

Supreme Court appoints panel on reversion

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

The Supreme Court of Virginia has appointed the 3-judge panel that will rule on the issue of Martinsville's reversion to a town.

The judges are the Hon. Rufus A. Banks, Jr., of the 1st Judicial Circuit (Chesapeake), the Hon. Frederick A. Rowlett, of the 28th Judicial Circuit (City of Bristol, Smyth County, and Washington County), and the Hon. W. Reilly Marchant of the 13th Judicial Circuit (Richmond), who will serve as the Chief Judge of the special court.

Stephen Piepgrass of Troutman

Pepper, the firm representing Martinsville in its reversion proceedings, said because the panel was just appointed, he is unaware of what, if any, additional hearings on the issue the panel might want to have.

"You may recall that Henry County filed in Henry County Circuit Court a lawsuit saying the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) and the VSA (Voluntary Settlement Agreement) are essentially worthless and cannot be enforced in any way," City Attorney Eric Monday said during Tuesday's city council meeting.

On Jan. 4, the Henry County Board of Supervisors approved a motion to file

a complaint for declaratory judgement in Henry County Circuit Court to stop the city's attempt to force the county to comply with the MOU and VSA. The supervisors voted 4-2 to reject the negotiated VSA in a Dec. 2021 meeting, a move that resulted in a contested reversion process.

"We are currently moving to have that case consolidated in front of the 3-judge panel, taking the position that state law says that the panel is empowered to rule on all matters that are related to reversion," Monday said. "It would then be our position that either the VSA or the MOU, both of which were signed by the county, still governs

this situation."

Though Piepgrass said a timeline is not yet in place, Monday said Tuesday, "I would anticipate that there would be some rulings coming from the 3-judge panel relatively quickly."

Even if the special court finds in favor of Martinsville's reversion, two companion bills passed by the General Assembly would require a voter referendum on the issue within the city before the court granted town status.

The city also submitted a letter to Gov. Glenn Youngkin asking him to veto the legislation. As of late Wednesday afternoon, Youngkin had taken no action on the bills.

Residents discuss issues at public input session on ARPA funding

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

Aid for the homeless, support for small business owners, and the need to rebrand Martinsville were among the topics discussed when Martinsville's City Council held a public input session on how it should allocate its federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA) dollars.

Among those to speak during the 3.5 hour, standing room only meeting was Keith Owens, executive director of Peer Recovery Connection. Owens said he would like some of the money to be directed toward a 30-bed "recovery program shelter" for the homeless.

"The number one contender for relapse is stable housing," Owens said. "If someone doesn't have stable housing, then relapse is imminent. Their mental health issues increase, their addictions increase because they have nowhere else to go and no one else to depend on."

He said his organization has reached out into the community and found that city residents "are very passionate about a homeless shelter."

"We don't want to be a public eyesore, we don't want to be on Main Street," Owens said. "Somewhere tucked away at the edge of the city."

Clients would come into the shelter where, in addition to having access to food, a bed, and showers, they would be assessed and, for 45-60-days, receive the services of various religious programs and mental health providers. "Essentially, a one-stop shop for these people and an opportunity to go from have-not to back on their feet as productive citizens" and eventually find stable housing, he said.

Ariel Johnson, the director of the MHC Warming Center and the co-chairman of the West Piedmont Better Housing Coalition, also discussed the need to better serve the city's homeless population by building a year-round shelter.

She said the Warming Center served 76 guests during its 120 days of operation, from November to March.

"We average 20 guests a night," she said, ranging in age from 6-months to 85-years-old. "This year saw more senior citizens than ever," she told council members. "Imagine the people that we miss the rest of the year. There is a need for some type of shelter that is year-round."

Business owner Joe Martin, who operates What's Your Sign in uptown, said he supports the idea of a homeless shelter.

Martin said he is "not so much a fan of the buying property from people that have dilapidated buildings." The comment referenced one of Towarnicki's earlier statements related to uptown revitalization, in which he

See **ARPA Funding**, page 4

Time capsule to be opened April 1



A time capsule embedded in the side of the old BB&T building on East Church Street will be opened at 11 a.m. on Friday, April 1.

The site was previously home to Piedmont Trust Bank.

According to an engraved stone block marking the location of the capsule, contained within is memorabilia from Piedmont Trust's 50th anniversary celebration. The opening date coincides with the 100th anniversary of the bank, and marks 50 years since the capsule was placed.

City Manager Leon Towarnicki said former employees of Piedmont Trust Bank in a particular are invited to attend the opening ceremony to be recognized. The opening also is open to all members of the public.

"We hope it's not an April Fool's joke," Towarnicki said, "but if it is, we'll all be surprised at the same time."

Students transport audiences to "a whole new world" in Disney's "Aladdin, Jr."



Martinsville High School junior Logan Carter (right, foreground) and the cast of Martinsville City Public Schools Drama Club perform the song "Arabian Nights" from "Disney's Aladdin, Jr." The musical will be performed in the Martinsville High School auditorium April 1-3.

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

"It is not what is outside that counts, but it is what's inside," Logan Carter's Genie says to an empty theater.

He and the rest of his cast mates are in the final weeks of rehearsal for Disney's "Aladdin, Jr." The play, set in the fictional Arabian kingdom of Agrabah, tells the story of a "diamond in the rough" named Aladdin who finds a magic lamp, befriends a genie, and ultimately learns that outward appearances matter less than what lies inside our hearts.

The script is an abbreviated version of the Broadway adaptation of "Aladdin," the Oscar-winning 1992 animated film produced by Disney. It will be performed by the Martinsville City Public Schools Drama Club students Friday, April 1 through Sunday, April 3 at the Martinsville High School auditorium.

Hayden Calfee, a 17-year-old junior at Martinsville High who plays Princess Jasmine, said there are some key differences between the stage production and the film that is familiar to many. For example, she said, the character of Abu, an animated monkey from the film, doesn't appear in the

play. Rather, Aladdin has three human friends — Omar (Max Rorrer), Babkak (Alex Butler), and Kassim (Caesar Draper) — "that are there with him throughout the whole play."

Rajah, Jasmine's tiger companion in the movie, is one of the princess' handmaidens in the play, played by Jordan Foster.

The character Iago, a parrot in the film, also is a human in the stage production, said Eli Simpson, 17 and also a senior, who plays the show's villain Jafar. In this production, Iago, Jafar's companion, is played by Samson Ray.

Even the character of Jafar differs somewhat between stage and screen, Simpson said. "It's not necessarily made prominent that Jafar is a sorcerer," he said. "There's one scene where he does an incantation, but nothing else."

One thing that remains the same, though, is the music. As Genie says in the show's opening number, "Agrabah is a place where everybody sings!"

Just a few weeks before the curtain goes up on the first performance, the cast's singing was put to the test during a late afternoon rehearsal in the auditorium. School production staff were not happy with a just-completed run-through of the song "Prince Ali."

It lacked energy, they said.

"Every single time, you have to give 110 percent," director Shauna Hines told the students. "You have to be the show you want to see." Hines is the division's coordinator of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math), CTE (career and technical education), and fine arts.

Other production staff members are music director Eric Becker, stage managers Lateisha Fuller and Sharon Millner, choreographer Karla Scales, master set builder Barry Dillard, and master artistic designer Emma Weatherly.

Hines and the rest of the staff give the cast a short break to refocus their energies, and then they're back on stage, trying it again, dancers waving brightly-colored flags in the background as actors sing about the wealth and majesty of the mysterious Prince Ali. They didn't nail it, but they got better.

One notable element about this "Aladdin Jr." cast is the wide gap in age between the oldest and youngest actors. High school students share the stage with middle and elementary school students which can be at once

See **Aladdin, Jr.**, page 8

Martinsville's textile heritage celebrated at Founders Day

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

Martinsville's legacy as the former sweatshirt capital of the world and the history of the once-thriving textile industry was celebrated last weekend at the Martinsville-

Henry County Historical Society's annual Founders Day celebration.

Will Pannill, the grandson of William Letcher Pannill, who opened the Pannill Knitting Company in 1925, addressed a crowd of more than 80 (many of whom were former employees

of the textile industries) in the courtroom of the historic former Henry County courthouse, now the Heritage Center & Museum, about the history of some of the textile companies that were founded in Martinsville and Henry County.



Left, Will Pannill, the grandson of the founder of Pannill Knitting Company, recounted the histories of a number of the textile companies that opened in Martinsville and invited audience members to share stories and memories of their own. Right, Founders Day guests look at memorabilia brought in by former employees of the various textile companies.

See **Textile Heritage**, page 5

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UPDATES



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

(Event information/calendar items must be received by 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the desired publication date. Email to newsreporter@theenterprise.net)

Friday, March 25 and Saturday, March 26

VMFA on the Road will be at Piedmont Arts (215 Starling Avenue, Martinsville.) The program is a traveling art museum from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond that brings art to remote corners of Virginia by way of the Museum's Statewide Partners program. Visitors will be able to tour "A View from Home: Landscapes of Virginia."

Saturday, March 26

The Martinsville-Henry SPCA, the Martinsville City Police Department, and PetSense are partnering to host a microchip clinic from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. at PetSense (240 Commonwealth Blvd. W, Martinsville.) The cost of a microchip and registration is \$10. Dogs must be on leashes and cats must be in carriers for the safety of the animal.

The Spencer-Penn Centre is hosting Painting with Genie beginning at 1 p.m. All supplies are provided. Pre-registration is required by calling (276) 957-5757. The cost is \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members.

The Horsepasture Volunteer Fire Department (17815 A.L. Philpott Hwy) will host a country buffet breakfast from 6-10 a.m. The cost for adults is \$8 and children under 10 are \$4. All carry-outs are \$8.

Sunday, March 27

The Spencer-Penn Centre will host a barn quilt class from 12-4 p.m. All supplies are provided and pricing is based on size, ranging from \$75 to \$85. The registration deadline is Friday, March 18. For more details or to register, call (276) 957-5757.

Monday, March 28

A COVID-19 vaccine clinic will be held at the Martinsville branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library from 10:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. and at Albert Harris Elementary School from 4-6 p.m. The vaccines will be administered free of charge for adults and children ages 5 and older.

Tuesday, March 29

The Basset Historical Center will feature music from the local country and gospel group the Southern Gentlemen from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. The program is free and open to the public. Masks will be required.

A COVID-19 vaccine clinic will be held at the Bassett branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library from 10:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. and at Patrick Henry Elementary School from 4-6 p.m. The vaccines will be administered free of

charge for adults and children ages 5 and older.

Friday, April 1 and Saturday, April 2

Fido's Finds, 119 East Main Street, Martinsville, is hosting a basement sale. Every sale benefits the Martinsville-Henry County SPCA. The sale will take place Friday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Call Fido's Finds for more information at (276) 656-1101.

Saturday, April 2

The Friends of the Blue Ridge Regional Library is hosting a book sale at the Martinsville Library (310 East Church Street) from 9:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. Proceeds will support the library system. A members only book sale will take place Friday, April 1 from 1-5 p.m.

Monday, April 4

The Martinsville City School Board will hold its regular school board meeting at 6 p.m. in council chambers of the Martinsville City Municipal Building (5 West Church Street).

Thursday, April 7

Piedmont Arts hosts the Earl White String Band, a mainstay of the old-time, folk, and dance community for more than 45 years and one of the few Black Americans preserving and playing Appalachian old-time string band music. General admission tickets are \$20 and are available at Piedmont Arts and online at piedmontarts.org.

A caregiver support group will meet from 11 a.m. until 12 p.m. at the Spencer-Penn Centre. This free program facilitated by Good Samaritan allows those caring for a friend or loved one to share the rewards and challenges of caregiving while connecting with others who understand. Attendees will learn on managing stress.

Friday, April 8

Music Night at the Spencer-Penn Centre, with Travis Frye & Blue Mountain will play in Alumni Hall. Gate opens at 5 p.m. and music begins at 6:20. Admission is a \$5 donation. Social distancing will be required and masks when that is not possible. Concessions will be sold.

Saturday, April 9

The Spencer-Penn Center is hosting a spring grapevine floriculture/decorating workshop from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. Participants will create their own decorative grapevine wreath. Don't have a wreath? No worries! One can be purchased for \$10. All other supplies included. The cost is \$20 for

members and \$25 for non-members. For questions or to register, call (276) 957-5757.

Tuesday, April 12

Horsepasture District Supervisor Debra Buchanan will host a community meeting at the Horsepasture Ruritan Building from 6-7:30 p.m. County Administrator Tim Hall, Henry County Sheriff Lane Perry, and VDOT Resident Engineer Lisa Hughes will attend.

Wednesday, April 13

The Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society is sponsoring its annual "Be a Part of History" blood drive in conjunction with the American Red Cross from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the Martinsville-Henry County Heritage Center and Museum. To schedule an appointment, visit redcrossblood.org or call/text John Phillips at (276) 806-5022.

Saturday, April 16

The Bassett Volunteer Fire Department will host a benefit breakfast from 6:30-10:30 a.m. All proceeds will benefit Brenner Children's Hospital.

Saturday, April 23

The Spencer-Penn Centre is hosting its 11th annual Pig Cookin' Competition from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. This free event includes a 'barnival,' vendors, cruise-in, silent auction, and more. BBQ will be available for purchase. Call the centre at (276) 957-5757 with any questions.

ONGOING

The Louise R. Lester Spay/Neuter Clinic is hosting wellness clinics every Tuesday. Clinics are by appointment only—no walk-ins will be accepted. Call (276) 638-7297 to schedule your appointment. Beginning in April, the clinics will be held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, rather than weekly.

The Martinsville-Henry County SPCA is hosting an adoption special through April 16. Adoption fees for all dogs 40 pounds and over are \$50. Come by Tuesday through Friday from 12-6 p.m. and Saturdays from 2-4 p.m. to find your forever friend.

Patrick & Henry Community College is organizing a virtual Leadership Learning Community! If you have leadership questions, P&HCC can connect you with answers through this virtual community. Participants have the opportunity to collaborate and brainstorm current, real-time challenges and successes with fellow leaders while learning from each other or gaining insights from professionals skilled in areas of concern.

Sessions will be held from 4-5 p.m. every other Wednesday through June 22. For more information or to register, visit ph.augusoft.net or call (276) 656-0260.

Henry County Parks & Recreation invites you out for a trek along the trail! Meet as a group and walk along a different trail each week. Explore the trails of Martinsville-Henry County, make new friends, and get some fresh air and exercise. Call the HCPR Senior Services office at (276) 634-4644 to find out where the week's trek is happening. Trail Trekkers meet Thursday of each week (weather permitting) at 1 p.m. in the fall and winter and 9:15 a.m. in spring and summer.

The Blue Ridge Regional Library offers free one-day passes to the Virginia Museum of Natural History and the Henry County YMCA with your library card. The passes are good for one day and exclude special events. There is a wait period before you can check out the pass again. For more details and exclusions, visit brrl.lib.va.us.

The Fontaine Ruritan Club hosts Bingo every Tuesday at its headquarters, 1903 Joseph Martin Highway, Martinsville. Doors open at 5:30 and games begin at 7. Money from Bingo supports community service awards, scholarships, and other community efforts.

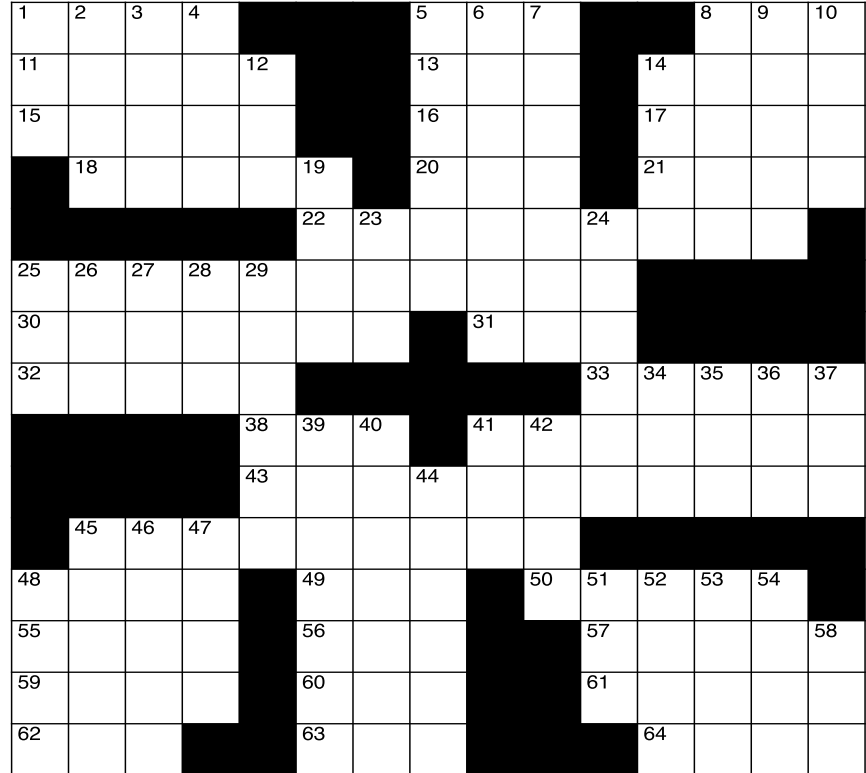
MHC Coalition for Health and Wellness offers no contact Medicaid application assistance for eligible Virginia residents from birth to 64 years of age. No sign-up fees, no premiums, no deductibles. Including Children's Medicaid/FAMIS, Pregnancy Medicaid and Adult Health Care -19 to 64 years old. Questions can be answered, and applications completed by phone. In-person application assistance is available from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursdays at The Community Storehouse.

Call or text Ann Walker 276 732-0509 to see if you qualify.

The Henry County Adult Learning Center offers free in-house and online classes to help prepare for college, career, or earn your high school equivalency or GED. Classes can help improve your digital literacy, job skills, English language skills, and earning potential. Call (276) 647-9585.

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- CLUES ACROSS**
- 1. One who regrets
 - 5. Time zone
 - 8. Subway dweller
 - 11. Bend in a river
 - 13. Alias
 - 14. Isodor ____, American Nobel physicist
 - 15. Very (music)
 - 16. Zero
 - 17. Phil ____, former CIA
 - 18. Competitions
 - 20. Unwell
 - 21. Puts in place
 - 22. Gets rid of
 - 25. Allows light to pass through
 - 30. Climbed quickly
 - 31. We all have it
 - 32. There's a North & South
 - 33. Emaciation
 - 38. Supervises flying
 - 41. Very dark colors
 - 43. Unwanted
 - 45. Grants
 - 48. Three visited Jesus
 - 49. Wife of Amun
 - 50. Broadway actress Daisy
 - 55. A Spanish river
 - 56. I (German)
 - 57. French opera composer
 - 59. Six (Spanish)
 - 60. Last letter
 - 61. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
 - 62. A curved shape
 - 63. Make a mistake
 - 64. Tall plant
- CLUES DOWN**
- 1. Computer memory
 - 2. "Et __": "And wife" (Latin)
 - 3. Ancient Syrian city
 - 4. College army
 - 5. Cassava
 - 6. Talented
 - 7. Capital of Estonia
 - 8. Finger millet
 - 9. In a way, assists
 - 10. Men's fashion accessories
 - 12. Misery
 - 14. Skin disorder
 - 19. Selling at specially reduced prices
 - 23. Good friend
 - 24. Stationary portion of a generator
 - 25. Expression of disappointment
 - 26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
 - 27. Where birds fly
 - 28. Midway between north and northeast
 - 29. Chaotic states
 - 34. Comedic actress Gastereyer
 - 35. Kids' dining accessory
 - 36. Snakelike fish
 - 37. Midway between south and southeast
 - 39. Assign lifelike qualities to
 - 40. One who cites
 - 41. Midway between east and southeast
 - 42. North wind
 - 44. One or the other
 - 45. Cavalry sword
 - 46. Of the Hungarian language
 - 47. Life stories
 - 48. Flat tableland with steep edges
 - 51. Swiss river
 - 52. Plant that makes gum
 - 53. French cleric
 - 54. One point east of northeast
 - 58. Free from

Farm market program for seniors gears up for season

Beginning on Wednesday, April 6, the Southern Area Agency on Aging (SAAA), will take applications over the phone The Farm Market Program for Seniors, (also known as the Senior Farmer's Market

Nutrition Program). The SAAA will also continue to take applications throughout the following week(s), while the supply of coupons lasts.

Eligible seniors may receive \$45 worth of coupons that can be used to purchase locally-grown fresh fruits, vegetables and cut herbs at participating Farmer's Markets. The number of people who can participate is limited.

You may qualify to participate if: you are (or will become) 60 years of age or older on or before June 1, 2022, and you are a resident of Danville City, Martinsville City, Franklin County, Patrick County, Henry County or Pittsylvania County. (Note, residents of Henry and Pittsylvania counties must have access to and be willing to shop at participating Farmer's Market's outside of their county) and you do not live with and are not an immediate family member of the farmer who grows the produce, and you have a gross monthly household income that does not exceed the income requirements of the program. Note the income limit for this program changes from year to year. Individuals who have qualified for the program in the past may not qualify for this year's program.

Individuals and couples who wish to apply for coupons must contact Southern Area Agency on Aging at 276-632-6442 or toll-free at 1-800-468-4571. Applicants must be prepared to provide total gross household income information when applying over the phone or in person.

Southern Area Agency on Aging is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Local superintendents support call for a “seat at the table” in education policy discussions

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

The Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) is pushing back against the lack of discussion that occurred between state and school officials ahead of the creation of a 30-day report on critical race theory (CRT) and other divisive concepts in the classrooms.

The report, delivered to Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera by Superintendent for Public Instruction Jillian Balow, “rescinds certain policies, programs, and resources that promote discriminatory and divisive concepts as directed by Executive Order One.”

In a letter to Balow written “on behalf of 133 public school division superintendents,” Howard Kiser, the executive director of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS), said that those superintendents “believe gross assumptions have been made, without evidentiary support, in the development of the 30-day report.”

“VASS just wants a seat at the table to discuss some of these thoughts with the new (state schools) superintendent. That’s it,” said Martinsville City Public Schools Superintendent and VASS board president Dr. Zebedee Talley.

“We were not consulted and so we felt it was important to write that letter ... to express some of our thoughts,” Talley said of the letter that was written after the VASS executive board and its officers met with Balow after she issued the report. At that meeting, board members “talked about some important instructional issues.”

Balow reported that discriminatory and divisive concepts “have become widespread in the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and in Virginia school division,” and that the department “will need to proactively review policies, practices, and pedagogies around the state to uphold the Civil Rights Act and comport with Executive Order One.”

To that end, the report reflects that a number of resources related to educational equity have been removed or rescinded, specifically “all resources included on VDOE’s EdEquityVA website, including EdEquityVA resources and resource repository.” The report stated that “numerous resources within EdEquityVA employ the concept that current discrimination is needed to address past discrimination.”

VDOE’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Audit Tool, “a main resource for EdEquityVA,” was rescinded on Feb. 9, according to the report. “The guiding mission statement for the tool is, ‘Education Equity is achieved when we eliminate the predictability of student outcomes based on gender, zip code, ability, socioeconomic status or language spoken at home,’” the report stated.

The report stated that Balow’s office rescinded “all resources included on VDOE’s culturally responsive website” which, according to the site, is geared toward “increasing the cultural proficiency of Virginia’s educator workforce” under the premise that “culture strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process, making culturally responsive educators necessary for the equitable achievement of today’s increasingly diverse student population.”

Also rescinded was a VDOE web series providing guidance for educators on a terrorist responsive and inclusive commemoration of the 9/11 attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The report stated the video was “rescinded 9/2/22 in response to public criticism.” The video timestamp noted in the report marks a point in which the presenter said, “We are not going to reproduce a false assumption of Muslim responsibility for 9-11” and “we’re also not going to use this space to reproduce anti-Muslim rhetoric.” Other parts of the video discuss the impact of 9-11 commemorations on Muslim students who, according to the video, experience heightened anti-Muslim racism, threats, and bullying around those commemorations.

In his letter, Kiser asserted that “division superintendents and other stakeholder groups should have been consulted prior to the development of the 30-day report,” and that superintendents “disagree with your having rescinded much of the Ed Equity work done” by VDOE which was intended

“to provide support for the success of children in underserved communities and in select population groups.”

Further, he wrote that superintendents “disagree with your assumption that discriminatory and divisive concepts have become widespread in Virginia school divisions” without involving educators “in formulating that position or without having provided evidence to support that position.”

The letter included several suggestions moving forward, including establishing a working group “which includes superintendent representatives from throughout Virginia and superintendents of color, to discuss the process, objectives, and data” that will be reflected in an upcoming 90-day report and “sharing draft VDOE positions/documents with division superintendents, when possible, prior to making those documents public” to build trust.

The letter also calls for the elimination of the tip line set up to allow parents to report divisive content to the Governor’s office, saying that such a line “impedes positive relationships” between parents and educators.

The EdEquity materials rescinded by Balow “have been in place for years,” Talley said. “School divisions have spent years, and we’ve worked with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) for years spending time on this equity work to make sure all students get an opportunity to have a quality education. This was not done in silos. This was done throughout the state, all across the country in fact.”

Talley said that work on equity in schools even reached back beyond former Gov. Northam’s administration, though he added that “we’ve made good strides the past few years” when it became more of a focal point under Northam.

“Wouldn’t you think that the superintendents who are in charge of implementing policy would be involved in this conversation” about rescinding materials, he asked. “We want to be part of the conversation.”

Talley said that, while not all 133 of the state’s superintendents were directly consulted on the drafting of the letter, “came from the VASS board,” which is elected by and therefore represents those administrators.

Patrick County Schools Superintendent Jason Wood said that he did not receive a draft copy of the letter until the day before it was sent, but he noted “I’m not on that mailing list yet because I’m a new superintendent.”

Wood received the letter from Henry County Schools Superintendent Sandy Strayer at a meeting of the region’s superintendents because “during that meeting, I did not know what they were referring to” during discussions.

Wood said that, while he “cannot deny the truth in that letter - that we need more communication and collaboration in everything we do,” he supported and “really believed strongly about” some of the provisions of Executive Order 1, particularly since “in Patrick County we feel we do not teach divisive concepts.”

One such provision is “key language” calling for a review of curriculum, more transparency for parents, and things like that so they can know exactly what is being taught.”

Another key point from the order Wood supports is “increasing adequate cultural competency training for staff so we can take out our own beliefs and teach students to be thinking for themselves. That’s what we strive to do anyway. We differentiate our instruction to meet the needs of our learners and try to always strive to be equitable in all our decisions that we make because every student’s different and needs different things.”

Wood said that his division did not utilize the EdEquity materials provided by VDOE that have now been rescinded. Rather, “we provide that through a separate professional development program” and “a lot of internal trainings for our staff.”

He noted “our school division’s different than the next, and what we need is also different. We modeled our approach on what our students need in our specific locality.”

In addition to supporting more communication and collaboration between superintendents, educators, and state officials in discussions about instructional policy, Wood also urged greater communication between superintendents in

the creation of the letter itself.

He said since beginning in his current post, he has attended three meetings of the region’s superintendents, which are typically attended by a VASS representative. Wood said he was not aware of the letter being discussed or input solicited at any of those meetings. The meeting at which he was sent the letter by Strayer was the first time he heard about it.

Strayer said that VASS leadership “shared the letter with division superintendents just before sending it to the state superintendent,” which is not a change in the way information of that sort had been communicated previously.

She said that some of her staff contributed to the work that was reflected in the now-rescinded EdEquity materials and noted that, even with those resources gone, equity continues to be a priority for her division. “In Henry County we strive to ensure that all learners are presented the opportunity to achieve success through differentiated and tiered supports,” she said.

She said the division has spent decades focusing on differentiation and equity, dating back to 2001, when the division began a differentiation initiative. “Equity has been a huge part of that for us” in terms of expanding opportunities for students.

“I always say it’s about the opportunities and experience students have while they’re our students, and providing those meaningful educational experiences help prepare them to be successful learners and to impact our community and their world,” a philosophy which she said is at the heart of her school division’s strategic plan.

Strayer noted that school policy dictates political neutrality in subjects taught in the division. “We don’t teach one side or the other and are very neutral with our delivery.”

She supports the letter’s call for a strong line of communication between VDOE and superintendents. “As an educator and as a citizen, I think communication and collaboration are the two essential components of success,” she said. “We teach our children, and the workforce want our children to be efficient in communication and collaboration so as adults we need to model that.”

Before the pandemic, Strayer said superintendent memos were distributed to keep superintendents abreast of statewide issues. Those memos became Zoom meetings during the pandemic. Balow, she said, had a meeting with the superintendents via Zoom, which is the only such meeting Strayer is aware of. “I think VASS may have met with the state superintendent more, but this is an opportunity for us all to change what works for all of us” and to open up more opportunities for communication.

In an email, Kiser said that Balow called him “shortly after receiving the letter on March 10. She also spoke briefly about the letter with her superintendent advisory council on March 11,” a meeting he said he attended. “I also spoke with Secretary Guidera on March 14. The governor’s office reached out to me on March 14 seeking clarification on the membership referenced in the letter.”

Kiser said that he provided this statement in response to that inquiry:

“While we did not poll all 133 superintendents who are part of our organization, we believe the letter represents the views of our membership as openness, transparency, and partnership are long-standing beliefs of our organization and key to ensuring every child in Virginia receives a great education.”

He said both Guidera and Balow “have expressed a willingness to collaborate,” but as of Monday he had “not received a plan as to how the communication with education stakeholders will proceed.”

Kiser added that “Virginia superintendents have conversations in their regional meetings monthly on issues related to their work and issues of importance to the new state administration. The letter was written on behalf of the VASS membership, even though 133 division superintendents were not polled.”

However, he said, “I have received only positive feedback from the VASS membership and from many other educator stakeholders outside of VASS.”

Anchor celebrates 50th year of service

The Anchor Commission is celebrating our 50th anniversary this year.

The agency that serves youngsters in Henry and Patrick counties and the City of Martinsville, was started by a committee of concerned citizens headed by Jane Bassett Spilman in April 1972. The first program of the newly formed organization was the Boys Group Home, which is still in operation today.

Over the years, programs at Anchor have included the Group Home for Girls (started in 1973), Foster Group Homes, Wilderness programs, Outreach Detention, Family Preservation, and the Youth Empowering Services (Y.E.S.) educational programs.

Currently, Anchor operates multiple youth centered programs. The Anchor Group Home and Shelter Care for boys (Shelter Care opened in 2020), Seven Challenges and Seven Challenges – Brief (Brief Challenges) which are both Evidence-Based substance use disorder programs specifically for adolescents (male and female), Aggression Replacement Training (A.R.T.) – anger management training (male and female), Outreach Detention and GPS monitoring (male and female), the Transitional Day Program (T.D.P.) (male

and female) and Lee Ford Camp in Ridgeway which is open and widely used by the community.

“Anchor is planning celebration events this year and we would love to hear from any past residents or clients of Anchor programs who would like to share their experience at Anchor,” said Ricky Walker, executive director of the organization. “We would also like to hear from any past board members or employees who would like to share their experience.”

Email info@anchor-services.org or call (276) 634-2910.

The agency also expressed appreciation to a recent donor, Natalie Gongloff, for “her generous donation ... and we challenge the community to join her in financial support of Anchor as we celebrate our 50th anniversary year,” the commission board said in a release.



Last year, Natalie Gongloff presented Ricky Walker, executive director of the Anchor Commission, with a \$5,000 donation to fulfill a goal she set for herself to give \$5,000 to a nonprofit in the memory of her infant son, Ty Allen Gongloff.

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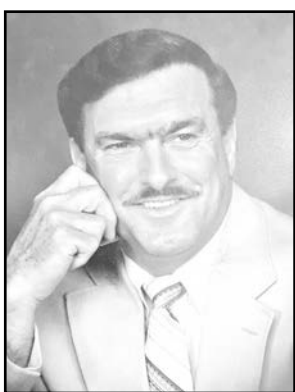
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OBITUARIES

Ronald Jay McCambridge

Ronald Jay McCambridge, 83, of Collinsville, VA passed away Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at his home. He was born November 18, 1938, in Hiwassee, VA to the late Luther Douglas McCambridge and Fannie Bell Quesenberry McCambridge. He was also preceded in death by his identical twin, Donald McCambridge; brothers, Marvin McCambridge, Everett McCambridge, and LeRoy McCambridge; and sisters, Brenda Looney and Irene Mabry. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Frances Franklin McCambridge; sons, Jeff McCambridge (Kathy) and Myron McCambridge (Niki); grandchildren, Kelcey Rigney (Tyler),



Sarah McCambridge, Nick McCambridge, and Collin McCambridge; and sister, Kay Phillips.

Mr. McCambridge worked for VA Department of Highways in Franklin County as inspector on the four-lane road from Henry County to Roanoke. He retired from DuPont when the plant closed and was a sergeant in the Army.

The funeral was on March 19, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville Chapel, with Rev. Raymond Moorefield officiating. Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the McCambridge family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

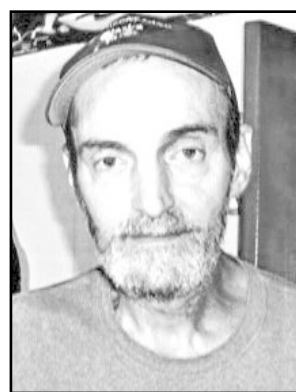
Daniel "Dan" Wayne Pritt

Daniel "Dan" Wayne Pritt, 64, of Ridgeway, Va. passed away on March 15, 2022.

He was born May 1, 1957, in Philadelphia, Pa. to the Leland Pritt and Naomi Haddix Pritt.

In addition to his parents, he was also preceded in death by three brothers, Charles, Ronald, and Timothy Pritt.

He is survived by one brother, Jim Pritt (Phyllis) of New Salem, PA and several nieces and nephews. Dan



was the world's best caregiver for the last 23 years. He is also survived by his "best buddy" Richard C. Cox, of Ridgeway, Va.

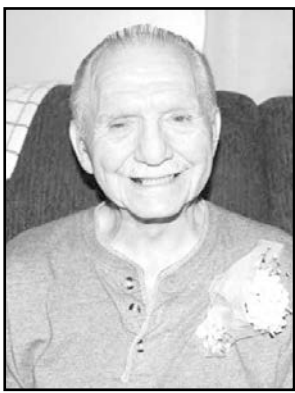
A memorial service was held on March 19, 2022, at McKee-Stone Funeral Home.

Arrangements are by McKee-Stone Funeral Home-Martinsville, VA.

To express condolences online, visit www.collin-smckee-stone.com.

George Jackson "Jack" Martin

George Jackson "Jack" Martin, 78, of Collinsville, VA passed away Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital. He was born April 15, 1943, in Bassett, VA to the late James Albert Martin and Vergie Hale Martin. He was also preceded in death by his brothers, Paul, Loyd, Maynard, and Mickey Martin.



Lodge, Martinsville, as well as serving as President of the Shriners Club locally. Jack was President of the Martinsville-Henry County Insurance Organization, Martinsville-Henry County Life Underwriters Association, and was chosen as "Man of the Year." Jack additionally became an LUTC1 and LUTC2, as well as LUTCF.

He is survived by his children, Tammy Martin, Todd Martin (Janet), Brian Martin, Robert Alexander (Mae), and Pokey; brother, Bill Martin; five grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, and caregiver, Janet Martin. A memorial service was held on Thursday, March 24, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville Chapel. Pastor Michael Harrison officiated. Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Martin family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

Jack graduated from Martinsville High School in 1962 where he excelled in basketball and football. He attended Patrick Henry Community College (UVA Extension) in 1963. His career began at the A & P Supermarket and resumed at DuPont for seven years. After a short stint in self-employment, Jack began a successful career in the insurance business, where he worked until retirement.

Jack belonged to Eden, NC Moose Club, Elks Club of Martinsville, and was a 32nd degree Mason in #152 Masonic

Greta Doyle Dalton

Greta Doyle Dalton, age 87, of the Horsepasture community, passed away on Monday, March 21 at Brighton Gardens Assisted Living Facility in Winston Salem, N.C. She is survived by her only son, Chris Dalton (Suzette), and granddaughters, Sydney Dalton & Lyndsey D. Evans (Cory). She was predeceased by her loving husband, Bobby Dalton in 2015, and by her parents, Howard & Oberia Doyle. Greta served the Lord faithfully for more than 50 years by playing the organ at Horsepasture Christian Church each week. She loved her church and her church family. She also served the church for a number of years by serving as part time church secretary.



ball games, pee-wee cheerleading, dance recitals and finally volleyball matches. Her obsession with cats also was well known. For years, she spoiled each cat she had, and was deeply saddened when they passed. Greta will be greatly missed. She was a wonderful wife, mother, and loving grandmother. We rejoice in knowing she is in the Arms of Jesus and is now reunited with her beloved Bobby.

Visitation will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Friday, March 25, 2022, at Horsepasture Christian Church. The funeral will be held at 1 p.m. on Friday, March 25, 2022, at Horsepasture Christian Church, with Pastor Kyle Thompson officiating. Burial will be at Horsepasture Christian Church Cemetery.

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the

Lord. 2 Cor 5:3

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Dalton family. Online condolences may be made at www.norrisfuneral.com.

Greta graduated from Spencer Penn High School in 1952, along with her husband Bobby. They had met in grade school and were married in 1956. They went through life hand in hand until his death in 2015. Anyone that knew Greta, knew her great love for her family especially her two granddaughters. She loved making them feel special and spent many hours playing dress up or attending soft-

John Kenneth Collins Sr.

John Kenneth Collins Sr., 66, of Martinsville, VA, passed away on Thursday, March 17, 2022. He was born in Richmond, VA on October 20, 1955, to Herbert Payne Collins, Sr. and Catherine Ann Collins.

John is survived by his wife, Marcia Collins of Martinsville, VA; son, John Collins (Katie), granddaughter, Emily Jane Collins, and grandson, James Hampton Collins of Purcellville, VA; daughter, Nicole Collins of Raleigh, NC; brother, Herb Collins, Jr. (Ruth Anne) of Martinsville, VA; brother, David Collins (Rosa) of Martinsville, VA; and sister, Mary Paige McElroy (Paul) of Huntsville, AL.

Because he had a larger-than-life personality and gave the best bear hugs, "Big John" will also be sorely missed by a host of cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends.

John was preceded in death by his father in 2007 and his first wife, Laura Tramel Collins, in 2011.

After graduating from Martinsville High School and then Virginia Tech, John, along with his brothers, was co-owner of Fibre Container Company, Inc. His infectious smile, golf swing and innate ability to connect with others made him a solid Vice President of Sales for more than 30 years. In fact, he and his brothers, friends and customers played in numerous golf tournaments together, and won their fair share.

Outside of work, John was a longtime member of First Baptist Church of Martinsville where he sang in the choir, taught Sunday School, and assisted as a Deacon. He served numerous terms as Deacon Chair, in addition to chairing the Early Learning Center, Business and Finance, and Personnel Committees.

John was known for his baritone voice that joyfully filled whatever room he entered. He was also known for being one of the first to join the dance floor when the music started. He used these skills to not only charm family and friends but to support the community through the Smith River Singers and the Piedmont Arts' Dancing for the Arts.

Still, his love of music, the community and the Hokies couldn't compare to his love for his friends and family who gathered at the First Baptist Church for a memorial service on Thursday, March 24, 2022.

Memorials may be made to Martinsville and Henry County Habitat for Humanity, 932 Starling Ave, Martinsville, VA 24112, SPCA of Martinsville-Henry County, 132 Joseph Martin Hwy, Martinsville, VA 24112, or Grace Network of Martinsville-Henry County, P.O. Box 3902, Martinsville, VA 24112.

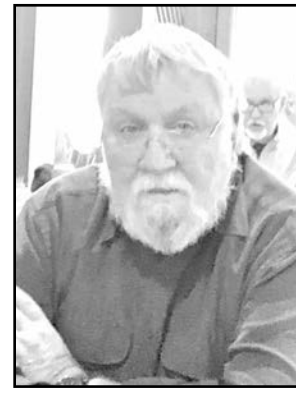
Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

James Michael Davis

James Michael Davis, 73, of Martinsville, VA, passed away on Friday, March 18, 2022. He was born on January 11, 1949, to the late Campbell Leonard Davis and Mary Mildred Martin Grindstaff. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brothers, Kenneth Davis, and Larry Davis.

Mr. Davis worked as a teacher at Carver and Magna Vista High Schools for 35 years. He was a loving husband, devoted father, and an avid bowler.

He is survived by his wife, Carolyn Bell Davis; son, Reverend Andrew Davis (Gretchen Davis) of Escondido, CA;



sister, Dana Nahstoll of Richmond, VA; brother, George Davis of Martinsville, VA; and grandchildren, Hunter Davis, and Anne Davis.

A graveside service was held on March 22, 2022, at Roselawn Burial Park, with Rev. Andrew Davis officiating. The Martinsville/Henry County Hall of Fame Bowlers served as

pallbearers. Memorial donations may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

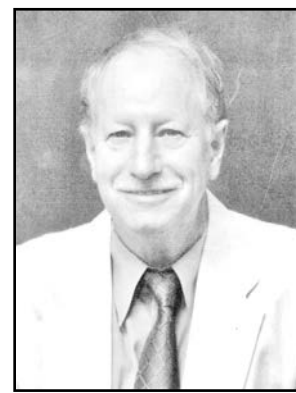
Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Davis family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

Donnie Gene Watkins

Donnie Gene Watkins, 72, of Martinsville, VA passed away Monday, March 21, 2022, at his home. He was born August 5, 1949, to the late Clyde Benjamin Watkins and Annie Mae Purdy Watkins. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his siblings, Robert Jackson Watkins, Maynard Davis Watkins, Evaline Watkins Brannen, George William Watkins, Eunice Burnette, Gladys Sheffield, Deborah Lorene Watkins Price, and Pauline Watkins Jones.

Mr. Watkins attended Stanleytown's Amazing Grace Baptist Church and was a member of White's Chapel. He served in the Army and was owner/operator of Watkins Construction.

He is survived by his siblings,



Clyde Douglas Watkins (Mildred), Jeanette Watkins Gill, Glen Michael Watkins (Glenda), and Sheryl Yvonne Wells (Charles); and numerous nieces and nephews.

A funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 26, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville Chapel, with Pastor Dr.

Greg Hodges and Pastor Jim Hodges officiating. Visitation will be from 5 to 7 p.m. on Friday, March 25, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services and other times at the home. Burial will be at White's Chapel in Ridgeway, VA.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Watkins family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

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FERRUM COLLEGE
Farm Museum Interpreter (Seasonal)

Ferrum College is seeking outgoing Museum Interpreter's to work with visitors at the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum's (BRIM) living history farm museum. The primary duties of the interpretive staff are to greet visitors; to guide them through the museum facilities; to talk about various aspects of local history and culture; to demonstrate life in the 1800's by carrying out household, farm, and garden tasks; and to assist visitors in hands-on educational activities of the period. BRIM interpreters usually wear period costumes during farm tours and some other museum events. The BRIM provides costumes and training. The Farm Museum Interpreter position is seasonal (primarily April through October). The work schedule varies, and some weekend work is required. A qualified candidate must be able to communicate effectively with visitors of all ages and must have the ability to learn and carry out 1800-period lifestyle tasks such as open-hearth cooking, handcrafts, heirloom

HELP WANTED

gardening, and heritage breed farm animal feeding. Interested candidates should submit an application or resume to Human Resources, Ferrum College, P.O. Box 1000, Ferrum, VA 24088 or e-mail to resumes@ferrum.edu. Background check required. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

PATRICK & HENRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Patrick & Henry Community College in Martinsville, VA has the following job openings: Physical Therapist Assistant Faculty/Program Director, Building and Grounds Technician, Workforce Grants Specialist, Workforce Grants Advisor, Science Lab Assistant, MHC After 3 Program Leader, MHC After 3 After School Instructor, and Adjunct Faculty in Communication Studies (Speech)- Patrick County and Main Campus Sites, English, Mechatronics, NCCER Plumbing, Nursing, and Welding. For details and application information please visit <http://patrickhenry.edu/>, scroll to the bottom of the page, and click on Employment Opportunities. Patrick & Henry Community College is an Equal Opportu-

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Competitive exhibit packet available for fair entries

The competitive exhibit packet is released for the Henry County Fair. The Competitive Exhibit Packet has been released for the various contests that will be held at the 2nd annual Henry County Fair, presented by VisitMartinsville.

The competition will offer a variety of categories, each offers a chance to win fair ribbons and prizes. Categories

include fresh fruits and vegetables, canned fruits, canned vegetables and meats, pickles and relishes, bread, candy, pies, flowers and plants, quilts, crocheting, knitting and textiles.

The Competitive Exhibit Contests are sponsored by Bryant Radio in Collinsville.

"These contests are a staple feature of many county fairs across the country,

and will give people in our region the opportunity to showcase their agricultural, homemaking and crafts skills", said Roger Adams director of Parks and Recreation for Henry County and also the director of the Henry County Fair.

The packet with the rules, categories and registration form can be download at www.HenryCountyVaFair.com/special-events, or picked up at the Henry

County Parks and Recreation Office.

The Henry County Fair will be held September 21 - 24 on the grounds at Martinsville Speedway, and will lead into the ValleyStar Credit Union 300 race at Martinsville Speedway on September 24. For more information, contact the Henry County Parks and Recreation Office at (276) 634- 4640 or visit www.henrycountyvafair.com.

City students win geography contest

Students in Beverly Woody's class at Martinsville Middle School participated in the Geography Bee Finals.

To compete in the final round today, students had to pass two eliminations.

The first required students to label all the continents and oceans on a blank map.

In the second, students were required to name all

the state capitals and label all the states on a blank map and get at least 80 percent correct.

Winners of the Geography Bee are:

- 1st- Abigail Campbell, \$25 prize,
- 2nd- Leonardo Hernandez-Mata, \$15 prize,
- 3rd- Lilly Rorrer, \$10 prize.



Carson Cole, Josiah Lucas, Lacio Gray, Leonardo Hernandez-Mata, Abigail Campbell, Lilly Rorrer, Keira Tatum, Zaina Talley, Angeliyah Eccles, Martinsville Middle School teacher Beverly Woody.

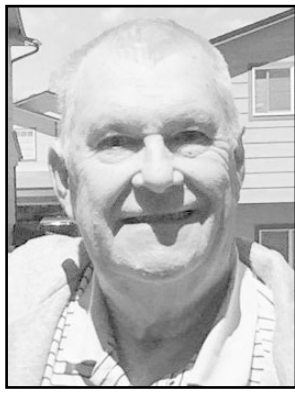
OBITUARIES

Walter Thomas Pollard, Jr.

Walter Thomas Pollard, Jr., 74, of Martinsville, VA passed away on Monday, March 14, 2022. He was born on May 2, 1947, to the late Walter Thomas Pollard, Sr., and Inez King Pollard.

After attending Virginia Tech, Walt worked as a chief clerk at Norfolk Southern Railroad for more than forty-two years. He continued to be a collector and admirer for all things railroad throughout his life. He loved watching sports, history, collecting coins, golf, and a good scotch. Of all his loves and interests, Walt loved his wife, family, and baby dogs the best.

He is survived by his wife, Donna Huff Pollard; son, Walter Thomas Pollard, III



(Donna Stanley); daughter, Terry Morris (Chris); three sisters, Sandy Dyer (Joey), Ruby Thomas, and Karen McClintock (Clay); and grandson, Jarod Morris (Moriah). Also surviving are lots of nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held March 19, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville Chapel.

Memorials may be made to Granberry United Methodist Church, 200 Granberry Road, Martinsville, VA 24112 or to the SPCA of Martinsville-Henry County, 132 Joseph Martin Hwy, Martinsville, VA 24112.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Pollard family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

Isaac Sean Rakes

Isaac Sean Rakes, 18 of Stuart, Virginia, passed away March 20, 2022. He was born on November 8, 2003 to Terry Stump and Ashley Rakes. Isaac was a Senior at Patrick County High School. He was a member of Pride of Patrick County Honor Band, and he attended Five Forks Wesleyan Church. Isaac had enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps through the delayed entry program.

He was preceded in death by his grandparents, Virginia and Larry Stump.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by step-mother, Dewonna Stump; a sister, Jada Stump; brother, Marshall



Adams; grandparents, Steve Rakes and Rhonda Lemons Rakes; Great grandparents, Robbie Lemons and Richard Lemons.

His funeral will be held Monday March 28, 2022, at 2 p.m. in the chapel of Wright Funeral Service, with Pastor Mike Fain officiating. Burial will be in the Lemons family cemetery. The family will

receive friends from noon until time of service.

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

DEATH NOTICES

Nora Gaye Hill

Nora Gaye Hill, 58, of Martinsville, Virginia passed away on Wednesday, March 23, 2022.

Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

Thomas H. Tucker

Thomas H. Tucker, 75, of Bassett, Virginia passed away Wednesday, March 23, 2022, at his residence.

Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

FROM THE FAMILY OF SHELDON DREW CAPPS

February 3, 1993-February 22, 2022

With heartbroken hearts we are so thankful for all the support, flowers, cards, Facebook and other media sentiments we have received during this staggering time in our lives. Only God knows why he was taken from us so soon. We would like to thank Dr. Michael Hatfield for officiating with his words of comfort. Also, thanks to each pallbearer that took time off to help us. A very special thank you goes out to the Henry Co Sheriff's Office, Henry Co Public Safety, Norris Funeral Services and Roselawn Memorial Gardens for making this journey a little less stressful.



Submit your community news and photos to newsreporter@theenterprise.net

Aladdin, Jr. from page 1

rewarding and challenging, according to some of the older cast members.

Hines said the drama club has been incorporating younger students since 2018, when middle school students participated in a production of “Disney: Musical Revue.”

Carter said he has enjoyed the opportunity to meet and work with those outside of his age range and grade level, particularly because “you might be working with them again.”

Simpson added that, over the course of a number of productions, some of the older cast members have watched some of the younger ones grow up, as Simpson himself did with Rorrer. “I saw him go from a little kid to the guy he is now,” he said.

Freshman Jyshir Plunkett, who plays the title role of Aladdin, said he has enjoyed watching some of the younger cast members progress and grow from show to show.

The younger cast members aren’t the only ones expanding their craft over the course of rehearsals. The older actors have been able to work more deeply with understanding the characters they were portraying onstage.

“It’s not just memorizing,” Rorrer said, “there’s a certain level of creativity that goes into it. We get to show our more artistic side in some scenes, which is fun to do but it’s also a big challenge.”

The actors said that Hines sat down with each of them to help them think creatively to learn more about their characters.

“Who do you think Jasmine is,” Calfee said Hines asked her in a one-on-one session. From there, Calfee explained how she initially perceived her character from only having seen the film, and how that perception differed after reading the script.

“Then she’ll reflect, and ask a few questions like, ‘how do you think this will impact your performance?’” Calfee said.

Carter said he benefitted from doing character work with Hines as well. “When you watch the movie, you see Genie as a very powerful being. He’s able to do a lot of things. But once you slip into the role, read the script and try to truly understand the character, you realize that Genie is more human than you think. He does have his emotional side and that shows in the show. I really like that.”

Simpson said delving deeper into his character helped him realize “Jafar was a lot more evil than I initially thought he was. I knew he was evil, but playing him, you realize you have to be a truly evil person,” which he said is a far stretch from his own personality.

Taking on the title role of Aladdin was a stretch for Plunkett as well. “Aladdin Jr.” is the 14-year-old’s second production. He said he was struck by his character’s playfulness, particularly in serious situations, something the young actor found challenging in his portrayal. “Usually, I’m serious in serious situations, so it was kind of weird adjusting to it, and I’m still adjusting to Aladdin,” he said. “He’s a very playful person. He’s there to have a good time.”

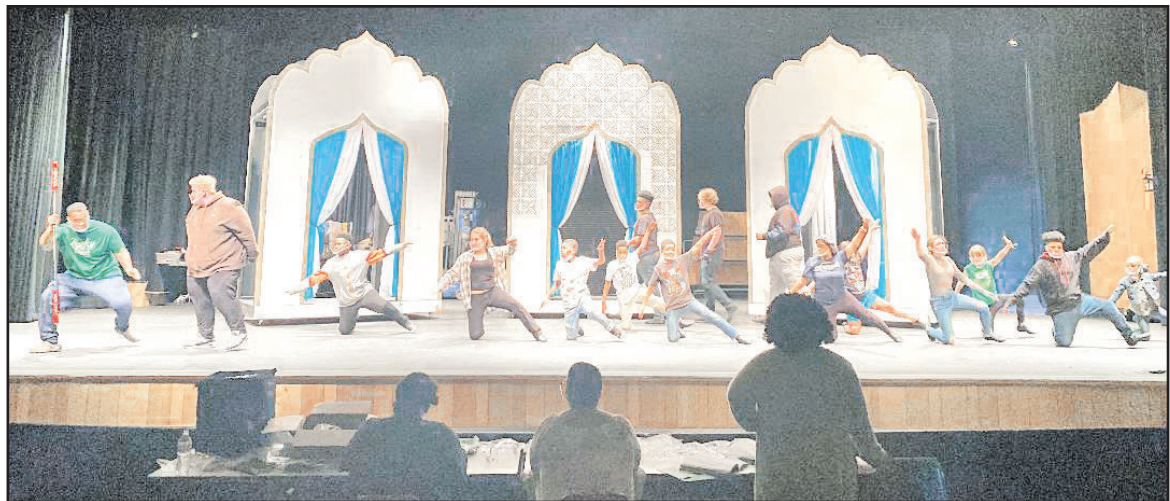
Rorrer, who at 15, has already performed in 17 productions, including several films, noted that there is no cinematic counterpart to his character, Omar. “I based it off of Abu, but as you keep reading through the lines, you realized that rather than (Omar) being a playful trickster,” as Abu was in the film, “he’s more of a sweet, caring friend.”

All the cast agreed that the production staff did much more than help them learn lines, work on dance steps, and find their characters.

“We have phenomenal directors, choreographer, all of the staff,” Simpson said. “They do so much for us. They’ll make sure we have everything. If we do something wrong, they’ll work with us and talk with us.”

“They put so much time and effort into the show,” Calfee added. “If you can’t afford something, they will buy it for you. They have your back. And if it’s something personal that you want to talk to them about, they’re always there.”

Staff are not the only ones putting time and effort into the production. Calfee said managing her time between coursework and extracurricular activities was a challenge she had to overcome.



Above, Production staff look on as the cast rehearses a song from the show. Cast members said staff members were “phenomenal” in terms of the time, effort, and passion they contributed to the production and working with students. Left, The cast of “Disney’s Aladdin, Jr.” (seen here rehearsing the song “Prince Ali”) includes Martinsville City School students of all age-levels.

“I take eight classes right now, including college classes,” she said. “Trying to juggle memorizing my lines, memorizing dance moves, everything for the play and other extracurricular activities” with classwork was difficult. Luckily, she said, deadlines set by Hines over the course of the production helped keep the cast, Calfee included, on track.

Memorization was also a challenge for Plunkett, as was learning about his character, but as he began to find Aladdin, he found “how fun it is to act and be a character, changing how your life actually is into somebody else.”

Simpson said he had difficulty staying in character after the physical exertions of singing and dancing, and Carter said he struggled with keeping his breath steady during the high-energy musical numbers — a challenge he seems to have overcome if his performance in the show’s opener, “Arabian Nights,” during last Thursday’s rehearsal was any indication.

The energy and talent the whole cast brought to the stage during the run-through of the iconic song was electric. The vast, empty auditorium was filled with voices singing the tale of “a faraway place where the caravan camels roam,” painting a picture with music, song, and dance of the fantastical world the characters will inhabit during the show.

All the work, the rehearsals, the bonds, the memorization and character-finding, everything the cast has experienced since rehearsals began in January will culminate in three performances in the Martinsville High School auditorium at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, April 1-2, and a 3 p.m. matinee on Sunday, April 3. Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door or online at mcpfinearts.org.

Each actor hopes that the audience will walk away from the theater feeling the time and effort put in to bringing “Aladdin, Jr.” to life.

“I want them to feel everything,” said Plunkett. “I want them to feel our performance” and to leave feeling the same joy and magic the movie elicits.

“I want the audience to relate back to the characters and know they are more than a character,” Calfee said. “I want them to see the bond me and Jyshir have as Aladdin and Jasmine. I want them to leave with a good impression of our theater and our club and what it stands for.”

“I want the audience to feel happy,” Carter said. “Joy is a beautiful thing. To watch a show and see all the magic that can really happen on a stage, it gives you joy, it gives you happiness. At the end of the night, when they (the audience) walk out of the doors, I just want them to feel happy. I want them to have a smile on their face.”

The full cast of the MCPS Drama Club’s “Disney’s Aladdin, Jr.” includes: Aladdin (Jyshir Plunkett), Genie (Logan Carter), Jasmine (Hayden Calfee), Jafar (Eli Simpson), Iago (Samson Ray), Sultan (Nicholas DeJesus), Babkak (Alex Butler), Omar (Max Rorrer), Kassim (Caesar Draper), Isir (Zoey Hannans), Manal (Zion Perkins), Rajah (Jordan Foster), Prince Abdullah/Razoul (Nigel Cook).

Members of the ensemble are Keandrius Beal, Bridgette Brent, Tahli Draper, Jaidence Hairston, Honesty Martin, Cameron Moore, KaVaughn Muse, Jeremiah Porter, Josiah Porter, Aurora Rankin, Lilly Rorrer, Veronica Smith, Jovonta Spencer, and Arianna Ybarra.

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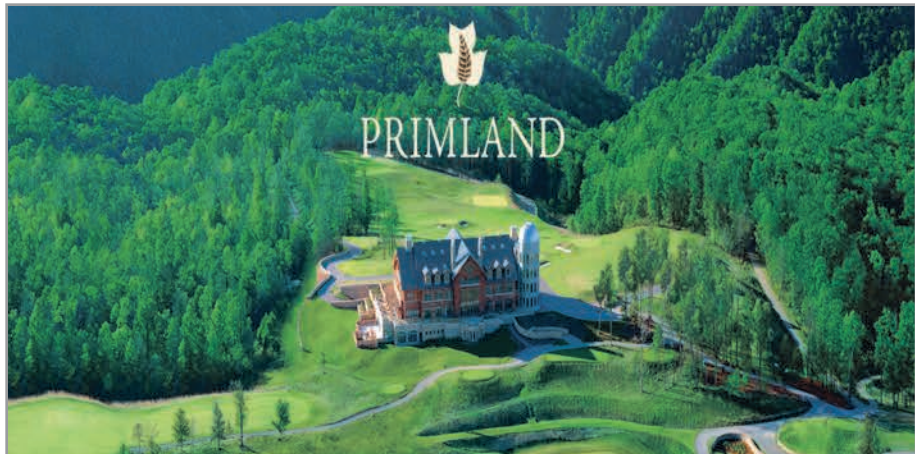
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