

HENRY COUNTY ENTERPRISE

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(USPS-6)

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Community health center continues to adapt to meet growing needs

By Jeff Reid

Initially funded through a 5-year, \$4.5 million grant from the Harvest Foundation, the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness (now called Connect Health + Wellness) has gone through a metamorphosis since its inception in April of 2005.

“Our mission is to increase access. Reduce risks. Together, we improve the overall health of our community,” said Brittany Anthony, marketing director of Connect Health + Wellness. “As such, we will continue to assess community health needs and work to develop solutions that drive our mission each day.”

In November 2021, the nonprofit



The Connect Health + Wellness mobile clinic offers primary and dental care to the community. (Contributed photos)

group took over operations of the formerly known as the Piedmont MHC Community Dental Clinic, Virginia Dental Health Foundation

at 23 Fayette Street in Martinsville.

“We are committed to providing quality and affordable dental health services to medically underserved children and adults in Martinsville, Henry County, and surrounding areas,” Anthony said. “The dental clinic primarily focuses on serving patients who are self-pay (don’t have insurance) and those who have Medicaid, as availability of dental services for these patients is scarce.”

The dental clinic is currently accepting new patients and operates on a sliding fee discount program, which is based on household income.

(See Community Health p. 2)

M-HC 250 Committee currently not working with lodge

By Debbie Hall

The chairman for the Martinsville and Henry County Virginia 250 Committee said the local committee “does not have any plans to include the Fieldcrest Lodge in their events” as they relate to the Virginia 250 celebrations.

In a story last week, titled “Reopening of Fieldcrest Lodge to coincide with 250 celebrations,” those involved in reopening the lodge stated that they were working with both the state and local efforts to be part of the 250 Semiquincentennial celebrations.

Jarred Marlowe, who was appointed by Henry County and the City of Martinsville to serve as the committee chairman, said “at the current moment, we do not have any plans for or with them. I wish the Fieldcrest Lodge and those associated with it the best in their endeavors.”

The current lack of involvement is not intended to imply “that over the course of the committee’s longevity that they won’t ever be involved, because this committee will exist through 2031,” said Marlowe.

Marlowe said the committee “is devoted to the preservation, education, and commemoration of America’s 250th anniversary, and how Martinsville and Henry

(See M-HC 250 p. 2)

Agreement inked on former Schock building

By Tyler Shively

The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) on Wednesday finalized a real estate transaction and approved a settlement agreement to buy back the shell building previously sold to Schock GmbH after the German company suspended plans to expand its operations into the U.S.

The IDA announced it would buy the building back for the original selling price, plus \$750,000 in improvements made by Schock Manufacturing last month.

Also last month, the Henry County Board of Supervisors appropriated the funds needed for the transaction, and directed the IDA to facilitate the purchase of land, building and improvements.

Henry County Administrator Dale Wagoner on Wednesday introduced a related settlement agreement and real estate purchase.

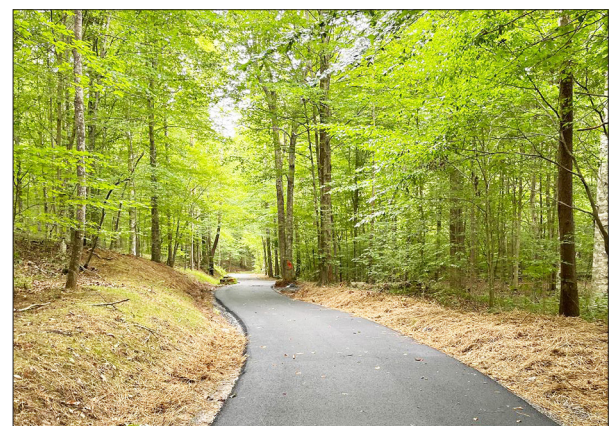
He explained that “Schock Manufacturing Inc. announced that it was suspending its plans to manufacture sinks in the United States and would not be locating to the Shell Building on Lot 8 at the Patriot Center in the Industrial Park.”

Deducted from the IDA’s \$1 million price tag is \$500,000 that will be returned to the Harvest

(See Agreement p. 5)



The Dick and Willie Passage Trail’s logo.



A portion of the Dick and Willie. (Courtesy of Henry County Parks and Recreation)

Construction of trail section to begin in March

By Jeff Reid

With the first segment of the Dick and Willie Passage Trail’s Phase-6A now open, construction of the second phase is ready to get underway in March, according to Roger Adams, director of Henry County Parks and Recreation.

The recently completed section, Phase 1, is an extension of the original 4.5-mile section that runs from Virginia Avenue trailhead to Mulberry Creek. Work on the 1.75-mile addition that runs along Mulberry Creek towards Spruce

Street was completed early last month.

“I think this is the most beautiful section of the trail,” Adams wrote on the county’s social media. “They are all pretty, but this is the most gorgeous section being along Mulberry Creek the whole way and there is a little waterfall and lots of wildlife down there. It’s really pretty.”

The response to the new section has been great, Adams said, and added that many people agree with his estimation that it’s one of the most beautiful.

(See Construction p. 5)

Annual audit gets high marks as council considers proposed amendments

By Tyler Shively

Martinsville City Council discussed matters involving the upcoming budget and proposed amendments to the city’s Nuisance Ordinance at a meeting last week.

Michael Upton, CPA with Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates, and based in Charlottesville, gave a presentation on the annual comprehensive financial report for fiscal 2023.

Upton said the city received “a clean opinion” on the annual audit. “That is the best opinion that we can offer, and essentially what that means is that the financial statements as presented are fairly stated in all material respects in accordance with generally accepted account-

ing principles.”

Additionally, “we assess the internal control environment for the purpose of developing our audit procedures and in so doing, if we come across anything that is a deficiency in internal controls we deem to be significant, or if it’s a material weakness in our minds, then we’re required to iterate and relay that information,” Upton said. “I’m pleased to report that there were no deficiencies in the control environment that we deemed to be significant deficiencies or material weaknesses.”

After a review of the four programs to fulfill the federal single audit requirement, Upton

(See Annual Audit p. 3)

Seasons in the park



Few places are better for a walk on a nice winter’s day than Jack Dalton Park, which includes a playground for youngsters. (By Pat Delaney)

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Community Health

(cont. from page 1)



Connect Health + Wellness clinic at 4944 Greensboro Rd. in Ridgeway.

In 2022, a mobile health clinic was added to help expand medical and dental services in the community. Most recently, the nonprofit group partnered with Patrick County to expand the mobile clinic program into Stuart/Patrick County to offer medical services that one would typically find in a doctor's office. Currently, the mobile clinic also visits the Caring Hearts Free Clinic every month to provide dental care services to patients of the Caring Hearts Free Clinic.

The mobile clinic will be visiting the Walmart in Stuart offering primary/medical care services again on Wednesday, February 29th from 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Anthony said nurse practitioner Joanna Carter and supporting clinical staff will be on board to welcome sick and well patients. Walk-ins, age 12 and older. Pre-registration is not necessary.

In addition to mobile clinic days for medical and dental care visits in Martinsville, Henry, and Patrick counties, the mobile clinic is used at health fairs, churches, festivals, and community events throughout the year to administer free health screenings and/or COVID vaccines and to help those who do not have a medical provider get connected with one.

In 2023, the nonprofit organization rebranded itself. According to Anthony, the agency's board of directors and leadership staff recognized that the addition of new services and clinics had helped the Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness grow and develop into a more dynamic and innovative organization, and concluded the branding and names of yesteryear no longer fit the organization. She said it was determined that a new name and a complete rebrand would help improve and simplify the process of patient access for the organization's clinics.

After much research was conducted, and time and effort by the board members and leadership staff, the Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness was rebranded as Connect Health + Wellness (plus sign pronounced "and").

Connect Health + Wellness now has 55 full-time and 6 part-time paid employees that are employed by the two health clinics, dental clinic, and administration offices. In addition, the dental clinic also partners with Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) School of Dentistry. This partnership provides 4 to 5 different students in the field of dentistry and dental hygiene to come to the clinic and shadow the dental staff weekly to gain experience. The health clinics also



Dr. Eric Harrison and dental assistant Alisha Goins finish up with a dental patient.

offer the opportunity for students in the healthcare field who are furthering their education and in need of experience to gain clinical hours.

Connect Health + Wellness provides a host of services including medical care (annual physical exams, routine office visits for illness, children's health services, vaccines/immunizations, annual physicals, sports physicals, lab services, and more). Dental care services include diagnostic and preventive services, fillings, root canals, extractions, etc.

Behavioral health, chronic disease management, help with medicine, medically necessary eye exams, mammography assistance, health/wellness education, and insurance assistance (including Medicaid) also are available.

Last year, Anthony said the nonprofit organization provided care to approximately 7,000 individual patients, which yielded approximately 25,000 clinic visits. She added that general medical and dental visits account for most of the visits, but there has been an uptick in the demand for mental health visits.

As in most rural communities, healthcare is a major issue, and the nonprofit hopes to address those concerns.

"Martinsville and Henry and Patrick counties are underserved, rural communities that have limited access to healthcare resources and many of our patients would not be able to access primary healthcare or other healthcare-related services if it weren't for community health centers, like ours, that offer affordable access to these services," Anthony said.

"Our first clinic was in Bassett (established in 2007), and it was later determined that individuals on the southern end of the county had difficulties getting to the clinic in Bassett due to lack of transportation," she said. "In 2017, we opened a second health center site in Ridgeway to help increase access for those residents.

"This is a good example of how we operate as a community-based organization. Our health centers and all of the services we offer positively impact our patients and their families, and our community. Without the services that can be accessed under one roof at our health centers, many of these patients would not be able to access high-quality, affordable care and medications that they need to maintain optimal over-



Dr. Kate Ryan welcomes new pediatric patients to Connect Health + Wellness in Bassett.

all health and well-being," Anthony added.

According to Anthony, the aging healthcare workforce in Virginia and the need to backfill providers who are retiring in the coming years is concerning. She said access to transportation will allow patients and residents the ability to obtain healthcare, medications, and advanced treatment (also a concern), along with the lack of mental health providers in the community and surrounding areas.

The goal of the nonprofit organization is to continue moving the needle in these communities to ensure no one goes without access to a doctor so that they can increase their quality of life, as well as decrease the number of people living with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and high blood pressure, for example, Anthony said, adding that all these chronic conditions can lead to living shorter lives if not managed properly.

Improvement begins with having a medical care provider, Anthony said, and new patients of all ages are welcome at Connect Health + Wellness.

"Those who live or work in the city of Martinsville, Henry, and Patrick counties, and surrounding areas are eligible for the services we offer," Anthony said. "We welcome everyone regardless of insurance status or ability to pay patients who are insured, including Medicare and Medicaid; uninsured (self-pay) and underinsured. Some of our assistance programs and services are based on eligibility guideline requirements, such as having a doctor, insurance, or a patient's income."

Connect Health + Wellness (Bassett, Ridgeway, and Dental). Health Clinic hours are Monday – Friday 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. and Dental Clinic hours are Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. For more information, visit www.ConnectHealthVa.org or call (276) 638-0787.

M-HC 250

(cont. from page 1)

County played a role in that. I am glad to hear that the Fieldcrest Lodge has plans for the future as I think it would be great for our area, but the local 250 committee does not have any active plans to promote it."

However, "we do have plans for an event soon in the Fieldale community. We will share more about the details as

they are finalized, but we hope to have an event in the spring in Fieldale," Marlowe said. "Ideally, we would like to incorporate every part of the county in our commemoration at some point. Some places have stronger ties to the Revolution than others, but we will strive to make every community feel involved in some way. Our county has a

rich history, and it is our goal is to tell that story."

To help get involved and keep up with the local committee's work, Marlowe said "I would love it if people reading this went and gave a 'like' to our committee's Facebook page. They can find us on Facebook by searching 'Martinsville Henry County Virginia 250' and

can stay up to date with our planned events, as well as tidbits of American Revolution knowledge along the way. "

Additionally, he said "if people are yearning for VA 250 events across the state, I encourage them to check out the state committee's website at va250.org. They have lots of great information there."

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Investment firm acquires former Bassett-Walker property

The estimated 813,000-square-foot industrial building at 1 Walker Road in Martinsville is available for lease after an affiliate of Phoenix Investors announced that it had purchased the facility.

Resurgence Properties previously owned the property that was the site of the former Bassett-Walker Textile complex, which produced knitted outerwear garments, according to a release from Phoenix Investors. With more than 700,000 square feet of available warehouse and office space, the facility also offers flexible configurations and is desirable for a variety of pursuits. It is located in an enterprise zone and is fully fenced with a guard shack for added security. The new owner plans to implement its capital improvement plan in short order and transform the complex into a premier industrial hub.

"The property in Martinsville has great bones and has been exceptionally well-maintained since it was built

in the 1970s," said Frank P. Crivello, Founder & Chairman of Phoenix Investors, said in a release. "Phoenix is ready and willing to demise the property into smaller suites or as needed to accommodate tenant needs."

Situated on 53 acres, the facility features 6 dock doors and 4 grade-level drive-in doors, according to the release. An ample parking area can accommodate more than 200 vehicles. Located less than 12 miles from Blue Ridge Regional Airport and about 10 miles from the North Carolina/Virginia state line, the facility offers convenient access to both.

In addition to Martinsville, the company has properties in Danville, Lynchburg, and other areas, with additional locations in several other states.

For leasing inquiries, call Executive Managing Director Grant Bates of Newmark at (434) 882-1176. For more information, visit phoenixinvestors.com.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

Meetings

Tuesday, February 27

The Henry County Board of Supervisors will hold its regular monthly meeting at 3 p.m., in the Summerlin Room of the Henry County Administration Building. The board will meet jointly with the School Board at 5 p.m., in the 3rd Floor Conference Room to prepare for the FY24-25 budget before reconvening for the 6 p.m. session in the Summerlin Room.

Events

Saturday, February 24

Daddy/Daughter Dance, 6-9 p.m., Spencer-Penn Centre. Tickets are \$50 for Father/Daughter, and \$15 for each additional daughter. Purchase by texting DANCE to (276) 286-0434.

A free Gospel Concert featuring the Virginia State University Gospel Chorale, will be held at 4 p.m. in P&HCC's Walker Theatre. The event is sponsored by the Fayette Area Historical Initiative, Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society and P&HCC's Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

The first ever Culture and Soul Expo, 11 a.m. -1:30 p.m. Feb. 24 at the New College Institute (NCI), 191 Fayette St., Martinsville. A free event. Registration is requested online at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

Friday & Saturday, March 1 - 2

TheatreWorks Community Players will present the first ever One-Act Play Festival, featuring three original, never-before-staged shows by three aspiring playwrights, at 7 p.m., 44 Franklin Street, Uptown Martinsville. Tickets are \$12 each and available at www.TWCP.net.

Sunday, March 3

TheatreWorks Community Players will present the first ever One-Act Play Festival, featuring three original, never-before-staged shows by three aspiring playwrights at 2 p.m., 44 Franklin Street, Uptown Martinsville. Tickets are \$12 each and available at www.TWCP.net.

Monday, March 4

Women's History Month Blood Drive, 10 a.m.

to 3 p.m. at the New College Institute (NCI), Lecture Hall A, 191 Fayette St., Martinsville. Hosted by the Martinsville-Henry County Heritage Center & Museum.

Friday, March 8

Music Night at the Spencer-Penn Centre, with the renowned Franklin County dance band, Twin Creeks Stringband. Gate opens at 5 p.m., 5:30 is open mic, and the band starts at 6:30 p.m. Admission is a \$5 cash donation. Concessions, including the ever popular Spencer Penn hot dogs and BBQ, will be sold.

Saturday, March 9

Dancing for the Arts, 4 p.m. at Martinsville High School Auditorium. Piedmont Arts' fundraiser with a slate of local celebrities dancing in support of the arts. The contest features eight teams competing to win the most votes, the highest score from the judges and a set of gorgeous mirror ball trophies handcrafted by local artist Terry Mitchell. Tickets, voting, and memberships are available at the museum and at PiedmontArts.org. Tickets are \$30 for reserved seating, \$20 for general admission, and \$5 for K-12 students.

Monday, March 11

MHC Democratic Committee will meet at 7 p.m. at the New College Institute, Baldwin Building, Room 107.

Saturday, March 16

Beers of Ireland with the Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society and Scuffle Hill Brewing Company, 2-4 p.m. in the Historic Henry County Courthouse, 1 East Main St., Uptown Martinsville. The cost is \$10 per person. Reservations must be made by March 10, and fee paid at the door. Make your reservation at <https://jbphillips.wufoo.com/forms/beers-of-ireland/>.

Saturday, April 20

Spring Craft Show, 9-5 at Bassett High School, 85 Riverside Drive, Bassett. Tickets are \$5. Children 5 and under are admitted free.

ONGOING

The Martinsville-Henry County Lions Club regularly meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Pacific Bay Restaurant, 530 Commonwealth Blvd, Martinsville.

AWANA meets at Blackberry Baptist Church on Sundays, from 4-6 p.m.

TOPS FIELDALE VA 0626 meets each Tuesday at 5:45 pm at the Rangeley Ruritan Building on 134 Calloway Drive, Fieldale, VA. New members are welcome. For more information, call Patti at (276) 358-0489.

The Bassett Ruritan Club hosts Rook Music & More on Fridays from 10 a.m. - noon. Play Rook, work puzzles, make a craft and listen to a mixture of bluegrass, country & gospel music by different bands each week. If you want, bring a snack to share. This event is free to the public. Any donations received will go to the Bassett Ruritan Club to pay for electricity etc.

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 1903 Joseph Martin Highway, Martinsville. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and games begin at 7. Money from Bingo supports community service awards, scholarships, and other community efforts.

Book Bingo on the 4th Tuesday of the month at the Martinsville Branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library, 11 a.m. to noon. Call (276) 403-5430 to register.

Medicaid eligibility renewals have resumed. Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness (MHCCHW) offers Medicaid/FAMIS application and renewal assistance for Virginia residents from birth to 64 years of age in-person: Wednesdays 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at Community Storehouse, 128 E. Church St (lower level of the old Leggett Building) in Martinsville, or by phone, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. MHCCHW's specially trained Medicaid/FAMIS Outreach Advocate is available to help. Call or text Ann Walker at (276) 732-0509 to learn more or for an appointment.

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. Call (276) 647-9585.

New census reveals a decrease in farms and farmland

According to the recently released 2022 Census of Agriculture data, Virginia is trending with the nation in terms of fewer farms and less farm acreage than in 2017, when the previous census was conducted.

In 2022 there were 38,995 farms in the commonwealth compared to 43,225 in 2017. Farm acreage was 7.3 million in 2022, down from almost 7.8 million in 2017.

In Virginia, the number of small and medium farms—those under 1,000 acres—all decreased in numbers. But farms from 1,000 to 5,000 or more acres increased slightly—from 1,340 in 2017 to 1,367 five years later.

Nationally, the number of farms and farm acreage also decreased from 2017 to 2022. According to the 2022 census, there were 141,733 fewer farms in 2022 than in 2017. The number of farm acres fell to 880 million, a loss of more than 20 million acres in five years.

“The latest census numbers put in black and white the warnings our members have been expressing for years,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “Increased regulations, rising supply costs, lack of available labor and weather disasters have all squeezed farmers to the point that many of them find it impossible to remain economically sustainable.

“Family farms not only help drive the economy, they allow the rest of the nation the freedom to pursue their dreams without worrying about whether there will be enough food in their pantries.”

Average farm production expenses, which include things like equipment, crop inputs, livestock, animal feed, labor and more, increased across the

nation and in Virginia as well.

The census also found that the average age of farmers continues to increase. In the commonwealth, the average age of a farmer in the 2012 Census of Agriculture findings was 57.2. Ten years later, it had increased to 59.2.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service conducts the Census of Agriculture every five years. The data collected provides valuable insights into demographics, economics, land use and activities on U.S. farms and ranches.

In addition to tracking the number of farms and amount of farmland, the census tracks the value of agricultural products, the use of renewable energy-producing systems and characteristics of farm operators themselves.

“The Census of Agriculture provides critical information for USDA in its work to ensure farms of all types and sizes have the support that they need,” said Tony Banks, senior assistant director of agriculture, development and innovation for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. “The data provides a very important snapshot of agriculture's production and economic health, and is useful in documenting trends that can help direct state and national public policy.”

The first Census of Agriculture was conducted by the Census Bureau in 1840 in 26 states and the District of Columbia. In 1997, the agriculture census was transferred from the Census Bureau to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. The 2022 census is the 30th in the series and the sixth conducted by NASS.

Dean's List at Hollins University

Three local students earned Dean's List honors during the fall 2023 semester at Hollins University:

Naomi Hairston, of Bassett;
Olivia McNebb, of Martinsville;
Lidia Soto Minter, of Martinsville.

To attain this distinction, students must earn at least a 3.5 average on a 4.0 grading scale.

Annual Audit

(cont. from page 1)

said, “we did not find any instances of noncompliance as it pertains that the compliance requirements established in the uniform guidance.”

The audit also showed that the city's revenue in 2023 exceeded its expenses by \$1.8 million.

“This is the best performing year the city of Martinsville has on record as far back as I can see in terms of the final position,” Vice Mayor Aaron Rawls said. “That's pretty cool.”

Community Development Director Keith Holland told the council that two new building inspectors have been hired and will begin working with the city in October. Holland discussed issues the city has with the costs of maintaining overgrown lots. He believes that some of the financial issues can be resolved by planting low-growth vegetation, such as clover. A proposed amendment allows the city to reseed unattended lots with low-maintenance vegetation after three notices of violation. However, many naturally wooded lots would be exempted from this policy.

One proposed amendment would reduce the height limit of vegetation, from 18- to 10-inches, and another is extending the enforcement area from 50- to 150 feet from the street, which would include back yards in many cases.

This amendment was questioned by members of the council, with Rawls encouraging building officials to look into other cities in Virginia to find the average enforcement area. Other amendments would require mandatory cutting of vegetation twice a year, and a limit of 40 tires within the enforcement area of a property.

Holland said the department also is working on a tracking system that would keep up with repeat calls on certain properties.

“We want to see action. If this ordinance is put in place, we expect to see it enforced,” Mayor LC Jones said.

Council members agreed that the building officials have been effective at addressing reported problems, but emphasized a desire for the team to be more “pro-

active.” Council members believe that the employees should not only address public nuisances after they are reported, but to take initiative and address any issues they see around the city themselves.

Councilmember Tammy Pearson noted that the proposed ordinance specifically refers to “weeds and grass” and that the language within the ordinance should be more specific in defining weeds.

Holland explained that the initiative is not to put anyone out of a home or penalize individuals who are unable to maintain their property, such as the disabled or elderly. Instead, the department intends to provide information about social services and assistance to residents in need.

Martinsville resident Michael Green discussed the suggested amendments, and concurred that the ordinance needs to be more specific with the language used to define weeds. Green elaborated on his experiences with overgrown properties encroaching on neighbors. The issues that he and his neighbors face are specifically with trees that are causing safety hazards and potential property damage.

The council will consider the proposed amendments at an upcoming meeting.

In other matters, the council:
*Set a public hearing on the Aaron Mills Senior Housing Project to be held during their next meeting on Feb. 27.

*The city's Chief Information Officer presented a Budget Process Planning Calendar for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. This document is available to the public online.

*Kendall Davis, public information officer, announced that the first ever Culture and Soul Expo would be held at the end of this month. This event is being held to celebrate Black History Month and the culture of the local black community. This event is a free ticketed event, but registration is requested online at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com). This event will be held 11 a.m. -1:30 p.m. Feb. 24 at the New College Institute (NCI), 191 Fayette St., Martinsville.

Students Briefs

Holland-Penn earns a spot on the Dean's List at Coastal Carolina University

More than 3,000 undergraduate students at Coastal Carolina University were named to the Dean's List for the Fall 2023 semester, including Shailey Holland-Penn, from Ridgeway. Students who make the Dean's List have achieved a grade point average of 3.5 or higher (3.25 for freshmen) for the semester.

Local students named to

OPINION

My prestige TV show

By BEN R. WILLIAMS

This past Sunday I watched the last episode of "True Detective: Night Country" on HBO and I had a sudden revelation: anyone can write and direct an expensive prestige drama series. Literally anyone, even that guy who survived having an iron rod blown through his head in a railroad construction accident. Well, I'm literally anyone, and it's high time I get a big sack of that HBO money.

Please enjoy my pitch for the pilot episode of the next big prestige show you'll be seeing on your TV soon.

COLD OPEN

We open on a mysterious old woman walking through the woods. Suddenly, she sees a fox emerge from the underbrush. It is wearing a little hat, so the viewer knows that this is no ordinary fox. She watches it run away, and it stops next to a ghost man. The ghost starts dancing to a slow, moody cover of "Sugar, Sugar" by The Archies. When the song ends, the ghost man points to a pile of dirt and disappears. The old woman walks over and begins digging through the dirt, only to find the ghost man's dead body from before he was a ghost! Can you believe it? I'm hooked already!

TEN MINUTE LONG OPENING CREDITS SEQUENCE

The title of the show flashes on the screen; it is called "Murders in the Dark: Day for Night." A slow, moody cover of "Love Will Keep Us Together" by Captain and Tennille plays while a series of images flash on the screen; a bloody knife, that fox with the little hat, a ping pong paddle, a spiral ham, a signed headshot of Rodney Dangerfield, etc. It all really sets the mood.

OUR HEROES

We open on our two protagonists driving down the road; they are Alcoholic Detective and Strong Female Character. Alcoholic Detective is a terrible human being ever since his wife was murdered and he turned to drinking. Strong Female Character, meanwhile, is angry all the time. That's how we know she's a strong female character.

"I can't believe there was a mass murder at the nudist colony," she says angrily. "Looks like we have to clean up another mess."

"Those dead nudists are the lucky ones," Alcoholic Detective says. "There's no point in being alive."

On the side of the road, they see a two-headed giraffe. A slow, moody cover of "Give Up the Funk" by Parliament starts playing. This probably means something!

Once they arrive at the scene of the crime, they begin examining a big pile of dead nudists. Let me tell you, you won't believe how nude these folks are. That's premium cable for ya!

"I think these nudists were murdered, probably by that mysterious cult in town," Alcoholic Detective says. "Seeing something like this makes me want to drink a bunch of liquor and then take out my barely suppressed rage on someone who doesn't deserve it."

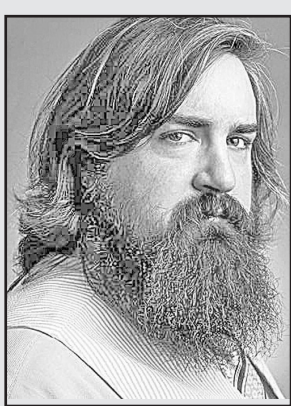
"Seeing a bunch of dead bodies doesn't affect me at all," Strong Female Character says. "You might have noticed that I'm very tough."

"Do you have any other interesting character traits?" Alcoholic Detective says.

She punches him in the stomach.

THE SUBPLOT THAT GOES NOWHERE

In a shack somewhere deep in the jungle, we see a man in a tuxedo making a ham sandwich. He goes to squeeze some mustard on it ...



By Ben R. Williams

but BLOOD comes out of the bottle! He turns to the camera and says, "I bet this is about those Murders in the Dark!" A slow, moody cover of Glen Campbell's "Rhinstone Cowboy" begins to play.

THE MYSTERIOUS GUY WHO'S BRIEFLY INTRODUCED IN THE FIRST EPISODE AND IS ALMOST CERTAINLY THE MURDERER

We see Alcoholic Detective and Strong Female Character pull up at an old factory. They walk inside, and we see that this is a factory that makes sparks.

"Who's in charge here?" Alcoholic Detective yells. "Somebody better answer fast, I've been drinking!"

A mysterious guy walks up to our heroes. He has an eye patch, a hook hand, and a hook foot.

"I been here a long time," he says mysteriously. "Since before the mountains, I'd wager."

"Yeah, well, do you know anything about the murder at the nudist colony behind this spark factory?" Strong Female Character says. "Don't lie to me, I already hate you."

"Murder?" the mysterious guy says. He shakes his head nervously and tugs at his collar, revealing a giant neck tattoo of an Eye of Horus above a pile of murdered nudists. "Nah, nah, I've never even heard of murder."

"We're not getting anywhere with this jerk," Strong Female Character says, casually punching the mysterious guy in the face. "Let's leave and come back in five or six episodes."

THE OTHER SUBPLOT THAT GOES NOWHERE

An old woman walks into a building. She approaches a man seated at a desk and places an ancient book in front of him.

"This book belonged to my granddaddy," she says. "It contains wisdom. The old wisdom, from before the sun and the moon kissed the sky. Sometimes the dead talk to me."

"Yes ma'am," the man says. "That's very nice, but like I told you last time, this a Toyota dealership and I'm not sure what you want from me."

THE CLIFFHANGER ENDING THAT MAKES YOU WANT TO BINGE THE NEXT EPISODE

Alcoholic Detective and Strong Female Character are driving down the road again. Suddenly, Strong Female Character's cell phone rings. She answers it.

"What is it, jerk?" she says. "Oh yeah? We'll be there in five."

She hangs up the phone. "Alcoholic Detective," she says, "Turn this car around and drive straight to the laundromat on fifth."

"Is it a break in the nudist murder case?" he asks. "Did they find a murder weapon?"

"No," she says ominously. "They found their clothes."

A slow, moody cover of Wham's "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" begins to play as we fade to black.



Patrick & Henry Community College's President, Dr. Greg Hodges; Jewell Drewery, vice chairman of the board, and six students representing Henry and Patrick counties and the City of Martinsville are pictured with Del. Eric Phillips during a discussion about the important role P&HCC is playing in their lives and future careers.

Richmond Report

By Del. Eric Phillips

Well, we survived "Crossover" last Tuesday and House bills have moved over to the Senate for assignment to committees and eventually to the Senate for floor votes, if they were passed out of committees. This same process goes for the Senate bills through to the House and then on to Governor Youngkin's desk for his consideration.

This week, we are in the midst of grueling budget negotiations. The House Appropriations Committee met on Sunday and voted out HB29 and HB30 with amendments. HB29 and HB30 are bills just like others but are handled in a different way, procedurally. Members can make objections to the House Appropriations Committee's amendments in writing and then they are voted on in Thursday's session. It is anticipated to be a very busy week with the budget bills, as well as other bills working through committees.

The Democrat controlled House Appropriations Committee abandoned Governor Youngkin's tax relief plan and instead proposed more than \$1.3 billion in higher taxes on hard-working Virginia families. This happened right after they shortcut bills to prosecute criminals poisoning our children with fentanyl-laced pills. The Democrats stated there was no room in the budget for this much needed prosecution. These kinds of decisions mean increased taxes for our families already fighting high inflation and endangering our most vulnerable population. It is my hope that constructive amendments can

be made this week to offset spending.

There is good news from the House Appropriation Committee's amendments that have a positive effect on our district. The New College Institute's funding was reinstated in the second year of the budget. Also, my Pittsylvania County Library-Gretna Branch's amendment to complete its renovation project was also included. Both of these items are extremely important to all residents of the 48th district, and the continued education of our children and adults.

It was a pleasure meeting with community colleges on Valentine's Day and they had the opportunity to witness all the red and pink that adorns the General Assembly Building on that special day.

In addition, Danville Community College visited with Senator Mulchi and me last week. It was a great meeting with Shannon Hair, Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Development; Cathy Pulliam, Dean of Student Services; Frederick Betts, Coordinator of Enrollment Services; Paul Burnette, Workforce Success Coach; and students with a variety of majors from nursing to cybersecurity.

As always, our door is open in Richmond for visits and to share your positions on legislation coming before the Virginia General Assembly. You can reach us by telephone at (804)698-1048 and by email at delephillips@house.virginia.gov. You can also track legislation and watch session and committee meetings at <https://virginiageneralassembly.gov/>.

Construction

(cont. from page 1)

tiful sections of the trail.

He added that the closet trailhead to the new section is at Fisher Street. Several people have been parking on the side of the road at Fischel Street to shorten the walk a bit.

Construction of 6A, Phase 2 - which will cross Mulberry Creek and extend to and across Spruce Street - uses the existing sidewalks to the Spruce Trailhead, and about 2 miles long should start around the middle of March, with completion expected in October.

"Depending on the weather," Adams said the start of the build may be as early as mid-March.

A second section (6B) from a new trailhead at Spruce Street to the Smith River Sports Complex was established in 2019. It is approximately 2.7 miles in length and was funded by the Harvest Foundation, an organization founded through the sale of Martinsville's Memorial Hospital, Adams said of the standalone section that was built at the time "because we had all the easements and paperwork done."

He added that for 4 or 5 years, the trail has been in sections in different areas. "You couldn't walk the whole thing without getting in your car and driving" to another section.

Following the completion of 6A,

Phase 2, the two sections will connect, making a continuous 11 miles of paved trail from Virginia Avenue to the sports complex.

Partnering with the county on funding for the project are the Appalachian Regional Commission, Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Harvest Foundation, Adams said, and was quick to note that the completion of the upcoming trail portion will not mark the end of the trail system.

"We're going to build from Virginia Ave. and go towards Fieldale," Adams said. That phase of the project is currently in the preliminary and engineering phases.

The Dick and Willie Passage Rail Trail Phase 1-5 was constructed in 2010 and extends 4.5 miles from the Virginia Ave. trailhead to Mulberry Creek. The initial trail was constructed on the former Danville and Western Railroad track, and stopped at Mulberry Creek. Once part of the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the Danville and Western was affectionately named the "Dick and Willie." Locals who desired a modern way to connect the towns of Danville and Stuart raised the funds through the sales of "subscriptions" to construct the rail and completed the line to Stuart in 1884.

Agreement

(cont. from page 1)

Foundation. Schock also agreed to deductions of \$45,553 for unpaid real estate taxes, and \$9,500 in attorney's fees for costs incurred by the county in connection with the agreement.

Schock will receive less than \$500,000 for the purchase, Brandon Martin, Public Information Officer said.

Mark Heath, president and CEO of the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp., explained the reasoning behind Schock Manufacturing's decision to halt expansion into the U.S.

Like many industries around the world, Europe's real estate market is suffering in the post-Covid economy, he said, and added another

reason is due to an agreement Schock had with another company, Elkay, which is known globally for its production of water fountains after its sale to another company that does not manufacture products in line with those produced by Schock.

Heath assured the board that Schock wants to stay in contact with the IDA, and noted that he is "convinced if and when they get around to US operation, (Henry County) will be the first on the list to be considered."

He iterated that while there is no guarantee, he believes that based on good relations with the company, there is a high potential that Schock will bring industry to the county in the

future.

In other matters at the IDA meeting:

Tim Pace, director of engineering and mapping, presented an update on a project at Commonwealth Crossing. He said bids are being sought on the grading project for Lot 2. A mandatory pre-bid conference scheduled at 10 a.m. on Feb. 28. Bids will be opened at 3 p.m. on April 11 in the Summerlin Room of the county administration building.

Pace noted that most of the required permits have been obtained, with one awaiting a signature of approval.

The IDA also welcomed to the board Barry Jarrett from American National Bank & Trust.

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Legislation proposes statewide Black Maternal Health Week in April

By Taya Coates
Capital News Service

Black Maternal Health week will be recognized annually in April, if Virginia lawmakers sign off on a proposed resolution.

The week, held from April 11-17, is intended to raise awareness that Black women are dying from childbirth at a disproportionately higher rate.

Sen. Lashreese Aird, D-Petersburg, introduced Senate Joint Resolution 23, which passed the Senate and awaits House approval.

"The resolution is a next step of many in an effort to raise awareness about what is occurring in the maternal space, especially among Black women," Aird said.

Aird began researching the state of Black maternal health with colleagues in 2018, after several high profile figures garnered national attention for the issue.

Then in 2019, she co-sponsored a resolution to recognize the U.S. maternal and infant mortality crisis. That same year, state lawmakers established



A pregnant woman shows off her belly stretch marks. A measure to establish Black Maternal Health Week in Virginia passed the Senate. Photo courtesy of Taya Coates/VCU Capital News Service.

the Maternal Mortality Review Team to investigate deaths and gather statistics. Aird in 2021 declared that racism is a public health crisis. She also supported a measure that allows women enrolled in Medicaid to be reimbursed for prenatal and postpartum doula services.

"As we began to explore the birthing experiences of women here in the commonwealth, we saw an equal trend among them as well," Aird said. "That began the journey of really trying to put policy in place that could combat this, what is a real life crisis."

Virginia is among the top 10 U.S. states for highest maternal mortality, according to the proposed resolution.

While maternal deaths are on the rise for women of all backgrounds, the risks are even higher for Black women. The number of pregnancy-related deaths in Virginia rose from 53 to 82 between 2019-20, according to the Virginia Department of Health. Black women in the state are 1.67 times more likely to suffer from pregnancy-related deaths compared to their white counterparts. That number increases to

three times more likely at the national level, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Black Mamas Matter Alliance, an Atlanta-based organization, is credited with founding Black Maternal Health Week. Efforts to create a national observance have failed, although congressional resolutions have been introduced since 2018 and several presidential proclamations made.

The Virginia General Assembly designated July as Maternal Health Awareness Month in 2020.

There are groups working throughout the state to minimize maternal risks, advocate for legislation, offer education and provide services. The Virginia Rural Health Association, Danville Maternal Health Task Force, OB-GYN Associates of Danville and Birth in Color RVA last October discussed the state of Black maternal health in rural Virginia.

Most of Virginia's rural hospitals have stopped delivering babies and provide limited access to prenatal care, according to Beth O'Connor, executive director of the Virginia Rural Health Association.

"The intersection of poor outcomes for African American women in general with the lack of services in rural communities has created a crisis," O'Connor stated in an email.

The University of Virginia held a panel discussion on Black maternal mortality last March, which featured various community members who work daily to support the cause. The university wants to "be a part of the collective that helps solve this crisis," according to Ashley Woodard, director of Diversity Programs and Strategic Partnerships at the UVA School of Medicine.

"We must educate more people about this crisis because it will take people working at various levels (e.g. healthcare workers, politicians, community organizers, lawyers) to fix what is broken," Woodard stated in an email.

There were several bills introduced this session that tackled maternal mortality. One that recently passed the House was introduced by Del. Charniele Herring, D-Alexandria. House Bill 781 reestablishes the Task Force on Maternal Health Data and Quality Measures that ended on Dec. 1 last year.

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A New Take on an Old Scam

One of the oldest scams around involves a criminal getting hold of one of your checks and forging the payee and the amount. Usually this is done by "washing" the check with chemicals to remove the real information you have written on it. Today, with access to new technologies, criminals are "cooking" checks by creating fake versions of real checks using computer programs. These "cooked" checks can be manipulated digitally and either printed or deposited electronically, saving the crook a lot of mess and hassle.

The best way to protect against these scams is to be

careful how you send checks. If you use your checkbook to pay bills via mail, how you send those bills is the key to staying safe. Rather than dropping the bills in your mailbox and flipping up the flag, take them to the post office and drop them off inside. A criminal can't wash or cook a check they don't physically have, so taking this extra step to safeguard your mail can protect your bank account in the long run.

Report scams to local law enforcement. For help from AARP, call 1-877-908-3360 or visit the AARP Fraud Watch Network at www.aarp.org/fraudwatch-network.

Three aspiring playwrights featured at the One Act Play Festival

By Barbara Waldron

Currently in its 20th year, TheatreWorks Community Players will present a One Act Play Celebration March 1-3, with showings at 44 Franklin Street, Uptown Martinsville.

The festival will “highlight three unique plays by three aspiring playwrights,” according to Scott Guebert, a member of the organization’s Board of Directors.

In a synopsis of each of the original, never-before-staged shows, Guebert said “If Walls Could Talk” follows the same family as different generations navigate the passage of time. Things change, but the family remains the same.

“Waiting on the Train in Southbend, IN,” he said, is a family drama that follows a group of friends who are stuck on the wrong side of the tracks while trying to get back to their home. They are forced to rely on each other while they

wait for the train to come back to them.

“Dating in the Time of Zombies” is a dark comedy about a scientist trying desperately to cling to normal life by attempting to hold a speed dating event. They try to find a way to get back to normal life while dealing with the constant distractions of zombies, Guebert said.

“If Walls Could Talk,” was written by Emma Metzger, a Magna Vista High School student.

The central point of the story is the house and centers on the lives of the individuals who possess it. “Just one room is utilized so the gathering of people can see the changes all through the years,” said Zach Jordan, director of the trio of plays.

“It is set in one room of a house over the course of about 50 years, and shows snapshots from the lives of various people who live in the house over the decades,” Jordan said. “The message is that all of these common experi-

ences are to be valued and that we are all tied together through similar human experiences.”

Cast members include Sarah Kallam, Zoey Kirk, James Wilson, Katlyn Kinney, Landon George, Linzie Register, Owen Amos, Fox Stallard, Daniel Galyon, and William Ortega.

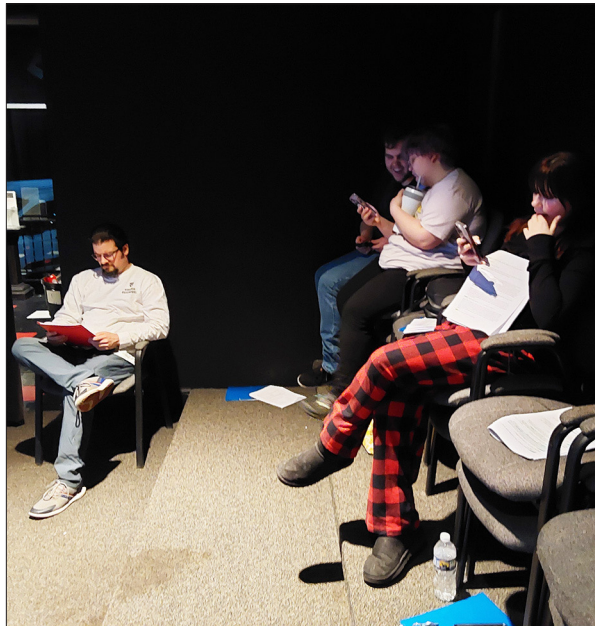
“Waiting on the Train Southbend, IN” was written by playwright Daniel Van Nostrand, a local resident. “Dating in the Time of Zombies,” was by playwright Chuck Smith.

Showings begin Friday, March 1 at 7 p.m., and continue Saturday, March 2 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, March 3 at 2 p.m. All three plays will be performed at each showing and tickets are \$12 each and include all three plays in one night. Tickets are available for purchase at <https://www.twcp.net/info/tickets.cfm>.

For more information, visit TheatreWorks Community Players at <https://www.twcp.net/info/oneact.cfm>.



Cast members for “If Walls Could Talk” include Landon George, Zoey Kirk and Fox Stallard.



Daniel Galyon, Landon George, Sarah Kallam and others read through their lines at a recent rehearsal.



James Wilson and Linzie Register.



Actors prepare for their performances during a recent rehearsal last week.



Katlyn Kinney and Daniel Galyon run lines.



Magna Vista duo combine for 45 points in win over William Byrd, team advances in Regional tournament

By Jeff Reid

Sophomore guard Simeon Moore and junior forward Torian Younger provided a potent one-two punch for the Magna Vista boys basketball team against William Byrd on Friday night.

The duo combined for 45 points in the team’s 73-66 victory over the Terriers in the first round of the VHSL Region 3D Tournament.

Moore led the Warriors (8-16) with 23 points, 9 rebounds and 6 assists while Younger added 22 points and 10 rebounds. Senior guard Landon Hall hit six three-pointers for 18 points and 6 rebounds.

Isiah Board scored a team high 27 points for the Terriers and Jahdai English chipped in 11.

Landon Hall nailed a pair of three-pointers and Younger and Hall chipped in six points each to give Magna Vista a 20-11 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Both teams scored eleven points in the second quarter with Magna Vista going into halftime with a 31-22 lead.

The Warriors led by as many as sixteen points in the third quarter when Hall hit a second three-pointer at the 4:26 mark to put Magna Vista up 43-27. However, William Byrd came charging back. A three-pointer by junior guard Drew Lindsay and a three-point play by sophomore forward Luke Helton kicked off a 13-2 run that cut the Warriors lead to 45-40 at the 2:02 mark. A pair of free throws in the final minute by Simeon Moore put the Warriors up 47-40 at the end of the third period.

The Terriers and Warriors traded mini runs in the final period. Magna Vista scored the first nine points to rebuild their lead to 56-40 at the 5:50 mark. A steal by William Byrd’s Isiah Board started a seven-point mini run by the Terriers that cut the Warriors lead to 56-47 with three minutes left in the game. However, Magna Vista answered back with an 8-point run to make the score 64-47. William Byrd’s Jahdai English hit two 3-pointers in the closing seconds, but the Terriers still came up short, 73-66.

Both teams scored 26 points in the final period with William Byrd nailing five three-pointers. The Terriers tallied a total eight three-pointers in the second half. Moore, and Younger scored a combined total of 27 points for the Warriors in the second half. Hall added nine points on three-pointers.

Magna Vista Coach head coach Ty’Quan Graves said he knew this would be a tough team to beat at home and that the game plan was simple: compete for four quarters, do the small things right and most importantly “Believe! believe in yourself, your team, and your coach and everything else will work out.”

“I have voiced the importance of doing the small things (box out, close out, hustle, make free throws, execute, and minimize turnovers and second chance opportunities) all season and tonight the small things helped them finish on top,” Graves said.

“I am extremely proud of them,” he added. “Magna Vista is a fairly young team full of players seeking to

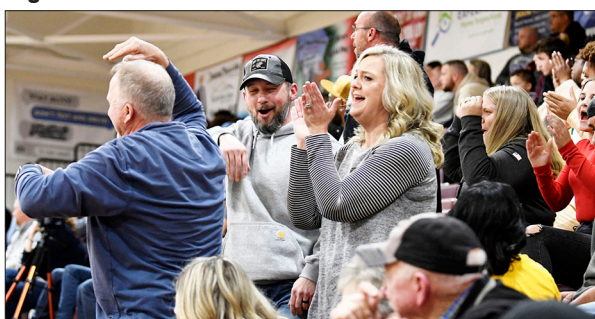
learn the game. Our guys competed from start to finish and wanted to win this game badly. Moore and Younger came to play tonight and Hall had 18 points on 6 three-pointers... the execution of the offense opened up a lot of opportunities, and these guys aggressively took advantage of those opportunities.”

Magna Vista will head to Roanoke to face Blue Ridge District champs Northside (22-3) on Tuesday Feb. 20 at 6:00 p.m. in the semi-finals.

“Northside is a really good team and well coached,” Graves said. “Northside shoots the ball extremely well and plays aggressive on both ends of the court so it’s imperative that we take care of the ball and limit them to one shot opportunities.”



Magna Vista senior guard Bryson Kidd is sandwiched between William Byrd defenders Isiah Board (12) and Israel Hairston (4) as he drives to the hoop Friday night in Vinton.



The Magna Vista cheering section celebrates after a basket by junior forward Torian Younger to put the Warriors up 62-47 with 2:53 left in the game.



Senior shooting guard Landon Hall (2) is congratulated by teammates as he heads to the bench at the conclusion of Friday night’s game against William Byrd. Hall finished the night with 6 three-pointers for 18 points.



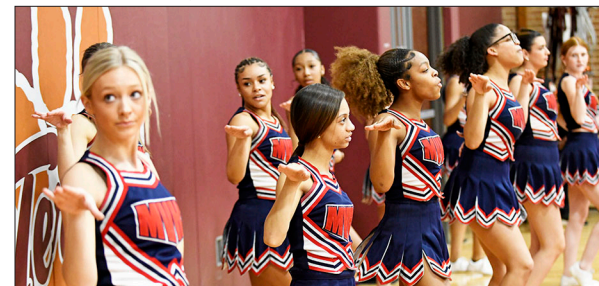
Magna Vista sophomore guard Simeon Moore (1) puts up a shot against William Byrd’s Israel Hairston Friday night in a first-round game of the VHSL Region 3D boys basketball tournament.



Magna Vista first-year coach Ty’Quan Graves talks with his players during a 30 second timeout Friday night in Vinton.



Magna Vista’s Torian Younger puts up a shot in heavy traffic Friday night against William Byrd in the first round of the Region 3D basketball tournament.



MV Varsity Cheer: The Magna Vista Varsity cheerleaders fire up the crowd Friday night in boys basketball action against William Byrd in Vinton.

Applications for P&HCC Scholars and Commonwealth Legacy Scholars Now Open

The Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) Foundation is now accepting applications for the Patrick & Henry Scholars and Commonwealth Legacy scholarships. Each year, up to ten local high school graduates are chosen to become Patrick & Henry Scholars. These scholars receive a scholarship to cover tuition, textbooks, and fees for up to two academic years.

"Becoming a Patrick & Henry Scholar is a distinguished honor that is both an experience and an opportunity," said Tiffani Underwood, Director of the P&HCC Foundation, adding, "The application process is rigorous, but the reward of being P&H Scholars is invaluable both while on campus here at P&HCC and beyond."

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must have a high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. They must be graduates from an area high school or have completed a homeschool program of study. Scholars are chosen for their superior academic achievement, civic involvement, and leadership po-



2023-2024 P&HCC Patrick & Henry Scholars.

tential. Graduates of homeschool programs must be seventeen years of age or older at the time of the application and must reside in the P&HCC service region.

Once accepted, Patrick & Henry Scholars must maintain a 3.0

grade point average and be full-time students (enrolled in at least 12 credit hours) at P&HCC. They also will be expected to participate in two extracurricular activities per semester and accrue ten volunteer service hours each semes-

ter.

Students who apply for the Patrick & Henry Scholars award will automatically be considered for the Commonwealth Legacy scholarship. One outstanding student from each community college in Virginia is selected to receive this award, which was created by the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and is sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education. The funds from this scholarship can be used for tuition, textbooks, and fees. Eligible students are full time, associate degree-seeking students attending college for the first time. As a merit-based scholarship, it will be awarded to a student who has demonstrated academic excellence and a commitment to develop leadership skills.

To apply, students should visit www.patrickhenry.edu/scholarships.

For additional information, contact Letitia Pulliam in the Patrick & Henry Community College Foundation Office at (276) 656-0250 or lpulliam@patrickhenry.edu.

Millions dedicated to water system upgrades, EPA said

Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced more than \$94 million from President Biden's Investing in America agenda for Virginia drinking water and clean water infrastructure upgrades. The funding is part of the over \$50 billion investment in water infrastructure upgrades from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – the largest such investment in American history.

The funds will support essential water infrastructure that protects public health and treasured water bodies across the state. Nearly half of this funding will be available as grants or principal forgiveness loans, ensuring funds reach underserved communities most in need of investments in water infrastructure.

"President Biden's Investing in America agenda continues to transform communities for the better with this latest infusion of funds for critical water infrastructure projects," said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. "With \$50 billion in total, the largest investment in water infrastructure in our nation's history, EPA will enable communities across the nation to ensure safer drinking water for their residents and rebuild vital clean water infrastructure to protect public health for decades to come."

"Since 2022, funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has enabled EPA to distribute more than \$2 billion across the mid-Atlantic region to spur new and necessary investments in water quality," said EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz. "Thanks to this historic funding, more communities will receive the clean and safe drinking water that every American deserves."

"The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law continues to deliver," said U.S. Senator Mark Warner, D-Alexandria. "I am glad to see this funding go towards preserving our beautiful bodies of water

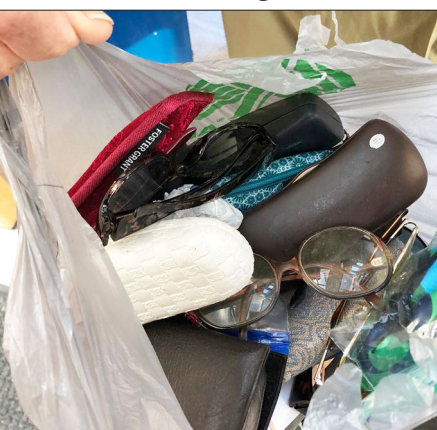
and ensuring that Virginians have access to safe, healthy water sources."

"I am proud to have voted to pass the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which continues to make a difference in so many communities across Virginia," said U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, D-Richmond. "I'm thrilled that Virginia is receiving federal funding to help upgrade critical water infrastructure and improve drinking water quality. I look forward to seeing the benefits of this investment for years to come."

Communities across the country are facing water infrastructure challenges. Many cities and towns have an aging water infrastructure – old, broken or lead pipes carrying drinking water and wastewater treatment plants in need of major upgrades. Some communities struggle to maintain adequate stormwater infrastructure to effectively manage flood impacts from climate change and others need to upgrade their water treatment to address emerging contaminants like PFAS.

The funding EPA announced for Virginia is part of a \$5.8 billion investment through the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRF), one of EPA's signature water investment programs. This multi-billion-dollar investment will fund state-run, low-interest loan programs to address key challenges, with \$2.6 billion going to the Clean Water SRF for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and \$3.2 billion going to the Drinking Water SRF for drinking water infrastructure nationwide. The announcement includes allotments for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law General Supplemental funds and Emerging Contaminant funds for SRF programs for fiscal year 2024. EPA anticipates announcing allocations for billions of dollars in additional resources for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Lead Service Line Replacement fund later this spring.

Lions Club at work in community



Lions Club member Cliff Rood picks up glasses that people have donated from a donation box at the Martinsville library. Rood planned to deliver the glasses to Lori Floyd, who will bring them to the club's headquarters in Roanoke, where they will be cleaned and sorted and graded, then sent to people in need. (Contributed)



Proud teachers pose with their students' creations in the Foster Gallery.



The Foster Gallery is a dedicated space in Piedmont Arts to honor and showcase the art of local students.

Area middle schoolers to have their art on display at Piedmont Arts

Artwork by students from Laurel Park Middle School, Fieldale-Collinsville Middle School, Martinsville Middle School, and Carlisle Middle School will be on display from March 1-16 in Piedmont Arts' Foster Gallery. A reception will be held for exhibiting students and their families, Tuesday, March 12 from 4-6 p.m. at the museum. Piedmont Arts is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Piedmont Arts is known for hosting amazing and innovative exhibits. Nowhere is that truer than in the Foster Gallery. Exhibits are curated every six to eight weeks, allowing work by students from all 19 schools in Martinsville-Henry County to be displayed during the

year.

Curated by Charity League of Martinsville and Henry County, the Foster Gallery is an important part of Piedmont Arts' community programming, encouraging young people to participate in the arts and giving the public the opportunity to experience the wealth of talent in the area. Piedmont Arts and Charity League believe that the arts are a vital part of an excellent education, and both are pleased to take an active role in arts education in the community.

Piedmont Arts is a nonprofit art museum, located at 215 Starling Ave., Martinsville. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is free. Learn more at PiedmontArts.org.

General fund revenues in January were consistent with forecast

General fund revenues for January 2024 remain in line with the consensus revenue forecast, Gov. Glenn Youngkin said last week. For the month of January, Virginia experienced a 2.5 percent decline in comparison to the same period last year, despite an extra collection day relative to the prior year. Year-to-date general fund revenues are up a moderate 5.3 percent through the first seven months of Fiscal Year 2024. The slight decline was driven largely by a dip in non-withholding collections and lower-than-expected individual income tax refunds related to the elective Pass-Through Entity Tax (PTET), while other major revenue sources were generally in line with expectations.

"The Commonwealth's January revenues show that our conservative forecast remains prudent as conflicting economic signals continue to cloud definitive conclusions in the fiscal year," said Youngkin. "Virginia's labor market remains tight and we continue to monitor withholding and non-withholding patterns as we start

a new calendar year. This month's report confirms we budgeted appropriately when releasing our Unleashing Opportunity budget in December and as the budget process moves forward in the General Assembly this weekend we can all be confident the topline forecast remains prudent."

"While PTET-related collections and refunds continue to distort overall revenue collections, underlying revenue growth in our major revenue sources remains on or slightly ahead of forecasts," said Secretary of Finance Stephen Cummings. "We are confident in our conservative revenue forecast and we are continuing to monitor revenue collections and economic data. Given these downside risks, we will maintain a cautious outlook going forward."

Among the major revenue sources, net individual income tax collections, corporate income tax, and interest income are all slightly elevated relative to last year, while sales and use tax collections, insurance premiums, and wills, suits and deeds are all lower year-to-date.

See more at www.henrycountyenterprise.com

Animal research transparency bill amended to create task force

By Alyssa Hutton
Capital News Service

Bills to increase transparency within public college and university animal testing facilities advanced in the General Assembly, but with amendments.

Sen. Jennifer Boysko, D-Fairfax, introduced Senate Bill 411 to require animal testing facilities to submit an annual report to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The report would include information about the number and species of animals used, including those not covered by the federal Animal Welfare Act, and the cost of experiments.

The measure also capped Freedom of Information Act records requests at \$25.

The amended bill will instead create a task force that looks for potential deficiencies at public animal testing facilities and makes any needed recommendations to increase public transparency. Recommendations could include situations of noncompliance with federal regulations and details about the facility care, use and number of animals. The report will be due by November.

Representatives such as lawmakers, universities and unaffiliated animal welfare groups will sit on the task force, in addition to members from the Virginia Press Association and Virginia Coalition for Open Government.

The substitute is a compromise between stakeholders, animal protection groups and higher education institutions, Boysko said at a finance committee meeting. Several universities testified against the bill at a previous subcommittee hearing, based on its financial impact and "significant burden."

Animals covered by the federal AWA include dogs, cats, monkeys, guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits or other warm-blooded animals, alive or dead. The task force would also require information about animals not covered by the AWA, such as birds, rats and mice bred for research and some farm animals.

"We have grave concern about the time and effort that this would take us to provide and put in the public sphere and it has not been articulated to us what the actual goal of this legislation is besides just transparency," said Ross Grogg with Kemper Consulting, on behalf of Eastern Virginia Medical School at the subcommittee meeting.

There's no centralized mechanism to count all species of animals across facilities, according to Elizabeth Hooper, who spoke for Virginia Tech.

"I appreciate what the senator is trying to do, we've done a lot in this area, we're very proud of that," Hooper said. "Unfortunately, we do think that this would be very challenging for us to do, and it would be very costly for us to do."

"Maybe we can take one step at a time," Boysko said in response.

Facilities usually keep an approximate census count of the species not reported under the AWA. Co-patron Sen. William Stanley, R-Franklin County, said the bill just asked to post publicly the internal counts already kept by the facilities.

Representatives from many of the state's public universities testified in opposition to the original bill.

The estimated university fiscal impact ranged from \$200,000 to \$1.84 million, before the bill was amended. The costs

would be to reconfigure or obtain additional software and hire at least one full-time employee to manage the new duties.

The amended bill will have no fiscal impact, Boysko said.

SB 411 passed the Senate unanimously. Del. Shelly Simonds, D-Newport News, introduced the related House Bill 580. Similar changes were made to that bill, which passed the House 56-43.

"There are many people who are concerned about animal welfare, and they're taxpayers and they are community members, and they have the right to know how public funds are being spent at public universities," Simonds said.

Boysko passed a bipartisan transparency measure with Stanley during the 2023 legislative session. The bill required animal testing facilities to annually post documents of their use of AWA animals, and inspection reports.

That bill was watered down before it passed, according to Daphna Nachminovitch, senior vice president of cruelty investigations with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The group had hoped to get the count of all animals and species last year, and tried again this year.

"The public does not know how many animals they have, what kind of animals they have, what kind of experiments they use them for, even though the public funds the very existence of these facilities," Nachminovitch said.

The state requires animal control officers and animal rescue agencies to annually submit custody records, including totals of animals euthanized. This is



Gracie's tattoo on her ear. Gracie was rescued from Envigo, an animal breeding and testing facility that was shut down in July 2022 due to malpractice. Photo by Alyssa Hutton/VCU Capital News Service.

basic information that Virginians have a right to expect, Nachminovitch said.

"I think a lot of people would be quite upset to learn what happens behind closed doors of laboratories," Nachminovitch said. "If we can just shine a light on and increase transparency, especially for those facilities that are funded with our taxpayer dollars, that would be a good start."

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.

VA General Assembly OKs bills to develop small modular nuclear reactors

Edwin J. Viera
Virginia News Connection

Virginia's General Assembly has approved legislation to develop small modular nuclear reactors.

The bills passed both chambers despite concerns about how this affects ratepayers. Senate Bill 454 allows utility companies to begin billing customers during a research and development phase, which means ratepayers can be billed for engineering, site development and other costs before utility companies get a power plant permit.

Peter Anderson, state energy policy director for Appalachian Voices, said Virginia should learn from other states with similar legislation.

"Georgia was developing a new conventional nuclear reactor," Anderson pointed out. "They passed some legislation kind of like this one, and what they ended up with was a project that ultimately came online about \$20 billion over budget and about 15 years



after the initial in-service date."

The reactors have not seen a major success rate in Virginia. Last year, the state's General Assembly considered a bill creating a small modular reactor pilot program. The bill passed in the Senate but failed in the House. Even if the bills are signed into law, the State Corporation Commission has the final say

in granting utility companies a permit to build one.

Along with concerns about how the measure affects ratepayers, there are environmental concerns. A 2022 Stanford University study found the reactors produce more volumes and highly reactive waste than traditional light-water reactor plants. Anderson noted electric grids need to meet certain specifications as part of the clean-energy future.

"The electric grid needs to be carbon-free, and it needs to be reliable and it needs to be affordable for people in their everyday lives," Anderson asserted. "If you're not doing all three at the same time, something's broken. It's not an easy thing to do."

While some are uncertain about nuclear energy's place in a climate-smart future, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin has made it part of his "all of the above" energy plan. The plan calls for using several other energy sources such as natural gas, biomass, and renewable sources.

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Patti P. Snead, PT, DPT
PELVIC HEALTH PHYSICAL THERAPIST



FORMAL EDUCATION : Old Dominion University, Doctor of Physical Therapy, 2007 • Chowan University Bachelor of Science Biology, 2003. **CONTINUING EDUCATION/CERTIFICATIONS**: Herman and Wallace, Pelvic Floor Level 1: Introduction to Pelvic Floor Function, Dysfunction, and Treatment • American Physical Therapy Association Level 1: Pelvic Health Physical Therapy • Herman and Wallace, Pelvic Floor Level 2A: Function, Dysfunction and Treatment: Colorectal and Coccyx Conditions, Male Pelvic Floor, Pudendal Nerve Dysfunction • American Physical Therapy Association, Fundamental Topics of Pregnancy and Post-partum Physical Therapy • Herman and Wallace, Pelvic Floor Level 2B: Function, Dysfunction and Treatment: Urogynecologic Examination and Treatment Interventions • Herman and Wallace, Dry Needling and Pelvic Health • Herman and Wallace, Biofeedback for Pelvic Floor Dysfunction.

PELVIC HEALTH PHYSICAL THERAPY



The pelvic floor is a group of muscle, tendons, and ligaments in your pelvis which provide support for your pelvic organs, aide in bowel and bladder control, and contribute to sexual function. These structures coordinate with the bony structure of your hips and spine and the muscles of your back, abdomen, and diaphragm to provide your trunk with stability. Your pelvic floor must be able to contract and relax fully as well as respond to forces transmitted through your extremities. Injury to the pelvic floor may occur but is not always the cause of dysfunction.

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MONDAY - FRIDAY 08:00 AM - 4:30 PM

Campgrounds in state parks open for season with burn restrictions in effect



The 4 PM Burning Law bans open fires, including charcoal and wood fires, between midnight and 4 p.m. It is in effect through April 30.



Camping at Virginia State Parks

Campsites in state parks, which have been closed since Dec. 4, are now available for booking online through reserve.vaparks.com. Visitors are encouraged to plan ahead and may make reservations up to 11 months in advance to secure their desired camping dates and accommodation.

Managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia State Parks offers more than 1,800 campsites, with options ranging from primitive camping to RV sites with electric and water hookups.

Full-service campgrounds with bathhouses are open from the first Friday in March through the first Monday in December, with the exception of Douthat, Hungry Mother, Pocahontas and Shenandoah River state parks, which have full-service campgrounds open year-round.

Campers who begin making reservations in

March should be aware that the 4 PM Burning Law is in effect through April 30. This law bans open fires, including charcoal and wood fires, between midnight and 4 p.m. This restriction applies to all areas of a park, including picnic and cabin areas with grills or fire rings.

During the burn restriction period, gas grills and propane stoves are allowed; however, some parks have personal grill restrictions, so visitors should contact the park before making plans to bring one.

An exception to the 4 PM Burning Law is campgrounds that have an on-duty camp host. In those situations, signage will indicate that open fires are allowed before 4 p.m. if they are maintained within a designated campfire ring or circle. The fire must be under constant supervision until it is completely extinguished. All flammable material should be cleared from a 20-foot area around the fire, and

campers must also have ready access to water, a rake and a shovel.

To check the camp host status, please contact the park directly. Primitive campgrounds do not have hosts. For more information about campgrounds and burning restrictions, please go to virginiastateparks.gov.

Visit the camping webpage for more details about reservations, cancellations and severe weather procedures. If you are traveling with horses, visit the equestrian camping page for the policies dealing with horses while camping.

Reservations can be made online or by calling 1-800-933-PARK (7275) and choosing option 5. You can make lodging reservations up to 11 months in advance or for camping, up to 2 p.m. on the day of arrival, so start planning your next adventure today.

P&HCC Leads the Nation in Festo NC3 Certifications

Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) led the nation in 2023 in Festo National Coalition of Certification Centers (NC3) Industry 4.0 certifications, with 580 certifications earned by students during the calendar year, contributing to the college's total of 2,750 certifications issued since the beginning of their NC3 partnership.

NC3 certification curriculum provides students the opportunity to demonstrate the expertise they acquire for today's in-demand industry skills. NC3 certification supplements course curriculum with theory and hands-on practice using world-class equipment and tools. These stackable credentials increase employment potential in a variety of industries.

"We're currently at 2,750 credentials and should achieve 3,000 by the end of the semes-

ter," said P&HCC instructor of Industrial Electronics Technology Daniel Edwards.

P&HCC students earned 580 credentials in fundamentals of electricity – AC (60), fundamentals of PLCs – Allen-Bradley (49), fundamentals of fluid power – hydraulics (49), fundamentals of fluid power – pneumatics (47), fundamentals of electricity – DC (46), fundamentals of robotics (43), fundamentals of sensor technology (40), fundamentals of PLCs – Siemens (37), applied fluid power (37), applied PLCs – Allen-Bradley (36), fundamentals of mechanical systems (35), applied robotics (34), applied PLCs – Siemens (31), applied mechanical systems (25), Industry 4.0 certified associate – fundamentals (9), applied principles of smart sensors (1), and Industry 4.0 certified technician – applied (1).

"I want to congratulate P&HCC on an outstanding year of certifications. Their efforts are clearly evident by leading the entire nation in the issuing of the Festo NC3 certifications in 2023. We value P&HCC's commitment to their students and our relationship," said Steve Lehr, Festo director of business development.

About Festo: Festo is a global manufacturer of process control and factory automation solutions. To learn more, visit <https://www.festo.com/us/en/>.

About NC3: The National Coalition of Certification Centers is a value-driven organization and the future model for Career and Technical Education, creating highly skilled, job-ready professionals through a growing network of educational partners and global industry leaders. To learn more, visit <https://www.nc3.net>.



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