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(USPS-6)

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## Affordable mental health option offered by new pastoral service

By Jessica Dillon

Guiding Light Pastoral Care, a new counseling service operated out of the First Baptist Church by Bonnylee Witt, for both one-on-one and group sessions. The sessions are low-cost and allow all members of the community access to Witt's pastoral services. Guiding Light focuses on grief, life events, transitions, and stress management.

The cost for both one-on-one and group sessions with Guide Light is \$10 per session. Services for First Baptist Church members are offered for free.

Group sessions are regularly held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and are themed around understanding and coping with grief in a group setting. Not only do participants talk through their trauma, but they do activities such as filling a bucket with their feelings to help visualize what emotions are troubling them. Stress management classes with a similar curriculum are held on Tuesdays.

One-on-one classes can be scheduled throughout the week, and healthcare workers can take part in compassion burnout classes on the



Bonnylee Witt is pictured outside of the First Baptist Church in Martinsville, where she operates Guiding Light Pastoral Care.

second and fourth Mondays of the month.

(See Mental Health p. 2)



Community leaders worked on the beginnings of an action plan that will address the Opioid crisis in the City of Martinsville and Henry County.

## Officials craft action plan to aid in reducing opioid use

By Jessica Dillon

Representatives from the city and county gathered for an OMNI Institute meeting on April 22, marking the first part of a six-month program to reduce opioid use in the community. The three-hour meeting focused on the impact of opioids in the area, addiction education, and community discussion.

A mix of community leaders, such as Pam Cobler and Garrett Dillard, of the Reed Creek and Iriswood districts respectively, and Martinsville Commonwealth's Attorney Andrew Hall were among those attending, along with Henry County Sheriff Wayne Davis, Martinsville Chief of Police Robert Fincher, and Martins-

(See Opioids p. 2)

## Gaming tournament connects officers with community



Tournament winners Jamie Marsigit, Dino Marsigit, and Nehemiah Edwards are pictured left to right.

By Jessica Dillon

The Martinsville Police held a free Mario Kart 8 gaming tournament at Tequilas Sports Bar and Grill in Martinsville, in conjunction with Marvelfreaks Gaming Comics & Collectibles, a local hobby shop from Ridgeway. Tequilas sold food during

the event and provided a large area around for the police department to set up.

Prizes were supplied by both partners, with the Martinsville Police Department donating a gaming console and game worth more than \$300 to the tournament winner. Marvelf-



Martinsville Police Sgt. Lyles, Amanda Doman, Sgt. Chris Bell, Officer O'Hara, Officer Havens are pictured.



Martinsville Police Officer Havens was among those to participate in the video game tournament.

reaks donated the smaller prizes, which were video game-related stuffed animals.

"They donated a lot," said Tobin Doman, the owner of Marvelfreaks. He commented that his shop had never given out such a generous grand prize before and that the officers went all out for the event. Doman, along with his wife, set up the event and ensured it ran smoothly.

The event included 20 participants and gave some of the officers who work in the zone around Tequilas Sports Bar and Grill a chance to interact with the public.

"We came up with an outing for kids to come and have a Mario Kart Competition," said Sgt. Chris Bell. The idea to hold the tournament was a joint effort between several officers.

"Several of the officers that you see here actually work in this zone, so it gives people in this community an opportunity to see us on a different basis," said Bell, who was among four officers at the event, and one participating in the tournament.

Several children and adults participated in the tournament, with 20 in

total competing for the grand prize. The winners of first and second place were a husband and wife team.

"It was awesome. It was really fun for everyone," said Jamie Marsigit. The couple brought their family to the tournament to enjoy the free outing and plans to use the prize to help their family.

"I really appreciate the officers doing all this for the event and Marvelfreaks. It was a good event, and I had a lot of fun," said Nehemiah Edwards, who came in third place.

The city police department regularly makes an effort to get to know the community on a more personal basis, and recently assisted with a Drug Take Back Program to help safely dispose of prescription medication. The department plans more events in the future that will help residents get to know their local officers.

Marvelfreaks hosts several weekly card game tournaments. The local business will be hosting another video game-related tournament for Nintendo's Super Smash Bros: Melee on May 11. Children are encouraged to attend the events.

## Theater group gears up for final shows of the season

By Jessica Dillon

TheatreWorks Community Players is preparing for the last two plays of this season - "The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)" and "House Band Music Revue."

"The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)" is a comedy currently undergoing rehearsals and features three actors. The play is a marathon abridged retelling of Shakespeare's work with modern comedy added in.

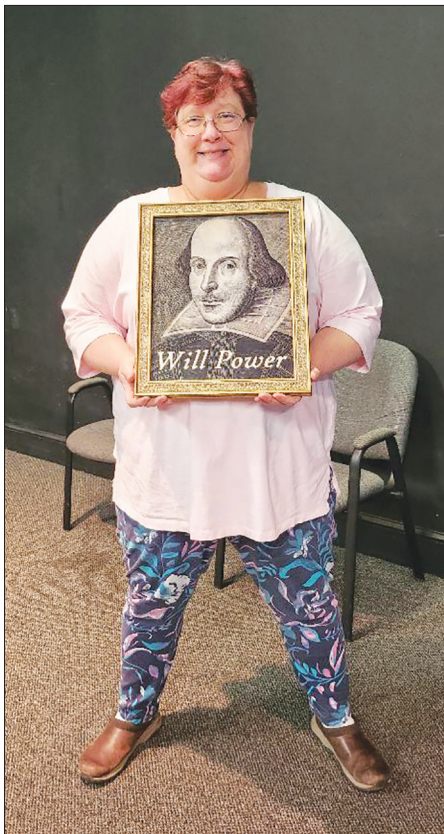
"We have three young men who I think emulate the original play's three men," said play director Devan Marsh. "They're perfect for this marathon." Marsh is a school teacher in North Carolina who teaches theater arts. This will be her first show with the TheatreWorks Community Players.

The play will cover all 37 pieces of Shakespeare's work in 97 minutes, with a short intermission.

"If you have a knowledge of Shakespeare, then you will get the inside jokes. If you don't, you will still have a ball," said Marsh.

The play was originally written by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield. Due to the changing times, it has been rewritten to accommodate modern trends. Marsh said the play allows for some creative freedom and has been redesigned with modern audiences in mind.

It will be performed on May 9, 10, and 11 to accommodate Mother's Day and on the following weekend, May 17, 18, and 19. Every show will begin at 7 p.m., with the exception of the final show on May 19, which will start at 2 p.m. to accommodate Sunday crowds. Tickets for the play are \$15, and adult beverages are



Devan Marsh poses with a painting of Shakespeare.

available for purchase on-site.

"House Band Music Revue" is a musical that has just finished auditions and is slated for June performances.

"Our show is a fun little show with a live band on stage. The audience will get to enjoy watching all of the events that happen in a club that the band members witness," said director Joanie McPeak. The songs that play during the show will explain the events happening on stage.

(See Theater Group p. 2)

## Skill game bill, reversion legislation discussed

By Jessica Dillon

A bill calling for the regulation of skill games has been a hot topic in the Virginia General Assembly. And Gov. Glenn Youngkin recently added a large number of amendments to the bill.

Del. Eric Phillips, of Henry County, discussed the bill and how it would affect local establishments like Rosie's Game Room.

The bill aims to heavily regulate the way skill games operate in the state of Virginia, which has caused a divide between businesses that profit from the games and community

members who believe gaming is harmful due to gambling risks.

Part of Youngkin's amendments to the bill would stop skill games from locating within 35 miles of each other. A conflict of interest for the Martinsville Henry County area since Caesars Virginia in Danville, is only 30.8 miles driving distance from a local gaming facility.

"It does have a 35-mile radius for any casino, which means that you pretty much wouldn't see them in my district at all because they're all 35 miles from a casino or a Rosies," Phillips of the 48th District, which in-

cludes portions of Pittsylvania and Henry

(See Legislation p. 2)

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## Mental Health

(cont. from page 1)

“I’m a little different. I’m not a certified counselor, but I’m trained in counseling techniques,” said Witt, a professionally trained chaplain.

The counseling service doesn’t focus on traditional therapy techniques, like cognitive behavioral therapy, but Witt is familiar with them. She has learned about the DSM-5 and worked in a psychiatric hospital as part of her pastoral training. Witt is trained in the style of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE).

“I can assess when someone comes to me what may be going on and I can refer that client. What I offer is a compliment to therapy services,” said Witt of her business.

Witt said that learning pastoral care is an introspective journey.

## Opioids

(cont. from page 1)

ville Sheriff Steve Draper.

“I’ve seen the impact on struggling families and how they get involved in the Opioids, and how it impacts children and their loss of loved ones,” said 1st Sgt. James Ayers.

“We see the opioid epidemic addiction permeating so many different aspects of our society, such as mental health; people try to medicate themselves. I’m looking for solutions at this point..” said Hall. “The proliferation of opioids has created a lot of vulnerable people. We want to reduce any instances of people being vulnerable,” Fincher said.

“I see substance use disorder as a disease of despair and not a moral family,” Nancy Bell, of the Virginia Health Department, said.

“We’ve spent a fortune hiring an army of community health workers.” Ariel Johnson, the director of Harm Reduction and the Warming Shelter, said. “Harm reduction focuses on pre-contemplative where folks are left in the dark. I believe that the opposite of addiction is connection.”

Many attendees shared brief stories about how opioid use had negatively impacted their personal lives as driving reasons behind their choice to help with the epidemic. The impact on

## Theater Group

(cont. from page 1)

McPeak has worked with the TheatreWorks Community Players and has done several musicals for the theatre. Along with the directors, several volunteers work hard to help with tasks like choreography and stage management.

“It’s always a great team here,” said Heather Minter.

TheatreWorks will host a casino night before the premiere of “House Band Music Revue,”

## Legislation

(cont. from page 1)

counties and the city of Martinsville, said.

“There are other things in the bill that say you can’t have them in so many feet of a church, school, or daycare center,” Phillips said, adding that the amended bill would all but ban skill games in the area due to the heavy restrictions.

“It’s an issue I have heard about from constituents both for and against it more than almost any other issue,” he said, noting there were originally two versions of the bill - a House version and a Senate version.

The House version, HB 590, would limit the number of machines placed in a convenience store and require large yellow stickers to notify law enforcement that the skill machines were regulated. The games would be highly taxed, with the proceeds earmarked for local law enforcement. The bill also focused on safeguards on ensuring that gamblers were 21 years old or older, and restricting skill game hours.

The Senate version, SB 212, was less restrictive, and both versions passed. In the follow-

ing conference, both bills were merged, but the senate bill language took up the majority of the new bill, Phillips said.

“I voted against that bill on the final passage because it had very little regulations and little money for the police departments to be able to regulate it,” Phillips said, adding that he could have supported the House version.

“We already have the lottery, which is gambling, and then we have casinos, which is gambling, and then we have Rosie’s, which is gambling,” he said. “So, we are basically saying it’s ok to gamble as long as you’re not a small local businessman.”

Negotiations on the bill are still ongoing.

Phillips was also involved in the current legislation regarding the City of Martinsville’s proposed reversion to a town. The process to revert was started in 2019, and legislation was drafted to require a referendum of the city’s residents to enact reversion.

“I think that folks knew that a referendum

wouldn’t pass at that time, so that’s why you didn’t see it,” Phillips said.

The current law to require a referendum was to sunset in 2026, making it null and void, but Phillip’s proposal removed the sunset provision and added it to the city charter in case they want to revisit reversion in the future.

“It removed the expiration date of the sunset period, it made it a permanent thing, and it codified it in their charter,” he said.

The Martinsville City Council asked Phillips to sponsor the legislation, which was later passed by council before asking him to carry it on behalf of the city.

“The last time reversion came up, almost \$2 million was wasted just in legal fees,” Phillips said, adding his legislation eliminates repeat costs. If citizens vote for the referendum, then the reversion will take place.

Currently, the city is not looking to pursue reversion.

“I think that folks knew that a referendum

when two government-owned liquor stores open in the province.

Former Ontario treasurer Peter Smith and financier Aemilius Jarvis are arrested on May 13. Each man is charged with theft and conspiracy to defraud the provincial government in what became known as the Ontario Bond Scandal. Smith and Jarvis are ultimately acquitted of theft and fraud, but both are found guilty of conspiracy.

On May 14, a committee of the Methodist church recommends that the church never again participate in any type of warfare. The committee, convened in Massachusetts, votes 76 to 37 in favor of the church never engaging in warfare under any type of circumstances, including self-defense.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wellington Koo survives an assassination attempt on May 15. A package containing a bomb and addressed to Koo is delivered to his home, but a servant opens the package and is killed.

The wooden roller coaster The Giant Dipper opens at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk on May 17. In July 2012, the park celebrated the 60 millionth rider to ride The Giant Dipper, which is now a National Historic Landmark.

On May 19, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company uses telephone lines to transmit images for the first time. Over a two-hour period, the firm transmits 15 photographs from its office in Cleveland to company headquarters in New York City.

Fourteen-year-old Bobby Franks is kidnapped on May 21 in Chicago. Franks’s parents receive a ransom note demanding \$10,000 on May 22, but the boy’s body is discovered near Wolf Lake before any money is paid. Nathan Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb confess to the murder on May 31.

A nine-day conference that becomes a power struggle between Soviet Communist Party leaders Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky opens in Moscow on May 23. The Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party is the first conference since the death of First Secretary Vladimir Lenin roughly five months earlier.

Beulah Annan is acquitted of murder in Chicago on May 25. Annan shot and killed her lover Harry Kalstedt, and her ultimately sensationalized trial ended in acquittal when it was determined she acted in self-defense. The story eventually inspired the play “Chicago,” which has since been adapted into films as well.

The Battle of Turubah is fought on May 26 between the Kingdom of Hejaz and the Sultanate of Nejd. The battle would ultimately determine the fate of the region that would become Saudi Arabia.

The United States Border Patrol is created on May 28 to prevent illegal entry into the United States from Mexico and Canada.

A munitions depot explodes in Bucharest on May 29. The explosion shakes the city, causes damage to the royal palace and claims the lives of many.

Italian politician Giacomo Matteotti is shouted down as he protests the outcome of the previous month’s election during a speech at the Chamber of Deputies on May 30. Matteotti claims the Fascist Party employed intimidation tactics to win the election. The 39-year-old socialist leader is kidnapped and murdered by the Fascists’ secret police 11 days after delivering his speech.

to work at several hospitals, including Memorial Hospital of Martinsville, for 12 years before it became SOVAH Health. Later, she worked with area churches to provide community services before founding Guiding Light.

Witt said all are welcome, regardless of their religious beliefs.

“You find that many world religions parallel a lot,” Witt said, adding that she currently has slots available for new clients.

For more information, visit the Guiding Light Pastoral Care section on First Baptist Church’s website or to reach Witt directly, call (276) 806-1514.

Many inmates will leave the jail before a program is fully completed, and both sheriffs noted that inmates have to keep up with their education after being released.

The meeting showed there is support for a successful alliance between all of the organizations in the area.

“We have a lot of organizations that are capable of coming together,” said Brandon Martin, the county’s public information officer.

“It’s a competition. We need to take it away from being a competition,” said Dillard, who wants all of the organizations to work together to solve the drug problem.

“All of our goals should be that we want to get to where there’s a scarcity of individuals we are serving,” Johnson said.

Attendees also agreed that the community is heavily faith-based and that meetings would benefit from religious representation.

The next meeting is set for July as officials continue crafting a community plan using community data and discussion over the multi-meeting course. The final plan will be presented at the end of September to help the localities decide how and where to best use their resources.

munity. The group has been in Martinsville since 2004. The theater is located at 44 Franklin Street, Martinsville.

Tickets for the shows can be purchased online at [www.twcp.net](http://www.twcp.net) or at the door. Those looking to volunteer for future shows and events can check the group’s website or Facebook page to learn about upcoming opportunities.

## 100 Years Ago This Month: Historical events from May 2024

The month of May has been home to many historical events over the years. Here’s a look at some that helped to shape the world in May 1924.

Iodized salt is introduced in the United States on May 1. Iodized salt is now used in table salt across the globe, and its introduction to the U.S. is credited to Canadian-born pediatrician David Murray Cowie, who ultimately persuaded various salt retailers to utilize iodized salt to combat health problems, including goiters, that were linked to existing salts.

Russian aviator and schoolteacher Zinaida Kokorina makes her first solo flight on May 3. Kokorina is the first woman pilot in military history.

Erich Ludendorff is elected to the Reichstag in Germany on May 4. Ludendorff ran under the banner of the National Socialist Freedom Movement, which was standing in for the banned Nazi Party.

Sophie Lyons is murdered in Detroit on May 8 at age 75. Lyons was a notorious criminal in the post-American Civil War era, but abandoned her criminal life and spent her later years supporting causes related to the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. On the day of her death, Lyons allowed three men into her home, likely hoping to rehabilitate them. However, the men refused her help, ransacked her home and killed her.

George Buchanan introduces a home rule bill for Scotland in the British House of Commons on May 9. The ensuing debate becomes a shouting match, and the session is ultimately adjourned.

On May 10, 29-year-old lawyer J. Edgar Hoover becomes Acting Director of the Bureau of Investigation, which would eventually become the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Hoover would remain in the post until his death from a heart attack in 1972.

Prohibition ends in Alberta, Canada, on May 12



when two government-owned liquor stores open in the province.

Former Ontario treasurer Peter Smith and financier Aemilius Jarvis are arrested on May 13. Each man is charged with theft and conspiracy to defraud the provincial government in what became known as the Ontario Bond Scandal. Smith and Jarvis are ultimately acquitted of theft and fraud, but both are found guilty of conspiracy.

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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](mailto:dhall@theenterprise.net).)

## Meetings

### Wednesday, May 8

Community Advisory Board Meeting, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Municipal Building, 55 W Church St, Martinsville

### Friday, May 10

Art and Cultural Committee Meeting, 1 to 2 p.m., Municipal Building Room 32, 55 W Church St, Martinsville.

## Events

### Friday, May 3

Sounds on The Square Opening Night with the Andy Burnette Trio, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., 1 East Main Street, Martinsville.

### Saturday, May 4

Altrusa Yard Sale, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., Calvary Christian Church, 515 Mulberry Road, Martinsville.

Infinity 5k Ranch Run, 10 a.m., Infinity Acres Ranch, 136 Joppa Rd #4242, Ridgeway.

Storytime! 10 a.m., Spencer-Penn Center, 475 Spencer Penn Road, Spencer.

Cinco De Mayo, noon to 4 p.m., Broad St., Martinsville.

### Tuesday, May 7

Silent Reading Hour, 5:30 p.m., Blue Ridge Regional Library, 310 Church St E, Martinsville.

### Thursday, May 9

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged), 7 p.m. Theaterworks Community Players, 44 Franklin St, Martinsville.

### Friday, May 10

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged), 7 p.m. Theaterworks Community Players, 44 Franklin St, Martinsville.

### Saturday, May 11

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged), 7 p.m. Theaterworks Community Players, 44 Franklin St, Martinsville.

### Friday, May 17 – Saturday, May 18

Mayo Fire-Baptized Holiness Association meeting, 7:30 p.m., Christian View Church, 56 Christian View Church Road, Spencer. The meetinghouse is located at 261 Burbank Drive, five miles southwest of Ridgeway, Virginia. It is intended that the sessions of this association be devoted entirely to devotional service. Meeting times are Friday at 7:30 p.m., and Saturday at 10 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

### Monday, May 27

Henry County Memorial Day Ruck 22, 10 a.m., 1094 Virginia Ave, Martinsville.

## ONGOING

Bassett Train Station Farmers' Market is open Tuesdays 5-7 p.m. through September 24.

Uptown Farmers Market is open Saturdays 7:30 a.m. to noon through November 16, and Wednesdays from 7:30 a.m. to noon July 10 to September 25.

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.

The Bassett Ruritan Club hosts breakfast on the 2nd Saturday of each month from 6 - 10 a.m. The cost is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children under 12. All you can eat sausage, fried bologna, eggs, cooked apples, sausage gravy, made from scratch biscuits, made to order pancakes, coffee and juice. Dine in or carry out.

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, 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. Donations go to the Bassett Ruritan Club to pay for electric-

ity 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](http://brrl.lib.va.us).

TOPS FIELDALE VA 0626 meets Tuesdays, 5:30 - 6:30 pm at the Bassett Public Library, 3969 Fairystone Hwy, Bassett. New members welcome. For more information, call Patti Farmer (276) 358-0489.

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.

Neighbors in the Know, first and third Monday of each month, a different presentation and activity, followed by a way to get you moving. The program is an hour long and activities for children will be provided. Every third Monday, 10-11 a.m., a music program will be provided. This free program is perfect for all ages. Registration is not required.

# Added sugar, sodium to be limited under new meal standards for schools

Nutrition standards for school meals will be gradually updated to include less sugar and greater flexibility with menu planning between the fall 2025 and fall 2027, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced. The changes came about after listening closely to public feedback and considering the latest science-based recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

K-12 schools serve nutritious breakfasts and lunches to nearly 30 million children every school day. These meals are the main source of nutrition for more than half of these children and help improve child health.

Key updates to the nutrition standards to support healthy kids include:

**Added Sugars** - For the first time, added sugars will be limited in school meals nationwide, with small changes happening by fall 2025 and full implementation by fall 2027. The USDA cited concerns from parents and teachers about excessive amounts of added sugars in some foods, which factored into this new limit. Research shows that these added sugars are most commonly found in typical school breakfast items. Child care operators will also begin limiting added sugars in cereals and yogurts – rather than total sugars – by fall 2025.

**Milk** - Schools can continue to offer flavored and unflavored milk, which provide essential nutrients that children need, such as calcium, vitamin D and potassium. There will be a new limit on added sugars in flavored milk served at breakfast and lunch by fall 2025. Thirty-seven school milk processors – representing more than 90% of the school milk volume nationwide – have already committed to providing nutritious school milk options that meet this limit on added sugars.

**Sodium** - Schools will need to slightly reduce sodium content in their meals by fall 2027. In response to public comments, USDA is only requiring one sodium reduction, and not the three incremental reductions that were proposed last year. This change still moves our children in the right direction and gives schools and industry the lead time they need to prepare. The sodium limits in this final rule will be familiar to schools, as they were supported by leading school nutrition and industry stakeholders during previous rulemaking activities in 2017 and 2018.

**Whole Grains** - Current nutrition standards for whole grains will not change. Schools will continue to offer students a variety of nutrient-rich whole grains and have the option to offer some enriched grains to meet students' cultural and taste preferenc-

es.

Supporting Other Food Preferences and Local Food Purchases - While not a new requirement, starting this fall, it will be easier for schools to serve protein-rich breakfast foods such as yogurt, tofu, eggs, nuts, and seeds, which can help reduce sugary food options, while also supporting vegetarian diets and other food preferences. Also, this fall, schools have the option to require unprocessed agricultural products to be locally grown, raised or caught when making purchases for school meal programs, making it easier for schools to buy local foods.

Starting in fall 2025, schools will have limits on the percentage of non-domestic grown and produced foods they can purchase, which will enhance the role of American farmers, producers, fishers, and ranchers in providing nutritious foods to schools.

What's Staying the Same - School meals will continue to emphasize fruits and vegetables; whole grains; and give kids the right balance of many nutrients for healthy, tasty meals. School nutrition professionals are local experts in their communities and will continue serving meals that their students want to eat, while also prioritizing cultural and religious food preferences.

## Musical Extravaganza Concert set for May 19

The 2nd annual Musical Extravaganza Concert will be held in the First United Methodist Church Sanctuary Space, 146 East Main Street Martinsville. Admission is free. A love offering will be taken, and free nursery is provided.

The concert will be presented in the newly renovated Sanctuary Space of First United Methodist Church in Uptown Martinsville at 4 p.m. on Sunday, May 19. This community concert is annually presented on the 3rd Sunday of May and features the Choir Ministry at First Church alongside special musical guests from the greater Martinsville area, including North Carolina and New York. First Church is dedicated to providing free musical arts programming in this historic acoustic sanctuary space for Martinsville and the greater Patrick/Henry County environs.

Under the direction of Jill Gardner, Director of Music Ministries at FUMC, this concert is a potpourri of musical styles and will feature the talents of Cellist Sam Brinkley of NY, Oboist Martin Brinkley of NC and Vocalists Kadeem Breedlove,

tenor and Terrence Taylor, bass alongside the Adult and Children's Choirs of First Church.

In addition to larger choral ensembles, the program also features duets, trios, quartets and quintets showcasing the local talents of Mary Ann McConnell, Rena Edwards, Kimberly Snyder, Parker and Miranda Gunn as well as FUMC Music Director Emeritus Byron Corcoran. A special added musical bonus to this year's concert will be the addition of Handbell Soloist Anita McEntire and

Organist Rebecca Smith to our roster of instrumentalists for this concert.

This concert continues the commitment of First Church to provide free arts programming to our community in the exceptional acoustic sanctuary venue of First Church. Supported by the Uptown Partnership of Martinsville, this concert bolsters the collaborative efforts of this private-public initiative with the Uptown Partnership to provide musical arts events as well as to mentor local talent within our uptown district.

## Letters to the Editor Guidelines

Henry County Enterprise welcomes letters to the editor and/or reader viewpoints of 500 words or less. Submissions may be edited for clarity, length, legal ramifications or general taste at the editor's discretion. We reserve the right to refuse to publish submitted letters for the same reasons. All letters must be signed by an individual and include community. Letters that do not meet these guidelines will not be considered for publication. Viewpoints and opinions expressed in letters selected for publication are the opinions of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Henry County Enterprise.



# OPINION

## A Myriad of 'Last Times'

You just never know when the last time you will do something is.

When I was a child, I used to think about that when I heard a song on the radio – “When will be the last time I hear that before I die? Will I forget about that song, or will I remember it and just not hear it?”

Of course, that was well before any of us could have imagined that thanks to the internet, there are a myriad of ways to hear practically any song we choose, at any time.

Yet we still won't particularly know the last time of hearing it.

Lately, due to several significant deaths recently of relatives and loved ones, the “lasts” have been running through my head: Last time I sat across from Aunt Marie at Thanksgiving, last time I laughed at Uncle Warren's joke, last time I sat with Koonny Frog at church, last time I had a laugh with Mrs. Minter.

As I am writing this, my phone has received a text from my father. The message was lighthearted and unimportant, so I set the phone aside to respond later.

Then a chill came over me, considering what this column is about. I picked that phone up immediately and sent a cheerful reply.

I don't ever want to be haunted by a last time my father texted and I did not respond with love and attention.

When you're a parent, the lasts are particularly strong, and the list is long.

When is the last time you tucked your child into bed? Did you have any idea it would be the last?

When was the last time your child crawled into your bed at night for comfort?

Your child cuddled with you on your lap?

You held hands walking down the street?

It seems that one moment you are surrounded by a child – the child's arms and legs are an octopus's tentacles wrapping around you, or if not actually on you at the moment, then reaching out, waving, grasping. If the child is not on or all over you, he or she is calling for you, crying for you, wanting you.



### Holly Kozelsky

Then, suddenly, the child is free-spirited, independent. You might even be afraid to reach out a hand because that child may pull away.

I do have the benefit of remembering the last bath, or at least I think I do.

Like many aspects of parenting, bathtime was simultaneously tedious and magically special. For about an hour, my knees and back would ache as I knelt on the floor, or crouched over from a stool.

We'd play endless games, the last ones being about mermaids. My doll was to walk on the edge of the bathtub and start chatting with her doll, who was swimming in the water. Then my doll would realize with a start that her doll was different. Her doll would explain that she was a mermaid. Our dolls would have a long conversation about mermaids, mine asking questions in utter fascination, hers responding with confidence and delight.

How many times could this same scenario take place?

Countless times!

Household chores would be all piled up, a nightmare to tackle after she had not only gone to bed but actually fallen asleep. As the bathtub scenarios would go on and on, I'd say, trying to keep the desperation out of my voice, “Isn't the water getting cold?”

“No, it isn't!” she'd respond cheerfully.

I do remember telling myself to keep on going, carry it out as long as I possibly could that night, because – drumroll, please – one never knows when the last time would be, and these moments are special.

The next evening, she announced that she would take her bath by herself.

I was relieved that I would be able to get the dishes and laundry done earlier than usual.

And that was that.

## Super Crossword

### STEEP STAIRWAY

ACROSS	52 Ltd. cousin	89 Relax after working hard	117 Puts in order	16 Lauder of fragrances	65 Crystal ball gazer, e.g.
1 Offer hush money to	53 Pot toppers	91 Red-tinged jewelry alloy	118 City on the Ruhr	17 Lois' partner	67 Neutralized, as a bomb
6 Strip of gear, as a ship	55 Edits for publication	94 Removes hair from	DOWN	18 Its capital is Nairobi	70 "The Cloister and the Hearth" novelist Charles
11 Weight unit for a druggist	57 Conflict	97 Second-to-last king of Egypt	1 African tree with a very thick trunk	21 Aspiring doc's major stashing stuff	72 Planes' first fliers, often
15 "I am at your — and call"	59 Sad paper notices	100 Greeting sent online	2 Italian municipality west of Turin	30 In the buff	75 Operations and the Hearst
19 "Elementary" actor Quinn	61 Say a different way	102 Emily Dickinson's "Much Madness is — Sense"	3 Perfect choices to fill positions	32 Cracked, as a cryptogram	77 Infer (from)
20 Sonata, often	63 Michael who co-hosted "Live" with Kelly Ripa	103 Tropical rabbit lookalike	4 Stereotypical setting for a brawl	36 Info group to be input	81 Like a district bishop's jurisdiction
22 Many a cruise stopover	64 Gets broader "No outlet" street	104 Shrink back	5 Having a right (to)	38 "Dagnabbit!"	83 Faith
23 Unconcealed	68 Always, in music scores	106 Brings about	6 In prison, informally	40 Bee-luring fluids	86 Difficulty
24 Customized for	69 Keyboard instrument	107 Finger-paint	7 Vardalos of "Connie and Carla"	43 Chief female officers in sacred rites	88 Finisher just under the winner
25 Lee of Marvel Comics	71 One of three womb-sharers	108 The Northwest's "City of Trees"	8 Toddler bed attachment	44 Gets bigger	90 Beach footwear
26 Like a swine	73 Florida's Key —	111 Like many allergy sprays	9 Like a truck ascending a steep hill, gear-wise	45 First division of a 13-Down	92 Overall for hitting the slopes
28 Also-rans	74 Charges for not paying on time	112 Robbie Knievel's father	10 Silly, like a honking bird	46 Sparse start of some rounds of applause	93 Sci-fi automatons
29 Like a diluted drink	76 Decongestant brand	113 Remark from the sharp-eared	11 The two dots in "naïve" or "Brontë"	47 Utter with a hissing sound	95 Grand home
31 Parceled out	78 Legal claim on property	114 1950s-'70s baseballer Boyer	12 Fly-catching warblers	49 Arena relative	96 Purloined
33 "Haven't — before?"	79 Broke a fast	115 Actress Russo	13 Shakespeare work part	51 Crafts' counterparts	97 Soundboard control knob
34 Shout of discovery	80 Filmflam	116 Deck crew officer, in brief	14 Imitated a cat	54 Apple's Jobs	98 Mojave plant
35 Having two hues	82 Non-PC person?		15 Small restaurants	56 Pop in a blended family	99 Northern French city
37 "It could go either way"	84 Suffix with Taiwan			58 Egypt's Nasser	101 Inflicted upon
39 Rival of Delta or United	85 Bothersome types			60 Detects like a dog	105 Actor Bert
41 Urgent	87 Boring type			62 Intertwined	109 "Well well!"
42 Fire residue					110 Fedora, e.g.
46 Taxpayer's ID					
48 Dedicates					
50 Fender guitar, for short					

# Thunder in the Hills

Recently I attended “Thunder in the Hills”, a play based off the infamous 1912 Carroll County Courthouse shootout, performed at the Courthouse.

Carroll County and the nation were rocked by the March 14, 1912 shootout. Newspapermen from all across the country flocked to the region to cover events. Until the sinking of the Titanic, this was the nation's top story.

“The Courthouse Tragedy” emanated from a trial involving Floyd Allen, a descendant of one of the oldest families of Carroll County. Floyd had accosted a Carroll County Deputy officer attempting to turn in two of Floyd's nephews.

Upon Allen's conviction, bedlam erupted in the Carroll County Courthouse. Dozens of bullets flew inside the courtroom. The community and the Commonwealth could not believe what had happened.

The shootout claimed five lives, including a Judge, the Commonwealth's Attorney and Sheriff.

Some members of the so-called “Allen Clan” were taken into custody quickly and tried. Sidna Allen and his nephew would be captured six months later in Iowa. Floyd and his son, Claude, were executed. Sidna Allen was sentenced to thirty-five years (in 1926, he was pardoned).

To this day, people from all over Virginia and the country remain interested in the incident. Families on both sides are still sensitive about the disputed events. At the memorial service I attended in 2012, some surviving family members of those who died in this tragedy traveled to Hillsville from as far away as New England.

My connection comes from my great-grandmother of Rockbridge County. She and her Bible study group traveled to Richmond to pray with inmates at Libby prison, including Sidna Allen.

While in prison, Sidna focused on woodworking and building furniture in order to sell items to support his family.

During my great-grandmother's visit, she purchased a box made by Allen. Written inside is, ‘Made by J. Sidna Allen, \$5.’

My grandmother handed the box down to me a few years before she died.

Since elected to Congress, I have displayed the box in my DC office.

The Carroll County Historical Society Museum features a collection of Sidna Allen's work: tables, treasure and jewelry boxes. His woodworking style reflected folk marquetry, creating intricate designs in his wooden objects.

As we look back on this incident, it's important to remember that we learn little about the past by attempting to apply modern law and mores. Romance, politics, power, and family honor all merged to become a lethal powder keg in this



### Morgan Griffith

Representative

tragic event.

The play was extremely well done. I was mesmerized by the performance. This same group has performed “Thunder in the Hills” every few years since 2012.

They say this is it. But I for one hope they will do it again or that maybe the Barter Theatre will pick up the production in the future.

Amongst the excellent cast was my former colleague in the Virginia House of Delegates, Tom Jackson. He played Floyd Allen and was superb. After the play, he showed me both Floyd Allen's pocket watch which he carried throughout the performance, and the lawbooks in the old courthouse's library which belonged to Commonwealth Attorney William Foster, who was killed in the shootout, and Dexter Goad, the Circuit Court Clerk, who was injured.

I should also mention that Martha Goad was played by Cynthia Jackson, Tom's wife, who was at Emory & Henry College while I was there. There were many outstanding performances and I do not believe I have ever seen a better cast.

As the play shows, the story has always been complicated. At Sidna Allen's death, the Lynchburg Newspaper wrote, “The Allens have just about proved their theory of their defense. That they were not all fundamentally bad men, but men for whom fate, in a bad hour, set a vicious stage.”

In a like manner, Carroll County is a good place that more than 100 years ago found itself thrust by fate, in a bad hour, into a vicious set of circumstances. Let us hope that this may never occur again.

Sidna's old house in Carroll County remains today. Located just outside Fancy Gap, the Queen Anne style house is an iconic Carroll landmark. In 1974, the house was designated for the National Register of Historic Places.

A portion of the play's ticket sales go to the J. Sidna Allen House Restoration project. Contributions can be sent to the charitable organization at:

J. Sidna Allen Home  
c/o Carroll County Historical Society and Museum  
P.O. Box 937  
Hillsville, VA 24343.

You may also visit [carrollvamuuseum.org](http://carrollvamuuseum.org) to make an online donation via PayPal.

Call my offices with questions, concerns, or comments: Abingdon, (276) 525-1405; Christiansburg, (540) 381-5671, or via email at <https://morgangriffith.house.gov/>.

## P&HCC's Alheli Ramos-Garcia to continue running career at Averett



Alheli Ramos-Garcia, of Bassett, has committed to Averett track and cross country following her graduation from Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) in May. Pictured at the signing (seated from left to right) are Alheli Ramos-Garcia, Hilda Garcia-Huerta (mother), and (standing), P&HCC coach Andre Kidd, Nadyra Perez (sister), Alfredo Huerta (uncle), P&HCC athletic director Brian Henderson.



Alheli Ramos-Garcia signed to participate in Averett's track and cross country program.

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# OPINION

## Chair ownership now out of reach for many Millennials

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — Jennifer Sullivan, 37, and husband Matt, 36, decided it was time to buy a chair.

"We've been together for ten years and married for five," she said. "It just felt like it was time for us to take things to the next level and buy a chair together. I was already drafting the Instagram post in my mind, a photo of us sitting in the chair with the caption, 'So we did a thing.' I was very excited."

They didn't set their sights particularly high. Jennifer, an adjunct professor of theoretical physics at the University of Southern California, and Matt, a high school biology teacher, knew they were never going to be able to buy a new chair or have one custom-built.

"Those days are obviously over," Matt said. "Now back in the '80s, sure, anyone could buy a new chair. But in the 2020s, that's just not a reasonable expectation."

Managing their expectations, Jennifer and Matt begin searching the used chair market. They were devastated by what they found.

"All I wanted was a nice, comfortable chair to go in the corner of our 120 square foot apartment," Jennifer said. "I didn't want a massage chair. I didn't want one of those chairs that has a USB port that lets you charge your phone. I didn't even want a recliner! I just wanted a nice, comfortable chair for \$50, maybe \$75."

But those chairs were nowhere to be found.

"I couldn't find a quality chair for less than \$100," Jennifer said. "I'm a respected professor of theoretical physics while my husband educates the leaders of tomorrow. We obviously don't have that kind of money."

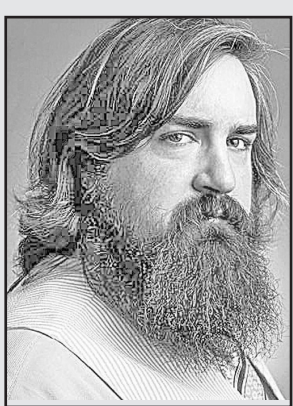
"I blame myself," Matt said, fighting back tears. "I try to be frugal, I try my best to save money, but last week at the grocery store I caved and bought an onion. It cratered our joint checking account."

Despondent, the Sullivans ended up buying two three-legged step stools, one of which is missing a leg.

"It's not too bad if you lean against a wall," Matt said, joylessly eating a bowl of ramen.

However, for people like Jennifer and Matt Sullivan, relief may be on the way.

Garrett Schofield, 78, is the en-



By Ben R. Williams

trepreneur behind an exciting new business model.

"I've worked hard to get to where I am today," Schofield said. "I was an assistant produce manager at Piggly Wiggly from 1963 to 1990 before I was promoted to assistant manager of the entire store. I retired in 2019. Thanks to some smart investments along the way, I had enough capital to create a new business model that's already filling a much-needed demand."

Enter Vanguard Chair Rentals, Schofield's brainchild.

"I've been going around buying up every chair on the secondhand market," Schofield said. "I own the chairs so you don't have to. Instead, you can rent the chair of your dreams for anywhere between \$5 and \$25 per month. And let me tell you, \$25 per month gets you a very comfortable chair indeed."

The business has been a runaway success for Schofield. While reviews of his service have been mixed, the numbers speak for themselves.

"I'm clearing about two million per year at this point, and I'm getting more renters every day," Schofield said. "No matter who you are, you've got to have someplace to sit."

Schofield chuckled. "And of course, those Millennials sure love sitting around, am I right?"

When asked if they would consider renting a chair from Vanguard Chair Rentals, Jennifer Sullivan very slowly lit a cigarette, while Matt Sullivan quietly regarded his two-legged stool and then began tying an extension cord into some manner of lasso.

## Letters To The Editor

### Stop signs worked

I am so disappointed that the city has removed the stop signs. I had observed that the stop signs were serving their purpose, slowing down traffic. I know everyone did not stop like they should, but I had not heard cars speeding down Main street and Church Street in the evenings as they did when they saw a string of green lights that were on. Also, I was glad to not have to wait for the lights

to turn green. It cut down on idling and therefore air pollution. I wish that the city would reconsider and put the stop signs back, especially the one at the end of Walnut Street. Some people do not know that it is legal to turn left on a red light if you are on a one-way street turning on to a one-way street.

Virginia King,  
Martinsville

### Children vs. Pets

There's a national divide, and it's not white versus black. It's not even Democrat versus Republican. The divide is between parents and pet owners.

First a story- Recently my wife and I took our two-year-old son to the park. We left the trail and went down to play in the creek. While we scooped mud and threw rocks, a dog, what looked like a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, lunged at us barking, growling, and clicking its teeth. Park rules state that dogs must wear a leash, but he appeared to be loose. I quickly picked my son up off the ground and watched the cord finally yank. He was on a leash. The owners, an older couple, shouted at the dog, but it never stopped growling. They walked away wrestling with the barely-restrained animal.

What was baffling to me was that they did not even say, "Sorry." As we returned to the car we found that their dog had pooped on the path and they just left it. Of course, my son stepped in it.

Here's where I say national divide. My son is above their dog. My son has more inherent value in his life than that dog has in his. My son is a human, that dog is an animal. Those people might decide to take their dog to the pound, but I will never abandon my son. That dog will probably die before they do, but my son will outlive me. What I'm saying is that America has "inordinate affection" (Colossians 3:5) for their animals and lacks "natural affection" (Romans 1:31) for children. Our thinking is absolutely

out-of-whack when it comes to the sanctity of human life.

I believe our modern vernacular expresses backwards thinking. Webster's Dictionary defines the word "bitch" as a female dog. However, Americans use that word derogatorily for women, but somehow it can also be used as a term of endearment. Who can make sense of that?

Words express what you think. What are we expressing by calling animals "children" or "fur-babies?" Absurdity. My wife carried my son for nine months in her womb and birthed him - that's a child! However, pet owners go to a kennel and select a pup from a litter. At some point my child will learn to use the toilet, but these adults will forever have to pick up their animals' feces. Children and pets are not the same.

America's thinking and speech are bad, but its sexuality is even worse. Stray dogs will indiscriminately mate with whatever is "in heat" and Americans seem equally promiscuous. The CDC states that 40% of American babies are birthed by unmarried mothers. That is animalistic!

If you're young and want to be happy, then get married and have children (Psalm 127:3; Proverbs 19:14). Be good to your kids so they'll bring your grandchildren to visit (Proverbs 17:6). In the end, go to Heaven as a family (Genesis 15:15; 2Samuel 12:23).

Finally, let us never forget Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton: "A dingo ate my baby!"

Caleb Robertson,  
Martinsville

# The Andy Burnette Trio to kick off Sounds on the Square series



Sounds on the Square will kick off the 2024 season with the Andy Burnette Trio on Friday, May 3, on the Plaza of the Historic Henry County Courthouse, 1 East Main Street, 7-10 p.m.

Admission is free. Beginning at 6 p.m., Scuffle Hill Brewing Company will serve craft beers, and Buckin Good Eats & Lemonade will sell food. Bring a lawn chair or blanket. Invite your friends and family for an evening of live music at Uptown Martinsville's premier concert series.

The Andy Burnette Trio is a high energy, crowd pleasing, good time band from Martinsville. The Trio is in constant demand, performing more than 120 shows a year in venues all across the region. Originally formed in 2017, the Trio is constantly evolving, adding new tunes,

playing bigger shows, and expanding their audience. Audiences hear everything from 70s soul, to 80s and 90s rock, pop, country, southern rock, blues, and funk. Learn more at [www.andyburnettetrio.com](http://www.andyburnettetrio.com).

Coordinated by the Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society, Sounds on the Square is sponsored by Carter Bank & Trust, Children

First Pediatrics, Deskins, Inc., The Estate & Elder Law Center of Southside Virginia, Hooker Furnishings, The Lester Group, New College Institute, and Sarver Cleaning Services.

A finalist in the Best of the Blue Ridge 2024 as Family Friendly Festival, Sounds on the Square is enjoyed by patrons of all ages, generations, and cultures.

## Number of initial claims continues to climb

Last week, Virginia Works announced that 2,331 unemployment insurance weekly initial claims were filed during the week ending April 20, which represents a 4.2 percent higher than last week's 2,238 claims and 26.8 percent higher than the comparable week of last year (1,838).

Nearly 84 percent of claimants self-reported an associated industry; of those reported, the top five industries (60 percent) were Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (293); Administrative and Support and Waste Management (248); Health Care and Social Assistance (237); Retail Trade (228); and Manufacturing (142).

An initial claim is a claim filed by an unemployed individual after a separation from an employer. The count of U.S. initial claims for unemployment insurance is a

leading economic indicator because it is an indication of emerging labor market conditions in the country.

Continued weeks claims (15,254) were 0.1 percent lower than last week (15,263), but 28.9 percent higher than the comparable week of last year (11,830). Nearly 93 percent of claimants self-reported an associated industry; of those reported, the top five industries (58 percent) were Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (2,281); Administrative and Support and Waste Management (2,125); Health Care and Social Assistance (1,327); Manufacturing (1,313); and Retail Trade (1,229).

A person who has already filed an initial claim and who has experienced a week of unemployment files a continued claim to claim benefits for that week of unemployment. On a weekly basis, continued claims reflect a

good approximation of the current number of insured unemployed workers filing for unemployment insurance benefits, and are a good indicator of labor market conditions, according to Virginia Works. While continued claims are not a leading indicator, they provide confirming evidence of the direction of the economy.

In the week ending April 20, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 207,000, a decrease of 5,000 from the previous week's unrevised level of 212,000. The advanced number of actual initial claims under state programs, unadjusted, totaled 201,619 in the week ending April 20, a decrease of 7,363 (or 3.5 percent) from the previous week. The seasonal factors had expected a decrease of 2,549 (or 1.2 percent) from the previous week. There were 203,233 initial claims in the comparable week in 2023.



# CLASSIFIED

## PUBLISHER'S NOTICE

All real estate advertised in this newspaper is subject to the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968, which makes it illegal to advertise "any preference, limitations or discrimination based on race, color, sex or national origin," or an intention to make any such preferences, limitation or discrimination. Our readers are informed that all dwellings advertised in this paper are available on an equal opportunity basis. This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate or employment which is in violation of the law.

**CLASSIFIED AD DEADLINE: MONDAY AT NOON**  
Call (276) 694-3101

### SERVICES

### HELP WANTED

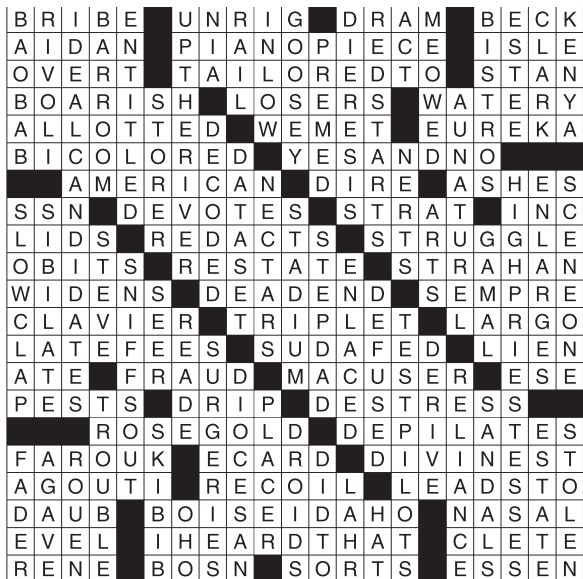
Submit your community news and photos to [dhall@theenterprise.net](mailto:dhall@theenterprise.net)

**Woodwrx, Inc.**  
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Carpentry/Cabinetry - fine woodworking, design, tile, closet & garage organizers, repairs, etc.  
Originally based in Palm Beach County- References. Bob Morehouse  
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Cell: 561-881-8292 E-Mail: [Bob@Woodwrx.net](mailto:Bob@Woodwrx.net)  
Website: [Woodwrx.net](http://Woodwrx.net)

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Positions open until filled.

If you've read this far, you can see how a classified ad in the Henry County Enterprise can work. Let our readers know you're hiring with a classified ad in The Enterprise for as little as \$8 a week. Call 276-694-3101 or email [submissions@theenterprise.net](mailto:submissions@theenterprise.net) for more information.



## ADVERTISE!

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# State department releases SOL reports for parents

To help give parents a more complete picture of their student's progress this school year, the Virginia Department of Education has developed a new Spring Standards of Learning (SOL) Parent Report designed to provide parents additional information about their child's performance this year in a clear and accessible format.

The Parent Reports are available to parents whose students have already completed the spring SOL assessments in school divisions around the Commonwealth and can be obtained directly from their child's school. For students who have not yet taken their SOL assessments, parent reports will be available after those students have completed their tests.

"An involved and informed parent is critical to a student's success," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons. "We want to empower parents with clear and useful information about their child's performance this year and equip them with tools to help their child catch up or get ahead over the summer."

"The new Spring SOL Parent Report provides a helpful year-long overview of student academic performance by including the fall and winter Virginia Growth Assessment score alongside the final spring Standards of Learning score," said Virginia PTA President Jenna Alexander. "The inclusion of easy-to-read bar graphs and simple performance descriptions for each question type transforms the SOL Parent Report into a helpful tool that can be used by students, parents, and teachers to target areas for new instruction."

The reports are designed to give parents

greater insight into their student's progress and more opportunities to participate with the child's teacher. "Parents are active, impassioned participants in the quest for educational excellence," said Ms. Tonia Emanuel, a parent of a Richmond City student. "These SOL parent reports are more than just data. It's our translator. It transforms complex information into meaningful dialogue and opportunities for advocacy, ensuring no child's potential is left unexplored and no opportunity for growth goes unnoticed."

The Spring SOL Parent Report informs parents if their child's test scores show that the child needs additional support, is considered at-risk of falling behind, or if the child is performing on grade level or above. Designed to provide a year-long look at a student's academic progress, the Parent Reports tie together the Virginia Growth Assessment scores previously taken and the current spring SOL results to show the current trend in the student's academic progress. These results help show in which content areas and skills a student may need additional support and where more time with a teacher or tutor could be beneficial to the student's academic success.

Sample parent reports are available for Grades 3-8 reading and math, and all other SOL tests (except writing). Additional resources for parents, including a video explaining the Spring Parent Reports and a tool for parents to help facilitate conversations with their child's teacher regarding their child's performance can be found on the Parent Resources page of the VDOE website under the Assessment tab.

## LEGAL

### Notice of Unsafe Structures

To All Owners and Parties in Interest of the Following Properties:

**710 W Fayette Street - condemned 3/28/2024**

Sons of Solomon Lodge #111 TRS

**1004 W Fayette Street - condemned 2/7/2024**

Gilbrather Lodge #1 Trustees c/o Lewis Carver - Sec/Treas

All unknown/unidentified Heirs, Lien Holders, and Trustees for the above properties

The City of Martinsville's Inspections Division inspected the above referenced properties and found them to be in violation of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) for the maintenance of existing structures. Each property listed above has two or more of the violations listed below:

#### 710 W Fayette Street

PM - 106.1 Unsafe, unsecure structure.

PM -301.3 - Vacant structure not maintained safe and secure.

PM -302.5 - Structure not kept free from rodent harborage.

PM -304.4 Structural members not maintained free from deterioration.

PM -304.6 - Exterior walls not maintained free from holes or breaks.

PM -304.13 - Windows not kept in sound condition.

PM-501.1 - Plumbing service not in compliance.

PM-604.1 - Electrical service not in compliance.

#### 1004 W Fayette Street

PM -106.1 - Unsafe, unsecure structure.

PM -301.3 - Vacant structure not maintained safe and secure.

PM -302.5 - Structure not kept free from rodent harborage.

PM -304.4 - Structural members not maintained free from deterioration.

PM -304.6 - Exterior walls not maintained free from holes or breaks.

PM -304.13 - Windows not kept in sound condition.

PM -501.1 - Plumbing service not in compliance.

PM -604.1 - Electrical service not in compliance.

#### ORDER

The Building Official has determined that in order to abate the unsafe or dangerous conditions on this property, this building must be razed and removed within (30) days of this notice.

Failure to comply with this order to abate the unsafe and dangerous conditions on this property will result in violation of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) for the maintenance of existing structures of Virginia Code Section 15.2-906 and or the USBC, as the Building Code Official deems appropriate. This may result in legal action against you, which would subject you to a fine of up to \$2,500 00, or the City may take the necessary action, up to and including the taking down and removal of this building, and charge the costs or expenses thereof to you. Any charges assessed that are unpaid would constitute a lien in that amount against the property.

#### Right of Appeal

You have the right to appeal this decision of the Building Code Official to the local Board of Building Code Appeals as provided for in Section 108 of the USBC. A written request for such an appeal shall be made on forms provided by the Code Official, and filed with this office within 14 calendar days from receipt of this notice and accompanied by a fee of \$100.00. Applications for appeal may be obtained in the Inspections Office located in Room #217 of the Municipal Building on West Church Street, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

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# Generation Alpha navigates increased screen time, social media use

By Thailon Wilson, *Capital News Service*

Connor attends Bailey Bridge Middle School in Chesterfield County and enjoys basketball, baseball, Taekwondo, musicals and reading. He understands that at age 12 he is considered part of Generation Alpha, people born between 2010-24.

Connor enjoys the benefits of technology; it helps prevent handwriting cramps, provides some entertainment and helps him connect with loved ones.

But Connor also has a wise insight about over-use.

"I try to limit it sometimes but, I usually try to keep like less than three hours a day," Connor said. "I think it's good for my health and for my eyes and sleep and everything."

The social media platforms and technology prior generations have been introduced to slowly over time are ingrained in the daily lives of Generation Alpha: smart phones and watches, desktops and laptops, tablets, gaming consoles, and virtual headsets. This generation and its predecessor Generation Z are often the focus of discussion concerning how screen time will impact them.

Connor, and several of his classmates, believe technology can be managed "with the right help and right people in your life."

Over the past decade, teen access to smartphones increased by 22 percentage points, according to the Pew Research Center.

Teens also continue to use social media platforms at high rates. Some described their social media use as "almost constant," according to a fall 2023 Pew Research Center survey of over 1,400 U.S. teens.

## Mental Health and Self Satisfaction

A 2023 state survey found Virginia middle school students have anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.

Almost 100,000, or 54%, of students surveyed reported problematic depressive thoughts, feelings or behaviors within a one-year period, according to the study.

Within a two-week time frame:

- 20.5% of surveyed students reported experiencing depression.
- almost 24% of surveyed students reported experiencing anxiety.
- over 22,000 surveyed students, or 11%, reported seriously considering suicide.

Mental health began to worsen in adolescents and young adults as social media gained popularity in the mid-2000s, according to research published in the American Economic Review. The number of major depressive episodes increased 83% between 2008 and 2018. Suicides also increased and are now the second leading cause of death for individuals 15-24 years old.

A quasi-experiment from the researchers found one of the biggest drivers of negative effects on mental health was students' ability to engage in unfavorable social comparisons to others online.

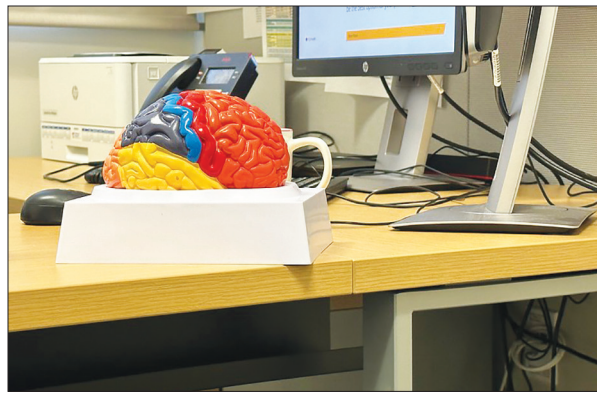
Teddi, a Bailey Bridge student, is a singer and avid horseback rider. She knows people think her generation spends too much time on their phones, but said it is not their fault because they were raised with technology.

"I feel like it's just kind of in us now," she said. "We're just so used to it and people from like Gen Z and the other generations they don't know, because they've been raised with other things, but we've been raised with technology."

Teddi has a phone but is not allowed to have her own social media accounts. Still, she said it is difficult not to compare herself to the seemingly perfect lives of influencers.

"But sometimes it's just hard seeing all those like people, influencers and stuff," she said.

Teddi's mom reassures her that she does not



An interactive human brain model is located in Dr. Mudit Kumar's office at the VCU Children's Hospital. Kumar uses it to describe certain areas of the brain and how they are affected by certain phenomena. Photo by Thailon Wilson/VCU CNS.

know if the influencer's life is actually perfect behind the camera, and to be her own person.

Almost 45% of eighth and 10th grade students reported daily spending over three hours on social media, according to the 2022 Monitoring the Future study. The ongoing study annually surveys a robust sample of students and adults on a wide range of behaviors, attitudes and values.

The self-satisfaction of students in eighth and 10th grades dropped sharply in the past decade, according to Monitoring the Future data.

Over 21% of students agreed in 2012 that they were satisfied with themselves. Ten years later that number dropped to 9.2%

## Addictive Feeds and Screen Time

Lawmakers, school counselors, parents and guardians continue to monitor the high use of technology and social media among youth.

Sen. Schuyler VanValkenburg, D-Henrico, introduced Senate Bill 359 in this year's General Assembly session. This bill aimed to restrict social media companies from deploying addictive algorithmic feeds for minors unless parents give consent.

"Over the last couple years, as a teacher mostly, but as a parent as well, I've seen a change in how kids interact with phones," VanValkenburg said.

Some of the biggest concerns are around reading level, attention span and socialization, according to VanValkenburg.

Statewide reading and math test scores for middle school students dropped during the 2020-21 school year. Math scores dropped by almost 40%, and still have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The drop in reading scores was not as significant and tracks closer to pre-pandemic levels.

"I think schools are not just trying to get kids back academically, although primarily they are doing that," VanValkenburg said. "They're also trying to get kids back socially as well."

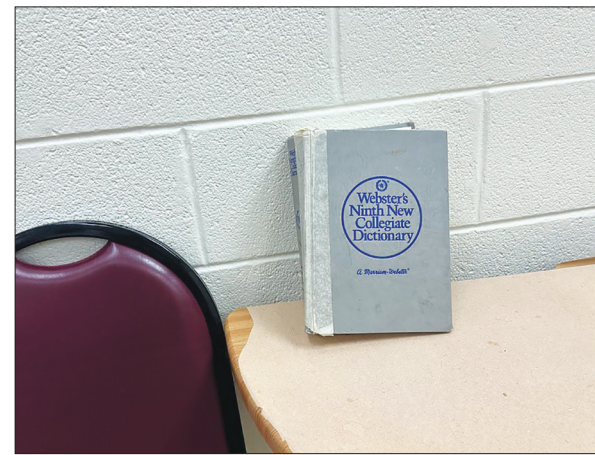
The addictive feed bill passed the Senate unanimously, but was pushed to 2025 in the House. This will give legislators more time to research since technology was a hot topic in this year's session, VanValkenburg said.

Republicans and Democrats introduced at least seven bills regarding social media regulations, including consumer data protections to restricted hours on social media for minors, but most did not advance from the subcommittee.

The lack of policy puts the burden of regulation on parents, who also may struggle with appropriate use. VanValkenburg still navigates the best usage of technology for himself and his children, he said.

Technology can help enhance education, but it can also shorten people's attention span, promote misinformation and poorly affect mental health, VanValkenburg said.

Talia also attends Bailey Bridge. She loves reading and playing softball, which helps her keep off social media, she said. She did not enjoy



In the teacher's lounge, a Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary is propped up against the wall. Photo by Thailon Wilson/VCU CNS.

the shift to online school during the pandemic, because it felt like she was "stuck on a screen."

She is allowed on TikTok but her account is private. Her mom follows her and checks to ensure Talia has not looked at anything inappropriate.

Talia advises Gen Alpha to read a book or hang out instead of being glued to the phone.

"You'll kind of start to think differently if you watch it a little bit too much because maybe you're seeing things that you shouldn't be seeing and you're more scared of going out places," Talia said.

## Afraid to be Bored

Child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Mudit Kumar works with families at the VCU Children's Hospital.

No one currently understands the long term impact of digital technology on Gen Alpha, or anyone, Kumar said.

Social media creates opportunities for people to meet like-minded people and find shared interests.

"You can do so many new things using the technology, and again that might help your self-esteem at times, so there definitely are a lot of positives," Kumar said.

However, some studies show social media scrolling activates many parts of the brain, much like the repetitive hook of slot machines, and a noticeable change occurs, according to Kumar. Instant gratification from a phone makes it harder for people to let themselves be bored.

"I think boredom is really where creativity and imagination thrives and we really don't get much of it anymore," Kumar said.

He encouraged parents to learn more about technology and be a part of the learning process for children, Kumar said. A balance of technology is best.

"We are growing at such a fast pace, especially the technology," Kumar said. "I think it's sometimes hard to keep up the research and keep up the policy."

Few companies examine the risk involved when the bottom line is about profit, Kumar said.

The Bailey Bridge students talked a lot about the importance of friendships, playing outside, getting sunshine and "touching grass." Gen Alpha will eventually grow up and be in charge. But for now, Connor has some parting words for other generations.

"You're gonna miss good things in your life if you're just doing the same thing on your phone all the time," he said.

*VCU InSight* journalist Karli Woodcock contributed to this report.

*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. *VCU InSight* is the capstone broadcast news program.

## Internships available at nonprofit ranch



An event at Infinity Acres Ranch.

A grant from the United Way will help promote agritourism and agriculturally based learning by funding internship opportunities at the Infinity Acres Ranch.

The funds allow the ranch to offer two junior/senior high school students or college freshman a two-month paid internship during June and July. Those selected for the post would work an average of 6 hours a day, 5 days per

week, with a flexible schedule for 8 weeks, according to an announcement from Laura and Rick Steere, who own the ranch.

The interns will learn animal husbandry, handling and training skills while assisting with community events, administrative tasks, and summer camps at the ranch. Upon successful completion, the individual will be awarded a \$3,000 stipend.



Laura and Rick Steere, owners of Infinity Acres Ranch, with a kangaroo.

Applicants may submit their resumes and the completed application no later than 5 p.m. on May 20, either by email to [infinityacresva@gmail.com](mailto:infinityacresva@gmail.com), or mail or delivery to Infinity Acres Ranch 136 Joppa Road, Ridgeway, VA 24148

Applicants will be contacted to schedule an interview, with a decision expected by the end of May.

Career fields that would benefit are veterinarian, vet tech, zool-

ogy, education, outdoor recreation, business management, non-profit administration, animal trainer, parks and recreation, camp counselor, therapist, biologist, agritourism, marketing, zoo keeper and others.

The facility's tag line for outreach is "Stay Local, Learn Global," and Infinity Acres Ranch has animals from around the world. Volunteer opportunities are also available.

See more at [www.henrycountyenterprise.com](http://www.henrycountyenterprise.com)



# Winners of Hooker Award announced

This year's recipients of the J. Clyde Hooker Award were announced by Piedmont Arts. They are Guy Stanley, a pillar of Piedmont Arts and Martinsville and Henry County, and Rooster Walk, the beloved music festival that is integral to this community. The Arts in Education award recipients and Scholarship recipients will be honored in a special ceremony on Wednesday, June 5 at 5:30 p.m. in the Piedmont Arts gallery.

The Clyde Hooker Award was established in 2003 by the Piedmont Arts Board of Directors to recognize businesses and individuals that are involved in and support Piedmont Arts and other arts and cultural organizations in Martinsville-Henry County. The award is named in honor of J. Clyde Hooker Jr. for his support of the arts.

In the letters nominating Guy Stanley, he was praised for his dedication to Piedmont Arts and its mission. As Board President, he tackled tasks of all sizes, from painting parking lot lines to leading the successful Growth and Restoration Capital Campaign. His expertise in fundraising, management, and project planning was invaluable, driving bold changes that improved daily operations. Piedmont Arts is deeply appreciative of his contributions and proactive approach.

Rooster Walk Inc. is a community nonprofit dedicated to promoting music, arts and education in Martinsville and Henry County. Rooster Walk presents shows throughout the year, along with a premiere music festival on Memorial Day Weekend. Rooster Walk was started as a tribute to two friends who passed away in their mid-twenties: Ed-

win "The Rooster" Penn and Walker Shank. Proceeds from the festival go to a college scholarship for Martinsville High School seniors and they have raised over \$323,000. Rooster Walk's Executive Director and Co-founder, Johnny Buck, has made a tremendous impact on the culture and way of life in this community that is sustained through his dedication and vision. Rooster Walk has helped put Martinsville on the map and is a great draw for tourism, the arts, and arts education.

The Arts in Education awards are given to educators in Martinsville and Henry County who emphasize the importance of the arts in their classrooms and programming. These educators go above and beyond to create opportunities for their students' creativity to shine. This year, the award goes to three recipients. Anne Norman Young of Carlisle School, Bryan Dunn of Magna Vista High School, and Martinsville City Public Schools' Performing Arts Academy.

The Nicodemus Hufford Memorial Arts Scholarship is given to an outstanding student of the arts who plans to study the visual or performing arts in college. This award is for rising college freshmen and was named after the famed portrait artist.

The Harold Knowlton Work Memorial Arts Scholarship is given to rising college sophomores, juniors, or seniors who are working to finish their degree in the visual or performing arts. Julia Ascough Work and Harold Knowlton Work shared a lifelong passion and respect for education and the arts. This generous scholarship will ensure that their

legacy of learning and imagination lives on by supporting the artists of future generations.

Please RSVP to attend by Monday, June 3. In lieu of admission, guests may make a donation to Piedmont Arts' scholarship fund.

## Bowman recognized for efforts



Henry County Sheriff's Deputy Jonathan Bowman, of the Adult Detention Center, was awarded Employee of the Quarter for 2024 by Sheriff Wayne Davis (left). Bowman has worked at the sheriff's office for more than 2 years. He is assigned to the Inmate Workforce Division of the Adult Detention Center.

# Arena proposal that caused so much fuss likely just a 'bargaining chip'

By Olivia Dileo, Capital News Service

Virginia remains one of at least 20 states without a major league sports team after a recent multi-billion-dollar deal collapsed.

Many people were skeptical of Gov. Glenn Youngkin's proposal due to the use of taxpayer money to build a private sports venue, potential traffic congestion, a perceived betrayal of the fanbase and uncertainty of the team's long-term commitment.

Some wondered if the potential pitch was just a well-played bargaining chip to help team owner Ted Leonsis get what he wanted from Washington, D.C. officials.

Days after the Virginia General Assembly extinguished the governor's plan to relocate the teams, Mayor Muriel Bowser, City Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and Leonsis announced the Washington Wizards basketball and Washington Capitals hockey teams will remain in Capital One Arena until at least 2050.

The district's City Council voted unanimously to accept the terms and pledge \$515 million.

The money will go toward an improved fan experience, enhanced player spaces and strengthened public safety measures. Monumental Sports & Entertainment, which manages the teams and is owned by Leonsis, will put around \$300 million toward a training facility on the top floor of the arena.

No one seemed to want the arena to move, except the people who directly benefited from it, including Virginia Tech, whose upcoming Innovation Campus sits near the proposed entertainment district. Most statements were issued through press releases.

An informal poll from four neighborhood civic associations found that 58% opposed the arena, 29% supported it, and 12% had mixed feelings. The associations sent the poll to 1,244 association members, and it had a 43% response rate.

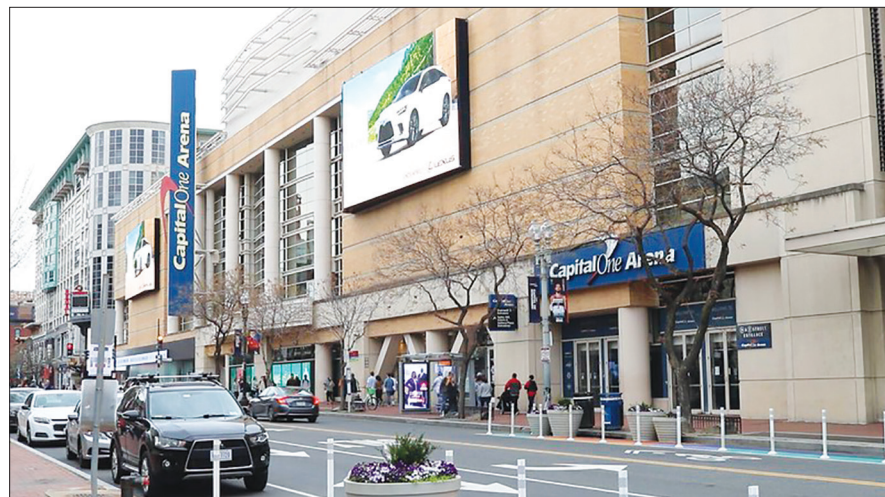
### History of the Deal

Youngkin officially announced the deal on Dec. 13, 2023, and it was considered officially dead on March 27, although it seemed unlikely to advance after it was boxed out in the Senate.

Youngkin attributed "personal and political agendas" to the deal's collapse.

The \$2 billion public-private partnership deal would have created a sports and entertainment district in Potomac Yard in Alexandria — just a bridge and six miles away from the current arena.

The deal included an arena for both teams, a media studio for the Monumental Sports Network, a Wizards practice facility, a performing arts venue and an esports facility.



Capital One Arena will remain in D.C. after deal collapses. Photo by Capital News Service.

The plan also included restaurants, retail, hotels and other communal spaces.

In December 2022, a state economic development official started searching for potential sports arena locations for a top-secret project nicknamed "Project Potter," according to the Washington Post.

The city of Alexandria began an economic and fiscal impact study in June 2023 to assess the potential move.

An arena would create approximately 30,000 permanent Virginia jobs and was "projected to generate roughly 2.5 times the economic output of what would otherwise be built based on current development plans," according to the study.

Youngkin met with the Major Employment and Investments Project Approval Commission, a group of appointed state legislators who oversee large economic projects, two days before the deal was made public, according to Cardinal News. However, several of those legislators were not returning to office.

Sen. Louise Lucas, D-Portsmouth, who holds two lead Senate positions as president pro tempore and chair of the finance committee, was not at the meeting, according to Cardinal News. Lucas now serves on the MEI Project Approval Commission, effective in January.

Lucas became one of the arena's biggest critics even before the plan was officially announced, stating on X: "While some people want sports stadiums ... I want tolls to disappear from Hampton Roads and I want recreational sale of marijuana."

House and Senate bills were introduced to create and allow the Virginia Sports and Entertainment Authority to fund and construct the Potomac Yard project.

The House bill passed with some bipartisan support. Both bills were assigned to the Senate finance committee that Lucas chairs and neither bill received a hearing. Project funding was not included in the biennial budget

passed by the legislature.

Virginians deserved better and the proposal would have driven investments along with "tens of thousands" of new jobs and revenue, Youngkin stated.

Neither Monumental Sports nor key supporters of the arena would go on the record about the proposal benefits. Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, D-Fairfax, who carried the Senate arena bill, did not respond to email requests.

### What People Say Went Wrong

The deal immediately received backlash from grassroots organizations, as well as fans.

Dennis Coates is an economics professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who has researched the growth effect of sports franchises and public stadiums and arenas. Monumental Sports probably used the deal strategically, he said.

"I think it was always the bargaining chip," Coates said. "If you want to extract concessions from your current landlord ... you wave around all of these potential concessions you are going to get someplace else."

It hurt the proposal that the team never shared a proprietary report which allegedly showed the benefits of the deal, Coates said. And it is getting "difficult to swallow" the shorter timeline that teams want to stay in a location, he said.

"Why should I believe that you're going to stay here for 40 years when you're leaving the place that you've only been in for 20 years?" Coates said.

Grassroots organizations lobbied effectively against the move and were backed by a powerful senator, Coates said.

"So in a way you had kind of a perfect storm of somebody who was powerful and a lot of people who were angry all coming together to say: 'No, we're not going to do this,'" Coates said.

Monumental Sports would have likely negotiated with other counties to pressure competitive bids, according to Coates.

"The District of Columbia upped their bid and the team took it," Coates said.

The district officials eventually added another \$15 million from Mayor Bowser's original offer, along with other perks.

If the team had not taken it, they eventually would have had to ask for financial help in the near future, Coates said.

"That's just the way this game has played out case after case, city after city," Coates said. "That's what happens if you sort of threaten to move — if they don't give you what you want you move to someplace that will."

### Grassroots & Advocacy

Ronald Moten is the co-founder and executive director of Don't Mute D.C., which strives to preserve the district's music, culture and history. In addition to traffic concerns, the move would impact the already struggling Chinatown community, Moten said.

The plan was selfish and would have many residual effects that were overlooked, according to Moten. Fans who have supported the teams for over 20 years felt "disrespected" by Leonsis.

"He's not listening to the people ... when you have so much money you become a narcissist and nobody can tell you nothing," Moten said.

John Breyault is vice president of public policy, telecommunications and fraud at the National Consumers League.

"We've become really familiar with how professional sports work and how teams and billionaire sports team owners get money out of states and localities to build playgrounds for themselves and millionaire athletes and their millionaire friends," Breyault said.

The arena funding would take away from priorities that really help people, including affordable housing, health care or mental health services, roads and infrastructure, according to Breyault.

Breyault referenced a study done by J.C. Bradbury at Kenesaw State University examined the impact publicly funded arenas in the U.S. have on communities, dating back to 1909.

"Whether they achieve the economic development and taxpayer revenue goals their backers claim they will, and what they found is that they never do," Breyault said.

VCU InSight journalist Matt Bowman contributed to this report.

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Some graduates of the Longwood@NCI program pose for photos before the Completion Ceremony.

## Longwood at NCI celebrates nine graduates

By Jessica Dillon

The New College Institute (NCI) celebrated the graduation of nine students from their Longwood University education programs on April 30. These students completed their bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood or Elementary education. The ceremony was almost an hour long, followed by a meal for graduates and their families to celebrate their accomplishments.

The Completion Ceremony started off with a message from NCI executive director Joe Sumner. "Students you are getting ready to embark on the next leg of your journey, it's not going to always be easy, it's not always going to be fun, but know that no matter what you encounter, you have everything it takes to be successful."

"Everything is built on the foundation of learning and strong education, particularly strong public education," said Dr. Angela McDonald. "You will change the life of a student at some point in your journey." Many of the students received green cords that symbolized that they were first-gen graduates. All but a single student received a Green Cord.

Naarah Leghorn presented the graduate speech for the students, acknowledging the struggles of her peers. "Some of you have done this while pregnant, while raising kids, while juggling more than one job."

She also praised the staff.

"We have some of the best professors," Leghorn was acknowledged as the Joan of Arc recipient for her dedication.

The Completion Ceremony ac-

knowledged that the students completed all of their coursework. The nine students will be invited to Longwood University to participate in the main graduation ceremony on campus. The attending graduates were also given gifts from NCI and Henry County Schools as they walked the stage.

Students graduating from the Early Childhood Education Program were Melissa Kellam-Wimbush, Devan Campbell, and Allyson Lawson. Graduates of the Elementary Education Program were Karina Altamirano Rodriguez, Hailey Harbour, Naarah Leghorn, Litzzy Santiago Lopez, and Madison Todaro. Saira Wilson also graduated with a minor in Early Childhood Education.

Sumner thanked Longwood for continuing the education programs that allowed local students to finish their bachelor's without traveling away from home.

The Longwood@NCI program allows students to earn a 4-year degree in education while staying in the Martinsville Henry County area. This program is done in conjunction with Patrick & Henry Community College. Applicants must have an Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, a GPA of at least 2.5, and earn a C or better in all courses before transferring to the NCI program.

An outline of the program can be found [www.longwood.edu](http://www.longwood.edu). For more information, interested applicants can contact Dr. Pamela P. Randall by calling (276) 403-5626 or emailing her at [randallpp@longwood.edu](mailto:randallpp@longwood.edu).

## Input sought on Appalachian Power's 2024 Biennial Review of Rates

The State Corporation Commission (SCC) is offering time for members of the public to give oral comments by telephone on Appalachian Power Company's 2024 Biennial Review of Rates. In the review, the SCC will analyze the company's base rates as well as the terms and conditions for the provision of generation, distribution, and transmission services.

In its application, Appalachian Power requests to increase revenues by approximately \$95 million, or 5.1 percent. The company states that the factors that contributed to its request include cost recovery for restoring service during major storms, increases in capital, material and labor costs, and rising interest rates.

The overall impact of the company's proposals would increase the monthly bill of a residential customer using 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per month by approximately \$10.22, or 6 percent.

The SCC has scheduled a public witness session to begin at 10 a.m. on September 9, 2024. Public witnesses intending to provide oral testimony must pre-register with the SCC by 5 p.m. on September 4, 2024. The hearing will be webcast at: [scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting](http://scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting).

Public witnesses wishing to provide oral testimony may pre-register in one of three ways:

Completing a public witness form for case number PUR-2024-00024 on the SCC's website at: [scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting](http://scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting).

E-mailing the same form (PDF version on the same website as above) to [SCCInfo@scc.virginia.gov](mailto:SCCInfo@scc.virginia.gov).

Calling the SCC at 804-371-9141 during normal business hours (8:15 a.m. – 5 p.m.) and providing your name and the phone number you wish the Commission to call to reach you during the hearing.

To promote fairness for all public witnesses, each witness will be allotted five minutes to provide testimony.

A public evidentiary hearing will follow the public witness hearing at 10 a.m. on September 10, 2024, in the SCC's second floor courtroom at 1300 East Main Street in Richmond to receive testimony and evidence from the company, any respondents and the SCC staff.

For those who prefer, there is also an opportunity to provide comments in writing on the Appalachian Power application. Written comments may be submitted through the SCC's website by September 4, 2024, at [scc.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments](http://scc.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments). Simply go to the SCC website, select "Cases" and then "Submit Public Comments," and scroll down to case number PUR-2024-00024. Then select SUBMIT COMMENTS.

Comments also can be submitted by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission, c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. All comments must refer to case number PUR-2024-00024

# Open Barn Event Attracts Dozens

Horse enthusiasts by the dozens participated in a successful Open Barn event Saturday, April 20 at the State Farm Work Center in Goochland County, according to the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) and James River Horse Foundation.

The Open Barn event gave visitors an opportunity to interact with the more than 20 retired, thoroughbred racehorses on site at the work center. Female inmates from State Farm Work Center care for these retired horses, gaining valuable job skills and tools for the re-entry process.

State Farm Work Center's horse program is a public/private partnership between the VADOC and the James River Horse Foundation. The James River Horse Foundation is an Accredited Organization with the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance. The foundation provides all costs of horse care and VADOC provides the inmate work/training crew.

"Programs like this are a true win-win-win for all involved," said

Scott Richeson, VADOC Deputy Director of Programs, Education, and Re-Entry and VADOC Liaison for the James River Horse Foundation. "It is great for the inmate because of the re-entry skills they gain and the lasting bond they form with the horses that teach responsibility and discipline. The horses also benefit from the care they receive from the inmate workers. Finally, the community benefits because many of these horses can be sponsored or adopted."

The VADOC provides re-entry resources to incarcerated inmates and individuals under community supervision to assist in their transition back into the community. A successful transition back into the community enhances long-term public safety for those who live and work in Virginia. More information can be found on the Re-entry Resources section of the VADOC website. Information about the James River Horse Foundation can be found on their website <https://www.jamesriverhorses.org/>.

## Several pick up packets for Martinsville election

By Taylor Boyd

Preparations for the November 5 Martinsville City Council election are currently underway as several people have picked up and may be filling out their packets.

The three seats up for grabs in the upcoming election are currently held by Tammy Pearson, Kathy Lawson, and Lawrence Mitchell.

City Registrar Sara Workman

said some picked up packets for themselves, "and then some of these have picked up for other people as well."

As of Wednesday, May 1, Workman said five people have picked up packets, including Aaron Rawls, Julian Mei, Rayshaun Gravely, Dwayne Waller, and John Paul Wilkens.

Rawls is currently vice-mayor.

## Project to protect 1,900 acres of forest in Southeast Virginia receives federal grant



The Nottoway River is part of the Chowan River basin of Virginia and North Carolina. These waters flow into the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary, the second largest estuarine complex in the contiguous United States. Photo courtesy of Virginia's Healthy Waters Program.

A Virginia state project to acquire 1,900 acres of contiguous forest in Suffolk for biodiversity conservation and future public access will receive a \$5.6 million federal grant.

Officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration today announced a total of \$123 million in recommended habitat protection and restoration awards, in partnership with state coastal zone management programs and national estuarine research reserves. The funding is provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, through NOAA's Climate Ready Coasts initiative.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, with support from Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Virginia Coastal Zone Management program, is seeking to protect one of the largest unprotected blocks of contiguous forest in the Albemarle-Pamlico watershed region, which includes nearly 250 acres of freshwater wetlands and 10 miles of stream reaches.

The property would be dedicated as part of Virginia's natural area preserve system and managed by the Virginia Natural Heritage Program.

"This important project will conserve a key expanse of land that is mapped in Virginia's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan, which will help to improve water quality in the Chowan River basin and the nationally significant Albemarle-Pamlico estuary," said DCR Director Matthew Wells. "We're also excited about the prospect of ultimately bringing opportunities for paddling and hiking to a currently underserved region –

in line with our goals of increasing public access to the great outdoors in Virginia."

"Located between DCR's South Quay Sandhills Natural Area Preserve and the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, this property is within one of the state's most significant hotspots of biodiversity, with more than 100 species of high conservation need," said Jason Bulluck, director of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. "This site presents the opportunity to restore and expand climate-resilient, native longleaf pine savannah ecosystems in southeast Virginia."

Partners include The Nature Conservancy, the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, or APNEP; and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program.

The grant supports seeking dialogue with tribal nations who have ancestral ties to the region about the conservation and management of the land. Research will be done on the history of tribes with ancestral and present-day connections to the region and watershed.

"We are happy to embark on this ambitious project that will increase collaboration in our shared waterways of the Albemarle-Pamlico region, and ensure Tribal communities are included in decision making that will conserve this important ecosystem for generations to come," said APNEP Director Dr. Bill Crowell. APNEP, a federal-state program hosted by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, has launched Tribal Coastal Resilience Connections, which supports tribal communities in the region in considering climate resilience during community planning.



# Debate continues on Va. bill to legalize physician-assisted death

By Shelby Warren, *Capital News Service*

George Michael Vasiloff loved music, his family and barbecues. The native Minnesotan played saxophone and clarinet and performed in the Marine Corp. band. He shared his love of music with his daughter, and they played in the church choir together. It's a fond memory, said his daughter Kate Vasiloff.

George Vasiloff was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease in September 2013. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, is a progressive disease that attacks nerve cells that control muscles. The condition can result in the loss of movement, speech, eating and breathing, according to the ALS Association.

Kate Vasiloff and her father stayed up late to talk the night he was diagnosed. George Vasiloff was terrified of what the disease would do to their family, and what his family would watch him go through.

His daughter assured him it was OK to pass on his terms.

"I wanted to give him any slice of peace I possibly could," Vasiloff said.

Her father slept well for the first time since his symptoms started because he felt he would have control if things got bad, she said.

He passed in his sleep 18 months after his diagnosis.

Vasiloff believes people should have a choice in their death.

"Why don't we give people the autonomy to make decisions about their own body when their body is failing them?" Vasiloff said.

Vasiloff has lobbied since 2020 for physician-assisted death with the organization Compassion & Choices.

Physician-assisted death is being discussed more as states introduce legislation, including Virginia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee, among others.

People are polarized around the procedure; divided by the concept of a person's free will versus accepting their fate. Many physicians oppose it on the principle of their oath to heal. Faith leaders believe it goes against the will of God. But people on both sides of the issue say it is about respecting human lives.

The process is legal in California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and Washington, D.C., according to Compassion & Choices. Several states have pending amendments.

Legislation on physician-assisted death was recently voted down in Virginia; there have been attempts to legalize the procedure since 2019.

Sen. Ghazala Hashmi, D-Richmond, sponsored Senate Bill 280 this year, which would allow an adult diagnosed with a terminal disease to seek a physician's approval to end their life. Hashmi worked with Compassion & Choices to draft the bill, in response to constituent requests, she said.

"They want to die in Virginia, and they want to be able to have ownership over their final decisions in that regard," Hashmi said.

## Physician-Assisted Death, Explained

Physician-assisted death is when a life-ending prescription is given to a patient by a physician. The patient takes the dose on their own. The process differs from euthanasia, when a doctor administers the drug and causes the death directly, which is legal in some countries but not the U.S.

"This is a bill that expressly is concerned with terminal illness, and disability is not a terminal illness, depression is not a terminal illness — and we have those safeguards in place to protect the individuals in making the right decision for themselves," Hashmi said.

SB 280 required that to be eligible for phy-



Sen. Ghazala Hashmi, D-Richmond, the patron of Senate Bill 280 on physician-assisted death. Photo by Chelsea Brooks-Giles, VCU InSight.

sician-assisted death, an individual must be a mentally competent adult and have a terminal illness with a diagnosis of six months left to live. Two oral statements and a written statement must be given to a medical provider, according to Hashmi.

The Virginia legislation created a Class 2 felony for anyone who interfered with a patient's end-of-life request, or coerced a patient to request the procedure.

Former Virginia congresswoman Jennifer Wexton could be considered the face of the legislation, Hashmi said. Wexton was diagnosed in 2023 with progressive supranuclear palsy, which affects motor functions and has no cure. Wexton will not seek reelection in the fall.

Wexton issued a statement of support for Hashmi's bill that was read ahead of the final vote in the Senate.

"Prohibiting willing physicians and their terminally ill patients and our families from working together to create an end-of-life plan that is peaceful, humane and allows us to maintain our dignity is needlessly cruel," Wexton stated.

The Oregon Death with Dignity law in 1997 was the first to be enacted in the U.S. and has similar safeguards as Virginia's proposed legislation.

## Hospice and Palliative Doctor View

About 1.7 million Medicare beneficiaries receive hospice care each year, and Medicare pays about \$23 billion annually for hospice care, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In Virginia, 46.2% of Medicare beneficiaries used hospice care in 2020, according to figures from a National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization report.

The American Medical Association says the process directly goes against the role of a physician to heal.

Dr. Andy Arwari is a hospice care worker and palliative care physician who warned against legalizing physician-assisted death.

Dying patients receive specialized care through hospice to make life as comfortable and peaceful as possible before a natural death. The core philosophy of hospice is not to speed up or delay death and a hospice care worker is not going to end a life prematurely, according to Arwari.

Under current law, a licensed health care provider would have their license revoked, or suspended, for providing or administering life-ending drugs.

Medical care has an interdisciplinary approach that treats physical ailments but also focuses on psychosocial, and spiritual elements to ensure a patient is cared for on many levels, according to Arwari.

"Are we sure that we have explored all the possibilities and explain why that patient is suffering," Arwari said. "Did we exhaust every possible avenue to resolve that suffering before getting to that option of medical assistance in dying?"

## Religious Opposition



Dr. Tom Eppes, a family practitioner from Lynchburg, Virginia, spoke in opposition to physician-assisted death in January 2020. Photo by Andrew Ringle, Capital News Service.

Jeff Caruso, executive director of the Virginia Catholic Conference, lobbies for hospice and palliative care for end-of-life patients. Quality, affordable health care is seen as a right within the Catholic Church, Caruso said.

The Catholic Church teaches that every suicide is a tragedy, regardless of if it is approved by a physician. The government should advocate for the common good and respect life, according to Caruso.

"The government still has an obligation to do everything that it can to prevent suicide rather than promote suicide," Caruso said.

## End-of-life Care, or Doula

Reamey Belski is an end-of-life doula, also known as a death doula. They are nonmedical professionals who provide specialized care for the dying, which can include spiritual, emotional and logistical care.

Death doulas are often mediators between family members with caregiver fatigue and hospice care workers, according to Belski.

Belski estimated she has served as an end-of-life doula for approximately 25 people.

A patient's quality of life and environment is important to a death doula. If someone with a terminal illness is suffering greatly and wishes to end their life, they should have a right to do so in every state, said Belski.

A person chooses physician-assisted death when they wish to live but their body will not allow it, and she does not consider it suicide, Belski said.

"I think people who get caught up with the issue of medical aid in dying start blurring the lines between the two and they're very, very different things," Belski said.

Vasiloff also does not consider it suicide, saying "people with terminal illnesses desperately want to be here."

The first sign of her father's ALS happened when he could not lift his foot. The actual diagnosis took months, but his decline came on fast, putting him in a wheelchair just a month after his diagnosis, Vasiloff said.

She was thankful that up until his death he could still talk, eat and drink -- three of his favorite things. Those memories, just like their time in the church choir, stay with Vasiloff as she finds herself advocating for a change in state law.

"I never thought that I would be sitting here talking to you about this, and this involved in this issue," Vasiloff said. "I'm grateful that I have somewhere to put my energy and do this work in my dad's name."

VCU InSight journalist Chelsea Brooks-Giles contributed to this report.

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. VCU InSight is the capstone broadcast news program.

# Proposal would advance security of artificial intelligence ecosystem

U.S. Sens. Mark R. Warner (D-VA), who also is chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and Thom Tillis (R-NC) — the bipartisan co-chairs of the Senate Cybersecurity Caucus — introduced the Secure Artificial Intelligence Act of 2024 to improve the tracking and processing of security and safety incidents and risks associated with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Specifically, the proposal aims to improve information sharing between the federal government and private companies by updating cybersecurity reporting systems to better incorporate AI systems. The legislation would also create a voluntary database to record AI-related cybersecurity incidents including so-called "near miss" events.

As the development and use of AI grows, so does the potential for security and safety incidents that harm organizations and the public, according to the senators. Currently, efforts within the federal government — led by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) — play a crucial role in tracking of cybersecurity through their National Vulnerability Database (NVD) and the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures Program (CVE), respectively.

The National Security Agency (NSA), through the Cybersecurity Collaboration Center, also provides intel-driven cybersecurity guidance for emerging and chronic cybersecurity challenges through open, collaborative partnerships. However, these systems do not currently reflect the ways in which AI systems can differ dramatically from traditional software, including the ways in

which exploits developed to subvert AI systems (a body of research often known as "adversarial machine learning" or "counter-AI") often do not resemble conventional information security exploits.

This legislation updates current standards for cyber incident reporting and information sharing at these organizations to include and better protect against the risks associated with AI. The legislation also establishes an Artificial Intelligence Security Center at the NSA to drive counter-AI research, provide an AI research testbed to the private sector and academic researchers, develop guidance to prevent or mitigate counter-AI techniques, and promote secure AI adoption.

"As we continue to embrace all the opportunities that AI brings, it is imperative that we continue to safeguard against the threats posed by — and to — this new technology, and information sharing between the federal government and the private sector plays a crucial role," said Warner, D-Alexandria. "By ensuring that public-private communications remain open and up to date on current threats facing our industry, we are taking the necessary steps to safeguard against this new generation of threats facing our infrastructure."

"Safeguarding organizations from cybersecurity risks involving AI requires collaboration and innovation from both the private and public sector," said Tillis. "This commonsense legislation creates a voluntary database for reporting AI security and safety incidents and promotes best practices to mitigate AI risks. Additionally, this bill would establish a new Artificial Intelligence

Security Center, within the NSA, tasked with promoting secure AI adoption as we continue to innovate and embrace new AI technologies."

Specifically, the Secure Artificial Intelligence Act would:

- Require NIST to update the NVD and require CISA to update the CVE program or develop a new process to track voluntary reports of AI security vulnerabilities.

- Establish a public database to track voluntary reports of AI security and safety incidents.

- Create a multi-stakeholder process that encourages the development and adoption of best practices that address supply chain risks associated with training and maintaining AI models; and

- Establish an Artificial Intelligence Security Center at the NSA to provide an AI research testbed to the private sector and academic researchers, develop guidance to prevent or mitigate counter-AI techniques, and promote secure AI adoption.

"IBM is proud to support the Secure AI Act that expands the current work of NIST, DHS, and NSA and addresses safety and security incidents in AI systems. We commend Senator Warner and Senator Tillis for building upon existing voluntary mechanisms to help harmonize efforts across the government. We urge Congress to ensure these mechanisms are adequately funded to track and manage today's cyber vulnerabilities, including risks associated with AI," said Christopher Padilla, Vice President, Government and Regulatory Affairs, IBM Corporation.



# Virginia to receive federal funds for solar projects

The Virginia Department of Energy has been selected to receive more than \$156 million through the Solar for All (SFA) grant competition to develop long-lasting solar programs that enable low-income and disadvantaged communities to deploy and benefit from distributed residential solar.

This award is part of the historic \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, which was created under President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act to lower energy costs for families, create good-quality jobs in communities that have been left behind, advance environmental justice, and tackle the climate crisis.

The Virginia Energy Program (SAVE) will seek to enable energy savings and increase resilience by expanding access to solar and solar plus storage funding for low-income and disadvantaged communities. SFA funds will be used to transform the low-income solar market in Virginia by leveraging additional private capital and supporting solar business formation and expansion. SAVE will address existing market barriers to solar development by reducing up-front costs, enabling broader access to leasing and power purchase agreements, increasing access to financing for low-income homeowners, and removing barriers to interconnection.

"We're delivering on President Biden's promise that no community is left behind by investing \$7 billion in solar energy projects for over 900,000 households in low-income and disadvantaged communities," said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. "The selectees will advance solar energy initiatives across the country, creating hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs, saving

\$8 billion in energy costs for families, delivering cleaner air, and combating climate change."

"The health and economic benefits of renewable energy should be accessible to every community," said EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz.

Virginia Department of Energy is among 49 state-level awards totaling about \$5.5 billion, along with six awards to serve Tribes totaling over \$500 million, and five multistate awards totaling approximately \$1 billion.

The EPA estimates that the 60 SFA recipients will enable over 900,000 households in low-income and disadvantaged communities to deploy and benefit from distributed solar energy. This \$7 billion investment will generate over \$350 million in annual savings on electric bills for overburdened households. The program will reduce 30 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions cumulatively, from over four gigawatts of solar energy capacity unlocked for low-income communities over five years. Solar and distributed energy resources help improve electric grid reliability and climate resilience, which is especially important in disadvantaged communities that have long been underserved.

Solar for All will deliver on the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to creating high-quality jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union for workers across the United States.

The \$7 billion investment in clean energy will generate an estimated 200,000 jobs across the country. All selected applicants intend to invest in local, clean energy workforce development programs to expand equitable pathways

into family-sustaining jobs for the communities they are designed to serve. At least 35% of selected applicants have already engaged local or national unions, demonstrating how these programs will contribute to the foundation of a clean energy economy built on strong labor standards and inclusive economic opportunity for all American communities.

The 60 applicants selected for funding were chosen through a competition review process. This multi-stage process included review from hundreds of experts in climate, power markets, environmental justice, labor, and consumer protection from EPA, Department of Energy, the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Department of Treasury, Department of Agriculture, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Department of Energy's National Labs – all screened through ethics and conflict of interest checks and trained on the program requirements and evaluation criteria. Applications were scored and selected through dozens of review panels and an interagency senior review team.

The EPA anticipates that awards to the selected applicants will be finalized this summer, and selected applicants will begin funding projects through existing programs and begin expansive community outreach programs to launch new programs in the fall and winter of this year. Selections are contingent on the resolution of all administrative disputes related to the competitions.

# Northern Virginia Businessman Pleads Guilty in Federal Bribery Scheme

A Northern Virginia businessman, who paid a \$25,000 cash bribe to then-Culpeper County Sheriff Scott Jenkins' reelection campaign, recently pleaded guilty to federal bribery charges.

Rick Rahim, 60, of Great Falls, Virginia, pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit federal programs bribery and honest services mail fraud and one count of honest services mail fraud.

Rahim is the third Northern Virginia businessman to plead guilty as part of the bribery scheme. In March 2024, James Metcalf of Manassas, Va., pled guilty to one count of bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds. Fairfax Attorney Frederic Gumbinner pled guilty in November 2023 to an identical charge.

"Today's guilty plea demonstrates how seriously the Justice Department takes public corruption and the bribery of public officials," United States Attorney Christopher R. Kavanaugh said. "The badges and guns worn by the men and women who swear an oath to protect and serve the Commonwealth of Virginia is not for sale and those who attempt to buy that honor will be held to account."

According to court documents, Rahim owned

and operated several businesses, including BV Management LLC and Food Truck Company LLC. Rahim had no law-enforcement of military experience and was disqualified from owning a firearm due to a prior state felony conviction.

In 2003 or 2004, Rahim met a businessman residing in Prince William County, Virginia who was also an Auxiliary Deputy with the Culpeper County Sheriff's Office. In late 2019, the businessman asked Rahim if he wanted to "support" Jenkins. At that time, Rahim understood support to mean give money. The businessman told Rahim that Jenkins would probably agree to make Rahim an Auxiliary Deputy in exchange for his support.

Rahim agreed.

On July 31, 2019, Rahim, the businessman, and Jenkins met at the Culpeper County Sheriff's Office. During the meeting, they discussed Rahim's previous felony record and his desire to get his firearms rights restored. Jenkins claimed he could use his official position to ensure that Rahim's petition to restore his firearms rights would be granted.

Jenkins and Rahim agreed that Rahim would provide things of value to Jenkins in exchange

for Jenkins' use of his official position to get Rahim's rights restore and to appoint him an Auxiliary Deputy with the Culpeper County Sheriff's Office.

On two occasions, Rahim gave Jenkins manila envelopes filled with cash—once with \$15,000 and a second time with \$10,000. In addition to the \$25,000 in cash, Rahim also made in-kind donations to Jenkins' campaign, including a campaign billboard and approximately 200 customized knives.

In addition, Rahim loaned Jenkins \$17,500 towards a new home Jenkins was building. Rahim never requested repayment because he wanted to maintain a good relationship with Jenkins.

On May 27, 2020, the Circuit Court Clerk of Culpeper County swore Rahim in as an Auxiliary Deputy Sheriff and the Sheriff's Office issued him a deputy badge and identification card.

The FBI's Richmond Field Office, Charlottesville Resident Agency is investigating the case. Trial Attorneys Celia Choy and Lina Peng of the Justice Department's Public Integrity Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Melanie Smith of the Western District of Virginia are prosecuting the case.

# Tips for safely charging Electrical Vehicles at home

As electric vehicles (EV) enter our roadways, the National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®) has introduced a series of free resources, guidelines, and information to help raise awareness about EV fires and safe EV charging practices at home.

According to the International Energy Agency, global sales of electric vehicles exceeded 10 million in 2022 and are expected to grow in the coming years. At the same time, consumer concerns about the fire safety risk of EVs are increasing. Lithium-ion batteries, the most widely used and reliable source of energy for electric vehicles, are central to questions about safety.

"It is widely known that electric vehicles provide environmental and cost-effective benefits," said Lorraine Carli, vice president of Outreach and Advocacy at NFPA. "However, as fires involving EVs are reported in the news, concerns about the risks they pose persist. Through advocacy efforts that highlight our new online resources and information, NFPA is working

to better educate the public about the risks associated with EVs and other devices that use lithium-ion batteries, along with ways to use them safely."

The new online resources from NFPA feature more detailed information about lithium-ion batteries, EV maintenance, and what tips consumers can follow to stay safe when charging their electric vehicle at home. Resources for safety educators and consumers, including a safety tip sheet and social media cards, are all free and downloadable. A free training course is also available to the public that helps address some of the common concerns and myths about owning an electrical vehicle, including safety features, charge types, and battery life.

To help prevent fires, NFPA has several recommendations when charging electric vehicles at home:

\*Before charging an electric vehicle at home, have a qualified electrician check your electrical system to see if it can handle charging.

\*Install charging equipment in safe locations. Keep away from busy areas and things that could catch fire.

\*Use devices that are listed by a qualified testing laboratory.

\*Read and follow all manufacturer directions. \*Check chargers and cords for damage before using. Never use if damaged.

\*Do not use more than one plug or extension cords with the charger.

\*Keep charging items out of reach of children and animals when not in use.

\*Cover charging station outlet to keep water out.

Learn more about electric vehicle fire safety, find training information, and download the free safety tip sheet at [nfpa.org/evsafetyinfo](https://www.nfpa.org/evsafetyinfo).

Information on the safe use of smaller devices that use lithium-ion batteries such as computers, smart phones, e-bikes and e-scooters, can be found at [nfpa.org/lithiumionsafety](https://www.nfpa.org/lithiumionsafety) and [nfpa.org/ebikes](https://www.nfpa.org/ebikes).

# Virginia's blossoming floriculture industry offers bountiful options for Mother's Day

Cultivating beauty is a blossoming business in Virginia—offering plenty of options for Mother's Day gift giving.

The fast-growing nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod sector ranked fourth among Virginia's top farm income-earning commodities, generating \$399 million in 2022, according to the most-recent U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture.

The state's floriculture industry is bustling, as the number of farms growing bedding and garden plants, cut flowers, florist greens and potted, flowering plants jumped from 618 in 2017 to 822 in 2022.

There are 320 Virginia farms cultivating cut flowers and florist greens today—a 73% increase from 184 farms in 2017.

Part-time farmer Terry Osborn of Corvallis Farms has noticed more vegetable growers incorporating fresh-cut flowers at her local farmers market—where she sells specialty produce and seasonal bouquets from May through August. Her family has been growing summer annuals like peonies, larkspur, zinnias and sunflowers on their small Culpeper County farm for 35 years.

Osborn said her customers appreciate her flowers'

lasting beauty. The blooms are cut every Friday and guaranteed fresh until the next Saturday market. She's also noticed more shoppers adding flowers to their regular shopping lists.

"I will treat myself to flowers before anything else, and I think a lot of people see it that way—it's just a bright spot for their day," she said.

Bob Wollam of Wollam Gardens, also in Culpeper, has witnessed the industry's evolution throughout his 36 years of growing cut flowers. While overseas imports make up a majority of the U.S. flower market, "local flowers are getting people's attention," he said.

"Customers are becoming more aware of the benefits of buying locally grown flowers, which have a low carbon footprint" because they haven't been trucked thousands of miles, Wollam explained.

He welcomes visitors to his 11-acre farm, where he grows more than 80 varieties of perennial and annual flowers for them to pick.

Wollam and other flower farmers, like Jenny and Paul Maloney of Wind Haven Farm in King William County, are extending their growing seasons. Wollam's tulips were ready by Valentine's Day in his heated greenhouse, and the Maloneys' high tunnels

produced blooms by mid-January.

Growing over 100 varieties of flowers and foliage on their farm, the Maloneys provide year-round materials for Richmond florists, businesses and grocery stores.

"Virginia is a beautiful place to grow flowers," Jenny Maloney remarked. She said the state's "happy medium of weather" and thriving ecosystems allow a greater variety of flowers to thrive.

They're utilizing high tunnels to offer their wholesale clients plentiful options for Mother's Day—what Jenny calls "the Super Bowl for local flower farms." Bachelor's buttons, campanula, orlaya, nigella and delphinium are among the variety of blooms that will be ready.

Wollam's Lenten roses were the first to bloom this spring, and his ranunculus, sweet Williams, viburnums, bleeding hearts, daffodils, snowdrops, Iceland poppies and peonies also will be ready for picking by Mother's Day.

Osborn hopes her 200 peony bushes will bloom in time for Mother's Day bouquets, yielding a favorite flower of the holiday.

To find fresh-cut flowers near you, visit the Virginia Grow website at [vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown](https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown).



# Both sides of Virginia recreational cannabis debate tout improved health and safety

By Michael Chun, *Capital News Service*

Three years, four sessions and one veto since the first legislative attempt, Virginia still does not have a recreational cannabis market. Potential investors say that makes it hard to plan for the future. Advocates and some politicians say the reasons the governor gave for his recent veto are only exacerbated by preventing recreational cannabis sales.

Gov. Glenn Youngkin recently vetoed House Bill 698 and Senate Bill 448 which would have created a framework for an adult-use, recreational cannabis market.

This session was not the first time the General Assembly acted to create a retail market. Lawmakers passed a bill in 2021, but the part of the bill that would create a recreational market had to also be passed the next year before it became law — which never happened. The part that did not need reenactment legalized simple possession of marijuana.

Republicans gained a House majority in 2022, along with a new governor who was uninterested in creating a cannabis market. Lawmakers skipped over the issue in 2023 and brought it back this year with a legislative Democratic majority.

Del. Paul Krizek, D-Fairfax, and Sen. Aaron Rouse, D-Virginia Beach, worked on a compromise between their two bills, and expressed disappointment over the governor's vetoes.

"Public servants are obligated to tackle pressing issues, regardless of their origin or culpability. They cannot cherry-pick which problems to address," Rouse stated.

Youngkin is concerned the illegal market will thrive if a recreational market is established, but other lawmakers believe the lack of a legal market is driving up those numbers.

"States following this path have seen adverse effects on children's and adolescent's health and safety, increased gang activity and violent crime, significant deterioration in mental health, decreased road safety, and significant costs associated with retail marijuana that far exceed tax revenue," Youngkin stated in his veto.

The better approach would be to revisit any discrepancies in enforcement, according to the governor.

"Governor Youngkin's failure to act allows an already thriving illegal cannabis market to persist, fueling criminal activity and endangering our communities," Krizek stated in an email. "This veto squandered a vital opportunity to safeguard Virginians and will only exacerbate the proliferation of illicit products."

Rouse called the governor's "dismissive stance" toward cannabis sales unacceptable.

The unregulated and untaxed illegal cultivation and distribution of cannabis generates at least over a billion dollars annually in Virginia, according to a 2020 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, or JLARC, report.

As the law currently stands in Virginia, adults over 21 can legally use and possess cannabis for an amount up to 1 ounce. Green-thumb adults are allowed to cultivate four plants at home. Adults can also pay to get medical approval and purchase cannabis through state-approved dispensaries.

**Advocates Disappointed, say Bill was Good**

Chelsea Higgs Wise is the executive director of Marijuana Justice. She has trodden the Capitol steps since 2019 to lobby and inform lawmakers. She testifies in committees about cannabis-related legislation, including equity measures and the modification of cannabis-related offenses.

The Black-led organization's advocacy work includes a path forward for people who have been incarcerated on marijuana charges, through repeal, repair and rehabilitation. The organization also pushed for social equity programs that help formerly incarcerated people get into the legal cannabis business.

The legislation vetoed by the governor would have legalized it right, Higgs Wise said.

"It includes the equity portions and includes repair for communities and includes certain funds," she said. "This is what we've been promising Virginia."

The excitement did not last long. A few weeks



**Drying process for cannabis after harvest. Photo courtesy of Chester Cannabis Co.**

after the bill passed, it met the governor's veto pen.

"It's a grave disappointment that Virginia is going to have to wait for a safe and regulated cannabis market," Higgs Wise said. "Gov. Youngkin's obsession with the legacy market is misplaced, but we recognize the need for a regulated market for reinvesting our community."

Marijuana Justice does not use the term black market, and instead uses "legacy market."

"The legacy market is thriving, we've always had a marijuana market here in Virginia and across the U.S.," Higgs Wise said. "We don't need the government to tell us what that is. They're just coming in now to make a lot of money off of it."

The Virginia Cannabis Equity Loan Fund would have provided grants, low-interest and zero-interest loans to qualified micro business applicants. The fund was called the social equity license in previous legislation, and Republicans attempted in 2022 to channel the money to other places and eliminate the qualifying provisions.

The micro business provisions were a way for people to get involved with what is anticipated to be a multimillion dollar business, including veterans of the U.S. armed forces as long as they met certain qualifications.

Illegal markets often still thrive in the first few years after a state legalizes cannabis sales. That has to do with equity provisions, or lack thereof, according to Higgs Wise.

"Their people that they know are not selling it, that means it is not in their neighborhood; it's too expensive," she said.

The familiar aspect of connecting with the local supplier, often a friend or someone from the community, also does not come with extra fees.

"These are the equity portions that we have to think about for the consumers as well as for the business owners," Higgs Wise said.

The first year of the recreational market could see sales between \$123 million to \$206 million, according to JLARC estimates from the bill's impact statement. By year five, sales were forecast to be between \$609 million to just over \$1 billion.

Lawmakers settled on a 8% marijuana tax, with sales and use tax at 1.1% percent. Localities had the option to tax up to 2.5%, and include a food and beverage tax.

Recreational marijuana sales could bring in \$6.41 million in the first year from the 8% tax alone. By the fifth year, the tax revenue was forecast at \$66.41 million.

The legal marijuana market would overtake the illegal market by year four, and have nearly two-thirds of the sales by year five, even with much higher tax rates, JLARC reported in 2020.

JLARC looked at the reported cannabis use rates compared to the use rates of other states to determine this figure.

Higgs Wise said to "rest assured" her organization will be back next year to push for a recre-



**A cannabis plant grown at home in a closet, courtesy of the grower. Virginia residents over the age of 21 can grow up to four plants.**

ational market.

"For those who want to participate in Virginia's cannabis industry, we welcome you to join us to fight for a fair and just market," Higgs Wise said.

Impact on Virginia Cannabis Companies  
Griffin Moon and Dave Bredard launched Chester Cannabis Co. two years ago to sell hemp products that were legal at the time, and had hopes of getting into the cannabis market.

"So that's definitely the biggest challenge for companies in this industry is all the changing legislation," Moon said. "You just never know what's coming."

Currently, hemp products cannot contain more than 0.3% THC. Moon and Bredard disposed of a number of products after lawmakers cracked down on THC levels in hemp in 2022. Lawmakers sought more regulation of delta-8 sales, according to a report from the Virginia Mercury.

They had to go back to the lab and create a new product line, Moon said.

"It's hard to kinda set up a business if you can only think of a year or a couple years in advance and set up, you know, five, 10 years down the line," Moon said. "It's just hard to think of the future."

**Policy Standpoint**

Gregory Habeeb, president of Gentry Locke Consulting, represents Virginia's Cannabis Association. He served as a Republican delegate representing southwestern constituents from 2011-2018.

A roughly \$3 billion illegal cannabis market already exists, Habeeb said.

"So the real issue is how we should regulate that market," Habeeb said. "By passing a bill to regulate it, we can address the public health and safety concerns."

The illegal market continues to grow, going untaxed, unregulated, with untested products sold, according to Habeeb.

"We're hearing from law enforcement all over the state that they want something done, it's time to get it done," Habeeb said.

Polls continue to show that recreational cannabis is a bipartisan issue. A majority of Virginians support retail sales. Democrats have the most support (70%), followed by Independents (54%) and then Republicans (46%).

"Nobody wants a system where unlicensed drug dealers sell untested, untaxed products," Habeeb said. "I think there's going to be some political consequences, as more and more people come around to the idea that we need to regulate this market."

*VCU InSight reporter Mark Jones contributed to this report.*

*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. VCU InSight is the school's broadcast capstone.*

## Parking fees to be implemented at newest state park

Sweet Run State Park will implement a \$10 parking fee for guests beginning on May 6.

Virginia's newest state park doesn't have a contact station yet, so guests will be able to pay using a self-pay envelope found at the pay stations located at each of the park's entrances and parking areas. The pay stations accept cash, check or Visa, Mastercard or Discover cards.

Guests can also purchase an Annual Pass to avoid daily parking fees at Sweet Run, as well as all Virginia State Parks.

"We made it through the first few months of the transition into a new park and now comes the parking fee collection time that all guests were anticipating," said Sweet Run State Park Manager Kevin Bowman. "Parking revenue will be used to continue to develop Virginia State Parks and its pro-



**Aerial view of Sweet Run State Park**

grams. Just a reminder that purchasing an Annual Pass is a great way to avoid daily park fees and is a perfect gift for outdoor enthusiasts or anyone on your gift list any time of the year."

Failure to pay the entrance fee can result in a \$25 parking ticket.

Visit the Virginia State Park parking fee webpage for more details on parking fees and how to make payments.

### DOMINION VALLEY PARK

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2024

#### MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

FRIDAY MAY 24 | 5:30 PM

Down East Boys  
Chuck Wagon Gang  
Kelly Ratcliff

SATURDAY MAY 25 | 5:30 PM

Karen Peck & new River  
The Harvesters Quartet  
The Churchmen

SUNDAY MAY 26 | 10:30 AM

Music by Beachy's Next Generation  
Message by Curt Ashley

#### LABOR DAY WEEKEND

FRIDAY AUGUST 30 | 5:30 PM

The Inspirations  
The Churchmen  
Jeff Tolbert & Primitive Road

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 11 | 5:30 PM

The Singing Cookes  
The Harvesters Quartet  
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SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 2 | 10:30 AM

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# Authors participate in book signing event



Stephen Rainey signs one of his many books.



Finley Turner with several hardback copies of "The Engagement Party: a Novel."



Dr. Pam Cobler and Betsy Henny shared a table.

By Jessica Dillon

Several local authors spent time at Imagination Lavender Farm recently for an April 27 book signing event. Many set up tables to sign and sell books on the farm that's located in Martinsville. The authors included Ben Williams, Dr. Pam Cobler and horror author Stephen Rainey.

Many genres of books were on sale, including Jim Mize's comedic "Bean Pole" series and Brenda Strickland's "Moonshine and Salteens." Attendees could visit the author's tables, talk to them about their books and even purchase a signed copy.

Families visiting the event brought their children and dogs along to enjoy the sunny weather.

This marked the first book signing event held at the farm, with many of the authors commenting that they enjoyed their time at the venue.

"It's always fun to attend a new event, it's a beautiful venue, and it's always fun to meet new

authors," said Cobler, author of "Manners Matter: Kuddle Kitty." She is currently waiting for the second book in her series to come out.

"It's been really fun. I think it's nice to see people supporting local book authors," said Finley Turner, author of the hit book "The Engagement Party: A Novel." "I'm very happy that people are still into reading."

Authors chatted with each other as the event drew to an end.

"My favorite part was hearing about what everyone else has been doing," said Melissa Rooney, author of "The Fate of The Frog."

Angela Wright put together the book signing event and plans to host more author signings in the future. Those wishing to attend the next author signing can email Wright at Mizewill@Comcast.com for vetting. Future author events will be by invitation only with limited space available.

"I'm pleasantly surprised that we had such a

great turnout and that we have so many authors from this area or originally from this area," said Carolyn Byrd, who owns the farm along with her husband. The book signing took place under the main shelter, and refreshments were available for attendees.

The farm also opened its gift shop to let visitors browse handmade art and lavender products.

Other upcoming events there include a Memoir Writing Workshop on May 4 and Mother's Day Tea on May 11. The farm is currently open for the season on Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and other days by appointment only.

Appointments can be made by contacting Imagination Lavender Farm at 276-734-2828. For more information about events visit [www.imaginationlavenderfarm.com](http://www.imaginationlavenderfarm.com) and on the farm's Facebook page.

## First Saturday Outing set



Enjoy a late spring paddle on the beautiful Mayo River on May 4, as the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) floats six miles from Anglin Mill's Mayo Beach to NC 770 near Stoneville, N.C. DRBA's First Saturday Outings (FSO) are always free and open to the public. Learn more at <https://www.danriver.org/event/2024-05-04-9-00/may-fso-paddle-on-the-mayo>.

## Smith River Singers host concert



The Smith River Singers performed Monday for an audience of several hundred at Galilean House of Worship. Pictured here, Kim Snyder, backed by the Still Water Ensemble, sings "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." Pam Randall is directing, and Beth Chapman accompanies on piano. Smith River Singers are all volunteers, and membership is open. Sixty-five singers performed in this concert, "Love Is in the Air."



Jeff Stegall (in front) is the soloist as the Smith River Singers perform "When I Fall in Love." Pam Randall is directing, and Beth Chapman accompanies on piano. Smith River Singers are all volunteer, and membership is open. Sixty-five singers performed in this concert, "Love Is in the Air."

Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society

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2024

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Friday, June 7, 2024 • Barefoot Modern

Friday, July 5, 2024 • The League of Ordinary Gentlemen

Friday, August 2, 2024 • Forrest Taylor

Friday, September 6, 2024 • The Ghosts of Liberty

Friday, September 13, 2024 • "Line-Dancing on the Square"

Friday, October 4, 2024 • Andy Burnette Trio

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# Clinch River State Park expands in Russell County

A total of 457 acres of riverfront mountains in Russell County have been added to Clinch River State Park, which will provide new public access to the river for outdoor recreation.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has acquired a cluster of five parcels along 2.5 miles of Clinch River connecting to the town of Cleveland as part of the park's Artrip Bent Unit.

The largest of the new tracts, 435 acres known as the Owens Preserve, was previously owned by The Nature Conservancy. In 2001, the nonprofit organization donated an open-space easement and dedication of the property to DCR as an addition to Cleveland Barrens Natural Area Preserve. DCR secured total ownership of the property this month, which will be managed by Virginia State Parks.

The site features more than 4,000 feet of river frontage and natural spring-fed streams, one of which forms a waterfall that flows into the Clinch.

"We know outdoor enthusiasts are looking forward to taking in the views of the rugged hills and hollows along the Clinch River, which is a global biodiversity hotspot. This addition to Clinch River State Park will allow us to showcase our natural resources to the millions of individuals who live in Virginia and nearby states and play an even greater role in the expansion of Southwest Virginia's outdoor economy," said DCR Director Matthew Wells.

Clinch River is Virginia's first "blueway" state park, or recreational water trail system. The Artrip Bent Unit and Sugar Hill Unit in St. Paul in Wise County make up the two main anchors of the park.

With additional canoe/kayak access points forming a "string of pearls" along a 140-mile stretch of the river from Tazewell, Virginia to the Virginia-Tennessee state line, the park will offer opportunities for day and overnight trips to explore the Clinch River Valley and its natural treasures.

"The Nature Conservancy seeks to connect our conservation work to the needs of local communities along the Clinch River," said Meg Short, land protection program



A waterfall at the Owens Preserve tract. (Photo courtesy of Schnabel Engineering.)

manager for the nonprofit organization in Southwest Virginia. "Our transfer of the Owens Preserve to Virginia DCR supports both the conservation of an important natural area and the expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities in our region."

The second parcel of the Artrip Bent Unit, about 232 acres in Russell County, was purchased by DCR in 2019. Adjoining the Owens Preserve, these two tracts combine to form a significant land mass of nearly 700 acres, and an area sufficient for establishing resource and natural area protection, trails and other facilities.

"My husband, the late Tom Owens, was born, raised, and lived his entire life in the small Artrip community," said Shirley Owens, the former owner of the two tracts. "As a young man, he had a dream of owning all the land on the south side of the Clinch

River from Artrip to Cleveland. Over the years, he purchased tract after tract until his dream became a reality. Since the Owens Preserve will now be part of the Clinch River State Park, it – along with his other properties conveyed separately – and all the land that he loved is together again. He would be pleased that he created a legacy that will be enjoyed and appreciated by future generations."

Under the adopted master plan for the park, the first improvements at the Artrip Bent Unit will include an entrance road, trails, ranger station and maintenance yard. Currently, this property is closed to the public, but visitors are welcome to explore the existing trails at Sugar Hill as well as the Clinch River from the park's day use boat launches at Artrip, Carbo and Old Castlewood.

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