

## Sheriff defends deputy's actions during council meeting incident

By Staff Reports

Martinsville Sheriff Steve Draper said his deputy, Reva Keen, acted on what she believed were signals from City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides and Mayor LC Jones when she removed Councilman Aaron Rawls from a recent meeting.

"And that's what she did. She was under the impression that was it," Draper said.

He explained Jones "I think had just kind of looked at her, because she was standing near him, and gave the gesture of just nodding his head, and the city manager used her head and kind of just ... if you look at it (video), you can see it better than I can tell you. It's hard for me to de-



Martinsville Sheriff's Deputy Reva Keen

scribe it, but you can see it," Draper said of a video recorded by Caleb Robertson of What Does The Bible Say?

Keen, who serves as a bailiff in court, will not be disciplined for her actions, Draper said.

"My deputy followed what she was told to do. As far as we're concerned at this point, we're not going to do anything. Because like I said,

looking at the video it's obvious that there was a gesture made," Draper said.

Keen was assigned to the meeting at the request of city officials after funds were found to pay overtime. Her job was to keep the public from approaching the council, Draper said.

"Just like a courtroom, you just can't pass the bar in the courtroom to come toward a judge or come toward the Commonwealth's Attorney or anybody. Our people are to keep people behind the bar, and that's our job," Draper said.

"When we put this in effect, it was the same thing. We started it to keep the public, when doing their comments or they (See Sheriff p. 3)



Martinsville City Council members Aaron Rawls and Julian Mei called a press conference to discuss the March 25 council meeting.

## Rawls' removal sparks accusations, conflicting accounts among city officials

By Jessica Dillon and Taylor Boyd

The chaotic removal of council member Aaron Rawls from a March 25 Martinsville City Council meeting has ignited a firestorm of accusations, conflicting narratives, and concerns about government transparency and authority.

Rawls, flanked by fellow council member Julian Mei, held a press conference on March 27 and alleged City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides of orchestrating his removal, and to criticize the council's handling of controversial topics, includ-

ing executive pay raises.

In response, city officials — including Ferrell-Benavides, Mayor LC Jones, Vice Mayor Kathy Lawson, and Rayshaun Gravely — denied any coordinated effort to oust Rawls. They instead attributed his removal to a misinterpretation by a sheriff's deputy attempting to maintain order during a contentious meeting.

The fallout has divided the council and residents, with Rawls, Mei and others alleging a breach of constitutional rights, while another (See Rawls p. 5)

## Martinsville council hears proposed \$87.2 million spending plan

By Taylor Boyd and Jessica Dillon

Martinsville City Council members heard a draft of the proposed fiscal year 2025-26 budget at its Tuesday, April 1 meeting, with proposed revenue of \$87,233,656 and expenses of \$85,874,519.

City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides said revenues are projected to decrease by 1.3 percent in the proposal, while expenses are expected to increase by 0.7 percent.

"That gives you a difference of a positive of \$359,137. That would increase our fund balance, which would be our goal," she said.

As of June 30, the projected unaudited fund balance is \$27,130,079.



City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides presented the proposed fiscal year 2025-26 budget.

The proposed general fund revenue is \$37,593,551 with its projected expenses being \$37,141,933.

Unlike most cities where about 80 percent of the general fund is used (See Martinsville p. 2)

## Incumbent to seek reelection in Collinsville



Joe Bryant, vice chairman of the Henry County Board of Supervisors, will seek reelection to the Collinsville District seat.

Joe Bryant, the incumbent Collinsville District Supervisor, announced Tuesday that he will seek reelection in the November election against challenger Chris Lawless.

"As I look back on the past 16 years of serving this community, I am filled with pride for what we've accomplished together. Over these years, I've had the honor of working alongside many of you, listening to your concerns, and finding solutions that benefit us all. My experience has given me the insight to recognize the challenges we face, as well as the wisdom to understand the importance of moving forward—together," Bryant wrote in an email

Tuesday.

When he first joined the board, Bryant said his "focus was clear: to strengthen our community, to make decisions that would last, and to ensure that every voice was heard."

He retains that same commitment, and is "ready to continue that work. I am proud of the work we've done as a team, and even more proud of the way our current board has come together. We've fostered a culture of collaboration, respect, and mutual support—values that have made us a stronger, more unified group," Bryant wrote.

While there have been many successes, Bryant said "there is still work to be done. Challenges remain, and there are goals that still lie ahead. But I am confident in our ability to meet these challenges. With 16 years of experience and a deep understanding of the issues at hand, I know that we can continue moving forward, making thoughtful decisions that will benefit not just today, but for future generations."

He noted that "strong leadership is about more than just making decisions — it's about building relationships, earning trust, and being accountable. It's about ensuring that every decision we make reflects the values of our community and serves the greater good. I am ready (See Incumbent p. 3)

## Board discusses evolving county identity

By Cole Hall

The Henry County Board of Supervisors recently convened to discuss their latest agenda, focusing on how they want to represent the county in official language.

A significant portion of the discussion centered on the term "mill town" and whether it remains an appropriate descriptor for Henry County.

"I want to hold onto that past and not ignore it, but acknowledge it," Dr. Pam Cobler, of the Reed Creek District said. "This is an important part of our history."

Many board members sought to balance respect for the county's industrial heritage while also embracing a broader vision for the future.

"We refer to historic areas of de-

velopment around factories and mills. We used to be textiles and furniture, but we're much more than that now. What do we refer to them as?" Jim Adams, of the Blackberry District, and board chairman asked.

"What's wrong with being a mill town? It's true for how a lot of folks view our past," Garrett Dillard, of the Iriswood District asked. "What makes that a negative?"

While the discussion was tabled, the majority of the board appeared to favor a forward-thinking approach in county materials, one that acknowledges its manufacturing history while reflecting the ways it has changed.

The board also briefly discussed (See Board p. 3)

## Edwards tapped to fill vacancy on school board



Valeria Clark Edwards was selected to fill the vacant Horsepasture District seat on the Henry County School Board.

The Henry County School Board selected Valeria Clark Edwards to fill the vacant board seat in the Horsepasture District that was created due to a resignation. She will officially assume her role representing the Horsepasture District on April 3.

Edwards brings decades of experience in education and community leadership, making her a valuable addition to the Board as she works to support students, educators, and families across the district, the school board wrote in a release.

A retired educator with 28 years of experience in Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, Edwards has served in multiple capacities, including as a Kindergarten Teacher, Primary Reading Teacher, Assistant Principal, and School Bus Driver. Her career has been dedicated to fostering student success, ensuring equitable access to quality education, and men-

toring future educators. She also served as an Adjunct Professor at Winston-Salem State University and has been actively involved with the Henry (See Edwards p. 3)

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# Martinsville

(cont. from page 1)



The budget proposal includes a difference of \$359,137, “a positive ... that would increase our fund balance,” City Manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides said.

for personnel, Ferrell-Benavides said Martinsville differs with 55 percent used for city employees.

“As you look at the City of Martinsville, we have in this proposed budget 337 full-time (FTEs) and 81 part-time. Now, our end of the year estimate is 333 full-time and 81 part-time,” she said.

Constitutional officers include 88 employees, which represent about 26 percent of all full-time employees, followed by public safety at 25 percent, or 84 employees.

Utilities include 20 percent of employees; operations and infrastructure at 17 percent.

“General government, which is the internal administrative office, are nine,” and represent about three percent, “IT and Telecommunication together are about 14 individuals, representing about 14 percent. Fiscal services is at 11 employees, and they represent about three percent, and development services are eight employees” and represent two percent, she said.

The proposed budget includes a projected eight percent increase in real estate tax revenue, from \$7.8 million to \$8.4 million, Ferrell-Benavides said.

“With personal property tax, what we did based on just wanting to be cautious and not knowing, we projected that as flat. So, we went with end of the year. We did not project a revenue increase. We projected it to remain the same for that item,” she said.

The sales and other taxes are expected to increase by 3.5 percent to \$8,920,321.

Ferrell-Benavides said revenue from use and charges for services is expected to decrease, while intergovernmental revenue is expected to increase by 5.9 percent, from \$7,006,569 to \$7,423,437.

“That’s where you see most of the money that comes from the state, and that’s what supports our constitutionals in some of the areas,” she said.

With the proposed general fund expenditures, Interim Director of Finance Robert Floyd said the salaries and benefits category is about 55 percent of all expenses, at about \$20.3 million, and \$2.2 million for intergovernmental expenses is about six percent.

The supplies and materials category is four percent, at \$1.3 million, and professional services is \$247,135, or one percent of all anticipated expenditures.

“Contractual and services is at \$3.3 million, approximately nine percent of the budget. Utilities is a little over \$1 million at three percent, and other expenses is four percent at \$1.3 million,” Floyd said.

Ferrell-Benavides said the council and clerk office budget is proposed to increase to \$141,780 from \$114,025 and includes part of the funding for the deputy clerk salary.

“The city manager’s office - the city manager as you know serves as the CEO. My budget will be going from \$571,000 in the previous year to \$526,000. The difference is, I will no longer have a Chief Operating Officer (COO). She will be leaving us at the end of the calendar year, working on a contract to close out some projects at the end of the fiscal year to the end of the year, and so we have unfunded that position in the budget,” she said.

The city attorney in the proposed budget will increase to \$451,427 from \$294,679, and the total budget is \$542,135 for organizational development expenditures. Employee resignation expenditures decreased from \$404,295 to \$305,250.

“Community engagement is where we normally would have our communications and our PIO (Public Information Officer). One of the things we’ve done with this is we’ve consolidated that function under organizational development. So, what’s included in it is funding for our special events and other contractual services that are marketing things that we’ve talked about. That is one of the areas that we’re doing, really starting to merge our efforts together in our dual roles,” Ferrell-Benavides said.

Under Finance, administration is expected to be \$331,585, and accounting is expected to be \$251,595. Budget Procurement is proposed to be \$584,767.

Ferrell-Benavides said the budget presented by the police department increased to \$5,019,255 from the current fiscal year’s \$4.8 million.

For the Fire and Emergency Medical Services



More than two dozen residents attended the Tuesday, April 1 meeting.



Martinsville City Council tackled several issues at its April 1 meeting.

(EMS) category, fire has a proposed budget of \$2,903,905, and EMS is \$330,058.

Ferrell-Benavides said water and waste water were merged together in the budget.

“This budget has stayed pretty stable from \$9.9 to \$9.5” million, “which is a small reduction. Part of you’ll see the reduction has to do with we’ve made sure we’ve pulled out true capital expenses,” she said.

Telecommunications is expected to be \$2,359,788 in the proposed budget and IT will be \$3,477,537.

Stormwater’s proposed budget is \$420,620 for the upcoming fiscal year.

“Stormwater was our new fund, we’re still building that fund up,” Ferrell-Benavides said.

The Clerk of Circuit Court’s budget is proposed to be \$582,797, with the Commissioner of Revenue’s being \$639,775 and the Register and Electoral Board’s being less than \$300,000.

The sheriff’s office budget will cost \$1,455,710 for the courts, \$4460,510 for corrections, and \$182,155 for the jail annex.

Ferrell-Benavides said the outside agency funding requests amount to \$2,416,313.

For mandated agencies, or “the ones that we fund because of a state or a requirement,” \$1,859,456 is requested.

Ferrell-Benavides said some of the mandated agencies include the Blue Ridge Regional Library, the E-911 Department, and Piedmont Community Services.

The citizen and community engagement category of the outside agency funding request is \$262,865 with \$50,504 for ANCHOR, \$20,000 for the Martinsville-Henry County SPCA, and \$35,000 for the Martinsville-Henry County Warming Center.

The outside agency economic development category has \$252,733 in requests and tourism has \$41,259 from Fayette Area Historical Initiative (FAHI), Piedmont Arts Association, and the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

In other matters, the council:

\*Heard an update from Commissioner of Revenue Ruth Easley and discussed the elderly and disabled tax relief efforts.

Low-income for seniors is considered to be 80% of the Average Median Income (AMI), she said. “It is a little tone deaf since the city has 94 employees that make less than this annually.”

Easley suggested that those making \$35,000 get the exemption annually. She recommended only four levels instead of 10, and the draft ordinance suggests an adjustment every January 1, to mirror the Social Security Administration’s cost of living adjustment.

“We can make it happen with the June 15th payment. If you don’t make it happen tonight the treasurer and I can’t make it happen,” Easley said. If the tax rate is increased to the proposed .82 cents per \$100 of assessed value, then the cost of the December tax payment would be \$41,051.97, but if the lower tax rate on the reassessment notice is adopted — 71.5 cent per \$100 of assessed value, then the relief in December would \$35,795.31.

Veterans who are a 100 percent service connected disabled receive 100 percent tax relief running the city \$57,672.95 in June at the .82 cents rate, with the .71.5 cent rate being \$62,817.76.

There are around 53 qualifying veterans with around 130 applicants that have yet to qualify due to waiting for documentation.

“You have the ability to work with those folks that have applied that would otherwise be denied,” Lawson asked. Easley indicated that would be the case. She also stressed to the council to make the June deadline, she “has to know right now.”

Easley also noted that some tax payers don’t fit into the disabled or elderly category, and discussed the possibility of a future grant program. “You could create something like \$15,000, \$20,000,” but that would require more of an investigation and the only locality that’s doing something similar is Charlottesville.

The council followed Easley’s recommendation and sent the resolution to the city attorney for review. This new proposal will be added to the budget as it’s reviewed.

For now, Easley will host a Community Discussion about the reassessment. It will be held April 10, from 6-8 p.m., at the New College In-

stitute (NCI), Baldwin Building, 191 Fayette St.

\*Heard from Caleb Robertson who said he had shown the video he took of Rawls being removed from the March 25 meeting to Commonwealth Attorney Andy Hall and City Sheriff Steve Draper, who both said they don’t believe the law was broken.

“But even if it goes forward, a note about the money, I believe the city’s liability insurance deductible would be about \$50,000 if I’m not mistaken. So, as we look at all this discussion tonight about budget, for individuals that might be upset at the idea of if it were to happen a council member took legal action, \$50,000 wouldn’t be the most money that this current city council has lost for the city,” he said.

As the budget process continues, Robertson said he hopes the council can band together to help taxpayers out. “We would like to see deductions, we’d like for the community to have an easier go at this one,” he said.

\*Heard from Charles Roark, of Star News, who asked who has the right to have a member removed from a council meeting, and referenced Rawls March 25 removal.

“I think we’re all trying to figure out who has the right to eject someone. Is it the clerk, is the city manager, is it the mayor? We’re trying to figure out how the law works on that, and with the legal representative here, I hope we could maybe get some answers to figure out how that process works. We can’t find anybody that knows how this works, so we keep trying,” he said.

Noting there were multiple representatives of local media outlets covering the meeting, Roark said he believes the public deserves to know what happened and how the process works.

“I think the media will stay on it,” he added.

\*Heard from Morgan Lee and Conner Worthington about their experience volunteering at the Martinsville-Henry County Warming Center and using it when homeless.

\*Heard from John Mann who told the council and Ferrell-Benavides that he appreciated the work that they put in for the citizens.

“It’s so much better when we can come together and work as a team, and not work against each other,” he said.

Mann also said he wants to find a way to funnel the entire revenue from race weekend at the Martinsville Speedway into the city “so we would not have to struggle to raise taxes and raise electric bills no more than we have to. There’s things out there that we can do,” he said.

\*Heard from Virginia Hairston, who told council that a Brightspeed employee allegedly got permission from the city council to dig holes on her property and put down lines.

“Nobody asked anybody in the family. Nobody asked anybody in the house They came down, they had a work crew, they had big bulldozers, they had people digging holes in my yard close to a pipe that my sister just paid over \$27,000 for,” she said.

Hairston asked if she had any legal recourse, and after learning her property is off the road and an easement wouldn’t apply, council member Aaron Rawls said, suggesting consulting with the authorities.

Vice Mayor Kathy Lawson said her husband also reported an experience with Brightspeed.

In that case, a representative claimed the city had given the company authorization to sign everyone up for service, “which was just a blatant lie,” Lawson said.

\*Scheduled a budget public hearing for the first reading of the FY 2025-2026 budget for May 8 and for the second reading on May 20.

\*Scheduled a public hearing for the real estate tax decrease for May 8.

\*Heard from Community Development Director Eric Payne about a proposed resolution to apply for Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) Individual Distribution and Gold Standard funds. It was also discussed during the council’s work session prior to the meeting.

\*Approved a resolution of participation for the pre-65 retirees in the health insurance plan.

\*Tabled approval of the March 17 meeting minutes.

\*Approved the March 25 meeting minutes.

\*Heard city reports and announcements.

\*Heard comments from council.

\*Heard comments from the city manager.



# 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).)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Meetings</b>   |  |
| <b>Tuesday, April 7</b><br>Board of Equalization Hearing, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., New College Institute, 191 Fayette St., Room B207, Martinsville.   | Celebrate The Resurrection, 11 a.m., Egg Hunt & Hot Dog Lunch, Blackberry Baptist Church, 3241 Stones Dairy Road, Bassett.   |
| <b>Wednesday, April 8</b><br>Board of Supervisors Budget Work Session, 5 p.m., Administration Building Fourth Floor Conference Room, 3300 Kings Mountain Road, Martinsville.  | <b>Monday, April 14</b><br>The Friends of the Blue Ridge Regional Library meet in the Main Branch, 310 E. Church St., Martinsville, 10:30 a.m. All are welcome.  |
| <b>Thursday, April 9</b><br>Architectural Review Board Meeting, 4 p.m. to 5 p.m., Municipal Building Council Chambers, 55 W. Church Street, Room 208, Martinsville.   | <b>Tuesday, April 15</b><br>Martinsville -Henry County Republican Committee, 6:30 p.m. at the Henry County Administration Building, Summerlin Room, 3300 Kings Mountain Road Martinsville.   |
| <b>Thursday, April 10</b><br>Community Discussion about the reassessment hosted by Commissioner of Revenue Ruth Easley, 6-8 p.m., at the New College Institute (NCI), Baldwin Building, 191 Fayette St.   | <b>Tuesday, April 15-Thursday, April 17</b><br>Martinsville City Public Schools will host in-person kindergarten registration, 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. at MCPS Central Office (746 Indian Trail). Translation services are available by calling (276) 403-5833. A list of documents required for registration is available on the Back to School page of the MCPS website. |
| <b>Friday, April 11</b><br>Music Night at Spencer Penn with Travis Frye and Blue Mountain. Gate opens at 5 p.m. and the band starts at 6:30 p.m. Admission is a \$5 cash donation. Concessions, including the ever popular Spencer Penn hot dogs, chicken salad, BBQ, and homemade desserts, will be sold.  | <b>Saturday, April 19</b><br>Family Easter Celebration 10 a.m., games, egg hunt, Bible stories, crafts, prizes, and free lunch. Fort Trial Baptist Church, 170 Oak Level Road, Stanleytown.  |
| <b>Saturday, April 12</b><br>Fish Fry by American Legion Homer Dillard Post #78, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 139 Creekside Drive, Martinsville. Fish sandwiches are \$9, homemade desserts are \$2, sodas or water are \$1. Drive-through event with limited dining-in. Call (276) 224-5679 or (276) 340-5169 to place orders.   | <b>Saturday, April 26</b><br>Oak Level Ruritan Club Community Yard Sale, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., 7668 Oak Level Road, Bassett. Spaces are \$20, vendors welcome. Concessions available. To reserve a space, call (276) 340-3158 or (276) 732-8096.  |
| <b>ONGOING</b>  |  |
| Uptown Pub Run, Mondays 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, 277 Philpott Dam Road, Bassett, hosts breakfast on the 2nd Saturday of each month, \$9 for adults, and \$4 for children under 12. All you can eat, sausage, fried bologna, eggs, cooked apples, sausage gravy, 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.  |  |
| Book Bingo on the 4th Tuesday of the month at the Martinsville Branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library, 11 a.m. to noon. Call (276) 403-5430 to register.   |  |
| 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 <a href="http://brrl.lib.va.us">brrl.lib.va.us</a> .  |  |
| 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.   |  |
| The Martinsville-Henry County Democratic Committee meets on the first Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at New College Institute on Fayette Street (parking is on Moss St.). RSVP at <a href="http://mhcdcvva.org/meeting-rsvp">mhcdcvva.org/meeting-rsvp</a> to get Zoom link.  |  |
| Neighbors in the Know. Join staff and volunteers in the Hylton Library at the Spencer Penn Centre for activities and socializing on the first and third Monday of each month. A different presentation and activity weekly, followed by a way to get you moving. The program is an hour long and activities for children will be provided. Every third Monday, 10-11 a.m., a music program will be provided. This free program is perfect for all ages. Registration is not required. |  |
| The Martinsville -Henry County Republican Committee meets on the 3rd Tuesday every month, 6:30 p.m., Henry County Administration Building, Summerlin Room, 3300 Kings Mountain Road, Martinsville.  |  |

## Edwards

(cont. from page 1)

County Board of Elections for the past three years.

“We had several fantastic candidates for the seat, which we could not have gone wrong with any of them. We are excited to welcome Valeria Edwards to the School Board,” said Teddy Martin, chairman of the school board. Edwards “extensive experience in education and unwavering commitment to community service will be instrumental in advancing our mission to provide the best educational opportunities for all students in Henry County.”

Edwards holds an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education from Forsyth Technical Institute, a Bachelor of Science in Early Child-

hood Education from Winston-Salem State University, and two master’s degrees in Supervision, Administration, and Elementary Education from North Carolina A&T State University.

In addition, Edwards is a dedicated community leader, actively serving in multiple organizations, including the Martinsville-Henry County NAACP, the WSSU Alumni Chapter, and the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Incorporated, where she has held various leadership roles. She has received numerous awards for her service, including the Outstanding Volunteer Service Award from the Martinsville-Henry County NAACP.

## Incumbent

(cont. from page 1)

to continue this work, leading with integrity and a commitment to the well-being of our town.

“I am proud of what we’ve accomplished as a board, and I am excited about what lies ahead. Together, we’ve created a foundation for success, and I believe that with your support, we can contin-

ue to build on that foundation for a brighter future,” Bryant wrote.

He acknowledged that the work ahead is “not always easy, but it’s work I’m ready to do. I ask for your trust and your vote so we can keep moving forward, together,” and thanked residents for their continued support.

## Free, puppet-themed Family Day set for April 12



Piedmont Arts and Beegins With You will host a free puppet-themed Family Day from 10 a.m.-1 p.m., on Saturday, April 12 in the Gravely-Lester Art Garden.

Children and adults are invited to take part in this fun event

featuring puppet-making crafts, an Easter egg hunt and a giant puppet parade by Paperhand Puppet Intervention.

Paperhand Puppet Intervention is a unique puppet theater based in Saxapahaw, N.C. Its members have been creating

## Board

(cont. from page 1)

the county’s cultural and environmental resources and concerns, particularly the issue of littering.

“Trash is a problem. There is an issue of littering, and we do not want trash to be the first thing people see when they come to Henry County,” Joe Bryant, of the Collinsville District, pointed out.

Supervisors emphasized the county’s natural beauty as a key asset for tourism but noted that littering was beginning to harm that image. The discussion included ideas to promote community involvement in keeping the county clean.

“It’s the citizens’ re-

sponsibility to keep our county clean,” Bryant added.

On the agenda’s action items, the board reviewed plans for revitalization, including housing expansion while respecting private property boundaries. Another major topic was the impact of state regulations at the county level, with some supervisors feeling they were being applied inappropriately which could potentially harm development.

“There’s a lot of push and pull between growth and regulations that aren’t appropriate for Henry County. Most of our land is agricultural, but we’re forced

to treat any development like it’s surrounded by an impervious surface,” Adams said.

Near the end of the meeting, supervisors discussed the difficulty of finding volunteers for EMS programs across the county. Ideas include relying more on part-time staff or increasing incentives to retain current volunteers.

The next work session to continue developing the supervisor agenda is scheduled for May 28 at the Henry County Administration Building in the Summerlin Room. Regular monthly board meetings will continue as scheduled.

## Sheriff

(cont. from page 1)

want to talk to the council, then you can’t approach the council. You give whatever to the deputy, just like we do in court, and the deputy will give it to the mayor. If the mayor wants to send it out to the rest of the members, that’s up to him,” Draper explained.

Draper, who previously served on council for three years from 1991 to 1994, noted this type of incident has never happened in the city before.

Before the meeting, Keen was told there could be some issues, Draper said, adding that he did not know who made the statement. Regardless, “that’s all they told her. She didn’t know what to expect.”

While he heard claims that Keen was participating in the meeting by nodding and clapping, Draper said Keen has said she did

not participate.

“I have never seen it. She said she wasn’t, so,” Draper said, adding that Keen is a seasoned officer with 30 years of service to her credit. “She’s never been a problem in court. Every judge she’s ever worked with likes her. If I found out, or if I saw it really happen, there may be some discipline, but I haven’t seen it,” he said.

He noted this type of incident has never happened in the city before, and changes are anticipated as a result.

“We have a policy in our attorney’s hands now to review if anything like this ever happens again. We were led to believe there was something within the operating procedures of the council, but it wasn’t addressed,” Draper said. “I drafted a policy and gave it to the city manager for further review.”

giant papier-mâché puppets, masks, shadow plays and spectacle performances since 1997. As part of their parades they tell stories, beat drums and encourage interaction. Their award-winning performances aim to be an inspiration, a call to action

and a celebration for everyone to enjoy.

This event is free and open to the public. It is sponsored by Carter Bank.

For more information on exhibits and events, visit [PiedmontArts.org](http://PiedmontArts.org).



# OPINION

## Greenland: “A Security Black Hole”

As promised before the election, President Donald Trump committed to prioritizing the best interests of the United States by securing our homeland and combatting out-side threats to our national security.

We have already seen important progress just months into Trump’s second term.

After a visit to Panama by Secretary of State Marco Rubio over concerns that Communist China exercised influence over the Panama Canal, Panama has initially accepted American overtures.

I discussed in a previous column that lawmakers from both parties expressed concern over Chinese-linked ports operating in the Panama Canal and the threats that posed to the United States.

Ports owned by the Hong Kong-based but Chinese-linked CK Hutchison Holdings is supposed to be sold to the American company BlackRock.

Additionally, Panama’s president announced his country’s withdrawal from China’s Belt and Road Initiative, a project meant to connect China to the rest of the world through the development of physical infrastructure such as ports and railways.

We will need to be vigilant on this issue. Time will tell whether Panama’s assurances and early actions are real or merely window dressing.

The Trump Administration is not just looking south of our border to protect U.S. national security interests.

The Danish territory of Greenland is viewed as another national security concern.

American interest in Greenland, an island more than five times bigger than California and more than three times bigger than Texas, dates back centuries.

Former Secretary of State William Seward, who helped facilitate



Morgan Griffith

Representative

the 1867 U.S. purchase of Alaska, remarked that acquiring Greenland was “worthy of serious consideration.”

Greenland was later an American protectorate in World War II. As a result of an agreement, America stationed forces in Greenland to deter the aggressionist aims of Nazi Germany (who invaded and occupied Denmark).

In 1946, U.S. officials made a \$100 million play to woo the Danes. Greenland, these officials believed, was a military necessity because of its location on the shortest polar route between Washington and Soviet Moscow.

While no deal materialized, American troop presence on the island lasted.

The only U.S. military base there today is the Pituffik Space Base. Pituffik is the Department of Defense’s northernmost installation.

However, more U.S. Arctic bases may be needed to prevent an emerging threat.

Russian activity in the Arctic is concerning. Russia tests its nuclear deterrent and hypersonic missiles in the Arctic.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Russia’s Arctic Circle bases outnumber North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) installations by roughly 33 percent.

The shortest path by air to North America for Russian missiles or bombers would be over the North Pole.

An American Iron Dome defense system, a concept promoted by Trump, to defend us from such missile

attacks means that Greenland will play a critical role in our air defense capabilities.

Additionally, the waters between Greenland and the United Kingdom are the only way Russia’s northern-based naval fleet can access the Atlantic Ocean.

If a global conflict involving Russia were to arise, unfettered access to the Atlantic and movement around the Arctic will be critical to Russia’s war strategy.

Given Greenland’s location, additional U.S. military installations will strengthen surveillance of Russian military activity and deter aggression in the Arctic.

Russian encroachment in the Arctic must be treated seriously. If not, we invite a national security disaster to our doorstep.

For years, Greenland’s “security black hole” has frustrated observers and some security officials. Denmark consistently failed, as acknowledged by their defense minister, to make adequate improvements to its defense.

According to a 2021 High North News article, Denmark’s security of Greenland consisted of one aircraft, four helicopters and four ships!

Due to Trump’s Greenland concerns, Denmark is changing its policy.

This year, Denmark announced \$2.5 billion to boost military presence in the region and will raise their defense spending to more than 3% of gross domestic product.

While this is a welcome first step, future actions are needed.

For this reason, Vice President JD Vance’s travel to Pituffik is the latest development to illustrate our concerns about Greenland’s “security black hole.”

Given America’s status as the greatest defender of western civilization’s liberty and freedom, we strongly urge our allies in Denmark and Europe to heed American concerns.

Rubio’s visit to Panama yielded initial dividends. Vance’s visit might bear even greater fruit.

In an era where the Arctic is of increasing strategic interest to our adversaries, I will continue to monitor the Greenland situation and support the Administration in warding off threats to American national security.

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.

## Internal strife once again Martinsville’s chief export

MARTINSVILLE, VA — Buford Eggert leans against his old Ford tractor, chewing idly on an alder twig. His verdant fields sprawl out before him as far as the eye can see.

“Yep,” he said, “it’s a bumper crop this year. Barely April and I’ve already hauled a year’s load to market. I think we’re set to break some records.”

Like many local farmers, Eggert has shifted away from traditional agriculture. His chief cash crop these days is the thing that grows best in Martinsville:

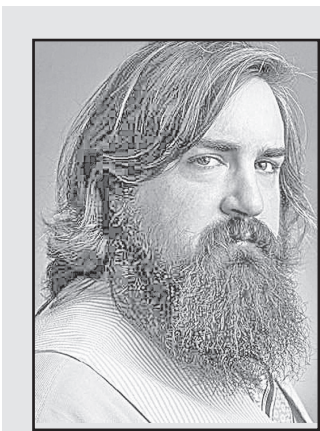
Crippling internal strife. “It goes by a bunch of different names,” Eggert said. “Whether you call it strife, infighting, acrimony, conflict, bickering, it’s all the same business. And friends, business is booming.”

Eggert credited Martinsville’s unique soil composition for the city’s remarkable ability to seemingly grow conflict out of thin air.

“Take a look at this,” he said, holding up a handful of rich, dark earth. “You’ve got economic inequality, a history of systemic racism that’s never been properly addressed, crabs in a bucket mentality ... and you see those little shiny bits? Those are poorly implemented ideas that someone heard at a conference.”

Strife sells, but who’s buying? According to Eggert, Martinsville produces more infighting per capita than any other U.S. city, allowing farmers like him to ship the excess to other municipalities.

“See, the problem some cities have is that they’re growing too fast,” Eggert said. “Everything’s going too well for them and everyone wants to move there. They just want to slow things down a bit, so they buy a few bushels of our internal strife. The next thing you know, companies that are thinking of relocating to the area check the local paper, read about some completely avoidable self-inflicted public embarrassment, and then decide to move to a different city. Before long, the property values start going back down. It’s a fine system.”



By Ben R. Williams

Agricultural scientist Nona Singhal said that she’s never seen anything quite like it.

“We conducted an experiment,” she said. “We locked a random volunteer in a room with one tablespoon of Martinsville’s soil. We then told him that he had just been elected to Martinsville City Council.”

“Within just one hour,” Singhal continued, “he was banging on the door and asking to hold a press conference to demand his own resignation.”

Singhal added that a follow-up experiment involved locking two people in a room with a tablespoon of soil. Tragically, there were no survivors, and further experimentation was discontinued.

“It’s powerful stuff, the soil,” Eggert said as he sprayed Miracle-Gro on his fields. “But sometimes — it’s rare, but sometimes — everything just gets too quiet. When that happens, I come out into the field at night and whisper the word ‘reversion.’ Next thing you know, we’re back in the black.”

We asked Eggert if he had any concerns that Martinsville’s perpetual internecine squabbling could have a negative impact on the city’s health. Eggert attempted to respond but his voice was drowned out by the sound of the Indian Trail power substation exploding again.

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## Letter To The Editor

### Rawls council meeting fiasco

This letter concerns the most accurate news story, “Rawls escorted from Martinsville council meeting after tense exchange,” published in The Henry County Enterprise on March 29, 2025. During a city council meeting, council member Aaron Rawls violated city council decorum or proper and polite behavior. Rawls attempted to voice his opinion concerning a council issue, but it turned into verbal bullying behavior.

It is not uncommon for a government official to be ejected from a formal government gathering if they violate established rules and procedures of order. During a recent presidential speech in the country, a congressman was ejected for not observing regulations or order. Even in a classroom, a teacher can remove a student for loud, excessive talking and misbehavior. There are basic rules of order in all aspects of life.

Council member Rawls has shown a pattern and practice of behavior during council meetings. He verbally attacks and name-calls other council members and community citizens. Once, Rawls attacked former council member Jennifer Bowles, who was speaking as a citizen. Then, at the first meeting of the new council’s inauguration, Rawls verbally attacked council members and citizens, and now he launched another verbal bullying attack.

### On the loss of a good friend

My good friend, George Bell, passed away last week at the age of 67 years old.

George had a storied life mainly due to his great size, but also his big heart.

George grew up in Portsmouth, Va. and upon his graduation from high school at 18 years old, stood a mere 7’6” tall and later became the tallest man in America at 7’8” tall.

After high school, George attended college in Atlanta and then went on to play for the world famous Harlem Globetrotters.

George later starred in several television shows and traveled the world doing tours and doing

Councilman Rawls now believes he has been persecuted and the victim of a conspiracy by the mayor and city manager. He feels his free speech rights have been violated. Rawls even believed that how some people dress during the meeting has some sinister meaning. Joining his entourage is council member Julian Mei, who has only served on the council for around 90 days. He was part of a recent news conference and feels that Rawls has a criminal civil rights violation. Such a suite would be frivolous. During the same council meeting concerning Rawls’ misbehavior, Julian Mei verbally chastised citizen Melody Cartwright because of how she looked at him.

How can council members Rawls and Mei conduct city business with such attacks towards other council members and others? Such behavior creates a hostile work environment. One of the most unfortunate consequences of this fiasco is that the sheriff’s deputy, whose job is to protect and serve citizens, has been criticized. Sheriff Steve Draper should firmly stand behind his officers and protect their integrity. Because of city council member Rawls, the city government is spiraling out of control, which can be stopped by just practicing proper decorum.

Lawrence Mitchell,  
Martinsville

trade shows for many large corporations.

George eventually worked for many years at the Norfolk Va. Sheriff’s Office.

George was like a “rock star” when he helped me with my basketball clinics, and we worked together in southwest Virginia with an “anti-bullying” program for local and regional schools in the area.

George was a “gentle giant” and loved by everyone he met... especially kids.

Thank you, George, for your friendship of 50 plus years.

Michael Jarrett,  
Bassett

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# Rawls

(cont. from page 1)

camp condemns Rawls’ comments as disrespectful and disruptive.

**The Incident**

Rawls’ removal occurred after he indicated residents may not have been told their taxes and utilities would increase, “and now we’re talking about raising executive pay with your money. Raise the pay for somebody who’s making almost \$200,000 a year in the City of Martinsville,” Rawls said at the meeting.

At his press conference, Rawls said, “I knew Tuesday night was happening, it was no surprise to me. The level of coordination was absolutely criminal, literally.”

Rawls claimed he was removed from the meeting at the instruction of Ferrell-Benavides, who allegedly signaled to the attending sheriff’s deputy, Reva Keen, with a nod. A video of the meeting, taken by Caleb Robertson of What Does The Bible Say?, shows Ferrell-Benavides nodding her head twice in the deputy’s direction, then motioning her head sideways, towards Rawls.

“I wasn’t removed by the mayor, I was removed by the city manager,” Rawls said. “Civil rights violations are the most expensive” kind of civil suit. “They try to turn a room against you,” he said, describing what he characterized as a “stacked agenda” designed to suppress dissent.

He also alleged that hostile audience members were encouraged to disrupt his remarks, creating an atmosphere in which his statements were intentionally drowned out.

Mei, who has aligned himself with Rawls on several issues, called the incident “the most disturbing event I’ve ever experienced.”

Mei said he noticed documents being distributed before the meeting and later received a text alerting him to their presence. During the meeting, Rawls referred to the documents as being “disseminated unsigned by a coward.”

City council members whisper to each other about decisions during meetings, Mei said, adding the March 25 meeting was no different. He said he heard a member twice whisper to Jones that Rawls was out of order.

According to Mei, after Jones slammed his gavel and told Rawls to “fall in order,” Keen approached Rawls and began escorting him from the chamber.

“I’ve gone back and looked at the footage, it doesn’t look as aggressive as it felt at the time,” Mei said. “But it did feel like he was being grabbed by the elbow or the arm and pulled up out of his chair.”

Mei acknowledged that he was in favor of giving Jones the authority to negotiate the city manager’s salary. “It was my suggestion that we go ahead and give LC the authority to do this,” he said, adding that he is also part of the minority vote.

Noting that gallery footage shows Ferrell-Benavides giving the signal to remove Rawls from his elected seat, Mei insisted that Rawls’ First Amendment rights were violated.

“Aaron’s rights of speech under the First Amendment have been 100 percent violated,” Mei said. “Regardless of attacks, Aaron was protected by the right of free speech.”

**Conflicting Accounts**

In a later interview, Ferrell-Benavides categorically denied ordering Rawls’ removal.

“I know someone said they saw me shaking my head, well if you look, I shake my head a lot. I move my head a lot,” she said.

“But at no point in time did anybody call for him to be removed. It’s inappropriate for me as a city employee, as the City Manager, based on the ICMA Code of Ethics to have that done,” she said.

Ferrell-Benavides said the only person with the authority to have Rawls removed would be Jones, or in his absence, Lawson.

“The mayor is the chair, and so he runs the meeting. According to the rules of the council, he has to control the decorum. But at no point in time did anybody call for him to be removed,” she said.

In speaking with Sans Anderson, the city attorney’s office, Ferrell-Benavides said she was informed that as clerk to city council, she could order someone removed from a meeting.

“While I didn’t think I had the right, she said you could in certain situations as the clerk have the right if someone is disruptive to have them removed as the clerk. I didn’t do that, and I wouldn’t do that. I had the ability and didn’t realize it,” she said.

Ferrell-Benavides believes Rawls being removed from the meeting was an unfortunate situation that’s been growing overtime.

“While Mr. Rawls may be looking for the conspiracy theory there is not one here. There was a degree of shock on mine and anyone’s face. The key is nodding my head, shaking my head, I shook my head several times at different things, and in fact there were people who would look at me and I’m like, ‘yep, this is what I deal with’ and that wasn’t the case. She (Sheriff’s Deputy Reva Keen) said it too, she said I did not tell her to do that,” she said.

Ferrell-Benavides said she also followed up with Sheriff Steve Draper to ask if Keen thought she was telling her to remove Rawls, “and she said no.”

Rawls’ removal also wasn’t preplanned. “Oh God no,” Ferrell-Benavides said. “The only thing that I could say would be preplanned for me, I was not going to sit and be insulted. I would have walked out if he would have started like he keeps doing, but other than that, absolutely not.”

While Martinsville Police Chief Rob Fincher has kept order during previous meetings, Ferrell-Benavides said Keen’s presence was due to more people attending the meetings and acts of violence in other localities — not because of Rawls.

Before his removal, “we had a great meeting. We had a very aggressive agenda. We were almost done with the meeting and going in a positive direction. So, all the rest of this hurts me and hurts our city because we’re trying to get developers to come here, and they see this kind of stuff. It doesn’t make us look good and we’ve got to get over ourselves and focus on Martinsville. We’ve got to start putting Martinsville first and leave the personal vendettas and egos out of it,” she said.

Jones also denied ordering the removal. “I was focused on maintaining control of the room,” Jones said. “With the statements that were being made and people in the audience making statements, it was hard to draw the line.”

Jones noted the entire council voted to approve its Rules of Council which include being respectful to each other.

“Even when we have discord with each other, you can articulate your points without slanderizing another person,” he said, denying an organized plan to wear black on black clothing. He noted that many people wore different colored clothing.

“When you disrespect members of this community - see Aaron’s not from this community, so he doesn’t understand the culture fabric of this community. It’s not a black or white cultural fabric. It is a community culture fabric because all of these people went to school together, they grew up together, they worked together, they go to church together. So, when you disrespect one, he can disrespect one person, he doesn’t know who they’re related to, who they’re friends with, what type of organizations they’re involved in, so the next thing you know he has a whole city upset with him behind that,” Jones said.

As a result, Jones said many residents came out to confront that type of behavior.

“I think that’s what he saw. It’s not like an organized thing like somebody plotted against him. No, you have a lot of people upset, this city’s upset, and he thinks because of the 10 to 15 people who are supporting his disrespectful behavior that he has the power to continue the movement, but he doesn’t understand he has the whole city upset with him,” he said.

Jones noted the last election is an example of that as Rawls “put up three people to run and only one of them (Mei) passed” because he’s from Martinsville.

Lawson said that no official motion was made to remove Rawls, and Keen just misunderstood.

“That’s my understanding because nobody made any indication. He just needed to stop talking because he had violated the Rules of Council, and the Rules of Council have a code of conduct, and the code of conduct says that you will not badmouth” your peers, she said.

Lawson said Rawls did that by making negative comments about other council members, which is why Jones called him out of order.

“We did not have any idea she was going to ask him to leave. We’ll have a policy in place I’m sure within the next month to address things of that nature,” she said.

In her almost 10 years on council, Lawson’s never seen a situation like this before.

“Of course, we’ve never had one of our council members bash us. It was an unfortunate situation. It was just one of those ‘oh my gosh’” situations, she said.

Lawson didn’t think Keen would remove Rawls, but rather stand behind him so he would stop talking.

“I don’t necessarily agree with it, but he needed to stop talking,” she said. “He has bashed me for two years, I don’t listen to his stuff. I hear, but I’m not going to listen to garbage. I’m just not going to listen to it,” she said.

Gravely said, “I was really just looking all around, and I really couldn’t exactly tell you who did it. I’d actually have to look at the footage from the other local media to give you a definite answer because there was a lot going on that night”.

He believes Keen used her training to do what she did.

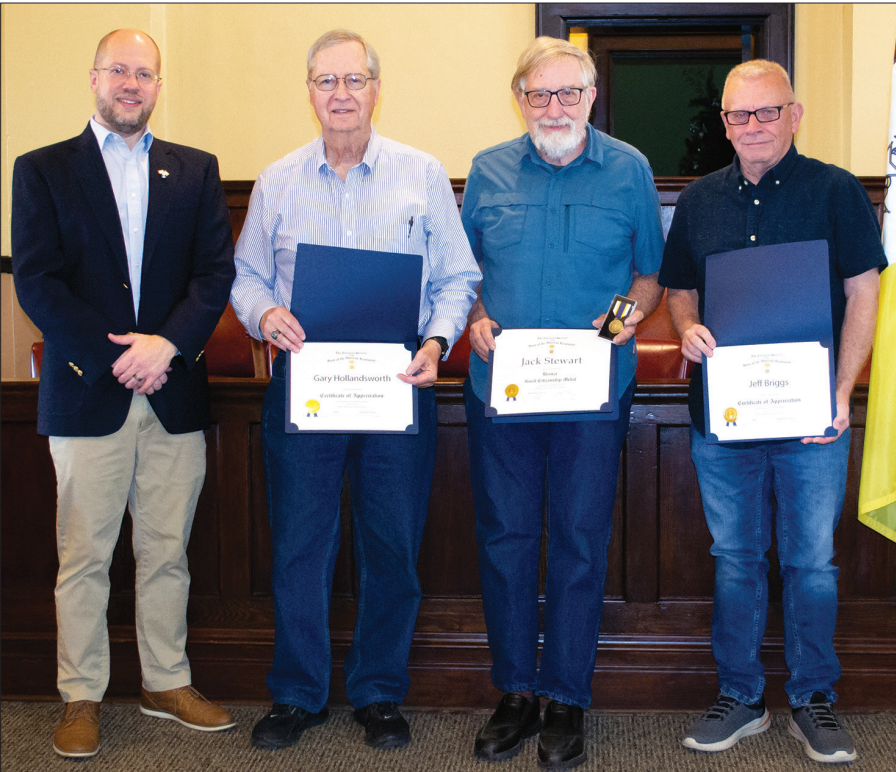
“I’ve been a deputy, I’ve worked as a bailiff, I’ve worked in the jail, I’ve worked on patrol. It’s also a discussion on what they should do,” Gravely said.

**Looking forward**

Ferrell-Benavides has since requested a formal legal opinion to determine whether the removal violated any laws or policies.

“If we did something wrong, we have to acknowledge it. We have to own it if it was a mistake,” she said.

# Colonel George Waller Chapter of SAR Honors Local Volunteers



Andy Doss, Gary Hollandsworth, Jack Stewart, and Jeff Briggs are pictured. (Contributed)

The Colonel George Waller Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) held its monthly meeting on Saturday, March 29, at the Martinsville-

Henry County Heritage Museum. The meeting included reports from members on recent events, chapter updates, and the recognition of outstanding individuals

for their service and dedication.

Pete Lovell, Jeff Briggs, and Judson Leviner, reported on the many events they had attended and participated in since the last meeting. Chapter President Andy Doss shared updates on his recent engagements, including serving as the keynote lecturer at the Franklin County Historical Society’s 250th meeting, where he spoke on “Local Militia Organization,” and delivering a lecture for the Colonial Dames on “The Dutch Attack on Virginia of 1667.”

A highlight of the meeting was the announcement of the 2025 Bronze Good Citizenship Award, which was presented to Jack Stewart for his exceptional volunteer service with the Martinsville-Henry County Historical Society. Stewart has been a dedicated force at the Heritage Museum, restoring artifacts, maintaining exhibits, and lending his expertise to a wide range of projects that preserve and celebrate local history.

Additionally, Jeff Briggs and Gary Hollandsworth were recog-

nized for their many years of volunteer service and commitment to the SAR. Their dedication has been instrumental in supporting the chapter’s mission and community initiatives.

Looking ahead, the Colonel George Waller Chapter is actively involved in planning a Virginia 250th Symposium, scheduled for August 3, to commemorate America’s semiquincentennial. The chapter will also host a living history display at the upcoming Spencer-Penn Pig Cookin’ on April 26, offering an interactive glimpse into the past for attendees.

Dr. Mervyn and Virginia King provided an update and tour of the museum’s newly expanded annex, showcasing recent improvements and future plans for the space.

The Colonel George Waller Chapter continues to promote patriotism, historical education, and community service in Martinsville and Henry County. For more information about the chapter’s activities, find them on Facebook.



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## LEGAL

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BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS  
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Pursuant to Section 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia, a series of public hearings have been scheduled for **April 23, 2025, at 1:00 p.m.** in the Summerlin Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, Kings Mountain Rd., Collinsville, Virginia. The purpose of these public hearings is to receive citizen input into the possible issuance of a Special Use Permits for the following cases:

**Case S-25-04 Roger and Deborah Wheatley**  
A request for a Special Use Permit was received under Section 21-302 of the Henry County Zoning Ordinance to allow for the establishment of a campground facility to accommodate up to 10 sites. The property is 1.056-acres, on the east side of Axton Rd, and 0.3-mile south of Cascade Rd. The property is in the Iriswood District, is zoned Agricultural District A-1, as shown on Tax Map 66.7/28N.  
**Case S-12-03 Tobin Doman**  
A request for an amendment to an existing Special Use Permit was received under Section 21-902 of the Henry County Zoning Ordinance. In March of 2012 a Special Use Permit was granted to this property to operate a billiards and arcade business. One of the conditions of approval was that no ABC license would be issued to the establishment. The current applicant wishes to amend that condition to allow for him to apply for an "on premise wine and beer" license. The property is located 6629 Greensboro Rd, in the Ridgeway District, is zoned Commercial District B-1, as shown on Tax Map 62.4(34)/8-12. The applications for these requests may be viewed in the Department of Planning, Zoning & Inspection between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.  
Lee H. Clark, AICP  
Director of Planning, Zoning & Inspection

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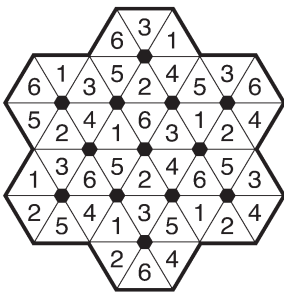
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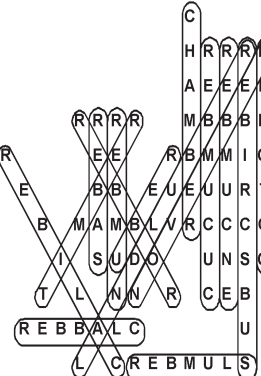
## Puzzle Answers!

### SNOWFLAKES

solution



### WORDS ENDING IN "BER"



### SCRAMBLERS

solution

1. Assure 2. Merge;  
3. Closure; 4. Pretty

Today's Word

**TREASURER**



answer



### Weekly SUDOKU

Answer

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

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Crossing the Lines

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

Board votes to cut ties with consulting firm

The Patrick County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to terminate its contract with the Berkley Group, LLC, at its Monday, March 24, meeting.

The Berkley Group is a local government consulting firm specializing in providing direct services such as community development and planning, capital project management, administration, and other local government concerns.

The county began contracting with the group last year to assist its Planning Commission in creating ordinances focused on solar power and tall structures.

According to Vice-Chairman Andrew Overby, of the Dan River District, Berkley received \$3,600 a month for its services.

County Administrator Beth Simms said the county can issue a 30-day notice as it is currently in a month-to-month contract with the organization.

“We probably have to pay through April,” Simms said, “and then we can cancel it for May.”

Doug Perry, of the



County Administrator Beth Simms discusses issues with the board. Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith is seated behind.

Smith River District, said he wanted to hear from the Planning Commission to ensure it had received all it needed from Berkley and was not currently using the firm for any essential tasks.

“Do you want to try and use them to get through the current solar resolution stuff we have?” Simms asked Planning Commission Chairman Kurt Bozenmayer.

At the March 18 meeting, Bozenmayer said the commission approved a resolution to amend the comprehen-

sive plan, which determined that commercial solar is not a conforming use within the county. That amendment will now go to the supervisors for approval.

“I think that pretty much wraps it up because Berkley Group indicated that their next steps would be to revise the solar siting ordinance. I’m not so sure we need a solar siting ordinance if we’ve made the decision that our comprehensive plan is going to consider commercial solar a nonconforming use,” Bozenmayer said.

ATF, state police help investigate Gregory Pallet blaze

Federal, state, and local authorities are investigating a commercial structure fire that occurred at Gregory Pallet and Lumber Company in Stuart, the most recent in a series of significant fires across Patrick County and surrounding areas.

According to Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith, the fire at Gregory Pallet was reported to the 911 Communication Center at approximately 1 a.m. on Friday, March 28. Multiple fire departments from around the region responded to battle the blaze.

The fire destroyed numerous structures, vehicles, and other equipment, burning an estimated 10 acres.

Due to the scale of physical damage and



Local, state and federal authorities are investigating the cause of a blaze at Gregory Pallet and Lumber Company in Stuart. (Contributed)

financial loss, the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and Virginia State Police are assisting the Patrick County Sheriff’s Office in investigating the cause and origin of the fire.

“We are forever

grateful for our volunteers, both in our county and throughout the region, for their dedication and selflessness, and our thoughts and prayers are with the Gregory family and their employees,” Smith stated in a Friday afternoon release.

Stuart’s 10th annual Wine & Beer Fest moves to Star Theatre



The 10th annual Wine & Beer Festival will be held on Saturday, April 5, at the Star Theatre. (Contributed photo)

The Town of Stuart will hold its 10th annual Wine & Beer Festival on Saturday, April 5, at the Star Theatre from 12-4 p.m. Admission is free.

Town Manager Bryce Simmons said there will be a \$10 wine tasting, which includes a free wine glass.

“Right now, there are four wineries that we know will be there—Villa Appalachia, Wood Acres Fruit Wines, Childress Vineyard, and Daring Wine and Cider Company,”

he said.

One Family Productions will also be onsite selling beer and other concessions for those who aren’t wine enthusiasts.

While the event has typically been held at the Stuart Farmers’ Market, Simmons said it has often been plagued by bad weather, such as rain and heavy winds. As a result, the town decided to hold it at the Star Theatre.

For additional information, call (276) 694-3811 or (276) 692-7188.

Judge Ruth Williams and the Little White Cottage



Judge Ruth Williams’ former home on E. Blue Ridge Street stands in disrepair, but perhaps one day it will be restored, with roses once again welcoming travelers to Stuart. (Contributed)

Once upon a time, a quaint white cottage on E. Blue Ridge Street was a welcoming sight for those entering Stuart. Times

have changed—the street has changed, and the people have changed. The cottage remains, but it has deteriorated into a

tumbledown shack, with a caved-in roof and a dismantled porch. The once meticulously groomed lawn, bordered with flowers, is now overgrown with weeds and debris. The lovely roses, suitable for cutting, no longer exist to adorn the front porch railing but have been replaced with old boards and clutter.

Known locally as the “Judge Ruth” curve, the bend in the road near the cottage was one that teens and others navigated carefully—they had no desire to appear in court before the Honorable Judge Ruth Olive Williams, who lived there. Judge Williams is a legend in these parts, a remarkable woman whose path to the bench was far from ordinary.

When she was first appointed as a trial justice, she was one of only two female judges in Virginia. Her journey to being a judge was an unusual route.

Williams grew up about five miles south of Stuart in the Five Forks community, attending

small local schools until her family moved to Stuart in 1924, when she was 11. She later attended Stuart High School, graduating in 1930 as valedictorian.

Initially, she planned to follow in her mother’s footsteps and become a teacher, but she changed her mind and enrolled at National Business College in Roanoke, where she excelled in stenographic skills.

Returning to Stuart in November 1932, during the Great Depression, no jobs were available and she struggled to find employment. She briefly worked for R.E. Woolwine, and attorney Will Joyce recognized her exceptional shorthand skills and hired her to record proceedings and evidence for an upcoming trial in Patrick County Circuit Court. The case, involving the murder of local law officer Bunyon Sheppard in a stolen car incident, was of significant local importance.

**To read more, visit <http://www.theenterprise.net>.**

1-3-5-7-9

1-3-5-7-9

1-4-7-9:15

1-3-5-7-9

1-3-5-7-9

1-3-5-7-9

Hollywood Cinema  
beside Walmart  
Martinsville 276-656-3456





# FEAR KNOT

By: rj johnson

DOUBT? ...OR DARE!

EGE  
ARSIVO  
♥IGDER  
♥VIDA  
SAIVEL  
♥PSA  
♥ERSU  
♥AGREL  
♥TAE  
HEVSDA  
PHDET  
♥TSPE

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.

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Differences: 1. Plank is missing. 2. Pencil is missing. 3. Paper is missing. 4. Screwdriver is longer. 5. Pan is smaller. 6. Box is added. 7. Jar is missing.

## MAGIC MAZE

● WORDS ENDING IN "BER"

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

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. Unlisted clue hint: THE FAT OF A WHALE

Caliber Chamber Clabber Cucumber  
Encumber Landlubber November Number  
October Robber Saber Slumber  
Subscriber Timber Uber

## Super Crossword

FULLY STATED

**ACROSS**

1 Despises  
7 Tennis great Rafael  
12 Loutish guy  
15 Drop — (declines)  
19 Corned beef sandwich  
20 Kind of daisy  
21 Bullring shout  
22 Perfume bottle  
23 Baseball's "Iron Man," fully stated?  
26 Western U.S. gas brand  
27 Hit sketch show since '75  
28 Atop  
29 Move, as a seedling  
31 Stitch clothes  
32 Statistic of a chemical element, fully stated?  
39 Protein in egg white and milk  
41 Panther  
42 2010s dance move often done with the Whip  
43 Tropical vines

44 —'s razor ("keep it simple" principle)  
47 Fallon's network  
49 Singer Ora  
50 Irritability, fully stated?  
53 — Lingus  
55 Some racing autos  
49 Singer Ora  
56 Evil "Get Smart" group  
57 Tyro, in gaming lingo  
58 Actor Cage, informally  
60 Sneeze noise  
62 Prefix with tourism  
63 "Aladdin" monkey  
65 Auto-cleaning site, fully stated?  
69 "I knew it all —"  
71 Once surnamed  
72 "Thank you, Yvette!"  
73 Lode of unrefined metal, fully stated?  
78 — di-dah  
79 .001 inch  
82 Singer Cherry  
83 Hoppy drink

84 UConn women's basketball coach  
Auriemma  
86 Radiohead title track of 2000  
87 Prone (to)  
88 British islet  
90 Biblical boat, fully stated?  
95 Architect  
Ludwig Mies van der —  
97 Fun, in brief  
99 "The — Professor"  
100 Tribe of the Southwest  
101 Grads  
103 Ear-busting  
105 Mistaken  
106 Annual beauty contest, fully stated?  
111 Sorority letter  
112 Motif  
113 Solitary  
114 Uproar  
117 At the drop of —  
119 "Mystic River" actor, fully stated?  
125 Christ, in Italy  
126 CPR expert  
127 French ice cream

128 Focal point  
129 Punta del —  
130 Enzyme suffix  
131 Useful thing  
132 Believers in God, of sorts

**DOWN**

1 Circle bits  
2 Coffee bit  
3 Uproar  
4 Kabuki sash  
5 Sports official  
6 — Caps (candy brand)  
7 Not for Windows  
8 Truism  
9 Country singer Carter  
10 Scottish port  
11 Luau gift  
12 Certain cola container  
13 Hebrew "A"  
14 Rail against  
15 Egg cells  
16 Initial performance on Broadway, say  
17 Inked cheek image, e.g.  
18 Period when sales slump  
24 Destroy  
25 Baby buggy, in Britain  
30 Airport agcy.

33 North African capital  
34 Muscat's land  
35 Soup with tofu  
36 Junk email  
37 Kind of wrestling  
38 Always  
39 Comparable  
40 Pale purple  
44 Bear, in Baja  
45 Alternative to vanilla, informally  
46 Native of Habana  
48 Part of B.A.  
51 Overwhelm  
52 Stranded cellular stuff  
54 Cattle locale  
59 Dogma suffix  
61 Some film FX  
63 Hilo "Hello!"  
64 "— voyage!"  
66 Abode: Abbr.  
67 Ounce, e.g.  
68 Writer Levin  
69 Birthday topic  
70 Hair stiffener  
73 Running riot  
74 Buffs again  
75 Devotee  
76 Put in writing  
77 Trial balloon  
79 Criminals

80 Boise locale  
81 Cutting beam  
85 Anti's vote  
86 Tree knots  
89 Body of water west of Liverpool  
91 "Movin' —" ("The Jeffersons" song)  
92 German auto  
93 "Citizen —"  
94 Impressionist  
96 "Mom" has two  
98 Weather conditions  
102 Tiny criticism  
104 Uncork, e.g.  
105 Judith with two Tonys  
107 Looks as if  
108 Arm bones  
109 For the — (temporarily)  
110 Map blowup  
115 Cut calories  
116 Boaters' tools  
118 Mon. follower  
120 Links gp.  
121 Letters before 96-Down  
122 PC readout of a sort  
123 Winning sign  
124 Singer DiFranco

## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

• Rocker Chuck Berry had a degree in hairdressing.

• The shark on the "Jaws" poster and the T. rex on the "Jurassic Park" poster were both modeled after exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History.

• A single strand of spaghetti is called a "spaghetto."

• Beer cans in Japan have braille on them so blind people don't confuse alcoholic drinks with soft drinks.

• If you spent merely a day on each of the islands in the Philippines, it would take you nearly 21 years to visit all of them.

• Most Americans can buy an AR-15 rifle before they can legally buy a beer.

• A party boat carrying 60 men and women capsized in Texas in 2012 after all the passengers rushed to one side when the boat passed a nude beach.

• The world's first underwater mailbox was installed just off the shore of Susami, Japan.

• Henry Heimlich used the Heimlich maneuver for the first time at age 96.

• Vertebrates with larger brains and more neurons, such as humans and owls, tend to have longer yawns, which help cool the brain and support cognitive function.

• The term "scientist" didn't come into usage until 1834, when it was coined by University of Cambridge historian and philosopher of science William Whewell, who wanted to create a unifying noun for people engaged in various scientific fields.

• Citizens of the small town Kamikatsu in Japan's Tokushima prefecture are expected to separate their recycling into no fewer than 45 different categories.

• The Atlantic bluefin tuna can experience such high bursts of muscular activity while fighting a fisherman that it cooks its own flesh.

• Reese's Peanut Butter Cups were originally named "Penny Cups" after the amount they cost at the time.

\*\*\*

**Thought for the Day:** "Age wrinkles the body. Quitting wrinkles the soul."  
— Douglas MacArthur

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## Weekly SUDOKU

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

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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## 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!

Soothe  
**SUSARE**

Blend  
**GEMER**

End  
**SOCRUEL**

Cute  
**TRYPET**

**TODAY'S WORD**

## 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

CONSISTENTLY HITTING A GOLF BALL DEAD STRAIGHT IS EXTREMELY HARD. THAT'S WHY GOOD PLAYERS EITHER FADE OR DRAW MOST OF THEIR TEE-TO-GREEN SHOTS.

ANOTHER REASON "SHAPE" IS YOUR NATURAL TENDENCY TO MOVE THE BALL EITHER FROM LEFT TO RIGHT OR FROM RIGHT TO LEFT. BEST POLICY IS TO GO WITH WHAT COMES MOST EASILY FOR YOU.

"Before I give my report, remember — I warned you about electing me as \_\_\_\_\_!"

**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!

Soothe  
**SUSARE**

Blend  
**GEMER**

End  
**SOCRUEL**

Cute  
**TRYPET**

**TODAY'S WORD**

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# CASA program raises awareness for vulnerable children during Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time to focus on raising awareness about child abuse and the ways in which communities can come together to support and protect vulnerable children. Focus on Youth/CASA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for children who have suffered abuse and neglect, is proud to join the nationwide movement to raise awareness, encourage prevention efforts, and highlight the importance of positive change.

## The Impact of Child Abuse and the Role of CASA

Child abuse continues to be a serious concern in our communities, affecting thousands of children every year. CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) volunteers are trained to advocate for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, ensuring their voices are heard in the courtroom and throughout the child welfare process. With the guidance of our dedicated volunteers, children who have been removed from unsafe situations are given the opportunity to thrive in safe, loving environments.

“April serves as a crucial reminder that preventing child abuse is a shared responsibility. By raising awareness and providing support, we can make a significant difference in the lives of children who need us the most,” said Kerry Walker, Executive Director of Focus on Youth/CASA. “Through the CASA program, we can break the cycle of abuse and give children the hope and opportunity for a brighter future.”

## How the Community Can Help

Throughout April, the CASA program will be hosting informational sessions, and fundraising efforts to promote Child Abuse Preven-

tion Month. These events aim to increase awareness, provide educational resources, and highlight the vital work that CASA volunteers do in advocating for children’s well-being.

Here are a few ways the public can get involved:

**Become a CASA Volunteer:** Individuals who want to make a direct impact on a child’s life can apply to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate. CASA volunteers are trained to be a consistent, supportive presence for children in the foster care system.

**Raise Awareness:** Join the conversation on social media by using the hashtag #ChildAbusePreventionMonth and share the importance of protecting children from harm.

**Donate:** Donations to your local CASA program help provide the resources needed to train volunteers, support advocacy efforts, and ensure children receive the care and attention they deserve.

## Support for Families and Children

In addition to advocating for children, the CASA program works closely with local child welfare agencies, schools, and community organizations to provide support for families at risk of abuse and neglect. Through a combination of education, outreach, and collaboration, CASA strives to build a stronger safety net for children and families in need.

Focus on Youth/CASA is part of a national network of programs dedicated to advocating for children in foster care. By training and supporting volunteers who are appointed by judges to advocate for children’s best interests, CASA works to ensure that every child appointed to us by the courts has



Members of Martinsville City Council also presented a proclamation. They are pictured with Kerry Walker.



Kerry Walker holds the proclamation presented by the Henry County Board of Supervisors.

the opportunity for a safe, permanent, and loving home. With the help of dedicated volunteers, CASA has made a significant difference in the lives of thousands of children

and families across the nation. For more information about how you can get involved, visit our website [www.foycasamhc.org](http://www.foycasamhc.org) or call (276) 403-5691.

# Chastain visits Racing College of Virginia to promote safe driving campaign



NASCAR Cup Series driver Ross Chastain joined students at Patrick & Henry Community College’s Racing College of Virginia to emphasize the importance of making safe driving choices as part of the Who’s Your Driver? campaign. The event, held at the college’s state-of-the-art motorsports training facility, highlighted the critical need for young drivers to choose a sober driver and always buckle up.

Chastain, known for his fearless racing style and viral “Hail Melon” move at Martinsville Speedway, connected with students about the parallels between safety in motorsports and everyday driving.

“In NASCAR, we take every precaution to stay safe – helmets, harnesses, and a great team around us,” said Chastain. “But the same level of care needs to happen on the road. You don’t get a second chance in a crash. That’s why I’m proud to be here today encouraging these students to make the right choices: never drive impaired and always wear a seat belt.”

The event was part of the Who’s Your Driver? initiative, led by the Department of Motor Vehicles’ Virginia Highway Safety Office and DRIVE SMART Virginia, which aims to re-

duce impaired driving and increase seat belt usage, particularly among at-risk young drivers.

“The statistics tell us that far too many Virginians – especially young drivers – are involved in alcohol-related crashes,” said DMV Commissioner Gerald Lackey, the Governor’s Highway Safety Representative. “Our goal with Who’s Your Driver? is to save lives by reinforcing smart decisions behind the wheel, and we’re grateful to have Ross Chastain using his platform to amplify this message.”

With one in three fatal crashes in Virginia involving alcohol, and Virginia’s zero-tolerance law making it illegal for drivers under 21 to have a BAC over 0.02%, the equivalent of one drink, the campaign’s message is especially critical for college students and young drivers.

“Partnering with NASCAR driver Ross Chastain on a designated driver program is a game-changer,” said Kristin Pettway, Executive Director of DRIVE SMART Virginia. “His passion for safety, both on and off the track, inspires fans to make smart choices and look out for one another. Together, we’re driving home the message that planning ahead for a

safe ride and buckling up wins every time.”

The Racing College of Virginia, located at Patrick & Henry Community College, has a long history of training students for careers in motorsports. The program’s 94% completion rate and strong ties to NASCAR make it a hub for future racing professionals.

“Our students understand what it takes to be successful in motorsports – hard work, discipline, and making smart choices,” said Dr. Colin Ferguson, Dean of STEM at Patrick & Henry Community College. “Ross Chastain’s visit reinforces that those same principles apply when they’re driving off the track. We’re grateful for this partnership in promoting safety.”

During the event, students asked Chastain about his career, his Martinsville win, and how he stays focused on and off the track. The visit also included a tour of the Racing College’s high-performance engine center and hands-on racing facilities, where students build, test, and race their own late model stock cars.

For more information on the Who’s Your Driver? campaign, visit [whosyourdriver.org](http://whosyourdriver.org). To learn more about the Racing College of Virginia, visit [racingcollege.com](http://racingcollege.com).



# Hall returns to lead WPHD



Penny Hall returned to lead the West Piedmont Health District (WPHD), serving as its director since January 25. No stranger to the district and the communities it serves, she previously was the Chief Operations Officer for the West-Piedmont and Central Virginia health districts from 2019-2021 where she led the district during the COVID-19 pandemic,

providing operational leadership, guidance, and oversight to eight local health departments. She brings to the position 26 years of experience working in the Department of Social Services at both the state and local levels, where she worked in benefit and service programs. She holds a bachelor’s degree in sociology and a master’s degree in human services with a specialty in Executive Leadership. Her diverse background has allowed her to understand the challenges faced in health and human service work at all levels. Her focus remains on quality customer service and working collaboratively with local county and city governments, community partners and stakeholders to achieve optimal, healthy outcomes that best serve the residents of Virginia. “I am excited to be back working with the West Piedmont Health District,” Hall said. “I know that our public health professionals have our residents’ best interest at heart, and I take seriously our duty to make this the healthiest community possible.”

# Kenworth Sales Company Opens New TRP Store in Martinsville

Kenworth Sales Company is excited to announce the opening of its new TRP All-Makes Parts store in Martinsville. The grand opening will be celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 1, at 10 a.m., at 8500 A L Philpott Highway. The new store will supply after-market medium- and heavy-duty truck parts for all makes and models of trucks, trailers, and buses. Kenworth Sales has been selling TRP parts within its network for years, and the new store will leverage Kenworth Sales’ extensive network of parts inventory. “The TRP product line has the same level of quality as the other OEM parts we sell,” says Lindsey Shaw, TRP Store Manager. “They are made to the same specifications as the parts that were originally put on the trucks when they were built, plus they carry the same nationwide warranty as all other PACCAR parts.” “Whether on highway or short haul, city bus or school bus, garbage truck or straight truck, we strive to be able to supply any parts our customers need,” says Shaw. The store is also set up to supply parts to any size repair shop or maintenance facility. “This new TRP in Martinsville

represents our commitment to providing top-quality parts and exceptional service to our customers. We are excited to expand our presence and continue to support the trucking industry”, says John Gibson, District Manager of Kenworth Sales Company. TRP offers an industry-leading warranty and a promise of performance that includes a wide selection of dependable replacement parts for all makes of trucks, trailers, and buses. The brand is supported through a nationwide network of 1,000 parts and service locations, providing an aftermarket for all makes of commercial truck equipment that surpasses expectations for quality, dependability, and value. TRP of Martinsville is located at 8500 A L Philpott Highway and is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Same day delivery is available for part orders for the greater Martinsville area. For more information, please contact the store at (276) 788-5512. Founded in 1945, Kenworth Sales Company began in Salt Lake City, Utah, and has since grown to more than 1,400 employees with 36 locations in the Mid-Atlantic and Intermountain West.



Wind Speeders/Elementary Team (Row 1) - Alivia Williams, Vernon Midkiff, Aria Vasquez, and Verna Midkiff; Turbine Titans/Middle School Team (Row 2) - Coach Dr. Wendy Grimshaw, Keegan Redd, NyShawn Walton, Remington Crockett, Jamison Jackson, & Dr. Susheela Shanta. (Contributed)

# NCI Kidwind teams excel at regional challenge, advance to state challenge

The New College Institute (NCI) Elementary and Middle School KidWind Teams showcased their exceptional talent and dedication at the Lynchburg Regional Challenge hosted by Randolph College on Sunday, March 30. Competing against top teams in the region, the Elementary Team secured second place, while the Middle School Team claimed first place, marking an impressive achievement for both groups. The students demonstrated strong teamwork, critical thinking, and scientific knowledge throughout the competition. Under the guidance of Dr. Wendy Grimshaw, their dedicated NCI coach, the teams excelled in their one-on-one interactions with judges, showcasing their depth of understanding and enthusiasm for science.

“We are incredibly proud of our students for their hard work and determination,” said Dr. Susheela Shanta, Chief Academic Officer at NCI. “As first-time participants, their success is a testament to their dedication and the exceptional coaching provided by Dr. Grimshaw.” Following their outstanding regional performance, both teams will advance to the Virginia State Challenge, set to take place on April 12 at James Madison University (JMU). This next stage presents an exciting opportunity for them to further demonstrate their skills and compete at a higher level. For more information on NCI’s KidWind programs, please visit [www.newcollegeinstitute.org](http://www.newcollegeinstitute.org) or reach out to Dr. Susheela Shanta at [sshanta@newcollegeinstitute.org](mailto:sshanta@newcollegeinstitute.org).

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# Domestic policy, market issues among topics at upcoming agricultural trade conference

Policymakers, agribusiness professionals and academic leaders will soon share their insights regarding the Virginia agriculture and forestry industry’s role in the international trade landscape. Over 250 people are expected to attend the 16th annual Virginia Agricultural Trade Conference April 22 in Richmond. The conference highlights the global impact of the commonwealth’s agricultural and forestry exports and features speakers who address challenges and opportunities in the industry. In 2023, Virginia’s agricultural and forestry exports were valued at more than \$3.6 billion, according to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Seth Meyer, chief economist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is invited to share a trade and domestic policy update. Panel discussions will focus on growing Virginia agricultural exports, as well as emerging issues in

animal product markets featuring representatives from the meat export and dairy industries. “Anytime we can bring together industry leaders, government officials and representatives of our global trading partners, it’s a win,” said Wilmer Stoneman, vice president of agriculture, development and innovation for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, a conference co-sponsor. Virginia’s top agricultural and forestry exports in 2023 were soybeans valued at over \$1.4 billion, pork at more than \$862 million, wood products exceeding \$400 million, poultry at over \$200 million, and tobacco sales that generated more than \$180 million. “The global economy is critical to marketing these products grown or produced by Virginia’s agriculture and forestry industries,” Stoneman continued. “The conference will provide an outlet for participants to discuss how to sustain

and expand that impact.” In 2023, China, Canada and the United Kingdom topped Virginia’s export list. China imported more than \$912 million in agricultural products, while Canada bought more than \$429 million and the United Kingdom imported more than \$247 million. According to information recently shared by VDACS, Virginia’s top five export markets in 2024 were Canada, Belgium, China, the United Kingdom and Mexico. The conference will be held at the downtown Richmond Marriott and will be co-hosted by VDACS, VFBF, The Port of Virginia and the Virginia Tech Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. Discounted parking is available. Visit [vafb.swoogo.com/vaagtrade25](http://vafb.swoogo.com/vaagtrade25) to register by the April 3 deadline. See a Real Virginia video report about last year’s conference at [bit.ly/4iXzJyb](http://bit.ly/4iXzJyb).

# Sports Schedule

The following are the dates and times of local high school teams and their games for the week of April 7 - April 12:

|            |              |  |
|------------|--------------|--|
| <b>4/7</b> |              |  |
| 4:30pm     | Boys Tennis  | Hidden Valley at Bassett                             |
| 5pm        | Baseball     | Bassett at Magna Vista                               |
| 5pm        | Softball     | Bassett at Magna Vista                               |
| 6pm        | Baseball     | Martinsville at George Washington (Dan Daniels Park) |
| 7pm        | Girls Tennis | Bassett vs Magna Vista (Smith Complex)               |
| River      |              |  |
| 7pm        | Girls Soccer | George Washington at Martinsville                    |
| 7pm        | Boys Soccer  | Bassett vs Magna Vista (Smith Complex)               |
| River      |              |  |
| 7pm        | Boys Soccer  | Martinsville at George Washington (Dan Daniels Park) |
| <b>4/8</b> |              |  |
| 4:30pm     | Girls Tennis | George Washington at Bassett                         |

|             |              |   |
|-------------|--------------|---|
| 4:30pm      | Girls Tennis | Magna Vista at Martinsville             |
| 4:30pm      | Boys Tennis  | Bassett at George Washington            |
| 4:30pm      | Boys Tennis  | Martinsville at Magna Vista             |
| 4:30pm      | Baseball     | Blue Ridge at Carlisle                  |
| <b>4/9</b>  |              |   |
| 5pm         | Track        | Bassett at George Washington            |
| 5pm         | Track        | Magna Vista at George Washington        |
| 5pm         | Track        | Martinsville at George Washington       |
| 5pm         | Baseball     | Magna Vista at Mecklenburg County       |
| 5:30pm      | Baseball     | Tunstall at Martinsville (Hooker Field) |
| 6pm         | Girls Soccer | Martinsville at Tunstall                |
| 7pm         | Boys Soccer  | Tunstall at Martinsville                |
| <b>4/10</b> |              |   |
| 4:30pm      | Girls Tennis | Martinsville at George Washington       |
| 4:30pm      | Boys Tennis  | George Washington at Martinsville       |
| 4:30pm      | Baseball     | Carlisle at WCA                         |

|             |              |   |
|-------------|--------------|---|
| 4:30pm      | Girls Soccer | WCA at Carlisle                         |
| 5pm         | Baseball     | Martinsville at Bassett                 |
| 5pm         | Softball     | Martinsville at Bassett                 |
| 5pm         | Softball     | Magna Vista at Mecklenburg County       |
| 7pm         | Girls Soccer | Bassett at Martinsville                 |
| 7pm         | Girls Soccer | Mecklenburg County at Magna Vista       |
| 7pm         | Boys Soccer  | Martinsville at Bassett (Smith Complex) |
| 7pm         | Boys Soccer  | Magna Vista at Mecklenburg County       |
| <b>4/11</b> |              |   |
| 4:30pm      | Baseball     | Millennium at Carlisle                  |
| 5pm         | Baseball     | Magna Vista at Tunstall                 |
| 5pm         | Softball     | Magna Vista at Tunstall                 |
| 7pm         | Girls Soccer | Tunstall at Magna Vista                 |
| 7pm         | Boys Soccer  | Magna Vista at Tunstall                 |



# Enrollment open for year-long high school peer leadership experience

Enrollment opened on Tuesday, April 1, for the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority's (ABC) Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Project (YADAPP).

YADAPP is a unique peer leadership opportunity fostering healthy communities and the prevention of substance use. The annual program begins with a kick-off conference which will be held July 14-18 at Christopher Newport University in Newport News. Participation requires the registration of a team of four high school students (including rising ninth graders) and one adult sponsor.

During the conference, students attend topical workshops facilitated by peer leaders, hear from well-known motivational speakers and learn leadership and prevention best practices to develop a Strategies To Act Now (STAN) Plan addressing substance use among their peers. Teams compete for \$250 mini grants to use as seed money and returning teams compete for the \$500 Wheeler Award to sustain their continued prevention efforts.

"Peer-led substance use prevention is a proven effective path for empowering young leaders to take a stand to create positive change and promote the culture of healthy behaviors among youth in the commonwealth," said Virginia ABC Youth Education and Pre-

vention Coordinator Wyatt Anderson. "Given some of the troubling influences and viral pressures on youth in recent years, YADAPP offers timely tools specifically created to help students make smart choices and use their natural strengths to make a difference."

Early enrollment opens April 1 and offers a discounted enrollment rate of \$500 per team through April 30. The price will increase to \$600 per team until the June 1 enrollment deadline. The fee includes conference materials, lodging and meals, as well as year-long coaching and support for adult sponsors as they aid their team in implementing its STAN Plan throughout the school year.

Adult sponsors participate in a separate track throughout the conference and receive resources and training on topics that will help them support their team. Adult sponsors are eligible for continuing education units and professional development hours. Law enforcement officers are eligible for partial in-service credits through the Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Since its inception in 1984, YADAPP has impacted approximately 450 different high schools and community organizations and more than 12,000 students. For more information and to enroll, visit the YADAPP website, <https://www.yadapp.com/>.



Del. Wren Williams, R, Stuart, was among those to speak to those attending an event at Piedmont Arts.



Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears was at Piedmont Arts on Saturday, the first of many stops in Martinsville over the weekend.



Mary Martin, a former Henry County School Board member, and Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears posed for a photo at Piedmont Arts.



Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears visited Martinsville on Saturday, where she met with supporters and discussed her platform. (Contributed photos)



Naomi Hodge-Muse talks to Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears on Saturday.



Del. Eric Phillips, R-Martinsville, addressed the crowd Saturday.

## Gubernatorial candidate visits Martinsville

Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears, who is campaigning to serve as the next governor of Virginia, visited Martinsville over the weekend. Before

participating in NASCAR activities on Saturday, she discussed her campaign and met supporters at Piedmont Arts Center.

Earle-Sears attended several other events over the weekend, including service at Mercy Crossing Church on Sunday.

# Books and Bunnies second year a success



Harvest Youth Board members 'hid' 20,000 Easter eggs in the field at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex, before excited youngsters gathered to collect the eggs during the annual Books and Bunnies event.

By Jessica Dillon

The second year of Books and Bunnies, an annual event put on by the Harvest Youth Board with the support of several other charities that set up booths, made the event a success. The event this year was held at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex on March 22, and from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m., families took part in events, including meeting the Easter Bunny.

"We have an egg hunt going on, we have a bunch of non-profit organizations here. We are teaching the kids about the county," said Maddie Crowe, a member of the youth board.

Other organizations to participate in the event included the United Way of Martinsville-Henry

County, Blue Ridge Regional Library, and the Martinsville-Henry County SPCA. These organizations handed out information on their programs, and the SPCA brought adoptable puppies for families to meet.

The egg hunt was one of the largest activities at the event, with approximately 20,000 eggs placed in the field. Among the treasures were 15 green eggs that sparkled.

Youngsters who found one of those eggs "will get a basket with little toys and books." Children who took pictures with the bunny received a free book.

"It helps us bring literacy out into the community," said Crowe. Set-up started the day before the event, with the eggs being quickly



The SPCA booth included adoptable puppies for youngsters and families to visit.

put out that morning. "It took 45 minutes. We had a lot of help. I think we have around 30 to 50 volunteers." Along with eggs, balloon animals and play areas were set up at the event.

The youth board members were excited to help make the event a success.

"I know I would have loved to do something like this when I was a

kid," said member Dylan Spencer, who was helping to give bags to families at the entrance.

"It means a lot to me to be here; it's my last year, so I've been sitting on the board now for four years," said member Alexa Martell.

The Books and Bunnies event is set to return next year, and children of all ages are encouraged to seek out more books to read.

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# Fourteen MHS students honored with National Honor Society Induction

Martinsville High School welcomed 14 new members into the National Honor Society (NHS) during an induction ceremony on Wednesday, March 26.

“Membership in the National Honor Society has become recognized nationally as one of the highest honors that can be bestowed upon a high school student,” said MHS teacher John Allen as he opened the ceremony.

To qualify for NHS induction, juniors and seniors must demonstrate excellence in four pillars: scholarship, leadership, character, and service. During the ceremony, student induct-

ees spoke about each of these principles.

**Scholarship**

Elvin Amaya Turcios emphasized the power of learning, stating, “Learning furnishes the lamp by which we read the past, the torch guiding us to understand the present, and the light that illuminates the future.” He charged the inductees to “continually expand their world through the opportunities inherent in scholarship.”

**Service**

Jemea Craghead highlighted the impact of service, explaining, “A willingness to work for

the benefit of those in need, without monetary compensation or public recognition, is the quality we seek in our membership and promote for the entire student body,” she said. “We are committed to volunteering our time and talents for the creation of a better tomorrow.”

**Leadership**

Rilynne Williams spoke about the responsibilities of leadership, stating, “Leadership should exert a wholesome influence on the school. In taking initiative in the classroom and in school activities, the real leader strives to train and aid others to reach their common goals of success.” “The price of leadership,” she said, “is sacrifice—the willingness to yield one’s personal interests for the interests of others ... Leadership is always needed; thus, to lead is a meaningful and substantive charge to each of our members.”

**Character**

Kamori Dillard spoke on the importance of character. “Character is achieved and not received,” she explained. “It is the product of constant thought and action, the daily striving to make the right choice ... By demonstrating such qualities as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and citizenship, we may hope to prove by example that we value character.”

MHS principal Dr. Aji Dixon thanked the families of the inductees for their support. “Behind every student here, you have someone who has talked to them about the importance of education. These young people are dedicated to learning and to listening. Thank you for the hard work you’ve put in.”

He then addressed the inductees: “You all have set yourselves apart. Continue to strive for excellence and continue to know you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it.”

Superintendent Dr. Zebedee Talley echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the significance of academic achievement. “I want you to understand this is a tremendous accomplishment. Things like this are more important than state championships. You’ve proven that you’re among the best when it comes to something people cannot take from you, and that’s your brain power. I thank you for being among our very best.”

The 2024-2025 inductees to the Martinsville High School Chapter of the National Honor Society are Elvin Amaya Turcios, Aubrey Blankenbaker, NaDasia Cobbs, Jemea Craghead, Gabriel Davis, Kamori Dillard, Zaniah Dillard, Abigail Hernandez, Aerran Kellam, Ashley Lintag, NaBria Millner, Jun Olea, Rilynne Williams and Kaira Womack.

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Automobile Fluids (motor oil, transmission fluids, antifreeze, etc.)  
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ITEMS NOT TO BRING

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SATURDAY, APRIL 12  
9 am - 12 Noon (Will be held rain or shine)

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