York Times Notable Book, a New

York Times Editors' Choice, a Washington Post Book World Best Book of the Year, a Bookmarks Magazine Best Book of the Year, a Boston Globe Best Book of the Year, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, a finalist for the Stephen Crane First Fiction Award, and the winner of the Library of Virginia's People's Choice Award in 2009, 2016 and 2020. Martin and his wife, Deana, a photographer, live on a farm with dogs, cats, chickens, guinea fowl, and three donkeys.

The ceremony will celebrate 21 seniors who have received 80 admissions at more than 52 colleges across the United States. At the time of this release, the students have earned more than \$3.2 million in merit-based scholarships, and more are anticipated. Carlisle School is currently enrolling for the 2021-2022 school year. Classes will be offered in person five days a week this fall with flexible rate tuition and regional bus service available. For more information on how to join the Carlisle family, visit CarlisleSchool.org/tour.

# Eight high school seniors earn Superintendent's List honor



Martinsville High School held its Superintendent's Breakfast on Monday to recognize and celebrate the academic achievement of seniors who made Superintendent's List. To make the list, students must have a cumulative GPA of a 4.0 or better and be enrolled in at least one honor's class.

Superintendent's List recipients are: Eduardo Betanzo, Julianna Cox, Mackenzie Edmonds, Benjamin Jarrett, James Li, Jazmyne Penn, Ethan Thomas, Kellene Wotring.

"We are extremely proud of the tenacity, dedication, and hard work of our students," said Martinsville High School Principal Aji Dixon. "They have overcome obstacles despite the challenges associated with the pandemic and we look forward to reading and learning about their future successes."

"Congratulations to these students for achieving an incredible feat by excelling during a worldwide pandemic," Schools Superintendent Dr. Zeb Talley said.

"They have exemplified the ability to achieve while utilizing academic flexibility and perseverance. I am confident that our students on this Superintendent's List will make valuable contributions to future

intellectual activities."

Eight Martinsville High School seniors were named to the Superintendent's List during a ceremony Monday. Pictured, left to right, are Aji Dix-

on, Martinsville High School principal; James Li, Benjamin Jarrett, Mackenzie Edmonds, Kellene Wotring, Ethan Thomas, Jazmyne Penn, and Schools Superintendent Dr. Zeb Talley.

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#### HELP WANTED

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#### Ferrum College

Ferrum College is accepting applications for the position of Payroll Administrator/Accountant. This position is responsible for the accurate and timely processing of faculty, staff and student

payroll, and for the college's cash receipts functions. The Payroll Administrator/Accountant will prepare faculty and staff payrolls, including time-sheet entry and related journal entries. Prepare quarterly and annual federal and staff payroll tax reports including W-2 forms. The Payroll Administrator/Accountant will enter student account payments and cash deposits from various areas into Colleague Student Cash Receipts. Reconcile all payroll related liability accounts. Assist Accounting Specialist with bank reconciliations, and investigate and correct bank statement reconciliation items on a monthly basis. Prepare sales and meals tax reports, submit sales tax payment online, and prepare Reimbursable Expense Form for submission of meals tax payment.

The candidate will also assist the Director of Budgets with collection of data for cash forecasting, and assist with other Business Office functions as assigned.

Candidates must have a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting or related field. One to three years of payroll, cashing, and accounts receivable experience. Experience with Microsoft Office products including Excel and Word. Preferred qualifications are one to three years in college fund accounting. Additional experience with Colleague HR Payroll and Colleague Student Cash Receipts.

The position reports to the Director of Budgets. A background check and credit check are required if considered for the position.

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# Air travel picks up but recovery will take years

**Hyung Jun Lee**  
*Capital News Service*

Air travel plummeted during the pandemic. Experts say that travel trends will change as more people get vaccinated and begin traveling again.

Over 1 million passengers have traveled daily since mid-March, according to Transportation Security Administration checkpoint numbers. Mother's Day weekend saw the largest number of travelers since early March 2020. The total of passengers nationwide so far this year moving through TSA checkpoints is just over 40% of all traffic last year.

Virginia air travel is already picking up, according to several airports throughout the state. Robert Yingling, spokesman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, said numbers are low compared to 2019 but travel is increasing. He speaks on behalf of both the Washington Dulles International and Ronald Reagan National airports.

"Travel volumes at Reagan National and Dulles are still well below where they were at this time in 2019," Yingling said. "We have seen gradual recovery since the pandemic."

Troy Bell, the director of marketing and air service development at Richmond International Airport, said that air travel has increased as more people get COVID-19 vaccines and with the warming weather.

"March comes around and then all of a sudden we see about a 60% increase," Bell said.

"We've seen a true increase and we think this one's going to stick."

Air travel has increased daily at the Norfolk International Airport since January, according to Charles Braden, the director of market development.

"We had a big surge around the holidays; Christmas and New Year's holiday," Braden said.

International travel was "decimated" due to restrictive quarantine measures at the time and countries requiring travelers to take a COVID-19 test, according to Braden. Due to this, he said that international travel will not recover for some time.

"It's not expected really to recover for several years to the levels that it were previously," Braden said.

People are still traveling within the United States, however, to destinations where they can get outside and socially distance, Braden said.

"Even in the fall, a lot of the activity was to destinations that you could call open, and by that I mean places like beaches or mountains or deserts," Braden said.

Bell also said that many tourists departing Richmond are traveling to less urban, open areas.

"People are traveling to places like Florida," Bell said. "They're also traveling to some of the mountain destinations where the perception is lots of space, lots of fresh air, lots of elbow room and few restrictions."

Some of the most popular U.S. travel destinations are Orlando, Florida; Los Angeles;

Denver; and Atlanta, according to Yingling.

There are going to be a number of changes in air travel trends according to Rick Hamilton, a senior distinguished engineer for Optum and a frequent business flier.

"I think that leisure travel is probably going to pick up faster than business travel because everybody has this pent up desire for a vacation or to go see distant loved ones," Hamilton said.

Hamilton said that for the airline industry to recover, business travel needs to pick back up again, but it may resume more slowly than personal travel.

"If I'm flying internationally, my company will buy a business class ticket," he said. "If I'm flying internationally on my own dollar, I tend to buy coach tickets, economy class, and so that airline industry needs business travel to resume in order for their business models to really work."

However, Hamilton said that businesses are completing more tasks online and virtually, using video conferencing software, for example.

Even though businesses may have found an alternate method to traveling through the use of online tools, the prospect of better deals through face-to-face interaction could spark business travel once again, Bell explained.

Bell said once more companies start sending more representatives out to the field others will follow.

"As soon as that happens, you're going to find that other folks make the adjustment to



get out there, too," Bell said.

After 15 months, Hamilton is ready to fly again and recently bought his first air tickets for leisure travel. He advises travelers to follow guidelines and get vaccinated.

"I'm not extremely excited about sitting next to a stranger, you know, next to me on a plane," Hamilton said.

"But I believe that once you're vaccinated and follow all the normal CDC protocols, that it's an acceptable risk to get life back to normal, or something resembling normal."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Thursday that vaccinated individuals don't have to wear masks or social distance unless

a law or regulation requires it. Passengers must still wear masks in airports and on planes, however.

(Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.)



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## Summer Reading Program to start June 1

The Blue Ridge Regional Library's Summer Reading Program, Tails and Tales, is set to kickoff June 1.

Participating ages include infants and toddlers, preschool school age and teens.

Preschool and school age children must register in-person at kickoff to receive a limited edition registration bag with a special prize. (While supplies last.)

To-go lunch, at 1 p.m., and snacks, at 5:30 p.m., are available at the kickoff event for youngsters 18 and under, while supplies last.

For more information, call the following branch: Bassett, (276) 629-2426; Collinsville, (276) 647-1112; Martinsville, (276) 403-5430; Patrick County, (276) 694-3352 or Ridgeway, (276) 956-1828.

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