

## HENRY COUNTY ENTERPRISE

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# Owner of local eatery faces multiple charges, ABC license under scrutiny

## By Staff Reports

Lovrico "Rico" Johnson, Sr., the owner of Kornna Kitchen, is facing multiple felony charges, including 18 counts related to finances. During an arraignment hearing on Dec. 5 in Martinsville General District Court, Johnson said he plans to retain legal counsel.

Johnson has been charged with nine counts of larceny by bad checks and nine counts of obtaining money under false pretenses in connection with alleged incidents in June, September, and October, court records suggest. Johnson said that he had filed Chapter 13

bankruptcy and attributed the charges to automatic withdrawals that occurred after the filing.

The financial allegations come amid additional scrutiny for Kornna Kitchen, which has faced the loss of its temporary Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) license.

Martinsville Police Chief Robert Fincher recently sent a letter to the Virginia ABC Authority requesting a review of the eatery's compliance and license to sell mixed drinks due to incidents that occurred outside of the restaurant and police utilization in respond-

ing to those calls. That letter was drafted a few months after Fincher supported the restaurant's bid for an ABC license in March.

Fincher explained the process of endorsing businesses for ABC licenses, and noted that initial endorsements are standard. "If there ends up being a problem, then we have to write a letter to the ABC stating, 'hey, listen, it's time that needs to be reviewed more, we recommend it be reviewed,'" Fincher said.

Had Kornna Kitchen's license been permanent, revocation would have required a formal

(See Local Eatery p. 2)

## County School Board Honors Teachers of the Year; Finalizes Cell Phone Policy



Teachers of the Year from each school were honored during the December 5 meeting of the Henry County School Board.

## By Jessica Dillon

The Henry County School Board met on December 5 to honor outstanding teachers, approve a new legislative agenda, and finalize updates to the district's cell phone policy. Teachers of the Year from each school were celebrated during the meeting, with the top three — District Teacher of the Year and two runners up, receiving a special reward.

"We believe education is the foundation of our community, and we're proud to recognize and reward our exceptional educators and provide special prizes for the top winners," Barry Nelson, and Autos By Nelson, said. "In celebration of their dedication, the Henry County Public Schools District Teacher of the Year and the two runners-up were each hand-

ed the keys to a brand-new Ford Mustang Mach-E, the first-ever rally-inspired electric vehicle by Ford. Perfect for outdoor adventures or the daily drive to school, they'll enjoy this incredible vehicle for three months. Congratulations to Meadow View Elementary School's Carl Scales (2nd Runner-Up), Axton Elementary School's Amanda Chaney (1st Runner-Up), and Bassett High School's Joshua Doss, the District Teacher of the Year."

"We've got to make school fun again," Nelson added, emphasizing the importance of supporting educators.

Educators selected as Teacher of the Year from individual schools are:

Elementary Schools— Aman-

(See School Board p. 2)



Martinsville School Board members honor the division's Teachers of the Year.

## City School Board Honors Teachers of the Year, Shifts Graduation Date

## By Jessica Dillon

The Martinsville City School Board held its final meeting of 2024 on December 9, highlighting accomplishments, approving policy updates, and making adjustments to key events, including Martinsville High School's graduation ceremony.

## Teachers of the Year Recognized

Teachers of the Year from each city school were honored, with the district-wide winner set to be announced in January. The 2024 honorees are:

- Clearview Early Learning Center: Ashlee Cook
- Patrick Henry Elementary: Kelly Williams
- Albert Harris Elementary: Jasmine Hall

- Martinsville Middle School: Beverly Woody
- Martinsville High School: Jeremy Scott

## Graduation Date and Venue Changes

Responding to feedback from families and staff, the board approved changes to Martinsville High School's graduation ceremony schedule.

"This is from parents to our staff," said board chairperson Yvonne Givens. Superintendent Dr. Zebedee Talley explained further: "The graduation is traditionally held on Memorial Day weekend. Our families are traveling, a lot is going on."

Starting in 2025, graduation will be held on Friday of Memorial Day

(See Teachers Honored p. 7)

## Input sought on plan for Mayo River State Park



Future Mayo River State Park

## By Staff Reports

Residents and stakeholders will have the chance to influence the development of Mayo River State Park during a public meeting on December 16. Hosted by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the session will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Lester Banquet Hall at the Spen-

cer-Penn Centre, 475 Spencer Penn Road, Spencer.

The meeting aims to gather input for the park's master plan, a critical document that will guide the park's development, conservation, and recreational offerings over the next 30 years.

A Collaborative Vision for Mayo River State Park



Mayo River State Park, located in southwestern Henry County along the Virginia-North Carolina border, spans 637 acres, including the confluence of the North and South Mayo Rivers. The park complements North Carolina's Mayo River State Park, which extends 16 miles downstream.

"The master plan defines the

park's purpose, goals, and objectives and provides direction for construction, expansion, and operations," the DCR states on its website. The planning process integrates public input, resource assessments, market studies, and business development strategies to ensure the park meets both community and visitor

(See Mayo River State Park p. 3)

## Father-Son Tradition: Bowers Tree Lot Spreads Christmas Cheer for 35 Years in Koehler



Mike Bowers has operated Bowers Tree Lot on Appalachian Drive in Koehler for 35 years. Now his son Joseph Bowers joins him in helping people find and take home their perfect Christmas trees. (By Holly Kozelsky)

## Early deadlines, holiday closings set

The Enterprise Office will be closed Monday, Dec. 23 through Friday, Dec. 27 to allow us to spend time with our families.

We will check emails periodically. To reach us, email Debbie Hall, dhall@theenterprise.net or Pat Delaney, submissions@theenterprise.net.

The office will reopen at 9 a.m. on Dec. 30, with regular hours through Dec. 31. It will be closed on Wednesday, Jan. 1, and reopen with regular hours on Thursday, Jan. 2.

The Christmas edition will be published on December 21.

For the Dec. 28 edition, items for the Community Calendar and Classified section must be received no later than 5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 19.

We wish you and yours the happiest and merriest of holidays.

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## Local Eatery

(cont. from page 1)

hearing, Fincher added. He referenced a similar situation involving Roosky's Bar & Grill, a former Uptown restaurant, where a letter was sent requesting license revocation "right around the time that the homicide occurred."

Johnson maintains there have been no incidents in his place of business, and that incidents outside the eatery also occur at similar businesses. He added that he cannot control public areas outside of his eatery.

Fincher explained that ABC officials consider incidents occurring within a certain radius of licensed establishments when evaluating compliance. "It could just be in the general area. The ABC takes a look at that, and takes those into consideration as being a result of that business even though it may not be inside," he said, explaining that the agency assesses whether nearby incidents can be attributed to the business.

The police department provides ABC officials with service call records for licensed establishments, which are used to determine compliance. "Then, they'll go and work with the business saying, 'hey, you need to correct this, or you need to do that.' They're a law enforcement agency, but they're also a compliance agency," Fincher said, adding Kornna Kitchen has maintained its license to sell beer and wine.

In Kornna Kitchen's case, the recommendation to review the mixed drink license followed an analysis of police service calls and video footage that allegedly showed patrons engaging in criminal activity.

Johnson has said incidents would not occur if police officers controlled 'loitering,' which he cites as the reason for many issues uptown.

Fincher addressed misconceptions about enforcement in Uptown Martinsville, noting that loitering ordinances are not enforceable in Virginia following a court decision declaring them unconstitutional. "We can work on things such as trespassing on private property, in certain areas, and drunk in public," he said. "The loitering itself, there isn't a law that can be enforced on that."

In interviews after his court appearance, Johnson alleged many of his current issues are racism and/or hate crimes.

Although he declined to comment on pending cases, speaking in general terms and hypothetically, Fincher said investigations/charges are initiated because "people come to us or companies approach us. We investigate all cases brought to us."

City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides said that she does not have the facts necessary to form a professional opinion about Johnson's allegations. However, from a personal standpoint, she feels the situation is

"tragic for Rico and his family. In my mind, Rico has just tried to run a restaurant. Rico has given a lot to this city."

She added that sometimes, businesses get in over their head financially, and may find it difficult "to keep the lights on." The situation is sad for Johnson and the city. "We want more businesses in our uptown."

Professionally, Ferrell-Benavides said it is her job to ensure the city acts responsibly and acceptably. Neither the police department nor the Commonwealth Attorney's office fall under her purview.

"A lot of stuff is going on with this. Whether its racism or not, I can't say one way or the other, but I think we all have to be cognizant to the times we live in," as well as subtlety and subjectivity, Ferrell-Benavides said.

Martinsville Mayor L.C. Jones said that based on comments he has heard, Johnson's challenges stem from "classism, more of him not knowing his place. If he were outside of the area of uptown, I don't think he would have many of the current issues."

Jones said there is often a "mixed message between what he (Johnson) is saying and what we're hearing" from other sources.

He noted that other restaurants in the city also face issues, with incidents sometimes both outside and inside. Some of those businesses also offer live music and activities similar to the events Johnson provides. However, Jones said the location of Johnson's restaurant is comparable to the former Roosky's, which was also located uptown.

Roosky's eventually closed permanently, with its owner citing financial concerns at the time.

Jones said he receives frequent calls about the TAD Tavern, its success, and other businesses in the area. He also suggested that some of Johnson's problems may be "self-inflicted. I don't think he fully understands the culture and community here in Martinsville," Jones said. "What he envisioned bringing" in terms of a club, "the city wasn't ready for that."

Jones said he hopes Johnson's difficulties "are not politicized to make people of color" feel unwelcome, unwanted, or pushed out of the city. Instead, he wants the situation serves as a catalyst "to have those hard conversations."

If someone feels they are being targeted due to racism, Jones said, "and if they can articulate it, that it's okay (for them) to feel that way," adding that those who feel differently should have the opportunity to express themselves as well.

"We can't just throw a blinder on it," Jones said. "We need to get back to a place where we can have these sensitive conversations on

issues. We've got to be able to have these discussions."

Johnson's history suggests decades of legal issues across Maryland, North Carolina, and other areas, including criminal and civil cases involving charges such as assault, theft, fraud, and identity theft. Records from the Maryland Judiciary Case Search and North Carolina Judicial Branch eCourts databases link Johnson to numerous cases, and the U.S. Department of Treasury filed a federal lien against him for \$124,845.

Johnson began working in the bail bonds industry in November 2011, obtaining his initial license through Hard Knocks Bail Bonds, according to the Maryland Insurance Administration (MIA). In August 2012, the agency revoked his license after discovering he had misrepresented his criminal history on his application, a violation of state law. Investigations into complaints indicated that Johnson owed significant restitution to clients.

The MIA subsequently revoked the licenses of Hard Knocks Bail Bonds, Hard Knocks Bail Bonds Co., and AAAA U Got Bail Bail Bonds in 2014 for violations of Maryland insurance laws. In March 2015, at the MIA's request, the Frederick County Circuit Court issued a temporary restraining order to take down Hard Knocks' website. The agency alleged the company had continued to operate online despite its revoked licenses, soliciting business and collecting payments from the public.

"Numerous complaints have been filed with the MIA relating to this business. They originated in jurisdictions including Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Prince George's, and Frederick counties," the agency stated.

Johnson's legal troubles escalated in 2017 when he was charged with multiple counts of failing to return premiums, misappropriating premiums, and theft. He pleaded guilty to failing to return premiums and was sentenced to 10 years in prison, with all but three years suspended. He was also ordered to serve three years of supervised probation and pay \$11,459 in restitution to victims.

Additionally, Johnson was convicted of acting as an insurance producer without a license, resulting in another five-year sentence, with three years suspended, probation, and an order to pay \$2,500 in restitution.

In Martinsville, Johnson is also charged with two counts of extort: in writing, according to court records. Those charges stem from an alleged Nov. 23 incident, court records indicate.

Further court proceedings in Martinsville are scheduled for February 24.

## School Board

(cont. from page 1)

da Chaney (Axton), Sarah Reed (Campbell Court), Leah Lagesse (Drewry Mason), Sarah McCormick (G.W. Carver), Carl Scales (Meadow View), Taylor Walker (Mount Olivet), Jennifer Adkins (Rich Acres), Rachel Harrison (Sanville), and Kelley Bennett (Stanleytown);

Middle and High Schools—Page Belcher (Fieldale-Collinsville Middle), Alisha Britton (Laurel Park Middle), Joshua Doss (Bassett High), Mart Barrett (Magna Vista High), and Anna Rakes (Center for Community Learning).

An intermission allowed the top three winners to view their new vehicles.

### Cell Phone Policy Finalized

The board also finalized revisions to the JFC-R Standards of Student Conduct, clarifying cell phone use restrictions. The new policy prohibits cell phone use during the entire school day, including lunch and transitions between classes.

"Bell-to-bell" does include lunch and time in between classes," said Superintendent Amy Blake-Lewis. The policy updates also addressed outdated terms like "beepers."

Exceptions to the ban may be granted through 504 or IEP plans. "That decision is made by the IEP team in conjunction with the Director of Student Services and the designee of the Superintendent," Blake-Lewis explained.

Disciplinary actions for violations will escalate gradually. First-time offenders will participate in an educational module,



Joshua Doss, who was selected as the District Teacher of the Year, is pictured in front of the new Ford Mustang Mach-E. Autos By Nelson provided the vehicle for Doss and other top teachers to use for three months. Doss is an educator at Bassett High School. (Contributed photos)

with more severe penalties, such as in-school suspension, reserved for repeated violations. Out-of-school suspension is a last-resort consequence.

"There are two strands of consequences," Blake-Lewis said. Noncompliant students could face interventions, including meetings with parents and counselors. Parents of compliant students may be asked to retrieve confiscated phones.

Student board member Bryson Bateman voiced concerns about the new policy. "Realistically, I think the policy we have now is pretty effective," Bateman said, questioning the removal of limited phone usage during lunch and



Amanda Chaney holds a bouquet of flowers and inspects the brand-new Ford Mustang Mach-E awarded to her from Autos By Nelson. Chaney was named the 1st runner-up, and works at Axton Elementary School.

transitions. He also expressed concern about the severity of penalties, saying, "The penalties for this are quite severe."

Blake-Lewis countered with examples from districts already implementing similar policies. "It was a 'delight,'" she said, noting that students in those districts appeared more engaged and collaborative. "Several superintendents said that they see students bringing card games and board games out at lunch and using that time to really engage with each other."

### Legislative Agenda and Other Actions

The board approved a new legislative agenda focusing on



Carl Scales tried out the vehicle he will use for three months, courtesy of Barry Nelson and Autos By Nelson. Scales, a teacher at Meadow View Elementary School, was the 2nd runner-up.

teacher recruitment and retention, competitive salaries, school safety, accountability, accreditation, and governance. Recommendations from the Evergreen Salary Study were also adopted, along with the calendar for the 2025–2026 school year.

In other matters, the board also recognized achievements from students and staff, including:

\*Bassett High School and Magna Vista High School volleyball players.

\*Bassett High School boys' cross country runners.

\*Winners of the district's holiday card contest.

\*Virginia School Boards Association honorees.

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

## Meetings

### Tuesday, December 17

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m., Municipal Building, 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville.

Henry County Board of Supervisors meetings, 3 and 6 p.m., Summerlin Room, Henry County Administration Building.

## Events

### Friday, December 13

Christmas Extravaganza, 5 p.m., Spencer-Penn Center, 475 Spencer Penn Rd, Spencer.

### Saturday, December 14

The 10th Annual Brenda Riggins Memorial Christmas Blood Drive with the American Red Cross, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Stanleytown Elementary School Gymnasium, 74 Edgewood Drive, Stanleytown. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments have priority. You may schedule an appointment by contacting the American Red Cross at 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or

online at [www.redcrossblood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org), Sponsor Code: Brenda, or in the Red Cross Blood Donor App.

### Thursday, December 19

Silent Book Club Meeting, 6 to 7:30 p.m., Oakdale Inn, 214 Oakdale St, Martinsville.

## ONGOING

Uptown Pub Run, every Monday at 6 p.m., meets at Renewal Brewing 32 Franklin St, Martinsville.

The Martinsville-Henry County Lions Club regularly meets on the second and fourth Tuesday 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.

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

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

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

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.

## Mayo River State Park

(cont. from page 1)

needs. A dedicated Advisory Committee is working closely with the DCR to ensure the master plan reflects diverse perspectives. The committee includes representatives from organizations such as the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA), Henry County government, the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce, the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalists, the Sappony Tribe, the Monacan Indian Nation, and local civic groups.

"The Advisory Committee is involved at every stage of the master planning process, meeting three times to review and share ideas about park goals, programming, site design, and overall planning," the DCR states.

Henry County Administrator Dale Wagoner emphasized the importance of community participation.

"Mayo River State Park will bring so much to the area—outdoor adventures, chances to learn about nature, and a real boost for tourism and our local economy," Wagoner said. "The meeting on December 16 is a chance for everyone to have a voice in shaping this park for the future. I hope folks will come out and share their ideas—it's going to be an exciting step forward for our county."

Those unable to attend can stay informed and provide feedback through the DCR website or email. Mayo River State Park boasts

several unique features:

- **Size and Location:** Spanning 637 acres, the park is nestled in the scenic landscape of Henry County with elevations ranging from 710 to 965 feet.

- **Historical Roots:** Once home to the Sappony Native American tribes, the area contains archaeological evidence of villages from 1000-1450. The park's name honors surveyor William Mayo, who helped map the Virginia-North Carolina border in the early 1700s.

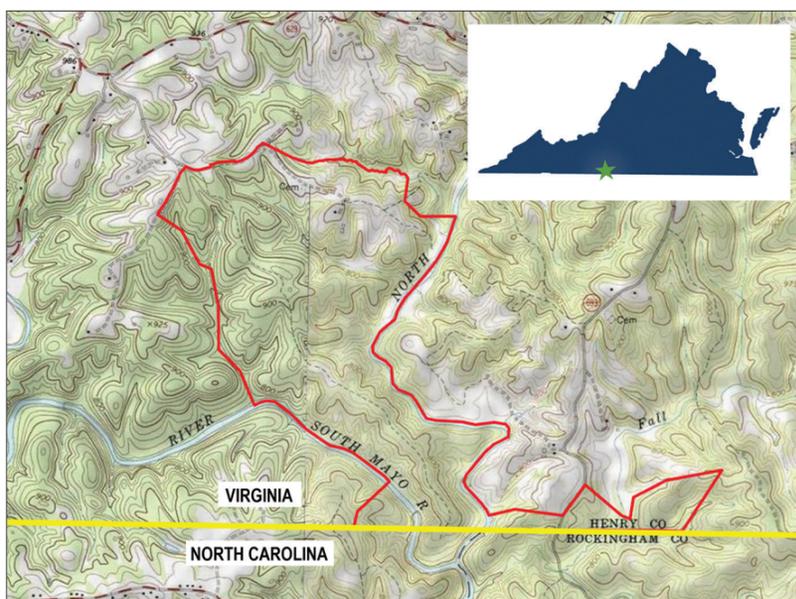
- **Scenic Rivers:** Portions of the North and South Mayo Rivers were designated as Virginia Scenic Rivers in 2008, recognizing their ecological and recreational value.

- **Trail System:** Dedicated on Earth Day 2022, the park's trails provide visitors with opportunities to explore its natural beauty.

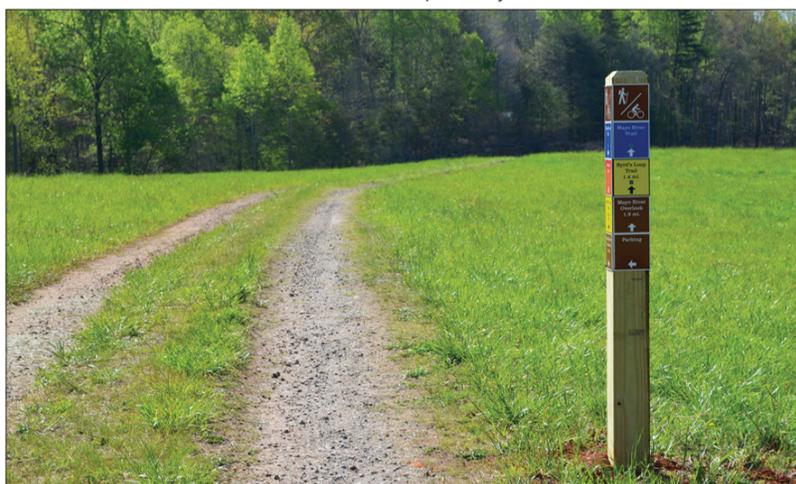
- **Regional Collaboration:** Sharing a border with North Carolina's Mayo River State Park allows for cross-state initiatives and resource sharing.

The DCR aims to complete the park's master plan by fall 2026, setting a clear roadmap for its development. Public participation at meetings like the one on December 16 ensures the park reflects the values and needs of the community.

For more information about the meeting or Mayo River State Park, visit [www.mayoriverspmasterplanva.com](http://www.mayoriverspmasterplanva.com) or email [PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov).



An outline of the proposed Mayo River State Park boundaries and features. The current timeline indicates the Master Plan will be completed by fall 2026.



## Bailey selected Deputy of the Month



Henry County Sheriff's deputy Bridgett Bailey was selected as Deputy of the Month for November. Jarrett Marketing LLC, and Papa's Pizzeria, Hollywood Cinema, and Livy's ice cream shop provide free meals, movie passes, and ice cream, and a Certificate of Appreciation. Bailey (center) is pictured with Henry County Sheriff's Capt. Redd (left) and Michael Jarrett.

## Congressional staff set local office hours

Ninth District Rep. Morgan Griffith's staff will be available at the following locations on December 18.

City of Martinsville: 10 - 11:30 a.m., City Hall, Room 208, 55 W. Church St., Martinsville;

Patrick County: 12:30 - 2 p.m., Patrick County Administration Building, Conference Room, 106 Rucker Street, Stuart.

In the event of inclement weather (heavy snow, sleet, icy rain, etc.), traveling office hours may be rescheduled to avoid putting constituents at risk. If schools are closed, office hours will be closed as well. Call the Christiansburg Office, (540) 381-5671 or the Abingdon Office, (276) 525-1405 with any questions or to schedule an appointment time in the event of an office hour closure.



## City deputy receives Top Gun Award

Martinsville Sheriff's Office 1st Lt. T. Gary received the Top Gun Award. Gary scored 99.2 at the qualifying range. The award takes maximum effort and sharpshooter skills to obtain. He is pictured with Martinsville Sheriff Steve Draper (left).

## 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

# The Legislator and the Ombudsman

During the recent election season, many congressional candidates who voted against various spending bills were criticized by their opponents for voting against those bills and yet working to get money for their districts from programs authorized by said bills.

I submit to you, it is not disingenuous but a misunderstanding of the role of Congress. This may require you to remember your civics lessons from school.

At its core, any member of U.S. Congress has two significantly different roles.

One comes in the realm of policy. We are policymakers, and that means drafting legislation, analyzing bills, suggesting changes and then voting for or against the legislation.

Further, the policymaker is tasked to meet with stakeholders, address witnesses in committee, and attend numerous forums.

Whenever I weigh decisions on supporting or opposing a particular bill, I always consider if the bill is in the best interests of my constituents.

What's confusing is once a bill is passed, the legislator switches from the classic policymaker role to an ombudsman role.

The ombudsman role of a Congressman is interfacing with the government for their constituents.

My office can help folks with their passports, assist in inquiries related to federal matters and provide insight on federal grant applications.

Further, the ombudsman role includes working with constituents, whether it be an individual, institution or another government agency, in receiving benefits passed by Congress.

The money is going to be spent, whether I



**Morgan Griffith**

Representative

approve of the underlying policy or not. And as an ombudsman, it is my duty to help get federal assistance for projects in the Ninth.

Because of these two different roles, some will misleadingly claim a lawmaker is not being consistent when they voted against the underlying bill but applaud the money coming to the district.

But it's not that simple.

Why you may ask? Let me explain.

Legislation X may come in the form of a government spending bill, where massive numbers of programs are funded in bills that may be thousands of pages.

Voting against the bill is a policy decision. When voting no, I, like many lawmakers, will have determined that the overall bill, despite some good in it, will do more harm than good.

Once the bill becomes law, however, in my role as an ombudsman, it is my job to get money for my district.

One example of this is the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). I voted against the bill, which injected billions of dollars into the economy in an effort to advance a Green New Deal agenda, funded the hiring of 87,000 new Internal Revenue Service (IRS) agents, and place new regulations and requirements on some prescription drugs.

The IRA passed and became law.

At that point, the provisions in the

bill allowed for any number of clean energy projects to come about. Projects in the Ninth District became eligible to receive federal dollars, such as a lumber grader for a lumber company. Further, the IRA included a tax credit provision for zero-emissions nuclear power production, promoting an energy source that can produce safer, more affordable energy at a more efficient rate.

If the bill only had money directed towards nuclear power production, or the timber industry, I likely would have supported it.

But the bill was massive, and most of it in my opinion was a waste of taxpayer dollars. As the legislator, I voted no. As the ombudsman, I applauded these reasonable projects.

A separate project under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), known as the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, authorized investments for the deployment of broadband service to areas of the country that lack sufficient high-speed internet, including rural areas.

After the IIJA's passage, Governor Youngkin submitted Virginia's BEAD application. Other state applications were approved during this time, while it remained to be seen if Virginia's application was accepted or denied.

This year, I pressed an official from the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) on why Virginia's application hadn't been approved. To me, Youngkin's proposal was a great plan to close the digital divide and equip rural Virginia with access to broadband.

Following the hearing, Virginia's application was approved. I did not vote for the IIJA as the legislator, but as the ombudsman, I was happy to press federal officials to help Virginia and the Ninth District.

I may not always believe in the underlying bill, but nonetheless, once it is law, I will not stop advocating for you, your businesses and our region.

Call the Abingdon office at (276) 525-1405, the Christiansburg office at 540-381-5671, or email by visiting [www.morgangriffith.house.gov](http://www.morgangriffith.house.gov) with questions or comments.

## The Lights of Christmas

After several false starts I've finally gotten the string of lights hanging along the roof of the porch.

Unfortunately, they are hanging down vertically, not across horizontally.

I'd give up, but I can't even give up until I climb back up the stepladder and get them down, then fold them up tight, shove them back in the box, then take all the matching boxes that are on the porch table, and go upstairs, then go into my daughter's room, move the bedside table – nope, I'm not even done explaining yet – open the little door, get on my knees, reach into the dark recesses of the storage space, pull out one of the Christmas boxes, put the boxes in, then hoist myself to my feet, close the little door, put back the furniture, and, whew.

What a hassle. It's too much work even to give up properly, so there they've been there, hanging the wrong way for the past few days.

As I drive around, I admire in wonder all the sparkling Christmas lights I see in other people's yards. How high people have climbed on ladders around and around the trees! How precise the lines along the angles of the houses, even along the rooflines!

For a couple of years, I did manage to light up my yard with colorful displays all in the trees, even way out there toward the road. I loved it, my daughter loved it, and a lot of people complimented it.

But here's the catch. It took a few days to put those lights up. For a working woman with a small child, time to do things is hard to come by, and it's even harder to do things in winter when it's dark after you get home from work. All your eggs are in the basket of the weekend, and if you have something else you are obligated to do on a Saturday or Sunday, you're outta luck.

But the hassle of putting lights up absolutely, totally, completely pales in comparison to the real struggle to get them down. By the time we're getting them down, it's much colder outside, and since Christmas is over and we're just doing the clean-up, it's no fun at all.

So now I have three or four tubs full of Christmas lights and extension cords which mock me every time we get out the boxes of Christmas stuff, or, in fact, whenever I try to get through the crawlspace under the house but have a hard time getting around because they are in



**Holly Kozelsky**

the way.

I did get lights up on the side porch. Of course, the string of lights that's supposed to attach to them but reach out to go around the crepe Myrtle tree is still just sitting coiled up on the porch swing.

I've been thinking about how great that front porch would look all year long. The porch is new – this house used to have one, but it burned off in a fire in the 1970s and I had a porch put back on last spring – so I had to nail up the nails all along the roofline.

Hooks would have been better, but after two or three times of going to town and meaning to get hooks but forgetting, I decided just plain nails would do.

A few days after work, I managed to get up a few nails, but it's a long porch, and it got too dark and cold to finish.

Then there was the Saturday I thought I could put up the lights before we had to leave for a funeral, but I was disappointed to realize that the cords were all folded up.

I unfolded and tried to straighten the cords, but it sunk in that it would take way too long.

Forget it! I said. I'll deal with it after the funeral!

But it was dark after the funeral, the trip to the store and the other Saturday errands.

Inside the house, we got everything decorated beautifully, but didn't get all the boxes put away yet.

Having boxes in the hall takes away a lot of the enjoyment of the (otherwise) beauty.

But it's just a whole new undertaking to get them back into the crawl space, when we're always having to run off instead to this appointment, that club meeting, or that extra-curricular activity.

However, there is one way in which having so much trouble getting my own decorating done has benefited me.

I now truly enjoy other people's Christmas lights much more thoroughly than I would have had I not known how much time and effort it takes to put them up and take them back down again.

## Holiday eating - December pleasures, holiday regret?

We don't have to eat ourselves to death to enjoy the holidays. I'm including myself when I say this. I gained two pounds just from Thanksgiving day alone. I had finally lost a few pounds and presto, faster than the twinkling of an eye I gained two back.

It's easy to do. I ate generous portions of ham and turkey, along with derby pie (two pieces), oatmeal cake and sweet potato pie. Yum, yum it was so darn good!

To show for my eating frenzy is some added weight and a high blood sugar number the next day. There are consequences to such pleasure!

If I get into my holiday rut of eating peanut butter fudge, cherry candy and every Christmas cookie that comes my way, I am certain to gain five pounds and probably more between now and New Year's Eve. I really don't want to look at January 1, 2025 with another resolution that includes spending all of 2025 trying to lose all the damage I did in December of 2024.

Thus, I have decided to attempt to lose a few pounds in December leading up to Christmas Eve. I'll probably blow it on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day because my wife is a phenomenal cook and everything she makes tastes so good. Most likely on Christmas Day, I'll gain a pound or two back, if I can really lose it. It's just scary how I've lost it so many times but it keeps finding me. There has to be some kind of device that fat has implanted in me because it keeps finding where I am!

You have to decide for yourself. Eat, drink, be merry and regret it in January or just say to heck with it and get fatter and fatter. If you don't care, nobody else cares. It's up to us individually.

Here's a question for you. Do you not know of any way to celebrate December other than eating like crazy for an entire month? There are alternatives. Try singing Christmas songs or listening to Christmas music. Watch Christmas movies. Send out Christmas cards. Go to a mall somewhere or Walmart and walk for an hour or so three or four times a week. Call people and wish them Merry Christmas. Take some of those goodies to a local nursing home. Take your tree down and put it back up again, anything but eating non-stop.

It's your life and your one body that God gave to you. I'm not pointing my finger at anybody because I would have four pointing back at me.

Food is a blessed gift from God. So, enjoy your food and let's give God thanks for every bite because so many people have so little to eat. There's another idea, share some of your goodies with the homeless.

My hope and prayer is that our December season will be filled with joy. Enjoy it all but just know January is right around the corner. How much do you want to have to lose in 2025? How bad do you want to feel on January 1?

It's so true that life is short and we should enjoy every day. However, shouldn't we make some effort to try to make this brief life just a few years longer so we can enjoy a few more holidays? Of course, even if you try to eat healthy and exercise you may still die young, but maybe you will die feeling better.

Dr. Glenn Mollette is read in all 50 states. Find out more at [GlennMollette.com](http://GlennMollette.com)

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# OPINION

## The end of civility

Well ladies and gentlemen, it seems that decorum has gone out the window. You can kiss politeness and civility goodbye. While you're at it, say sayonara to gentility and geniality, and don't get too attached to esprit de corps, either.

Yes, it's a new day in America, a crueler, more mean-spirited era. All the things we used to value — maintaining the status quo, looking the other way, taking it — have just been lit on fire and burned to the ground while a bunch of smug jerks dance around the ashes.

There's no point in beating around the bush. You've surely heard the news I'm referring to.

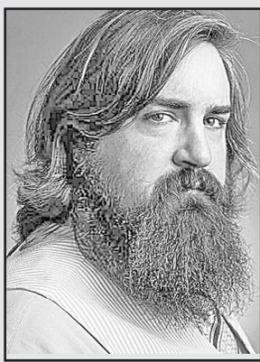
That's right: Avaricio, the robot that eats children and turns them into money, has been shot and killed.

You would think that's bad enough, but the story gets worse. People are celebrating Avaricio's demise! They don't care that this robot was gunned down as it was attempting to snake one of its extendable claw arms into a hospital nursery. They think it's all just a big laugh! These are sick people.

Now listen: I don't necessarily agree with everything that Avaricio did. I'm not the biggest fan of a cold, screaming robot scooping innocent, shrieking children into its cruel steel jaws and then alchemically converting them into stacks of \$100 bills. But I've always been taught that when someone dies, be they human or robot, you should never, ever take even a single moment to question whether their death represents a net positive to humanity, nor should you ever say a single bad word about them ever again.

I didn't come here today to think critically about Avaricio; I came here to cluck my tongue at those that did.

Did you ever stop to think that Avaricio was programmed to eat children and turn them into money? He was just following orders! What, are we going to execute everyone who did something horrible because they were following or-



By Ben R. Williams

ders? We're not Nazis.

If people had a problem with Avaricio, the robot that eats children and turns them into money, they should have found a different way to protest. They could have stood quietly on a sidewalk somewhere holding a sign, or changed their Facebook profile photo to a black background, or thrown soup on the protective plexiglass shield covering a famous painting. But instead, someone took an action that resulted in actual consequences, and that's something that can never be taken back.

But rest assured, the person who killed Avaricio will be caught. This isn't going to be like one of those dime a dozen child disappearances we've been experiencing lately; we're going to put some real resources behind this manhunt. Law enforcement won't rest until Avaricio's killer has been brought to justice. Already, the FBI believes they have a suspect: a man with nothing to lose whose loved one was eaten by Avaricio. This has narrowed the field down to a scant 47,385 suspects, and it'll be no time at all before he's brought to justice.

In the meantime, I hope everyone out there can show just a shred of human decency. This isn't funny; it's a tragedy.

Frankly, all this animosity aimed at this child-eating robot is inhuman.

## Lovell inducted into local chapter



At a recent meeting of the Colonel George Waller Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, local author Pete Lovell was inducted as a member. His patriot ancestor of record is James Johnston, who served as one of George Washington's Life Guards. In the photo (from left to right) are Andrew Doss, chapter registrar; Gary Hollandsworth, chapter treasurer and member sponsor; Pete Lovell; and Karen Lovell.

## Work on solar facility progresses



Work continues on a solar facility being constructed on the site of the Bassett Country Club. The view, captured from Stanleytown Elementary School, shows progress on the project. (By Ray Reynolds)

## Don't let scammers ruin holiday gift card giving

Taxpayers should watch out for gift card scams especially during the holiday season. The IRS never asks for or accepts gift cards as payment for a tax bill.

### Common holiday scams

Scammers may try to trick taxpayers into falling for the gift card scam. With this scam, criminals may impersonate government or collections officials and send official-looking requests for gift cards to resolve an outstanding debt or issue. The scammer may ask the victim to purchase the gift cards from different stores to avoid the suspicion of store employees. Once the taxpayer buys the gift cards, the scammer will ask the taxpayer to provide the gift card number and PIN.

### Scammers could also:

Send emails that appear to be from a legitimate company but are not.

Pose as an IRS agent and call the taxpayer stating that the taxpayer is linked to criminal activity.

Threaten or harass the taxpayer by telling them that they must pay a fake tax penalty.

Find out more about how to avoid tax scams and fraud.

How to tell if it's really the IRS

### The IRS will never:

Call to demand immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a gift card, prepaid debit card or wire transfer. Generally, the IRS will first mail a bill to any taxpayer who owes taxes.

Demand that taxpayers pay taxes without the opportunity to question or appeal the amount they owe. All taxpayers should be aware of their rights.

Threaten to bring in local police, immigration officers or other law enforcement to have the taxpayer arrested for not paying.

Threaten to revoke the taxpayer's driver's license, business licenses or immigration status.

### What to do if targeted by a scam

Anyone who has been a target of a scam should contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration to report a phone scam. Use the IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting webpage or call 800-366-4484. Taxpayers targeted by scams can also report to the Federal Trade Commission or visit their state attorney general.

## Health News

### Health News

The West Piedmont Health District reports the Care Resource Coordination is a program for people who have been impacted by respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). A Care Resource Coordinator can connect people to local resources such as food assistance, childcare, and support programs for people experiencing long-term effects of COVID-19, called Long COVID.

In Virginia, current rates of COVID-19 are low and stable. Seasonal flu activity remains low. RSV activity is increasing, particularly in young children. Respiratory infections caused by rhinoviruses/enteroviruses and the bacterium *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* remain elevated, primarily among children. Respiratory illness activity is expected to increase in the coming weeks, as it usually does in the fall and winter. The most up-to-date data can be found on VDH's Respiratory Disease Dashboard.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) estimates that flu vaccination prevented 9.8 million flu-related illnesses, 4.8 million medical visits, 120,000 flu-related hospitalizations, and 7,900 flu-related deaths during the 2023-2024 season. Studies have shown that older adults who get a flu vaccine are 40% less likely to be hospitalized because of influenza.

In children, a study showed that influenza vaccination reduced the likelihood that a child would need care in a pediatric ICU because of influenza by 70%.

### VDH Earns Innovation Award

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) received the AIM Bull's-Eye Award for Innovation and Excellence in Immunization. The award is presented annually to three state, territorial, or urban area immunization programs (awardees) in recognition of an outstanding immunization initiative. The award celebrates immunization programs' strategic initiatives that "hit their mark," achieving goals and increasing awareness by encouraging replication in other programs.

The VVD's Department of Health Division of Immunizations initiative highlighted the importance of providing newborns with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) protection within one week of birth by simplifying enrollment of birthing hospitals in their VFC program. This initiative increased the accessibility of free RSV protection for more children at birth.

### December is Seasonal Depression Awareness Month.

If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, call 911, or call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 or 1-800-273-8255 or text HOME to the Crisis Text Line at 741741.

## Weaver Wins a "Best of SNO" Award



tion, nursing, and social work programs and faculty gathered in the library, listening to Fender's story and the impact chemotherapy can have on children and their education.

In total, the Iron Blade has won eight writing awards in the past

Ferrum College Sophomore Grace Weaver, an assistant editor of the Iron Blade, has won a "Best of SNO" award for her story on "Considering Chemo."

Kappa Delta Phi (KDP) sponsored a presentation by Amy Fender, who is an Educational Support Navigator with the ASK Childhood Cancer Foundation at Carilion Children's Pediatric Hematology and Oncology Clinic in Roanoke. She serves as a mediator between hospitals and schools to provide the most positive educational experience for children with chronic illnesses and their families. Students in the educa-

year, along with the four national awards from the American Scholastic Press Association--bringing its total to 12 awards.

Assistant Professor of English and Journalism and advisor Dave Campbell said, "Grace Weaver is such a talented writer and reporter. But more than that, she is conscientious and takes her role as Assistant Editor quite seriously. It has been wonderful to watch her growth over the past three semesters, and I'm so excited to see her continue to refine her craft. With her talent and work ethic, the sky is literally the limit with her."

# CLASSIFIED

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# Foundation Launches "Apiary Retreat" Project



Pictured, left to right, Lori Fox, Billy Boaz, Justine Jones, Dr. David L. Jones, Lawson Jones, Owen Jones, Dr. David C. Jones, and Blake Shumate.

Beegins With You Foundation hosted its first donor event for the "Apiary Retreat" project, marking the beginning of an exciting journey towards environmental stewardship and community support. The event, held on November 27, brought together donors and community leaders to explore the future vision of the Apiary Retreat.

Donors included Dr. David L. Jones, his wife Justine, and their sons Owen and Lawson. In partnership with his parents, Karen and Dr. David C. Jones are investing in the youth of our community through their businesses Jones and DeShon Orthodontics and Roanoke Valley Orthodontics. Their commitment to community engagement and fostering an environment of support aligns perfectly with the mission of the Apiary Retreat.

During the event, attendees toured the grounds, engaging with the project's vision, which will include gardens, blueberry orchard, bee-keeping area, walking paths, and educational signage highlighting the importance of bees in our community. These activities are designed to foster stewardship and community engagement, with the harvest being packaged and donated to those in need.

"The Apiary Retreat is more than just a project; it's a movement to inspire acts of kindness and support," said Beegins With You Founder Blake Shumate. "Just like bees pollinate flowers, we aim to spread love and support throughout our community."

Dr. Jones and his son and their families, through their orthodontic practices, are dedicated to treating patients with respect and compassion, a philosophy that resonates with the values of



Beegins With You Foundation. Together, we are committed to creating a supportive community where everyone can thrive.

The Apiary Retreat project will take several years to complete, but its impact will be felt immediately as it brings together individuals and organizations committed to making a difference. The foundation invites the community to join in this journey and be part of a legacy of kindness and sustainability. For more information about the Apiary Retreat project or to get involved, please contact [media@beeginswithyou.org](mailto:media@beeginswithyou.org).

## LEGAL

**ORDER OF PUBLICATION** Case No. CL24000320-00  
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
VA. CODE §§ 1-211.1; 8.01-316, -317, 20-104  
MARTINSVILLE CIRCUIT COURT  
55 W CHURCH STREET, MARTINSVILLE VA 24112  
HOLLEY NICHOLE WIMBISH v. MATTHEW STEPHEN WIMBISH  
The object of this suit is to:  
TO OBTAIN A DIVORCE  
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## Sports Schedule

Following are the dates and times of local high school teams and their games for the week of December 16-21:

12/16 5:45pm Boys Basketball SVA at Carlisle  
7pm Girls Basketball Bassett at Patrick County  
7pm Boys Basketball Patrick County at Bassett

12/17 7pm Girls Basketball George Washington at Bassett  
7pm Girls Basketball Franklin County at Magna Vista  
7pm Girls Basketball Martinsville at Mecklenburg County  
7pm Boys Basketball Bassett at George Washington

7pm Boys Basketball Magna Vista at Franklin County  
7pm Boys Basketball Mecklenburg County at Martinsville

12/18 5pm Wrestling Multiple Schools at Bassett  
5pm Wrestling Martinsville at Bassett  
6pm Wrestling Magna Vista at George Washington  
TBD Girls Basketball Reidsville at Martinsville (Martinsville M.S.)

12/19 7pm Girls Basketball Chatham at Magna Vista  
7pm Boys Basketball Magna Vista at Chatham

12/20 5pm Swim & Dive Bassett at Halifax County  
5pm Swim & Dive Magna Vista at

Martinsville  
7pm Girls Basketball Magna Vista at Bassett  
7pm Girls Basketball George Washington at Martinsville (Martinsville M.S.)  
7pm Boys Basketball Bassett at Magna Vista  
7pm Boys Basketball Martinsville at George Washington  
7:30pm Boys Basketball Morehead at Carlisle

12/21 9am Wrestling Bassett at William Byrd  
9am Wrestling Martinsville at William Byrd  
4pm Boys Basketball Bassett at Morehead  
7:30pm Boys Basketball McMichael at Carlisle

## Teachers Honored

(cont. from page 1)

weekend at 7 p.m., rather than Saturday, and will take place outdoors to accommodate larger crowds. The later time is also intended to avoid the daytime heat.

While the board acknowledged concerns about scheduling conflicts with Henry County's graduation, members agreed the changes would benefit the community overall.

### Policy Updates and VSBA Insights

The board approved minor policy adjustments, including updates to cross-references and the inclusion of collective bargaining.

Members also reflected on impactful moments from the recent Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) Conference. Talley shared insights from an early board session, emphasizing the importance of fostering tolerance for differing opinions.

"I think that's something that's



Martinsville High School Principal Aji Dixon (center) accepts the school's Continuous Improvement Exemplar Award. He is flanked by Schools Superintendent Dr. Zebedee Talley (left), and school board members.

almost been lost in our country," Talley said. He expressed a desire to incorporate this lesson into schools, teaching students that dis-

agreement doesn't justify actions like bullying.

Talley also noted sessions addressing staff liability issues, such

as social media usage and cell-phone searches. He praised the city schools for being ahead of the curve in areas like artificial intelligence, another key topic at the conference.

"I took a lot of notes from both sessions," Talley said, describing the conference as a valuable resource for growth and learning.

### Additional Updates

\*The board announced that students will be dismissed three hours early on December 18, marking the start of Winter Break.

\*The next school board meeting is scheduled for January 13, when the first reading of the budget is scheduled. A second meeting on January 27 will include time for public comments on the budget.

\*In other recognitions, the board celebrated previous members and awarded the Continuous Improvement Exemplar Award to Martinsville High School.

## Smith River Singers Mark 10th Anniversary with Handel's 'Messiah' at Christmas Concert



The Smith River Singers performed Handel's Messiah at their 2024 Christmas Concert.

By Jessica Dillon

The Smith River Singers celebrated their 10th anniversary with a stirring Christmas concert on December 9 at the Galilean House of Worship. The centerpiece of the performance was Handel's Messiah, drawing an audience of nearly 1,000 people to the venue.

The choir, which began in 2014 with just 23 members, has grown to more than 80 singers. "We were very small and kind of struggling a little bit at the beginning," said Dr. Pam Randall, who leads the group. "The youngest singer is 14 or 15, and the oldest singer is 91. We span a very large range of ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and races. It's a choir that represents the community."

The Galilean House of Worship has hosted the event since before the COVID-19 pandemic, after the concert outgrew its original location at First Baptist Church. "We quickly outgrew that facility," Randall said. The current venue, which seats about 1,000 people, features a choir loft that can accommodate up to 85 singers. "It's a great venue for us to perform in," she said.

Professional opera singers joined the performance as soloists, along-



The Smith River Singers celebrated their 10th anniversary with decorative cupcakes.

side Still Water, a small ensemble within the Smith River Singers, which performed "Silent Night" and "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." A live orchestra, which included students from Bassett High School, added depth to the program. "Our very own bass is singing the bass solo," Randall said.

The choir, composed of non-auditioned volunteer singers from Martinsville and Henry County, focuses on bringing free music to the community. The group presents both a winter and a spring performance. "It's a different feeling when you sing in a massive choir like this," Randall said. "People like the magic that a large group of voices can create."



The Still Water Group performed "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."



The entrance to the Galilean House of Worship was packed before the show started.

The choir began rehearsals for the concert in early September. Most participants are returning singers, but Randall noted that about 10 new members joined this year. The performance, which highlighted the Christmas portions of Handel's Messiah, included texts drawn from the King James Bible.

"It is the highlight of my Christmas singing," Randall said. She added that the choir provides a creative outlet that brings her "a

ton of joy." The group was also featured this year on PBS's Buzz 4Good, which showcases nonprofits. "They're really passionate about singing," Randall said.

The Smith River Singers will return to the Galilean House of Worship for their Spring Concert on May 12 at 7 p.m. The event will be free to the public. More information about the choir and how to join can be found at [www.smithriversingers.org](http://www.smithriversingers.org).

## PSA Board Mourns Loss of Longtime Member

The Henry County Public Service Authority (PSA) is mourning the loss of Board Member Kathy Rea, who passed away following several months of health challenges. Rea, a dedicated public servant, served on the PSA board for nearly three decades, beginning her tenure in 1996 and assuming the role of Treasurer in 2004.

Rea's contributions to the PSA were pivotal, particularly in her capacity as Treasurer. She provided essential financial oversight, regularly reviewing and approving checks, scrutinizing bond issuances, and meticulously examining payments to safeguard against unnecessary expenses. Her efforts ensured the responsible management of ratepayer funds.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Kathy Rea, whose leadership as Treasurer of the Henry Coun-

ty Public Service Authority enriched our community in countless ways," said Dale Wagoner, General Manager of the PSA. "Kathy's meticulous attention to detail and steadfast financial stewardship ensured the success of vital projects, including those in the Horsepasture community. Her unwavering support for projects in the Horsepasture area leaves a lasting legacy, one rooted in compassion, service, and a deep commitment to the betterment of those around her. She will be missed."

Rea was a passionate advocate for the Horsepasture District, consistently championing initiatives that benefited the area. She played a key role in the Preston Road Water Line Extension project, which retired several well systems and provided public water access to nearly 400 residents.

Her dedication extended to securing grant funding for vital water and sewer infrastructure improvements in Fieldale, resulting in significant community advancements.

"Her unwavering support for infrastructure development has left an indelible mark on Henry County," Wagoner added.

Rea's commitment to public service and her impact on the region's infrastructure improvements have left a lasting impression on the community she served. The PSA Board and staff extend their heartfelt condolences to Rea's family and loved ones during this time of loss.

Rea's term on the board was set to expire on January 5, 2028. Her absence will be deeply felt by the PSA and the broader Henry County community.



Kathy Rea

# Crossing the Lines

## News snippets from outside the city/county lines ...

### Festival of Lights to Illuminate DeHart Park with Community Spirit, Holiday Cheer

The fourth annual Festival of Lights at DeHart Park is set to dazzle attendees from Friday, Dec. 13, through Monday, Dec. 23. Open from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and extended until 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, the event promises holiday magic for visitors of all ages.

Co-sponsored by the Patrick County Chamber of Commerce and Patrick County Tourism, the festival aims to raise funds for DeHart Park while uniting the community. Amy Corns, chairman of the Stuart Parks & Recreation Association Fundraising Committee, emphasized the inclusive nature of the event.

"I don't want this to be a Stuart festival of lights; I want this to be a Patrick County Festival of Lights," Corns said. "I want children, schools, and businesses from every area of the county. I want little ones to have something to do, and I want the older adults to have something to do. This is really just an event that



Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus will be onsite nightly during the 11-nights of the fourth annual Festival of Lights. (Photo from 2023)

everyone can enjoy. It gets people out at our park, but it also raises money for multiple groups without our county," she said.

Like the last two Festival of Lights, Corns said proceeds from the festival will help make the park's bathrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She estimated \$60,000 has already been raised toward the \$75,000 goal.

"We are 75 percent done raising the money for the bathrooms. So, we're hoping that this year will just put us over the top to be able to do the bathrooms. We're just wrapping that up and hoping that we can get the ball rolling into 2025 to get the bathrooms started and done," she said.

Corns believes around \$60,000 has been raised for the bathroom project.

The estimated cost is about \$75,000.

This year's festival features 58 light displays created by local businesses, churches, organizations, families, and individuals. Admission costs \$10 per vehicle — only cash will be accepted, with unlimited loops through the circular display area.

Visitors' zip codes will be collected this year to track the festival's reach, which

Corns noted extends to areas such as Henry County, Galax, Danville, and parts of North Carolina, "places all around," she said, adding the festival "really does pull a lot of tourists into our area."

Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus will make nightly appearances, with a special Christmas Pajama Night on Sunday, Dec. 15, where visitors can meet Santa and cre-

ate ornaments at the Fab Lab. Then, visitors will be able to go into Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) and visit the jolly old elf with the PCHS JV Cheer Team.

"The park will be giving away one free ornament to each family. Then, the families will be able to design other ornaments. I think they're like \$1 apiece if they want to design or engrave personalized ornaments" from the Fab Lab, Corns said.

A program created especially for the festival will detail the organization's mission, list every 2024 park sponsor, and each display, Corns said. A QR code is included in the program—a link to the website where votes can be cast for a favorite display.

Discount coupons, which expire December 31, for some local businesses also are included in the program.

For more information, visit Facebook.com/DeHartPark-StuartParks&Recreation Association.

### Tis the Season

From the Mistletoe Market and Grand Illumination Tree Lighting to the annual Christmas Parade, traditional holiday activities in

Patrick County got underway in earnest last weekend during Hometown Christmas in Stuart celebrations.



"Strength Through Community" was the theme for this year's Patrick County Christmas Parade, with Lauren Worley and Kaylee Stanley — who each overcame tremendous odds, selected as Grand Marshals, along with their respective family members. Lauren (left) and Kaylee (right) are pictured at the Grand Illumination Tree Lighting ceremony. (Photo courtesy of Patrick County Tourism)

### Former resident held on several charges

A former Stuart resident has been arrested on multiple sex offense charges against a minor, according to Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith.

William Burkes Goad, 73, who currently lives in Clemons, N.C., was charged Wednesday with five counts of aggravated sexual battery, four counts of indecent liberties with a minor, two counts each rape and forced sodomy, and one count of object sexual penetration.

Smith said the offenses allegedly began in 2019 and occurred until 2022, when Goad moved to North Carolina. The sheriff stated that the female victim was 11 years old when the alleged offenses began.

Goad is being held without bond in the Patrick County Jail.

The investigation is ongoing, and Smith is asking anyone who may



William Burkes Goad

have information to contact him confidentially at (276) 692-7012 Investigator Tennille Jessup at (276) 692-5885.

### Man charged with murder in connection with shooting incident

A Patrick Springs man was in custody after allegedly shooting and killing his wife, Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith said in a December 3 release.

Bennie Lee King, of 1271 Stella Road, called the Patrick County Sheriff's Office 911 Communications Center at 3:51 p.m., on Monday, December 2, and allegedly told the operator that he had just shot and killed his wife, according to the sheriff.

Smith said he, Maj. Rob Coleman and Sgt. Mike Harris, were the first to arrive at the scene of the home on Stella Road. According to the sheriff, King came out of the front of the home armed with a handgun.

King was allegedly pointing the gun at his head saying that he "wanted to die," according to Smith.

After what Smith described as "a tense standoff," King complied with officers' commands to drop his weapon and was taken into custody without further incident.

Alexis King, 64, was found deceased on the front porch of the residence.



Bennie Lee King

"I have known both of these families for decades, this is a heartbreaking event in our community and has caught us completely off guard," Smith said in the release on Tuesday.

The investigation is ongoing. Anyone with information regarding this incident can confidentially contact Patrick County Sheriff's Lt. Steve Austin, (276) 692-5950.

*To read more about these and other stories, check out The Enterprise, [www.theenterprise.net](http://www.theenterprise.net)*

*Be sure to like the Henry County Enterprise on Facebook*

**WICKED**  
NOVEMBER 27, 2024

2D 1-4-7PM

**MOANA 2**

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

**KRAVEN THE HUNTER**

1-4-7-9:15PM

**RED ONE**  
NOVEMBER 15, 2024

1-4-7-9:15

**\$5** tickets

**HOLLYWOOD CINEMA** beside WALMART  
Martinsville 276-858-3458

# New Adaptive Dock Enhances Accessibility at Monogram Smith River Sports Complex



The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Dec. 5 to celebrate the completion of the new adaptive fishing dock project at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex.

By Jessica Dillon

A new adaptive fishing dock at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex is making it easier for anglers who use wheelchairs to enjoy casting lines into the Smith River. The dock, designed to provide ADA-compliant access, is situated near a gravel parking lot for easy entry.

The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Dec. 5 to celebrate the project's completion.

The dock was constructed by J. Edward's Construction and funded through the Eco Ambassador Council. The council includes local businesses such as Blair Construction, Carter Bank, Clark Gas & Oil, Frith Construction, The Lester Group, Hooker Furnishings, Jones & DeShon Orthodontics, and Pickle & Ash.

"They put a pot of funding together,

we came up with some to work on together, and this is one they decided they wanted to fund," said Brian Williams, Virginia program manager for the DRBA.

Initially planned for Bassett, the project was relocated to the Sports Complex due to elevation challenges at the original site. "We don't have any other official ADA-accessible access places" locally, Williams said.

The new dock, specifically designed to support the weight of electric wheelchairs, has already attracted eager anglers. It also features a lower rail to facilitate fishing while seated and ample space to accommodate multiple users.

A similar structure in North Carolina served as inspiration for the dock's design. "It has a lower rail up there where you can fish off of it," Williams explained.



The Sports Complex location was selected for its high visibility and accessibility, ensuring frequent use by the community. "Maybe, one day we will get one up in Bassett," Williams added, noting hopes for future expansions.

Tyler Carter of Carter Bank & Trust expressed pride in the project. "This is something I think all of us are going to be proud of," he said.

Roger Adams, director of Henry County Parks & Recreation, echoed the sentiment. "It's just a great project," Adams said.

The dock is open during the Sports Complex's operating hours. Visitors can follow signs to river access, where the dock is located near the start of the dog trail with convenient nearby parking.



Roger Adams, director of Henry County Parks & Recreation, is pictured on the new dock.



## Campbell Family Donates \$500,000 to Support New Lester Family YMCA

The Martinsville-Henry County YMCA has received a significant boost for its new facility with a \$500,000 gift from Clay Campbell and his sister, Sarah Fain. The donation supports the construction of the Lester Family YMCA, a state-of-the-art facility planned for Martinsville.

Campbell, who serves as president of NASCAR's Mid-Atlantic Region, and Fain are the grandchildren of H. Clay Earles, the founder of Martinsville Speedway. Their gift underscores their commitment to enhancing the community's health and wellness resources.

"This new YMCA will have a tremendous impact on so many residents throughout Martinsville and Henry County," Campbell said. "Sarah and I are pleased to be able to support such an important community project. This new YMCA will benefit every age group, from our youngest preschool children to our oldest senior population."

The new YMCA will be located at the 7-acre site near the intersection of Memorial Boulevard and Fayette Street. The former shopping center site will be strategically located to the Albert Harris Elementary School, the Fayette Historic

District, Uptown Martinsville, and the new Five Points Neighborhood. The proposed facility will include a large fitness center, three full-court gymnasiums, indoor aquatic center, indoor elevated walking track, and multiple group exercise and community rooms. An Early Learning Center and many outdoor amenities are also part of the plans.

"On behalf of the YMCA, and the entire community, we are extremely grateful to Clay and Sarah for their early leadership support of our new facility," said Dru Rothrock, a member of the Capital Campaign Committee. "It is very fitting that we will recognize their gift with the naming of the new indoor running track."

The YMCA began the quiet leadership phase of a major capital campaign in September. To date, the YMCA has raised over \$4.5 million from local community leaders in addition to Harvest Foundation's \$12 million gift.

To learn more about the plans for the new YMCA, contact Brad Kinkema, Martinsville-Henry County Family YMCA CEO at (276) 632-6427 or brad@martinsvilleymca.com.

## Preparing for the build



Site work was underway in earnest for the newest Sheetz store that will be located across from Walmart, on the corner of Virginia Avenue and Commonwealth Blvd. The new store will be near Roses, Ollie's and El Parral Mexican Restaurant. (Photos by Ray Reynolds)

## Initial claims for unemployment dip

The 1,284 unemployment insurance weekly initial claims filed during the week ending November 30, 2024, are 42.8 percent lower than last week's 2,244 claims and 34.0 percent lower than the comparable week of last year (1,945), according to Virginia Works.

Nearly 84 percent of claimants self-reported an associated industry; of those reported, the top five industries (59 percent) were Administrative and Support and Waste Management (140); Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (115); Manufacturing (102); Accommodation and Food Services (88); and Health Care and Social Assistance (86).

Continued weeks claims (15,070) were 3.1 percent lower than last week (15,554) and were 25.8 percent higher than the comparable week of last year (11,984). Nearly 92 percent of claimants

self-reported an associated industry; of those reported, the top five industries (60 percent) were Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (2,419); Administrative and Support and Waste Management (1,932); Health Care and Social Assistance (1,414); Manufacturing (1,340); and Retail Trade (1,218).

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 UI benefits, and are a good indicator of labor market conditions. While continued claims are not a leading indicator, they provide confirming evidence of the direction of the economy.

THANK YOU FOR  
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ENTERPRISE

# Board of Supervisors to meet Tuesday

The Henry County Board of Supervisors will hold its regular monthly meeting on December 17 at 3 p.m., in the Summerlin Room of the Henry County Administration Building.

Kim Jackson of Creedle, Jones and Associates, will attend the meeting to present the audit of county accounts for the fiscal year that ended June 30. Staff will provide a copy of the audit and management letter at the meeting.

In other matters at its 3 p.m. meeting, the board will:

- \*Discuss the board's participation in meetings by remote electronic or telephone access. At the November 27 meeting, County Attorney George Lyle presented a memorandum outlining his findings related to attending board meetings by remote electronic or telephone access. The board will discuss the findings for clarification

and consider adopting any changes during the organizational meeting in January.

- \*Hear the monthly report on delinquent tax collection efforts by Treasurer Scott Grindstaff.

- \*Hear an update from the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp. by CEO and president Mark Heath.

- \*Public Safety Director Matt Tatum is asking the Board to approve an additional appropriation of \$26,398 received from vehicle insurance settlements. Mr. Tatum advised that the funds will go towards purchasing a replacement vehicle for the operations division.

- \* Parks and Recreation Director Roger Adams is asking the Board to approve an additional appropriation of \$49,975 received from Ford Motor Company for the buy back of a new vehicle that experienced continuous mechanical failures. Mr.

Adams intends to use the funds to purchase a replacement vehicle for the Parks and Recreation Department.

- \* Sheriff Wayne Davis is asking the Board to appropriate grant funds in the amount of \$14,489 received from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG). The grant funds will be used for overtime hours to provide high-impact law enforcement in areas experiencing increased crime.

- \* Davis is asking the Board to award a contract for \$215,871 to Haley Ford in North Chesterfield, Virginia, to purchase five 2025 Ford Police Interceptor All Wheel Drive Utility vehicles at \$43,174.20 each. These vehicles will replace five existing high mileage vehicles within the Patrol Division. Pricing is based on the Virginia Sheriff's Association vehicle procurement program and specifications. Fund-

ing for the replacement vehicles is included in the Sheriff's FY2025 budget.

- \*Consider resolutions honoring Tommy Slaughter and Rita Shropshire.

- \* Consider the date and time for the 2025 organizational meeting

- \*Hear an update from the Martinsville-Henry County YMCA and the Blue Ridge Regional Library.

- \*Consider meeting in closed session to discuss appointees to several boards, pending legal matters, the acquisition/disposal of real estate and as-yet unannounced industries.

At its 6 p.m. meeting, the board will hear an update about general highway matters, receive a presentation from the Parks and Recreation Department and hold a public hearing on a rezoning request from Jose Tiznado and Margarita Rodriguez.

## Additional funds sought to accelerate business-ready site development

An additional \$50 million investment will be included in Gov. Glenn Youngkin's budget package to accelerate Virginia's position as a national leader in business-ready site development, according to a release from his office. This investment reaffirms Virginia's commitment to cultivating economic growth, attracting high-paying jobs, and ensuring Virginia remains America's Top State for Business. The \$50 million investment in 2026 will build upon the over \$282 million previously committed by Governor Youngkin to site development statewide.

"Business-ready sites drive and accelerate jobs and economic growth," said Youngkin. "From day one, we committed to supporting site development because these investments strengthen Virginia's position to secure transformative projects that create thousands of jobs across the Commonwealth, like Microporous and the LEGO Group. Today's investment builds upon this success and reaffirms

our dedication to ensure Virginia remains America's Top State for Business."

Operated by Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program (VBRSP) certifies and prepares sites to ensure they meet the unique needs of businesses across sectors. Recent success stories include the \$1.35 billion investment from Microporous, which will create over 2,000 new jobs and build a 500,000-square-foot facility in Pittsylvania County; and the over \$1 billion investment by the LEGO Group, which will bring over 1,700 new jobs and a 1.7-million-square-foot precision manufacturing facility in Chesterfield County.

"The Virginia Business Ready Sites Program leads the nation. It was developed by a team of state, regional, and local partners including VEDP, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, railroad representatives, utility representatives, civil engineers, and other government, business, and

industry experts," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick. "With this innovative program, grants are considered on a competitive basis and made at the discretion of an expert investment committee composed of VEDP and Administration leaders whose goal is to accelerate site development for businesses."

The Virginia Business Ready Sites Program engages a team of state, regional, and local partners to guide development of economic development sites. The team pursues three goals: 1.) accelerate site readiness by expediting the certification and preparation of business-ready sites to meet market demands; 2.) enhance infrastructure by investing in utility and roadway development to ensure seamless project execution for prospective businesses; and 3.) support localities by partnering with local governments, utilities, and agencies to streamline permitting processes and facilitate faster timelines.

VBRSP coordinates with community partners to develop economic development sites in every region throughout the Commonwealth. Local governments can apply to VBRSP for matching grants to assist with assessment of site readiness or for development costs.

Between 2022 and 2024, Virginia committed more than \$282 million to matching grants for localities to complete site assessment and development, including \$126 million of matching grants awarded to 23 localities in August 2024. VBRSP is currently evaluating applications for \$40 million previously committed for fiscal year 2025, and grant awards will be announced in summer 2025. Applications for the additional \$50 million announced today will begin in the second half of 2025, and matching grants to localities will be awarded in the following year. A full listing of previously awarded grants is available at [vedp.org/vbrsp](http://vedp.org/vbrsp).

## Input Sought on Food Date Labeling to Address Consumer Confusion, Food Waste

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have issued a joint Request for Information (RFI) to gather insights on food date labeling practices, including terms like "Sell By," "Use By," and "Best By." The initiative aims to understand industry approaches, consumer perceptions, and the potential impact of date labeling on food waste and grocery costs.

The RFI includes questions such as which products carry date labels, the criteria used to determine the phrasing and dates, and how consumers interpret this information. It also explores whether

consumers misunderstand date labels—mistaking them as indicators of food safety rather than quality—and how this affects their shopping and disposal behaviors. Additionally, the agencies are examining the connection between date labeling, food waste, and household expenses.

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the FDA are jointly responsible for ensuring that food labeling is truthful and not misleading. The information gathered through the RFI could shape future policy decisions, guidance, or educational efforts aimed at reducing the premature disposal of safe and wholesome

food.

The move comes after the agencies received over 9,800 public comments urging an update to federal date labeling requirements. Commenters pointed to the confusion caused by inconsistent phrasing—such as "Sell By," "Use By," and "Best By"—which manufacturers currently use voluntarily. This inconsistency, they argue, may lead consumers to discard food unnecessarily, contributing to food waste.

In response, the FDA and USDA recommend the voluntary use of the phrase "Best if Used By" to indicate a product's peak quality date, noting that the product may still be safe to consume afterward.

However, federal regulations do not restrict the use of other phrases like "Sell By" or "Use By," provided they are accurate and non-misleading.

The RFI seeks input from stakeholders to address these issues, posing 13 questions about current practices, research findings, and potential solutions. Interested parties have 60 days to submit their comments via the Federal Register.

The results of the RFI may inform efforts to standardize date labeling, improve consumer understanding, and reduce food waste. For more information on submitting a comment, visit the Federal Register.

## December is Leading Month for U.S. Home Fires

Christmas trees, holiday decorations, and festive meals – hallmarks of the holiday season – present potential fire hazards that collectively contribute to an increase in U.S. home fires each December. According to the National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®), Christmas Day and Christmas Eve were the second and third-leading days of the year for home cooking fires, respectively, in 2022.

"When people are busy and trying to do many things at once, they're more likely to get distracted from what's on the stove or in the oven. Knowing that unattended cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires year-round, it's easy to see why the number of cooking fires spikes on these days," said Lorraine Carli, NFPA vice president of Outreach and Advocacy.

### Candles and Lighting

Decorating homes with electrical lighting and candles also contributes to a higher fire risk during the holiday season. Between 2018 and 2022, U.S. fire departments responded to an annual average of 835 home structure fires that began with decorations (excluding Christmas trees). Year-round, approximately one-third (32 percent) of home decoration fires were started by candles; in Decem-

ber, that number jumped to almost half (46 percent).

### Christmas Trees

Christmas tree fires don't happen very often, but when they do, they tend to be more serious. An annual average of 155 home Christmas tree fires resulted in four civilian deaths, seven civilian injuries, and \$15 million in direct property damage, with electrical distribution or lighting equipment involved in more than two in five home Christmas tree fires.

### Lithium-Ion Batteries

Many people will be buying and gifting electronic devices that contain lithium-ion batteries. As the use of these devices has increased in recent years, so too has the number of related fires. It's important to understand the risks associated with these batteries and ways to prevent them:

- Only purchase and use devices, batteries, and charging equipment that are listed by a nationally recognized testing lab and labeled accordingly.

- Use charging equipment that is only compatible with your device. To be safe, use only the charging equipment that is supplied with your device.

- \*Do not keep charging the device or device battery after it is fully charged.

- \*Do not put lithium-ion batteries in the trash. Recycling is always the best option. Take the batteries to a battery recycling location or contact your local waste department for disposal instructions.

- \*Stop using your device if the battery shows signs of damage, such as an unusual odor, excessive heat, popping sounds, swelling, or change in color.

- \*Only have device repairs performed by a qualified professional.

"The commonality between the

vast majority of all these fires is that they're largely preventable," said Carli. "By understanding when and where potential risks exist, people can take simple steps to reduce their likelihood, which can go a long way toward ensuring a festive, fire-free holiday season."

The NFPA offers a wealth of information and resources to help minimize the likelihood of cooking, candle, Christmas tree, and decoration fires. Learn more at [nfpa.org/winterholidaysafety](http://nfpa.org/winterholidaysafety)

## Holiday Scam Survey

As online holiday shopping ramps up, so do scam attempts. A new AARP survey shows that over 80% of adults have faced some form of holiday-related fraud, yet many of us are unaware of scammers' tactics – especially online.

The AARP holiday scams survey identified three specific threat areas: online shopping scams, gift cards with zero balance scams, and shipping scams. Here are tips to keep yourself safe from these deceptive tactics this winter.

When shopping online, visit sites you know and trust, and avoid clicking on offers or adver-

tisements for deep discounts on hot items. The safest way to give a gift card is by purchasing it online through the retailer's website. Check the balance when you receive a card and use it sooner than later. Lastly, if you receive a text claiming 'problems' with a shipment, don't engage with it; if you are concerned about the status of a package, contact the shipper directly.

Report scams to local law enforcement. For help from AARP, call 877-908-3360 or visit the AARP Fraud Watch Network at [www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork](http://www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork).

# Farm Bureau President Highlights Advocacy for Local Control Over Solar Facility Placement

The president of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation told farmers that the organization helped defeat legislation in this year's General Assembly that would have taken away local governments' ability to determine where commercial solar energy facilities are located.

"This is extremely important because mandates under the Virginia Clean Economy Act of 2020 include goals of having 16,100 megawatts of solar power in the commonwealth, which will require between 80,500 and 161,000 acres of land to achieve that goal," VFBF President Wayne F. Pryor told producers from across the state on Dec. 4. "That could potentially take away over 160,000 acres of Virginia land. Between 2017 and 2022, we lost nearly 500,000 acres of farmland, and one of the causes was farmland being used for solar facilities.

"We can't afford to lose more." Pryor's remarks came during the 2024 VFBF Annual Convention in Hot Springs. He told delegates to the event that when the VFBF governmental relations staff encouraged producer members to ask their representatives to vote against Senate Bill 697, more than 700

people responded. "We must ensure that other locations like marginal lands, brownfields, reclaimed mine sites and other sub-prime lands are used to achieve solar energy goals," Pryor continued. "Those decisions need to remain in the hands of localities that can ensure solar facilities are consistent with their comprehensive plans and the needs of their communities."

He also shared with convention participants that VFBF governmental relations staff created a workgroup led by the Board of Veterinary Medicine and the state veterinarian's office to address the large animal veterinarian shortage. A lack of large animal vets has plagued many rural communities in the commonwealth for years.

Pryor told Farm Bureau's volunteer leaders that 2024 was a successful year for the organization in many ways.

The Farm Bureau-affiliated Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation and Rural Sustainability helped former Tyson Foods broiler growers establish the Central Virginia Poultry Cooperative, which began producing

goldenrod - which are essential for the species. Milkweed is the sole plant monarch caterpillars rely on for survival.

Another success was through Farm Bureau's grain marketing division. The group moved over 6.1 million bushels of grain in 2023, which was 1.2 million more bushels than in 2022.

Pryor also thanked members who made an effort to help fellow farmers in Southwest Virginia whose farms and businesses were damaged by Hurricane Helene in September. After the destruction, Virginia Farm Bureau activated its Virginia Farm Relief Fund and began accepting donations and applications for assistance.

# Monarch butterflies may join federal Endangered Species List

**Trimmel Gomes**  
*Virginia News Connection*  
Monarch butterflies could soon be added to the federal Endangered Species list, with a decision expected by year's end.

Eastern monarchs, which migrate through Virginia, experienced an 80% population decline between the 1980s and 2020.

Their western counterparts have seen an even steeper drop of 90%.

Environmental groups first petitioned to list the monarch as threatened in 2014, and the species was designated a candidate in 2020.

Rebeca Quinonez-Pinon, monarch recovery strategist and climate resilient habitats director with the National Wildlife Federation, said monarch butterflies face numerous threats.

"Well, the main threats that we have identified for the monarch butterfly are habitat loss and fragmentation of the remaining habitats," said Quinonez-Pinon. "Climate change is at the top of the list, definitely, and the excessive use of pesticides."

She described monarch butterflies as a "canary in the coal mine" for pollinators, and Virginia's ecosystem - a critical warning that more action is needed to protect the environment.

Several species of bumblebees, also facing the same threats as monarchs, and the Bethany Beach firefly are candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Virginia home gardeners can play a vital role in supporting monarch butterfly populations by planting native milkweed and



goldenrod - which are essential for the species.

Milkweed is the sole plant monarch caterpillars rely on for survival.

However, Mary Phillips - head of native plant habitat strategy and gardening programs with the federation - cautioned that some common mistakes can hinder efforts to help monarchs thrive.

"We've seen studies where caterpillars are drawn to newer, younger stocks of milkweed," said Phillips. "That will help you continue that caterpillar cultivation and don't worry if you see the various predators. There's also a milkweed bug that sometimes goes on these plants. People get nervous about that. It's OK, it's natural."

She noted that using garden or systemic pesticides can harm monarchs and should be avoided.

In Virginia, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services studied the Beekeeper Pollinator Protection Plan and voluntary best management practices, to improve communication between beekeepers and pesticide applicators.

The goal was to reduce risks to pollinators from neonicotinoid pesticides.

The study was completed in December 2021.

While it provided recommendations, its implementation highlights the ongoing need for greater awareness and action to protect pollinators such as bees and butterflies across the state.

## Fostering connection: Combating social isolation during the holidays



**Trimmel Gomes**  
*Virginia News Connection*  
For many, the holiday season is a time of joy and celebration - but it can often bring loneliness and isolation for older adults.

Steve Morrison, a volunteer with AARP Virginia, described the holidays as the worst time for isolation - a challenge he knows well after years of caregiving for his wife.

He highlighted mobility as a significant issue for seniors with limited ability to walk, access transportation, and manage health challenges.

Drawing from his own experiences, Morrison has been addressing isolation through community-building efforts, a mission he began well before the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the problem.

"You have to get out there some way, either online, by phone, or in conversation with neighbors - and let people know that you're in isolation and you just need someone to talk to," said Morrison. "At least in my neighborhood, that has worked for me and for others. The neighbors have really stepped up."

Morrison launched a monthly luncheon in McLean, Virginia, to help people connect over a meal.

The initiative has been a success, with up to 50 attendees per event, though he now caps it at 40 after an earlier turnout of 75 overwhelmed the venue.

He recommended resources like

the National Institute on Aging, and AARP's Connect2Affect program - which offer tools to assess isolation, find volunteer opportunities, and access local support.

While Morrison's program is one of the few remaining events in his area since COVID, he said he hopes to inspire others to create similar opportunities.

He said he was deeply moved by how his neighbors rallied to provide meals when surgeries left him and his wife homebound.

"You just gotta be proactive. Even though you may be limited to transportation or your mobility. You just got to let people know, you have neighbors close by that are more than willing to help," said Morrison. "So that would be the first place that I would start. But these other websites, if you have technology options, all have really good suggestions."

According to AARP, there is a 26% increased risk of early death due to feeling lonely.

Some other tips to combat isolation include adopting a pet if you can care for one, signing up for classes at your local library, restarting an old hobby, or scheduling set times to interact with family and friends - in person, by email, social media, voice call, or text.

However, Morrison cautioned against too much dependence on social media.

Submit your community news and photos to [dhall@theenterprise.net](mailto:dhall@theenterprise.net) and be sure to like the Henry County Enterprise on Facebook

## Puzzle Answers!

**SNOWFLAKES**  
solution

**"OO" WORDS**

**SCRAMBLERS**  
solution  
1. Swap 2. Arise; 3. Creamy; 4. Cavort  
Today's Word  
**EMPTY**

**AMERICAS RAPIDS TORAH**  
SOMESUCH OBAMAS EVADE  
PAMPERRESISTANT MEDIA  
STATROBO OPS SPRIER  
IVY ALLPUCKEREDOUT  
ANKLE ANTED GODDOT  
POWERINGINFERNO ALA  
RTE DRY DOT STALIN  
OSIRIS THATSTHEPICKET  
NOSE MEADE LILT  
ICANALMOSTPASTEIT  
ALEX LEAVE VENT  
HYPNOTICPRANCE FLEXOR  
EMOTES PEA HUE ANA  
MAT NATURALPENDENCY  
SHAMU ALIAS GASES  
NOHARMINPRYING MER  
ACETIC IOU EERO HASH  
BARTS PENSIONHEADACHE  
OLDIE ACCENT INNERMAN  
BASES REESSES TOASTERS

**FEAR & KNIT**  
answer

**Weekly SUDOKU**  
Answer

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



# PUZZLE TIME

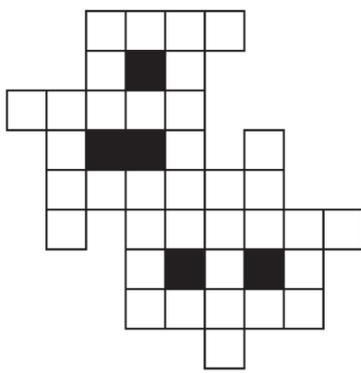


## FEAR KNOT

By: rj johnson

DOUBT? ...OR DARE!

- DFE
- SIFENU
- ♥ RESTI
- ♥ TEMI
- GUMERO
- ♥ AMR
- TRFE
- MERDU
- ♥ NIS
- ♥ ERDITE
- ♥ REFSI
- PRMU



Unscramble these twelve letter strings to form each into an ordinary word (ex. **HAGNEC** becomes **CHANGE**). Prepare to use only **ONE** word from any marked (♥) letter string as each unscrambles into more than one word (ex. ♥**RATHE** becomes **HATER** or **EARTH** or **HEART**). Fit each string's word either across or down to knot all twelve strings together.

## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Pillow is larger. 2. Picture on wall is moved. 3. Mouth is different. 4. Necktie is added. 5. Apron is different. 6. Wristwatch is added.

## MAGIC MAZE ● "OO" WORDS

Q O X U R P M J G D A X V C S  
 Q N O K I F D A X V T O Q U O  
 M J H L O O T T A T O F C C A  
 Y W O O R A K C U B O U R K O  
 P N H O L E J H M O O D O O V  
 F A D B R Z T A B X V T H O R  
 Y H U L L A B A L O O Y O P Q  
 O M K I B H G F W D L D O M B  
 Z Y W O V U T N R L I Q H A O  
 N L O K B O O Z A K I H A H F  
 D C A Z X W V B S K U S W S R

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. Unlisted clue hint: AN INK DESIGN ON THE SKIN

- Ballyhoo
- Bamboo
- Buckaroo
- Bugaboo
- Cuckoo
- Hullabaloo
- Kangaroo
- Kazoo
- Shampoo
- Skidoo
- Taboo
- Voodoo
- Wahoo
- Waterloo
- Yahoo

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## Super Crossword

<p><b>ACROSS</b></p> <p>1 The United States' landmass, with "the"</p> <p>9 Rafter's challenge</p> <p>15 Shul scroll</p> <p>20 Another similar thing</p> <p>21 Barack and Michelle</p> <p>22 Give the slip</p> <p>23 Like babies who throw tantrums when you try to put diapers on them?</p> <p>25 News outlets</p> <p>26 FBI or ERA</p> <p>27 Film lead-in to "Cop"</p> <p>28 Photo —</p> <p>29 More nimble</p> <p>30 Trellis climber</p> <p>32 Having a sore mouth from working long hours at a kissing booth?</p> <p>36 Joint a sock often covers</p> <p>39 Chipped in, in poker</p> <p>40 Beckett title character</p> <p>41 Intense fire used as an energy source?</p>	<p>46 Pie — mode</p> <p>49 Abbr. on a road map</p> <p>50 With 44-Down, decay of building timbers</p> <p>51 Colon part</p> <p>52 Communist Joseph</p> <p>55 Egyptian god of the dead</p> <p>57 Declaration while pointing at a group of workers on strike?</p> <p>62 Scent sensor</p> <p>63 George at Gettysburg</p> <p>64 Airy melody</p> <p>65 Statement when you're nearly ready to complete a collage?</p> <p>72 The "A" of "A-Rod"</p> <p>73 Depart</p> <p>74 Air out</p> <p>77 Mesmerizing horse movement?</p> <p>83 Limb-bending muscle</p> <p>85 Is theatrical</p> <p>86 Pod item</p> <p>87 Color grade</p> <p>88 Actress</p> <p>Gasteyer</p> <p>89 Tangle of hair</p>	<p>90 Inherent hanging-down position?</p> <p>96 SeaWorld whale, once</p> <p>100 Fake identity</p> <p>101 Fuels (up)</p> <p>102 "It won't hurt to snoop a little!"</p> <p>107 Body of eau</p> <p>108 Kind of acid in vinegar</p> <p>109 Debt note at an office sub</p> <p>110 Architect Saarin</p> <p>112 "Slung" food</p> <p>116 St. — (Caribbean getaway)</p> <p>121 Vintage song</p> <p>122 Stress</p> <p>123 Spiritual self</p> <p>124 Foundations</p> <p>125 Peanut butter cup brand</p> <p>126 Bread browners</p> <p><b>DOWN</b></p> <p>1 Cobra types</p> <p>2 Castle ditch</p> <p>3 Avenger Peel</p> <p>4 Lizard, e.g.</p> <p>5 British verb suffix</p>	<p>6 Indian dish</p> <p>7 Height: Prefix</p> <p>8 The whole —</p> <p>9 King, in Caen</p> <p>10 Belly muscles</p> <p>11 Jean — (perfume brand)</p> <p>12 Windows ad catchphrase</p> <p>13 Language of Copenhagen, to locals</p> <p>14 New jet in '68</p> <p>15 Worked as an office sub</p> <p>16 Carry too far</p> <p>17 Howard Stern's area</p> <p>18 "Bye, Brigitte"</p> <p>19 Bodily pump</p> <p>24 Conductor Georg</p> <p>29 "Every seat sold" abbr.</p> <p>31 "La Traviata" composer</p> <p>33 Spy novelist Deighton</p> <p>34 Shareable PC file</p> <p>35 Vainglory</p> <p>36 Chef's tie-on</p> <p>37 "Untrue!"</p> <p>38 Maryland congressman — Mfume</p> <p>39 Even a bit of</p> <p>42 Taxing gp.</p> <p>43 Mag bigwigs</p>	<p>44 See</p> <p>50-Across</p> <p>45 High degree</p> <p>47 Falsification</p> <p>48 Cookout pest</p> <p>52 BBQ rod</p> <p>53 Mosaic piece</p> <p>54 On the go</p> <p>56 Withdraw</p> <p>57 — Aviv</p> <p>58 Deli meat</p> <p>59 Foofaraw</p> <p>60 Model S car</p> <p>61 Otherwise</p> <p>63 Long skirt</p> <p>66 Balm plant</p> <p>67 Meshes</p> <p>68 A fifth of fifty</p> <p>69 D.C. donor</p> <p>70 Abbr. on a road map</p> <p>71 Dallasites or Houstonians</p> <p>75 — word (single-occasion coinage)</p> <p>76 Plate holders</p> <p>77 Skirt edge</p> <p>78 Diva Sumac</p> <p>79 Broken bits of ceramic material</p> <p>80 Tax doc. pro</p> <p>81 House animal</p> <p>82 Novelist Santha Rama —</p>	<p>83 Festivity</p> <p>84 Pigeon perch</p> <p>87 Males</p> <p>90 Rapa — (Easter Island)</p> <p>91 Solar beam</p> <p>92 Frazier foe</p> <p>93 Sheet fabric</p> <p>94 Website visit unit</p> <p>95 Pilot Amelia</p> <p>97 Actress McDaniel of "Gone With the Wind"</p> <p>98 Comes up</p> <p>99 Nero's 2,100</p> <p>102 Bigwig</p> <p>103 Florida city</p> <p>104 "Uncle!" crier, perhaps</p> <p>105 Explorer — de León</p> <p>106 Stratagems</p> <p>107 Disney film of 2016</p> <p>111 Nevada city</p> <p>113 Highest point</p> <p>114 — Pei</p> <p>115 Mama birds</p> <p>117 Golf average</p> <p>118 Ending for opal</p> <p>119 Extra NBA periods</p> <p>120 — Plains</p>
---	---	---	--	--	---

## TEEPEES

## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- Montana's Flathead Lake looks shallow due to its crystal-clear water, but is actually 370 feet deep.
- The expiration date on bottled water is for the bottle, not the water.
- In 2004, farmers in India used Pepsi and Coca-Cola instead of pesticides because they were cheaper and got the job done just as well. Not surprisingly, Pepsi and Coca-Cola strongly disagreed.
- After eating a large meal, lions can sleep for up to 24 hours straight.
- People used to use bread to erase pencil marks, until Edward Naine accidentally picked up a piece of rubber instead of breadcrumbs in 1770 and — voila! — decided to start selling rubber erasers.
- Two Bosnians had been talking in online chatrooms for a while when they decided it was time to meet in person. They discovered they were a married couple who had been cheating on each other with each other. They ended up divorcing.
- One French cafe, La Petite Syrah, charges 7 euros for a coffee to rude customers but only 1.40 euro to patrons who are polite to the waitstaff. The cafe is located, perhaps unsurprisingly, in Nice.
- Penguin egg whites turn clear when they're boiled.
- Michael Jackson was said to request that his wine be served in Diet Coke cans whenever he was on a flight. He didn't want his kids to see him drinking alcohol.
- Saudi Arabia once held a Women's Rights Conference that didn't include a single woman attendee.

**Thought for the Day:** "A good conscience is a continual Christmas." — Benjamin Franklin

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## Weekly SUDOKU

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

### DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

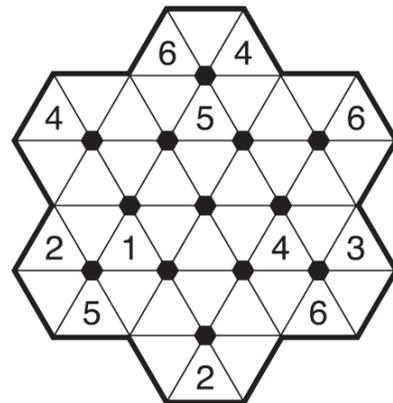
- ♦ Moderate
- ♦♦ Challenging
- ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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## SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



### DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦♦♦

- ♦ Easy
- ♦♦ Medium
- ♦♦♦ Difficult
- ♦♦♦♦

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## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

**R**ECOGNIZE THAT IN PITCHING OR CHIPPING YOU'RE PLAYING A RECOVERY SHOT. THAT MEANS YOU'VE MADE A MISTAKE OR GOTTEN AN UNLUCKY BREAK.

BECAUSE EITHER WAY, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT THAT, PUT IT OUT OF MIND — DON'T LET ANGER MAKE YOU COMPOUND THE ERROR.

APPLY YOURSELF EXCLUSIVELY TO THE UPCOMING SHOT — TO RECOVERING AS WELL AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN.



"While you were gone, the house seemed — except for the sink!"

## SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

- Switch
- WASP \_\_\_\_\_
- Ensue
- RAISE \_\_\_\_\_
- Smooth
- MYCARE \_\_\_\_\_
- Prance
- VORTAC \_\_\_\_\_

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# Upgrades in Black Box to boost youth engagement, community growth



TheatreWorks Community Players received a \$25,000 PUP! grant from The Harvest Foundation to fund improvements at the Black Box Theatre in Uptown Martinsville. Pictured from left are Facilities Chair Richard Dorr, Co-President Gracie Agnew, Treasurer Ed Preston, Co-President Brad Draper, and Dr. Sandy Strayer, program officer at The Harvest Foundation.

TheatreWorks Community Players is working on upgrades to its Black Box Theatre in Uptown Martinsville with support from The Harvest Foundation.

A \$25,000 grant, funded from Harvest's PUP! Small Grants Program will support work to construct a dressing room in the theatre's downstairs area and repair the lift (elevator) so sets can safely be transported to the upstairs stage.

"I know firsthand the incredible impact theatre can have — not just on individuals, but on entire communities," said Dr. Sandy Strayer, program officer for The Harvest Foundation. "This investment supports a space that fosters creativity, builds confidence, and brings people together. For our youth, it's an opportunity to discover their voices and develop skills that will benefit them for a lifetime. For Martinsville and Henry County, this theatre serves as a vital anchor for community revitalization, inspiring pride and meaningful connection through the arts."

Gracie Agnew, co-president of TheatreWorks, said being awarded a PUP! Grant allows

them the opportunity to improve the Black Box Theatre so they can continue providing a safe environment for stage productions.

"Our focus has always been on community engagement and enrichment through theatre," Agnew said. "For several years, we have strategically planned for more youth involvement in community theatre as well as outreach programs that will encourage participation from underserved populations. Our aim is to attract audiences who will dine out, shop, or stay in the area. This will lead to a broader impact for us as an agency in making uptown Martinsville an exciting cultural and arts mecca."

Richard Dorr, chair of the facilities committee for TheatreWorks, recently took board members and Harvest staff on a tour of the facility. He described the importance of building a new and improved dressing space that's private, especially as community outreach brings more youth to the theatre.

"We're looking to have closets and shelving spanning the back wall, and enough space to walk



Richard Dorr talks about planned upgrades in the basement of the Black Box Theatre, located in Uptown Martinsville at 44 Franklin St.

inside the dressing room," Dorr said. "We'd like to have plenty of seating and safe places to put belongings. We'll need (volunteers) to seal and paint the wall. We have a curtained-off area that is sometimes used for privacy, but we need a space that is comfortable and safe for everyone to use."

The Black Box Theatre is an essential asset in the arts and cultural identity of Uptown Martinsville. Ed Preston, treasurer of TheatreWorks, said, "The Black Box Theater is the place people can come to see the truth about life and social situations through our shows. We want to create an experience that gives

our patrons that Broadway feel at a local community level. There are so many talented people in this local area and we want the Black Box to be the place they can come enjoy and showcase their performing arts skills."

Established in 2004, TheatreWorks Community Players produces a variety of productions showcasing local and regional talents and teaching individuals interested in performing on stage. Upcoming shows include Grand Horizons in March and April 2025 and The Importance of Being Earnest in June 2025.

Follow them on social media or visit [www.twcp.net](http://www.twcp.net) to find out more.

Norris

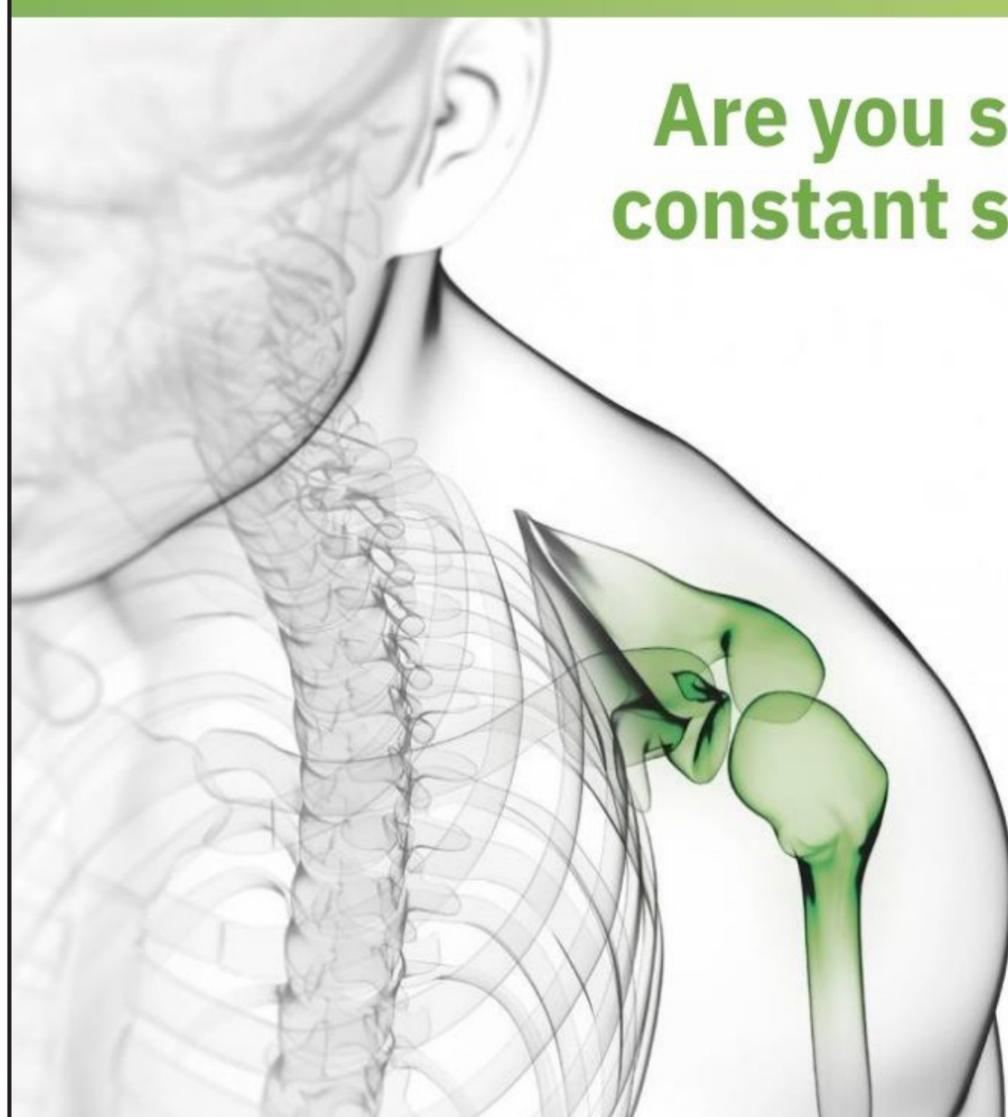
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- \*Other requirements will apply

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Danville, VA 24541  
[savannah.mcnear@spectrummed.com](mailto:savannah.mcnear@spectrummed.com)

# Trampled by Turtles to headline Rooster Walk 15 Music & Arts Festival

The chart-topping progressive bluegrass band Trampled by Turtles will headline the 15th annual Rooster Walk Music & Arts Festival, taking place May 22-25 at Pop's Farm in Martinsville.

"We're thrilled to finally welcome Trampled by Turtles to Rooster Walk," said Johnny Buck, executive director of Rooster Walk. "Our fans have been asking for them for years, and after several attempts, it all came together for RW15. We can't wait."

In addition to Trampled by Turtles, Town Mountain, of Asheville, N.C., and a long-time favorite, will return to Rooster Walk for their sixth performance at the festival. They previously co-headlined Rooster Walk 1 in 2009.

Other newly announced bands include: Kendall Street Company (jamband, Charlottesville, Va.); Sneezzy (partyfunk, Chicago, Il.); Caitlin Krisko & The Broadcast (soul roots, Asheville, N.C.); Caleb Caudle (roots music, Winston Salem N.C.); The Wilson Springs Hotel (roots rock, Richmond, Va.); Isaac Hadden (jam, Asheville, N.C.); Sol Driven Train (R&B,



Trampled by Turtles will headline the 15th annual Rooster Walk Music & Arts Festival, May 22-25 at Pop's Farm in Martinsville. (Contributed)

Charleston, S.C.); Florencia & The Feeling (R&B/soul, Johnson City, TN); Ramona & The Holy Smokes (honkytonk, Charlottesville, Va.); Big Fat Gap (bluegrass, Chapel Hill, N.C.); Mountain Walrus (jam, Roanoke, Va.); The Shoaldiggers (Horny swampgrass, N. C.); Griffin (southern rock, Martinsville); DJ What? (disc jockey, Martinsville);

Raffi Kids Tribute by Mile Andrews (Chapel Hill, N.C.)

A third and final batch of bands will be announced in January.

Tickets and camping passes for Rooster Walk 15 are available now at [www.roosterwalk.com](http://www.roosterwalk.com), which also features all the information needed to plan for an amazing experience. Some options are in low

inventory. With over 50 bands performing on 6 stages, attendees can expect an immersive experience filled with live music, food, craft beer, family-friendly activities, arts, and outdoor adventures, including guided fly fishing trips, pedal boats, yoga, and more.

Rooster Walk has earned recognition as one of the Top 5 festivals in Virginia by Richmond-Times Dispatch and was voted the region's Most Creative Charitable Event by Virginia Living Magazine for three consecutive years.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit local and regional charities, including the Penn-Shank Memorial Endowment Scholarship Fund for Martinsville High School students and the Rooster Walk Music Instrument Program for local schools. Additionally, a portion of every admission ticket sold before January 1 will be donated to the United Way's efforts to support Hurricane Helene victims in the mid-Atlantic region.

Rooster Walk is produced by Rooster Walk Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has donated over \$330,000 to local charities since its founding in 2009.

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