



Sarah Martin (center) was named Henry County Schools Teacher of the Year.



Melissa Zehr was among the parents who raised concerns to the school board.

## Parents voice frustrations about new grading system

By Taylor Boyd

Parents expressed frustration at the Dec. 4 Henry County School Board meeting about a new grading system that went into effect in May.

Melissa Zehr, a member of the PSCPS Parents Consortium, said that in the last three years, the board has revised its bylaws 51 times, including 19 revisions this year.

“The most troubling change came in May 2025, with the Administration and Absence bylaw. You gave the superintendent sweeping new power. If the board has no policy, she can act on her own and simply inform you later. That’s not oversight, you’re giving her a black check,” she said.

With this new power, Zehr

said Schools Superintendent Dr. Amy Blake-Lewis’s first action was districtwide grading changes without parent input, teacher surveys, or a board vote.

Following the meeting, Chair Teddy Martin II, of the Reed Creek District, said the changes were consistent with what the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), and the Board of Education push.

He noted Blake-Lewis and Assistant Superintendent of Instruction Lisa Millner also presented the changes at a previous meeting.

“This was run through parental advisory and teacher advisory, there were surveys, and

the board was briefed on it. The board did not have a vote on it as it was seen as an operational” matter. “The board does not find the statements made there consistent with the facts as we understand them,” Martin said.

When the division switched to the 10-point grading scale in 2015, Zehr said then-superintendent Dr. Sandy Strayer surveyed parents and brought the decision to the board for a vote.

“That’s the precedent, that’s our precedent,” she said.

Zehr added that parents and teachers were also blindsided by the new curriculum, which was said to be required by the state.

“That wasn’t completely

(See Parents p. 2)

## Jones warns city is on a “dangerous path” amid legal, political turmoil

By Staff Reports

Martinsville Mayor LC Jones said he is concerned about the direction the city is heading as a forensic audit is completed, legal fees rise, and tensions on the city council continue to grow.

“I think we are heading down a very dangerous path,” Jones said in an interview in which he discussed the federal complaint filed by former city manager Aretha Ferrell-Benavides, the release of a report prepared by the city’s legal counsel, and now, the audit that was ordered in July.

Jones said it is his understanding that the forensic audit was to be completed and presented at the city council’s next meeting on Dec. 16. However, as of Dec. 9, confirmation had not been received.

“I received an invoice on the audit for \$20,000. I just met with the City Manager (Rob Finch-

(See Jones p. 5)

## Auker, Durden to retire from school board

Board Members Thomas Auker and Elizabeth Durden were honored at the Henry County School Board’s Dec. 4 meeting, with both to officially retire from the board on December 31.

Auker held his position as Blackberry District representative for 12 years. The driving force during his tenure was his dedication to the students and teachers of Henry County, he said.

He was recognized at the board meeting by Superintendent Dr. Amy Blake-Lewis for demonstrating unwavering dedication to meeting the needs of all citizens of Henry County.

Highlights from his tenure include supporting equitable curriculum opportunities, implementation of the 1:1 iPad initiative, and improvements to and construction of school facilities. His support also contributed to the expansion of co-curricular and extracurricular programs that enrich the educational experience of students and promote school and community pride.

Durden represented the Collinsville District for four years. She originally ran for office to be a voice for her community from the perspective

(See Auker p. 2)

## On a mission to find the perfect tree



Elyssa Perry of Martinsville and her daughter, Makayela Richardson, search Bowers Tree Lot on Appalachian Drive for the perfect Christmas tree. (By Holly Kozelsky)



## Enterprise to close Stuart office, plans uninterrupted publication

For perhaps the first time since its founding in 1876, there will not be a physical newspaper office location for *The Enterprise*. The office, located at 129 N. Main Street in Stuart, will permanently close its doors to daily business operations as it transitions to a remote-first operating model on January 1.

Both *The Enterprise* and the *Henry County Enterprise* will continue to publish on their regular weekly schedules.

William Thompson, who once owned the building, estimated the newspaper moved its operations into the basement office in 1940.

With its December 31 closing, administrative responsibilities — including accounting, subscriptions, and classified ad placement — will be consolidated at the company’s home office in Lewisburg, W.Va.

The shift reflects an industry-wide move toward centralized administrative operations and reduced overhead costs. This decision is not a step backward, but rather a strategic move designed to help our local newspapers adapt to the changing media landscape and continue to move forward in ever-changing times.

Reporters, the editor and display advertising director will remain based in the communities they cover, and news gathering will continue as usual. Obituaries will be handled locally.

Readers and advertisers will continue to receive their weekly editions of *The Enterprise* and the *Henry County Enterprise* as if nothing has changed. Subscriptions, advertising, and news coverage will continue without disruption.

Beginning in January, current subscribers

with questions about billing or delivery, and new subscribers, will be able to contact the home office, Mountain Media, (304) 647-5724 for assistance. A partial list of email addresses and contacts for specific departments is below; additional contact information will be provided in upcoming issues.

**New Contact and Submission Information:**

• **For News Tips and Submissions:** Please email our editorial team at dhall@theenterprise.net. We are always interested in local-interest stories and photos.

• **For Advertising Inquiries and Obituaries:** Please contact Wendi Craig at 276-340-2445, or email advertise@mainstreetnewspapers.com.

• **For Subscription or Billing Questions:** Please call (304) 647-5724. Email addresses and contacts for specific departments will be provided in upcoming issues.

• **Legal Notices:** email to Kathleen Stickley at legalads@mountainmedianews.com.

• **Mailing Address for Payments:** P.O. Box 429, Lewisburg, WV 24901

We thank the community for its support over the years at our physical location and encourage you to continue supporting local journalism by subscribing, advertising, and engaging with our content.

*The Enterprise* will mark its 150th year of continuous publication in 2026, aligning with America’s 250th anniversary. We remain deeply committed to being out in the community and reporting the news that matters to you.



From small backyard competitions to town-wide displays, Hogg’s holiday trees, like this one in Ridgeway, bring cheer to the community each season.

## Holiday magic shines through local tree designer’s displays

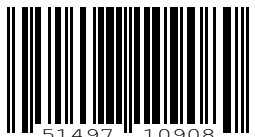
By Jessica Dillon

(See Holiday p. 5)

Ian Hogg, a local Christmas tree designer, has been creating elaborate light displays for around 20 years. This year, Hogg designed trees for the Piedmont Art Gravel-Lester Art Garden and the Town of Ridgeway, continuing a tradition he’s maintained for several years.

Hogg said his interest began when an old friend challenged him to a competition. “He would do something fun with a Santa hanging out of his chimney or something like that. And I had a tree in the backyard, I made out

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# Nominations open for annual Jack Dalton Community Service Award



Jack Dalton

Henry County is now accepting nominations for the 25th annual Jack Dalton Community Service Award, an honor to recognize residents who embody Dalton’s lifelong commitment to serving others.

Dalton spent more than 24 years on the Henry County Board of Supervisors, including serving as chairman, and was widely known for his steady leadership and dedication to improving life in the community before his death on May 24, 2000. The award bearing his name celebrates residents whose volunteer work reflects that same spirit of service.

Nominations are open through

12 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 31. This year’s recipient will be recognized at the Board of Supervisors’ January meeting.

Nominees should be Henry County residents whose volunteer efforts in 2025 made a meaningful impact on the county’s quality of life. The award focuses on hands-on service — the kind of work that strengthens neighborhoods, supports local organizations, and lifts up residents.

Nomination forms are available online and must be submitted digitally or returned to the county administrator’s office by the deadline. Forms and full details can be found

online at <https://www.henrycountyva.gov/308/Jack-Dalton-Community-Service-Award>.

Past recipients include Dr. Calvin Rains, Bill Adkins, Clay Campbell, Mary McGee, Charlie Bradshaw, Bob Petty, Thurman Echols, Nancy Bradshaw, Mary Jordan, Pat Ross, Claude Cobler, Beatrice Bullard, Barry Nelson, J. Smith Chaney Jr., Paul Kennedy, Bob Norris, John Thomas “Smokey” Pegram, James L. Franklin Jr., Dr. Joseph DeVault, Charlie “Junior” Lynch Jr., H. William Martin, Joel Barnes, Clifford Stone, and all local frontline healthcare workers in 2020.

## Parents

(cont. from page 1)

the truth,” Zehr said. “The state-approved programs Benchmark and Kiddom cost us less than \$200,000 so far this year, but 33 percent of our year-to-date instructional expense, over \$300,000, has gone to one single vendor — Emerald Education, a North Carolina consultancy.”

Zehr alleged that Blake-Lewis previously worked with the firm while employed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

“Emerald Education is not on the VDOE approved curriculum list. Their \$71,000 mass study that we paid for — the results have never been made public. A \$124,000 purchase order is now, for just one-and-a-half days of in-person training, buried in a line item that you voted on in June for math kits,” she said.

After questions were raised, Zehr alleged the company website was scrubbed, former employees deleted their LinkedIn profiles, and ties that were obvious six months ago disappeared. “Don’t worry, I have the online data. Transparency matters, trust matters,” she said.

Zehr questioned whether the superintendent’s previous affiliation with the company represents a conflict of interest. She said she submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for the conflict-of-interest forms, a study the board saw in May, and archived versions of the websites before they were changed.

To his understanding, Martin said Emerald Education has been acquired by another company.

“So the references to changes, at least to my understanding, are because of that acquisition and have no relation to the commentary,” he said.

To the board’s knowledge, Martin also said there was no line item of more than \$100,000 for a single day of training.

“That does not align with what has been presented to us. Our purchasing goes through many different levels of review and public accessibility. We’re not engaged in hiding things,” he said.

In a statement after the meeting, the school board said, “The school division adheres to all procurement laws and ethical standards when contracting with outside vendors. Our financial practices undergo multiple layers of oversight, including annual external audits, state reporting requirements, and routine board review. Our financial records — including audits, budgets, and procurement documentation — are public. We welcome community engagement and encourage any resident with concerns to review this publicly available information.”

“The evidence is coming. Parents are watching you,” she said.

Tom Auker, of the Blackberry District, said the board appreciated Zehr attending the meeting and speaking, and notified her that her three-minute speaking time was up.

Zehr said the public deserves answers, not revised bylaws that remove oversight, secret contracts, or unilateral decisions that hurt students’ love of learning.

“You want to know what real progress and improvement would be — restore your authority over major grading and curriculum changes, require public disclosure, and review all contracts and purchase orders with Emerald Education and its successors,” Zehr said.

She also asked the board to investigate relationships between Emerald Education and local school personnel, halt all payments, and further involvement with the vendor until the board clarifies that it is comfortable spending that money.

“Investigate why you have payments for professional development training under math kits,” Zehr yelled.

While he appreciated Zehr’s comments, Auker

again tried to stop her and reiterated that she was over the three minutes allotted per speaker during the meeting’s public comment period.

Zehr replied that the board needs to restore discourse and discussion between the board and the public as adults.

“I don’t agree with you, and yet I cannot talk to you. So, I bring it here. You have professionalism and decorum laid out for you every meeting that has been stuffed down your throats. You are elected officials. You do not work for her! You hired her. She works for you,” Zehr said.

Lily Tatoy, a student at Laurel Park Middle School, said she does not believe the new grading system reflects students’ true understanding of the material and adds unnecessary stress.

“It needs to be changed to the old, traditional grading system because all the kids who were struggling before, you guys made it worse by not giving them another chance to bring it back up,” she said.

Tatoy said she believes some parents are removing their children from the school system because of the change.

“I strongly believe SOLs (Standards of Learning) aren’t every test, and even when teachers or adults tell you, you should just know it. You need to memorize or remember how to do it,” she said, adding that board members need to remember students are children who already deal with a lot of pressure.

When looking at the board’s inclusivity statement and its learning-through-innovation goals in preparing students for college, the workforce, the military, and life, Myndi Mullins, Tatoy’s mother, said her daughter’s life is more stressful than her own.

“I work very hard to keep their life stress-free because they are children. This roll grade book you guys have, I have a child who is really stressed out with it. Her friends are stressed out with it, they come home every day and tell me

that a new friend is being homeschooled because of this,” she said.

Mullins said it comes down to money for the school board, since the division loses funding for every student pulled from the system.

“I have a goal of homeschooling at some point, and you guys push me a little closer to the edge every time I look at PowerSchool,” she said.

Mullins said she believes teachers fear retaliation if they speak up about the grading system change.

“The teachers hate it just as much as the parents do,” she said.

Because of the new grading standards, Mullins said her children probably will not receive the same academic achievements they earned last year, including Principal’s Scholars.

“You guys need to understand that as parents, we’re disappointed in every one of you and your choices. You need to do better,” Mullins said.

In other matters, the board:

- \*Received a citation of appreciation from former American Legion Homer Dillard Post 78 Commander Curtis Millner and members of the VFD for the flag etiquette classes offered to all fifth-grade students in the district.
- \*Approved a resolution honoring Auker for his tenure on the board.
- \*Approved a resolution honoring School Board member Elizabeth Durden, of the Collinsville District, for her tenure on the board.
- \*Honored the school division’s Holiday Card Contest winners.
- \*Honored Campbell Court Elementary School teacher Sarah Martin as the 2025 Teacher of the Year.
- \*Approved the consent agenda, heard the superintendent’s report, heard committee reports, and comments from board members.
- \*Approved the personnel report and addendum.
- \*Approved the religious exemption as presented.

## Auker

(cont. from page 1)



Retired Blackberry District School Board Representative Thomas Auker was recognized for his 12 years of service by HCPS Superintendent Dr. Amy Blake-Lewis.

of a parent. Blake-Lewis commended Durden for her strong commitment to public education and diligent work in ensuring that all students in Henry County have access to the highest quality learning opportunities.

During her time on the board, Durden championed improvements in teacher compensation, the addition of support staff, and



Retired Collinsville District School Board Representative Elizabeth Durden was recognized for her four years of service by HCPS Superintendent Dr. Amy Blake-Lewis.

initiatives designed to strengthen the division’s ability to attract and retain outstanding educators.

A reception was held for Auker and Durden before the meeting, with division staff, administrators, teachers, and the retirees’ families reminisced and celebrated the achievements of the two honorees.

## Congressional staff set December hours

Congressman Morgan Griffith’s Ninth District STAFF will be available in Martinsville and Stuart on December 15.

- Martinsville - 10 – 11:30 a.m., City Hall, Council Chambers, 55 W. Church St., Martinsville.
- Patrick County - 12:30 – 2 p.m., Patrick County Administration Building, Conference Room, 106 Rucker Street, Stuart.

In the event of inclement weather

(heavy snow, sleet, icy rain, etc.), traveling office hours may be rescheduled to avoid putting constituents at risk. If schools are closed in the locality, then office hours will be cancelled.

Call the Christiansburg Office at 540-381-5671 or the Abingdon Office at 276-525-1405 with any questions or to schedule an appointment time in the event of cancellation.

## Early holiday deadlines set

Due to the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays, Henry County Enterprise will have an early deadline.

Content, columns, announcements, etc., for the Saturday, December 27 edition is needed NO

LATER than 11 a.m. on Tuesday, December 23.

An early deadline will also be in place for the January 3 edition. Content for the January 3 edition is due by 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 30.

email us  
DHALL@THEENTERPRISE.NET





# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

## Meetings

**Monday, December 15**  
Martinsville School Board Meeting, 6 p.m., School Board Building, 746 Indian Trail, Martinsville.

**Tuesday, December 16**  
Martinsville City Council meeting, 7 p.m., City Municipal Building, 55 West Church St., Martinsville.

## Events

**Saturday, December 13**  
The 11th annual Brenda Riggins Memorial Christmas Blood Drive with the American Red Cross will be held from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Stanleytown Elementary School Gymnasium, 74 Edgewood Drive, Stanleytown, VA. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments have priority. Schedule an appointment by contacting the American Red Cross at 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or online at [www.redcrossblood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org), Sponsor Code: Brenda, or in the Red Cross Blood Donor App.

“Rudolph The Play,” 2 and 6 p.m., at Patrick & Henry Community College, 645 Patriot Ave., Martinsville. Tickets are \$15 online or \$20 at the door. Advance tickets can be purchased online at <https://phccpatriotplayers.square.site/>.

**Sunday, December 14**  
“Rudolph The Play,” 2 and 6 p.m., at Patrick & Henry Community College, 645 Patriot Ave., Martinsville. Tickets are \$15 online or \$20 at the door. Advance tickets can be purchased online at <https://phccpatriotplayers.square.site/>.

**Monday, December 15**  
Smith River Singers Christmas Concert “Merry & Bright,” 7 p.m., featuring the select ensemble Still Water, plus strings and percussion orchestra, Galilean House of Worship, 5078 A L Philpott Hwy, Martinsville. Free admission (offering collected.)

**Wednesday, December 17**  
Library board meets, 3 p.m. in the Bassett Branch Library.

**Friday, December 19**  
OSPT’s Christmas Extravaganza, 5:30 -10:30 p.m., Spencer Penn Centre, 475 Spencer Penn Road. Christmas movies and cartoons as well as refreshments. This is an event for all ages. Bring the family, enjoy the festivities and also get your pictures taken with Santa and The Grinch — and possibly Max. Wear your Ugly Sweater or comfy PJs, or come as you are. Participate in Christmas gift games by bringing a wrapped gift for a child (boy or girl) or adult (man or woman) to place in the gift exchange. Participants will draw a number and pick a gift (only bring a gift if you’re interested in playing the gift exchange game). Also, the ball gift game will be held in the ballroom. Everyone takes turns unwrapping a huge ball with hidden

gifts inside. Bring a new unopened gift for a child or elderly person. Donations will be collected for the children’s hospital in Roanoke and the nursing facility in Stanleytown, with delivery before Christmas.

**Sunday, December 21**  
Enjoy the sounds of the season with the MHC Historical Society at 3 p.m. in the museum. Musicians will be Joanne Linscott, Amy Stuart, Regula Dailey, Julian Ayers, Jeff Prillaman, John Fulcher, Baxter Jennings, Valeria Edwards, Linda Via, John Heiss, Dylan Chappell, Kerry Tillery, Beth Chapman, Virginia King, Ann Martin and Elizabeth Heiss. Admission to the program is free, and a reception will follow.

## Ongoing

Piedmont Arts’ Food Drive for Grace Network Food Pantry. Donations of nonperishable food and hygiene products may be dropped off at Piedmont Arts during regular business hours — Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. For more information, visit [PiedmontArts.org](http://PiedmontArts.org).

BINGO on Mondays, Horsepasture Volunteer Fire Department, 17815 A.L. Philpott Highway, Ridgeway. Doors open at 5 p.m., games start at 7 p.m. Concessions are available.

Uptown Pub Run, Mondays, 6 p.m., meets at The Ground Floor, 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. Free to the public, but donations will be used by the club to pay for electricity etc.

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

Bingocize at Spencer-Penn Centre. Play Bingo and prevent falls with simple exercises. This free class is offered Tuesdays at 10 a.m.

Chair Aerobics at Spencer Penn Centre, Tuesdays at 9 a.m. with Judi Perrin; \$5 fee, 45 minutes of exercise, strength building and fun.

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, 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 (park on Moss St.). RSVP at [mhcddeva.org/meeting-rsvp](http://mhcddeva.org/meeting-rsvp) for Zoom link.

# Volunteer fire agencies to receive federal funds

Bassett Volunteer Fire Company, Incorporated, will receive \$58,083, and Woolwine Volunteer Fire Department Inc. \$408,000, according to a release from U.S. Sens. Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine. The two announced over \$20 million in federal funding for Virginia fire departments, localities, and organizations last week. This funding is awarded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and made possible by the Fire Grants and Safety Act, legislation supported by Warner and Kaine that reauthorized the Assistance for Firefighters (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Resources (SAFER) grant programs. The AFG and SAFER grant programs are used by fire departments and localities to address staffing needs, purchase equipment, develop fire training and education

programs, and improve emergency medical services. “Every day, Virginia’s firefighters risk their lives to help and protect our communities,” said Kaine, D-Richmond, and Warner, D-Alexandria. “We are pleased to announce more than \$20 million in federal funding that will go towards ensuring our fire departments have the support, training, and resources they need.” The Assistance for Firefighters (AFG) grant program helps firefighters and other first responders obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources necessary for protecting the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards. A total of \$3,832,551 was awarded to 17 Virginia localities and fire departments for the 2024 Fiscal Year.

# OPINION True Holiday Spirit

**By Bryan Golden**  
Among other things, the holidays are a time of giving and receiving gifts. The question most often asked of people is, “what did you get?” Much less frequently asked is, “what did you give?” Invariably, the inquiries concern material gifts. Purchasing a gift can certainly be thoughtful and a wonderful gesture, especially when it’s backed up by your actions. However, the most valuable presents are those that aren’t sold in stores. When you give your love, your time, help someone in need, aid another in solving a problem or overcoming an obstacle, you give something priceless. The true spirit of the holidays is giving. When you give, you receive. You can get anything in life you want by helping enough others get what they want. But only if you give without expecting anything in return. The impact of giving isn’t limited to just the holiday season, it’s something that has value all year.

The power of giving is often underestimated. When you give unconditionally, you don’t just impact the recipient; you start a chain reaction. By brightening the life of one person you also affect all those who they then touch. No gesture of giving or kindness is too small. Holding the door open at a store, helping someone carry groceries to their car, letting an-

other car in front of you, saying please and thank you, and saying hello to a stranger you pass on the sidewalk, are some of the many things you can do daily. For family and friends, your time is one of the most precious gifts you can offer. Are you there for others when they need you? Do you offer a hand without being asked? Do you help out when asked? Too often, people get caught up in their own desires, thus losing sight of the needs of others. A person who tries to get through life by looking out for himself or herself first is invariably frustrated. Often this person views life as a competition to determine who can accumulate more. On the other hand, those who are concerned for the wellbeing of others are happier, more content, and more satisfied. By giving without expecting, they in turn receive the things they need. Giving is a simple concept that works every time it is applied. There will be people who don’t appreciate what you do, but it doesn’t matter. You are giving without anticipating anything in return. Besides, there will be many more who are thankful for your efforts. If you don’t treat others well, buying a gift won’t compensate for your behavior. The recipient might like what you give them but it won’t make up for your ac-

# Shooting incident under investigation

The Henry County Sheriff’s Office was dispatched to 8884 AL Philpott Highway in Martinsville around 7:45 p.m. on December 5, to reports of shots fired and a person who had been shot. The preliminary investigation indicated that a small gathering was taking place at the residence when a loud knock was heard at the back door accompanied by a man yelling, according to a release from the Henry County Sheriff’s Office. Individuals inside the residence went to the door to determine the source of the disturbance and allegedly encountered a man armed with a firearm. Individuals from inside of the residence went outside and were physically assaulted by the man. Those individuals then retreated into the residence and the uninvited man attempted to gain access to the residence when multiple shots were fired. There was an exchange of gunfire between the uninvited guest and another individual inside of the home. The uninvited man was struck by gunfire and succumbed to his injuries. The deceased person was identified as Jessie Lee Robert Rumley, 50, of Martinsville. Rumley was transported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Roanoke for an autopsy. The incident was captured on the residence home video surveillance system and is being reviewed by investigators and the Commonwealth



Travis C. Martin Attorney. The individuals inside of the residence have been cooperating with the investigation. Investigators responded and processed the scene for evidence, took witness statements, and collected physical evidence. Currently, Travis C. Martin, 43, was charged with possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. The Henry County Sheriff’s Office encourages anyone with additional information regarding this incident to contact them at (276) 638-8751 or through the Crimestoppers Program at 63-CRIME (632-7463). Crimestoppers offers rewards of up to \$2,500 for information related to crimes. The reward amount is based on the nature and substance of the information provided.

tions. You can’t bribe someone to forgive the way you treat them with a present. The best gift you can receive is the joy of making someone else happy. Being unselfish is a wonderful way to live. When you give with no ulterior motives, your actions are seen as genuine. Should you expect something in return, your behavior is always suspect. We all know people who do nice things only when they want something in return. Make giving a daily routine.

Don’t start and end with the holiday season. Every day is a good day to do something nice. When people feel good due to your actions, you can’t help but feel happy yourself. And that is priceless. The most significant action you can take is having a positive impact on the lives of others. *Bryan is the author of “Dare to Live Without Limits.” Contact Bryan at [Bryan@columnist.com](mailto:Bryan@columnist.com) or visit [www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com](http://www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com) Copyright 2024 Bryan Golden.*



OPINION

Virginia Heroes: From Rowlett to the Hobacks

As the Congressman representing Virginia's Ninth District, I am on the road often.

When traveling to visit various communities in the Ninth, I use some time in the car to listen to audiobooks.

One of my favorite genres is history.

In these historical pieces, I often look for relevant information suggesting ties to our region.


One of my recent books, Pearl

Harbor: Final Judgement by Henry Clausen and Bruce Lee, highlights the actions of numerous American officials in the run-up to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Clausen was appointed by U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson to be special investigator to look into the failures of Pearl Harbor.

As part of his investigation, Clausen interviews scores of witnesses. One witness is Lee County native Frank B. Rowlett.

Rowlett has long been of interest to me partly because of his graduation from my alma mater, Emory & Henry College (now University), but also due to his significant contributions as an intelligence officer for the U.S. Army before and during World War II.



Morgan Griffith

Representative

Thank you, whoever you are



Holly Kozelsky

Dear anonymous donor,

Thank you for enriching my life. Your generosity has made things better for me in many ways.

Thank you, anonymous donor, for the fun, companionship, unwavering love, protection and loyalty my dear dog has brought me for the past 12 years. She is a right proper member of the family and takes her role of taking care of my daughter and me seriously, just as we take taking care of her seriously.

She came to us from the Patrick County Animal Shelter after our previous dog had died. I was a flat broke, struggling single mother at the time. I would have paid the hundreds of dollars it takes to get a dog adopted, spayed, vaccinated and so forth, but you sure made things easier for me by paying all those fees yourself, leaving my part to be just \$10.

We assume you support the Patrick County Animal Shelter to help the animals. Did you also take into account how you are enriching the lives of the people who take them home? Your generosity helps us all.

Thank you, anonymous donor, for the beauty and cheer of a Christmas tree in uptown Martinsville. Did you know that by

donating that tree to the MHC Chamber you would be continuing a tradition that started in 1916 and has brought joy and togetherness to the community for the better part of a century?

Your lovely, stately Christmas tree stands proudly in the center of uptown Martinsville, bringing cheer to those who see it. In fact, your tree actually brings people to uptown Martinsville to look at it. I'm the director of the MHC Heritage Museum, which the tree was placed in front of, and it's been neat to look out the window (or at the screen of the security cameras) watching how many people come to see the tree close up, and to take pictures.

Thank you, anonymous donor, for leaving a bag of fresh tomatoes on my porch this summer. Did you know I had planted some tomato plants and then got so busy and overwhelmed over the summer that I didn't tend my garden and it did not succeed?

Thank you, anonymous donors, 12 years ago, when my daughter and I moved into our house in the country; the huge yard was overgrown and unkempt and too much to tackle. A short while after we moved in, men from the community whom we

hadn't met yet came over with their bush-hogs and tractors and other equipment and cleared the way for us to be able to take care of it with our lawn mower and standard gardening tools.

Thank you, anonymous donor who was in line ahead of me at the coffee shop and paid for my order.

Thank you, anonymous donor, for the hot coffee I like to drink while sitting at the Martinsville Branch Library. That coffee comes from the library's A Quiet Cup With Friends Coffee Bar, which was provided by some donors named and others anonymous.

Those are just some of the unnamed individuals whose compassion and generosity have made things better for me, just as I bet many aspects of your life have been made a little more special by them as well.

Early into the pandemic, when everyone was scared and protections were hard to get, an anonymous donor provided local postal workers with 114 masks and 18 face shields. Another gave 300 masks for the guests at the MHC Warming Center.

Anonymous donors have helped the SPCA time and time again – including a \$50,000 match to donations on Giving Tuesday a few years ago.

Anonymous donors have helped MLC Cancer Foundation, including one who gave money to help people with cancer who have connections to the furniture industry.

In 2022 an anonymous donor provided \$1,000 Christmas bonuses to each of five Patrick County workers; the recipients' names were randomly chosen in a drawing.

An anonymous donor gave \$100,000 toward the Southern Virginia Child Advocacy Center's "Burn the Mortgage" campaign in 2022. What more important role can a group have than to stand up for children in their most vulnerable times of life?

And we've all seen in GoFundMe and other benefits, online and off, how anonymous donors chip in to help people through tough times including catastrophic medical bills or unexpected funerals.

So thank you, anonymous donor, for one more gift that you give me: the magic and possibility of not knowing who you are, because that means you could be anyone. By being no one you are everyone: You give the gift of a positive outlook on humanity.

The United States needed to be on alert as conflicts engulfed Europe and Asia.

As Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were invading other countries, the U.S. was determined to monitor them.

We needed talented cryptologists and cryptanalysts to help intercept and decipher codes of foreign communications systems.

Accordingly, the Army selected Rowlett, among others, to accomplish the critical task.

Rowlett helped play a major role in solving "Purple," the codename for Japan's very sophisticated cipher machine.

In Chapter 2 of Pearl Harbor: Final Judgement, Rowlett claims that he was "the guy who actually did the impossible trick" with breaking the "Purple" code machine.

Through Clausen's investigation, he confirms Rowlett's account (p. 44).

Accordingly, American intelligence captured essential security and diplomatic information from the Japanese. They codenamed the decrypted information "Magic."

"Magic" would be vital to the safety and security of American armed forces.

Unfortunately, before the "day that will live in infamy," military leaders at Pearl Harbor missed "Magic's" warning signs.

On December 7, 1941, more than 2,300 American personnel lost their lives from the Japanese bombing.

The stunning attack prompted the United States to enter World War II. For the war effort to be successful, American communities like Bedford, Virginia, had to send their boys into action.

That action ultimately led to the storming of Adolf Hitler's "Fortress Europe" in Normandy on June 6, 1944.

None of the Allied forces achieved all of their objectives on D-Day.

Would General Eisenhower be forced to order a withdrawal from the beaches?

Would the losses of our soldiers be in vain?

In Marching Orders, a separate book written by Bruce Lee, Chapter 9 illustrates the significance of the "Magic" summaries obtained by American intelligence.

"Magic" helped inform General Eisenhower of Nazi military plans ahead of the Normandy landings.

According to military intelligence expert Robert T. Crowley, "Magic" revealed that, fearing an attack elsewhere, "Hitler was not committing his reserves" to Normandy.

This gave Eisenhower a "sense of confidence" the Allies' Operation Overlord would succeed (p. 212).

Among the soldiers who died in the operation were 20 from Bedford, Virginia.

That day, no other American community suffered more losses per capita than Bedford, Virginia.

These "Bedford Boys," including Raymond and Bedford Hoback, made the ultimate sacrifice so American forces could overcome and succeed.

Thanks to Rowlett, American intelligence and "Magic," their sacrifice was not in vain.

Later, the Hobacks' younger sister, Lucille Hoback Boggess, committed to honor the sacrifice and legacy of her two brothers, the "Bedford Boys," and all who took part in the Allied D-Day landings.

Ms. Hoback Boggess helped in the founding of the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia.

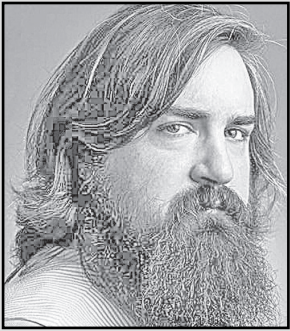
Along with Delegate Lacey Putney of Bedford and Bob Slaughter of Roanoke, she lobbied me and the Virginia General Assembly to support state funding for the Memorial.

Ms. Hoback Boggess continued to be a beloved advocate for the Memorial for many years. Sadly, she just passed away on November 19.

As we observe Pearl Harbor Day, we should all reflect on the inspirational legacies of these heroes from our region.

In this column, we honor heroes from the World War II era. The Ninth District of Virginia has produced American heroes from the American Revolution to the present day.

Regarding participation trophies



By Ben R. Williams

on field day.

I vividly remember my buddies and I comparing our ribbons at the end of field day. We all got at least one second or third place ribbon, but some of us had ribbons for 11th place or worse.

We thought our little ribbons were a joke. We laughed about them. I don't think any of my classmates felt a genuine sense of achievement for getting a ribbon acknowledging that they came in 11th place in a field of 11.

The worst thing about participation trophies was that they were embarrassing. If you were the kind of child who knew more about how to get all three warp whistles in Super Mario Bros. 3 than you knew about the basic rules of football, you didn't really want any light shed on your athletic prowess.

While obvious, it's also worth pointing out that we weren't giving ourselves these things. We were given participation trophies by Boomers who would later go on to mock us for receiving participation trophies.

My point is this: even in third grade, the general consensus between me and my classmates was that participation trophies were a meaningless waste of time and somewhat humiliating.

But the single most embarrassing participation trophy I have ever seen in my life was not bestowed upon a Millennial. Far from it!

It is difficult to imagine an award more embarrassing than the FIFA Peace Prize and a recipient more undeserving than President Donald Trump.

It's ridiculous that FIFA — an organization known for corruption, bribery, exploitation of migrant

(See Regarding p. 5)

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# Regarding

(cont. from page 4)

workers and obscene human rights violations that also dabbles in soccer — would offer a peace prize. It’s hilarious that it would create this prize for the sole purpose of giving it to a massively influential politician who’s been really ticked off lately that he didn’t get a Nobel Peace Prize. It’s infuriating that the recipient of said peace prize has mostly been making the news lately because his hand-picked Secretary of Defense — I’m sorry, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth — has been ordering the Navy to conduct strikes on alleged drug boats

Column Sponsored by: Dr. Mensink

# Holiday

(cont. from page 1)

of lights. We just had a little competition, and I just kind of started there.”

He has been working with Piedmont Arts for about six years and (in) Ridgeway for about four. “I just really enjoy doing this for the communities, and I’m glad people appreciate it. It does take quite a bit of time to create these things. It is a work of love. I wish I had more time to do more, but I appreciate everybody enjoying it.”

“I’ve had other people see them and want me to do them, but I just simply don’t have the time. But it’s just something I enjoy, and everyone in town seems to like it. And it’s just a little thing I figured out I’m good at.”

Hogg has also created displays for several festivals. “The lights have kind of been my thing. Rooster Walk Music Festival, I’ve done some artistic. I throw lights in trees with my own unique way of doing them, and I’ve done that for years and years and years. I even did it at Floyd Fest for a year or two.”

He hopes to eventually set up a GoFundMe to reimburse himself for the thousands of dollars he’s spent over the years and to buy newer programmable lights. “I feel like when I’m retired, I’ll sit and play and have more fun with it. But it’s gotten to where it’s a little bit like work, but I still enjoy it.”

“I donate my time to Piedmont Arts, but when Ridgeway asked, the only way I can do it is just charge my hourly rate that I used to fix computers to do that. I always go on the low end for them, but I enjoy it.”

Hogg said he believes the mayor appreciates his work and the new additions to town, such as the pickleball court. Creating the displays isn’t always easy—staking decorations can be

in the Caribbean and then go back and kill the survivors, which is a literal war crime. We didn’t even do that to the Nazis during World War II, and they were the NAZIS.

But more than that, it’s just embarrassing, and Trump’s gleeful acceptance of the sham award — which I suspect will be both the first and last of its kind — fully deserves every ounce of mockery it has received.

And I don’t want to hear about my generation and our participation trophies ever again.

tricky, and Hogg sometimes uses archery to get decorations in trees.

“Another fun thing I do is use a bow and arrow to get the support cables and decorations in the trees. I’m terrible at archery, but it works. I go with fishing line on the arrow, tie twine to that, and pull up whatever decoration it is. I had to shoot an arrow over the tree in Ridgeway to get the support cable, and oddly enough, it worked.”

Hogg has encountered occasional issues. “One was last night when I was coming home, and the whole middle of my tree was not lit because the wind was so strong. I had one connection that did the middle strand, and it came loose,” he said.

“Lights have morphed over the years. I’ve gotten the fairy lights that the bulb is built into the strand, and they work so much better. I spent hours fixing lights with bulbs, and I will never buy another light with a bulb. It’s got to be LED and built into the strand.”

Hogg’s dream project is to make an entire tree out of programmable lights that can do “swirls and fun things.” “That stuff is not cheap. The ones I have now are basic. At some point, I’ll do a GoFundMe. I think I’ll have no trouble getting something to go toward more lights.”

He said he enjoys working on displays for other events as well. “I love being approached to throw some lights in a tree for a wedding or this or that. It is fun to be recognized for it and have that sense of accomplishment. I just wish I had more free time to play with lights versus actually go to work.”

“I hope to do it for years to come and improve upon it. It is a painstaking process, but the trees do last. About two or three years with these new lights.”

# Farmers learn strategies for building resilience in life, business

A mental health workshop held Dec. 2 at the 2025 Virginia Farm Bureau Annual Convention in Williamsburg challenged Virginia farmers to reclaim control by confronting the uncomfortable.

When Mind Your Melon founders Marshal and Taylor Sewell asked workshop attendees why they may be reluctant to talk about mental health, they heard familiar responses.

“The idea that it reflects weakness—that’s something we’ve heard a lot in our work,” Marshal remarked.

The Mind Your Melon Foundation is a nonprofit organization focused on improving mental health and wellbeing among farmers and rural families. The foundation was created to raise awareness about farm stress and connect agricultural communities with meaningful sources. Through writing, workshops, speaking engagements and digital outreach, the foundation now reaches rural audiences across the country and around the world.

The workshop, titled “Taking Back Control: Building Resilience in your Life & Business,” centered around “flipping perspectives” on mental health.

“There’s so much power and strength in being able to look inward, figure out what’s going on, and figure out what you need to do to help yourself,” Taylor emphasized.

Workshop participants were introduced to resilience concepts, stress mapping and management strategies to navigate stress and find balance in business, family and personal decision-making.

Rooted in the science of resilience—specifically the “3 Cs: Commitment, Challenge and Control”—the sessions blended personal reflection with hands-on tools to help participants manage stress, uncertainty and risk in everyday farm life.

Participants were asked to write down what they are committed to, a challenge they can reframe as an

opportunity for growth, and an area they can take control of.

“You have to find a fine balance between being able to control what you can, and being able to admit and acknowledge the things that you can’t,” Marshal noted. “You look at things you can control and influence, and on some days, that’s no more than ourselves—our own actions, perspectives and how we respond.”

The Sewells encouraged proactive, protective and preventive thinking for reclaiming control in farming and life—like developing a farm succession plan, diversifying the business, or building up “your bench” of professional advisers and supportive peers.

“Who are your ‘oh no’ people—the ones you can call when it’s going sideways and you need some help?” Marshal asked participants.

“Think about who you want to show up for, and are you taking the best care of yourself to be able to do that?” Taylor added.

Marshal shared his personal experiences with the stresses, grief and challenges of farm life. His father died by suicide amid a devastating crop failure—showing “no real signs” of mental health struggles.

“I don’t mind being vulnerable about the things my family experienced, because I saw how it impacted us, and I don’t want to see something similar happen to any of you or your families.”

He encouraged applying the “ACE method of Ask, Care, Escort” in proactive conversations with loved ones who may be struggling—asking questions like, ‘How are you doing really?’; offering a listening ear; and being prepared to provide needed support and resources.

Taylor reminded participants to “ask for help” when needed.

“You’re not a burden, it’s not trouble, there are people in your life that care about you,” she emphasized.

Visit [mindyourmelon.org](http://mindyourmelon.org) for more information.

# Beware of holiday mishaps that could lead to insurance claims

For many people, the holiday season means good food, gifts, gatherings with friends and loved ones and engaging in special festivities. Don’t let seasonal hazards such as cooking fires, stolen or damaged gifts, icy sidewalks and over-worked electrical outlets dampen your holiday spirit.

The State Corporation Commission’s Bureau of Insurance encourages Virginians to protect themselves financially against holiday mishaps by reviewing their insurance now and ensuring they have the coverage they need if an illness, injury, theft, fire or other mishap occurs.

“Whether you are at home or on the road, don’t let a lack of insurance coverage put the brakes on your happy holiday season,” said Virginia Insurance Commissioner Scott White. “Review and update your insurance now. Make sure you know what is and is not covered and understand deductibles and coverage limits. Ask your insurance agent or company or the Bureau of Insurance if you have questions.”

White suggests:

- \*Take steps now to keep your home, vehicle and belongings safe during the holidays. Know how much your auto and homeowners insurance will cover if someone steals gifts, decorations or other items from your vehicle, home or yard. Know, too, what type of insurance you need if a guest slips and falls on your front steps; frozen pipes burst causing water damage to your home, or other holiday mishaps occur.
- \*Severe winter weather and distract-

# Jones

(cont. from page 1)

er) to try to figure out if this is a new charge they’re requesting, or is this finished and they’re just requesting the \$20,000 for services rendered. We’re trying to figure that part out, but based off of the last conversation with the attorneys, they are supposed to have something available for us at the next meeting, but I haven’t got a confirmation or anything yet,” he said.

Even without having seen it, Jones believes the audit should be made available to residents.

“I think everything needs to be released to the public because we’re up to what, \$300,000 plus for this investigation and this audit. We’ve made decisions, and we’re being asked to make decisions based off of information that we’re not being able to thoroughly go through, and then the public has no feedback or understanding why or what’s happening,” he said.

However, if there’s anything in the audit that could be defamatory to any employee or anyone that would sue based on its results, Jones believes the city’s attorneys need to explain that to the public.

“I just don’t see how we’ve been able to spend this kind of money, and really, we’re not being held responsible for it. It’s like the public is out of the loop and not knowing what’s going on and we’re just using attorney-client privilege and saying we can’t release this information,” Jones said, adding he believes residents have a right to know how taxpayer funds are being spent.

Jones said the audit is full of gossip, according to a comment made by council member Julain Mei during an open session meeting.

“If that’s the case, then what type of investigation was this? Because it was supposed to be a financial investigation and verifying and validating the claims of the whistleblower. So, what kind of investigation did they do that costs us \$300,000 that now we can’t release to the public,” he asked.

**Paul Goldman**

Paul Goldman, a member of Ferrell-Benavides’ legal team, wrote in an email that he has not been contacted to provide input as is customary under similar circumstances.

“The issuance of an audit report aimed at a current or former public official without first reaching out to that public official is strongly frowned upon by professional standards. The reasons are known to all such professionals. A refusal raises the most serious concerns regarding fairness, due process, and impartiality,” he wrote. “Accordingly, we wrote to the auditors last month.... They have not replied.”

Goldman later concluded, “we will give the financial auditors the benefit of the doubt for the moment. Perhaps there is a benign reason for their irregular procedure. We will therefore not discuss these matters publicly for now. But wait to see if they are reflected in the audit results.”

Jones also questioned why the report completed earlier this year — which

ed drivers can make holiday driving a challenge. Keep your auto insurance company’s contact information and a copy of your insurance card with you when you drive. \*Review your liability limits to ensure you have adequate protection against injury or damage if you are involved in an accident during the hectic holiday rush.

\*Know what your health insurance will cover if you need treatment at an urgent care facility or hospital while you are out-of-state or traveling abroad. Take health insurance information with you when traveling, such as identification cards and contact details for all your family members.

\*Make an early New Year’s resolution to create – or update – your home inventory. An inventory can help you determine if your homeowners or renters policy provides enough coverage for your belongings and can facilitate the claims process if you must file an insurance claim. An inventory also will help you identify high-cost items that may need separate insurance coverage such as jewelry, art or electronics. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners(NAIC) free smartphone app — NAIC \*Home Inventory — makes creating a home inventory easy.

\*Check to make sure you have insurance coverage for seasonal activities that you may enjoy such as skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling.

For information about a variety of insurance-related topics, contact the Bureau in Richmond at 804-371-9741.

reportedly contributed to Ferrell-Benavides’ termination — has not been made public.

“Is the report so bad and full of gossip that would put the city at risk, because I want it out just as bad as everybody else?” Jones asked. “Is it that bad that it puts the city at risk, that they can’t put it out? Did they get a report from hearsay with no real evidence, credible evidence? The question has to be answered.”

In August, the city council authorized its attorney, Sands Anderson, to share pertinent information with Commonwealth’s Attorney Andrew Hall for possible criminal proceedings. A special prosecutor was appointed in September to review the document. An unredacted copy has not been released.

Jones has raised repeated concerns about the legal costs associated with those issues. Last month, he noted that four months into the fiscal year, attorney fees had already surpassed the \$250,000 allocated.

Although Fincher said general fund dollars would fill the gap, Jones said the legal issues confronting the city remain serious.

**Kathy Lawson**

“The attorney fees are outrageous, and we cannot continue down this pathway. We need an in-house attorney for our day-to-day things,” Vice-Mayor Kathy Lawson said. While the city uses specialized attorneys as needed, she said it typically does not retain one regularly.

“For day-to-day, we just need an in-house attorney (to) review contracts, review agendas, things of that nature,” she said. “We have to pay three hours and travel every time Mr. Durbin (Sands Anderson) comes to a council meeting because he’s from Christiansburg.” She added that the city is still searching for a new attorney and council must be “prudent” with taxpayer funds.

**Aaron Rawls**

Councilmember Aaron Rawls said the council’s legal fees stem from its own actions.

“Bad behavior in public government costs the public big money. These costs exist regardless of who we pay for the service,” he said. “I advocate that refraining from illegal behavior is the only common-sense approach.”

During the council’s last closed session meeting, Rawls said members were briefed on preliminary findings while the audit was being finalized.

“We were told that the finalized report was still in the works and would be available in December or January. I don’t know that they guaranteed December, and I don’t know that they set a definite date, so I can’t definitely say that it’s done, but it is nearly done if it’s not,” he said.

Like Jones, Rawls believes the entire forensic audit should be made available for residents.

“I think it should all be released to the public. All investigations,” Rawls said.







Crossing the Lines

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

Early morning fire claims the life of one



One person died following a house fire near the Virginia-North Carolina line on Sunday, Dec. 7.

A man died following an early morning residential structure fire a house fire at 154 Memory Lane near the North Carolina-Virginia border on Sunday, Dec. 7. Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith said the 911 Communication Center received a call on Sunday, at 3:01 a.m., from a caller stating that the residence was on fire. Mul-

tiple fire departments were dispatched and responded to fight the blaze. Smith said the man was unable to escape and died inside the structure. "Out of respect for the family, we are not releasing the name of the victim until proper notification has been made," Smith said in a Sunday morning release.

Lighted tunnel added to growing Festival of Lights



A scene from last year's Festival of Lights at DeHart Park in Stuart. This year's festival begins on Saturday, Dec. 13, and runs through Tuesday, Dec. 23

A lighted tunnel for vehicles to navigate, new displays, and returning favorites are among the showstopping offerings of the fifth annual Festival of Lights at DeHart Park in Stuart. The festival kicks off Saturday, Dec. 13, and runs through Tuesday, Dec. 23. Open from 6–8 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and until 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, the event aims to deliver holiday spirit for attendees of all ages. Amy Corns, chairman of the Stuart Parks and Recreation Association Fundraising Committee, said this year's festival will feature 64 displays from local businesses, churches, organizations, families, and others — the most ever. "We're really, really excited. We have lots of new businesses and community groups that are going to add to our festival this year, so that should be re-

ally exciting," she said. To meet the goal of offering something bigger and better each year, Corns said the 2025 festival will include a lighted tunnel for drivers. "We had tremendous community support in helping us get this new addition," she said. Numerous individuals and businesses "helped us plant the poles and run the wires for the lights to hang on, and we're just truly appreciative of all the help that has gone into setting up for the lights." Admission is \$10 per car, and vehicles may drive through the loop as many times as they wish. Corns said the festival typically draws 75–100 cars on weeknights and around 150 on weekends. "Of course, each car, some of them have vanloads" of spectators, she said.

Sammy Shelor's 'Banjorama' set for Saturday



The Lonesome River band will headline the annual Sammy Shelor's 'Banjorama' on Saturday, Dec. 13, in the Patrick County High School Auditorium. Photo contributed

The Patrick County Music Association (PCMA) will end the year strong with the annual Sammy Shelor's Banjorama on Saturday, December 13. Sponsored by Hopkins Lumber, the event is free to the public. However, donations are appreciated and used to help the PCMA continue to support local musicians and provide free shows for the community. The group is also partnering again with the Patrick County Food Bank, with non-perishable food items collected during the show to help those in need during the Christmas season. The show will be held in the Patrick County High School (PCHS) Auditorium with doors opening at 5 p.m. and music starting at 6 p.m. PCMA President Denny Alley said the annual event that features Shelor and the

Lonesome River Band is the organization's show of the year. He described Shelor's band as a contemporary, bluegrass group. "The Lonesome River Band is one of the top performing acts in the country, and you don't get cheaper than free" to see them, he said. Formed in Meadows of Dan in 1982, the group has released 15 recording projects. Shelor, the group's leader, is a Virginia Country Hall of Fame member and a five-time International Bluegrass Music Association Banjo Player of the Year recipient. Concessions will be available for purchase from the Patrick County Shooting Education Team, with proceeds supporting firearm safety education for local youth. For more information or to watch past performances, visit Facebook.com/PatrickCountyMusicAssociation.

Reynolds Homestead hosts Victorian Christmas Open House on Dec. 14



Reynolds Homestead docent John Reynolds leads visitors through the historic home.

Virginia Tech's Reynolds Homestead will hold its annual Victorian Christmas

Open House on Sunday, Dec. 14 from 1 to 4 p.m. This free holiday tradition invites guests to step back in time and experience the season much as it was celebrated in the mid-19th century when the historic home was built. Costumed docents will lead visitors through the historic home, which has been richly decorated by Reynolds Homestead volunteers and staff. On the lawn, a carefully tended firepit will be available for fellowship and holly burning, an Appalachian tradition that likely has roots in European Yule celebrations. At the community engagement center, guests will enjoy crafts, refreshments, and live music by a Christmas quartet. Several activities will be led by the Rock Spring Descendants Committee to share stories and traditions of the enslaved community, including crafting corn husk dolls and other historical interpretations. If you are a person with a disability and wish to request accommodation, please contact Kristin Hylton at krhylton@vt.edu or 276-694-7181 ext. 26.

To read more about these and other stories, check out *The Enterprise* online at <http://www.theenterprise.net>.



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A member of The Wild Stallions Car Club of Martinsville and Henry County dropping off a food donation box to Magna Vista High School.

# Car club made charitable donations to county schools

This Week All 14 schools in the Henry County Public Schools (HCPS) District received a visit from The Wild Stallions Car Club of Martinsville and Henry County for a generous food donation.

According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, around 700 thousand Virginians are experiencing food insecurity, with a state-wide food insecurity rate of almost 8 percent. One in eight people and one in seven children face hunger in Virginia – meaning that over one million people in the state are facing hunger and almost 300,000 of them are children.

The HCPS district already has multiple programs in place to combat hunger and food insecurity for its students, including free meals programs throughout the school year and over the summer.

After hearing there may be an increased local need, The Wild Stallions Car Club took it upon themselves to organize a series of donations with the aim to reduce food insecurity for Henry County students.

The club is a community based group that strives to make a difference in the community it is based in, Event Coordinator Donna Pres-



The Wild Stallions Car Club of Martinsville and Henry County made a total of fifteen stops to make food donations to Henry County schools including at Meadow View Elementary School.

ton said.

“If anybody needs anything then we try to at least donate and see what we can do,” Preston said. “Most of the guys in the group know what it is to be without ... we weren’t going to let any kid go hungry.”

The group’s most recent community endeavor included trips to all 14 schools in the division, dropping off at least one box of non-perishable food at each location’s food pantry, and dropping off additional food at the Center for Community Learning.

“These types of donations help our families in the community and provide food to students in need during the breaks when they are not at school,” Bassett High School Principal Michael Minter said. “It is great to know that organizations locally are supporting our local schools with these much-needed supplies.”

“Support like this makes a meaningful difference for our families, especially as we head into the holiday season,” Mount Olivet Elementary School Principal Kelsey Gardner added. “Acts of kindness like this remind our students that our community truly cares about them.”

# Southern Virginia Regional Alliance Launches “Accelerate 2030”

The Southern Virginia Regional Alliance (SVRA) today unveiled Accelerate 2030, an ambitious five-year economic development strategy designed to accelerate regional growth through expanded private-sector partnerships and strategic investments.

The Accelerate 2030 campaign enters its public phase having already secured \$1,616,500—74% of its \$2.2 million goal. This initiative marks a pivotal shift in the region’s economic development approach, bringing together private-sector resources, leadership, and investment to complement existing public funding.

## Building on Proven Success

Over the past decade, the region has achieved unprecedented economic momentum:

- 34 new companies established
- 36 existing companies expanded
- 8,081 new jobs created
- More than \$3.2 billion in capital investment

While much of this success has been supported through SVRA’s partnerships with localities and the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), Accelerate 2030 opens the door to sustainable private-sector engagement that will expand capacity and accelerate regional momentum.

## Strategic Focus Areas

The Accelerate 2030 plan focuses on five core strategies:

- Regional Stakeholder Partnerships – Strengthening collaboration across the region
- Business Retention and Expansion – Support-

ing the growth of existing companies

Global and Regional Marketing – Elevating the region’s competitive profile

Lead Development for Business Attraction – Building a robust pipeline of opportunities

Talent Attraction and Retention – Ensuring workforce availability and readiness

## Measurable Impact

Over the next five years, Accelerate 2030 is projected to deliver:

- \$3 billion in new capital investment
- 6,000+ new direct and indirect jobs
- \$182 million annually in economic impact from consumer expenditures

## Leadership and Support

Tim Clark, President of Blair Construction, serves as campaign chair. Several other regional business leaders are also lending their leadership and investment to the initiative.

“Our competition isn’t within our borders—it’s other regions and states. Now more than ever, it is critical for us to work together to accelerate our opportunity to secure a prosperous future for Southern Virginia,” said Tim Clark, Accelerate 2030 chair.

## Get Involved

For complete details about the Accelerate 2030 plan, including specific goals, campaign leadership, investors, and testimonials, visit [svra.org/accelerate-2030/](http://svra.org/accelerate-2030/)

Companies interested in joining this regional partnership can contact Annette Medlin at [Annette.Medlin@ialr.org](mailto:Annette.Medlin@ialr.org).

# Gravely named Principal of Restorative Education Programs

Dr. Kenya Gravely will assume the role of Principal of Restorative Education Programs in Henry County Schools, beginning in February.

Gravely brings a deep and meaningful record of service to students—particularly those who face challenges in traditional school settings—and her experience will play a critical role in strengthening the division’s continuum of support.

Throughout her career, Gravely has distinguished herself as an advocate for at-risk youth, working directly with adolescents who may be struggling with behavior, discipline, or social-emotional needs. Her ability to build trusting relationships and connect families with meaningful resources has made her a respected leader within the division and community.

In her new role, Gravely will lead efforts to refine and enhance alternative education processes, expand intervention pathways, and ensure that students receive the structure, guidance, and supports needed to succeed in and beyond school. Her expertise will help shape a more responsive, student-centered approach across the division.

Superintendent Dr. Blake-Lewis said, “Dr. Gravely brings a rare combination of compassion, expertise, and unwavering commitment to students who need us most. I have complete confidence in her ability to strengthen our alternative education services and lead meaningful change. Her work has always centered on supporting students through challenge, and this new role positions her to expand that impact across the community.”



# NCI receives second major honor

The New College Institute (NCI) received the 2025 SWaM Award: Highest Small Business Spend Percentage

Awarded by the Virginia Department of Small Business & Supplier Diversity

“I am extraordinarily proud of New College Institute’s achievements in receiving both the 2025 SWaM Award and the Student Innovator Award,” said Chairman of NCI’s Board of Directors Eric Jones. “These recognitions highlight NCI’s deep commitment to strengthening our Commonwealth by fostering equitable economic opportunities through our procurement practices and empowering students to lead with innovation, creativity, and purpose. These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our staff, the talent of our students, and the strength of the partnerships that support NCI’s mission.”

## NCI Recognized with 2025 SWaM Award

At the Forum 2025 Supplier Connect Expo in Virginia Beach, NCI was honored with the 2025 SWaM (Small, Women, and Minority) Award for Highest Small Business Spend Percentage. This award, presented by the Virginia Department of Small Business & Supplier Diversity (SBSD), recognizes organizations that demonstrate exceptional commitment to supporting the small business category of SWaM-certified vendors.

“The Department of Small Business & Supplier Diversity congratulates the New College Institute for supporting small businesses in your procurements for Fiscal Year 2025,” stated Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity Agency Head Willis Morris. “Awarding 54.4% of your discretionary spend with the small business community underscores your commitment to strengthening Virginia’s economy.”

At 54.4 percent, NCI not only achieved the highest discretionary spending percentage with small businesses across the Commonwealth, but also exceeded both statewide and internal SWaM spending goals. While the Commonwealth’s SWaM goal was 42 percent and NCI’s internal goal was 52 percent, NCI surpassed both by reaching an impressive 65.49 percent spend with certified SWaM vendors.

“We are incredibly proud of our Finance and Operations team for their commitment to supporting Virginia’s small, women-, and minority-owned businesses,” said NCI Executive Director Joe Sumner. “This recognition reflects our values in action, ensuring that our purchasing practices strengthen local economies and create equitable opportunities statewide. Achieving the highest SWaM spend percentage in the Commonwealth is a testament to our team’s dedication and to NCI’s ongoing mission to invest in the communities we serve.”

NCI’s strong partnership with the Minority Business Consortium (MBC) played a meaningful role in advancing this work. By providing a home for MBC and collaborating to connect education, business, and innovation to strengthen the region’s workforce and economic resilience, NCI helps expand opportunities for local entrepreneurs and strengthens the regional small-business ecosystem.

The facility also recently received the Student Innovator Award, which was awarded to NCI’s FIRST Robotics Team, STAGS Team 1262, by the Southern Piedmont Technology Council.

# Keep warmth in and cold out: Take steps to get homes winter-ready

The East Coast’s first cold snap of the season brought freeze warnings across Virginia and served as a timely reminder for homeowners to prepare for the coming winter.

It may still be fall, but more cold weather is on its way. According to the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, the most common winter-related property destruction includes roof damage or collapse from snow, ice or sleet, and water damage from burst frozen pipes or ice dams.

“Extreme temperatures can wreak havoc on a homeowner’s largest asset,” said Kim Price, farm and field underwriting manager for Virginia Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. “From a claims perspective, we see this in the form of frozen pipes and damage to roofs from the elements.”

When prepping a house for winter, prevent frozen or burst pipes in attics, basements, crawl spaces and other minimally heated areas by wrapping them in pipe insulation. Keep cold air

outside, and increase energy efficiency by caulking and sealing any cracks or gaps and adding weather stripping around doors and windows.

“If you’re traveling, maintain reasonable temperatures to keep pipes from freezing and have someone checking on your home,” Price said. “For extended stays, turn off your main water supply and drain remaining water from pipes.”

Stay cozy by servicing and maintaining home heating systems, and schedule a tuneup or any preventive maintenance. If using a fireplace or woodstove, have the chimney inspected and cleaned, and check smoke detectors.

“When using a supplemental heating unit like a space heater, keep it on flat surfaces and 3 feet away from flammables, don’t use extension cords, and plug it directly into the wall outlet,” she cautioned. “Always turn it off when not in use.”

As for the home’s exterior, check your roof for loose and broken shingles, repair leaks and (See Keep Warm p. 11)



# SOVA Innovation Hub awarded OpenAI Foundation grant

The SOVA Innovation Hub is proud to announce that it has been awarded an OpenAI Foundation People-First AI Grant. The SOVA Innovation Hub was one of 208 nonprofits nationwide, and one of only four in Virginia, chosen from more than 3,000 applicants. This award underscores both the strength of Southern Virginia’s innovation-driven vision and the meaningful work already underway to advance that vision.

With this support, the SOVA Innovation Hub will launch SOVA AI Connect in 2026. This new community-based initiative will be designed by and for Southern Virginians, anchored at the SOVA Innovation Hub. SOVA AI Connect aligns with the mission of the SOVA innovation Hub to spark economic transformation in Southern Virginia.

SOVA AI Connect will help people build AI literacy, confidence, and practical skills through hands-on workshops and demonstrations, civic innovation challenges, and workforce training. The initiative will help people apply AI responsibly and creatively to strengthen local industries, improve services, and solve community challenges. This project will deepen the SOVA Innovation Hub’s ability to support community innovation and workforce development.

The SOVA Innovation Hub was created in a partnership between Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation (MBC) and Microsoft TechSpark to inspire people to pursue entrepreneurship and de-

velop digital skills. Through coworking, hands-on training, signature programs like RISE, EXCITE, and EVOLVE, and regional community outreach, the SOVA Innovation Hub brings together entrepreneurs, educators, students, and non-profit leaders to learn, collaborate, and grow.


MBC has spent over two decades expanding broadband infrastructure and economic opportunity across Southern Virginia. Through the SOVA Innovation Hub, MBC supports programs that build digital skills, support entrepreneurship, and ensure that rural communities have access to the tools they need to thrive in a modern economy.

“MBC invests in the SOVA Innovation Hub because we believe every community in Southern Virginia deserves the chance to participate fully in the digital economy,” said Tad Deriso, President & CEO, Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation. “This recognition from the OpenAI Foundation affirms the impact of that work and the potential of the people who call this region home. SOVA AI Connect will help residents build trust, skills, and confidence with AI—ensuring that emerging technology benefits our farms, schools, small businesses, and nonprofits in practical, meaningful ways.”

The SOVA Innovation Hub looks forward to launching SOVA AI Connect in partnership with the OpenAI Foundation and continuing to expand innovation capacity across Southern Virginia.

## OBITUARIES

### Gloria Chaney Smith



Gloria Chaney Smith, 96 of Martinsville passed away peacefully at home on November 28, 2025. She was born February 21, 1929 to Margaret Chaney. She was preceded in death by her husband Dudley and 2 sisters.


She is survived by her 3 sons, Steve, Eric, Giles, and their families.

Communications as well as Smith Wholesale, Inc.

There will be a private service for Gloria honoring her life of hard work and integrity.

Memorials may be made to Young America’s Foundation, 11480 Common Park Drive, Suite 600, Reston, VA 20191-1556.

### Albert Lee Hanchey



Mr. Albert Lee Hanchey, age 82 of Stuart, Virginia passed away at Heritage Hall Laurel Meadows on Sunday, December 7, 2025. He was born in Hopewell, Virginia, on March 12, 1943, to the late Chancy Raeford Hanchey and Mary Bell West Hanchey. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Phyllis Scott Hanchey; and three siblings, Mack Hanchey, Jane Shropshire, and Ray Hanchey. Albert enjoyed woodworking, creating things with his hands, fishing, and collecting coins and old bottles. He loved his blue hydrangeas! He was a talented singer and faithful servant of Christ, who

truly enjoyed telling others about Jesus.

Left to cherish the memories of Albert are two daughters and sons-in-law, Mary and Kevin Hubbard of Meadows of Dan, Esther and Gregory Davidson of Williamsburg; three grandchildren, Isaac and Devan Davidson, Jaley Davidson, and Maggie Davidson; one great-grand-

daughter, Hazel Davidson; Brother, Earl (Debbie) Hanchey, Williamsburg, VA; sisters, Joyce (David) Usher, South Port, NC, Bea (Jim) Mathews, Mauston, WI, Libby (Bob) McCluan, Beaverdam, VA, Faye McGill, Colonial Heights, VA; and many nieces and nephews.

The funeral service for Mr. Hanchey will be held Saturday, December 13, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. at Moody Funeral Home in Stuart with Rev. Kenneth Terry officiating. Burial will follow in the Scott Family Cemetery. The family will receive friends one hour prior to the service. Online condolences may be sent to [www.moodyfuneralservices.com](http://www.moodyfuneralservices.com).

## LEGAL

**VIRGINIA: IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF HENRY COUNTY, VIRGINIA**  
*IN RE:*  
GABRIELA ELIZABETH MARTINEZ CLAROS  
A MINOR CHILD, BORN  
APRIL 11, 2016,  
(BIRTH CERTIFICATE  
LOCAL NO. #201600002090  
REGISTERED IN NORTH CAROLINA):

JOSE CRUZ LOVO TELLES  
AND  
DILMA MARTINEZ CLAROS,  
JOINT PETITIONERS.

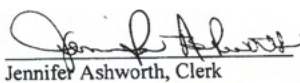
The object of the above-styled suit is to consider a Petition for Step-Parent Adoption of Gabriela Elizabeth Martinez Claros by the Petitioners, Jose Cruz Lovo Telles and Dilma Martinez Claros. It appearing by Affidavit filed according to law that unknown father of the child sought to be adopted, cannot be identified and therefore cannot be found for the purpose of servicing him with notice of the petition, which is the subject of this suit.

It is therefore ORDERED that the said unknown father appear on or before January 9, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the Circuit Court of Henry County, 3160 Kings Mountain Road, Third Floor, Martinsville, Virginia 24112, and at a hearing wherein the Court will consider the above petition and do what is necessary to protect his interests; and

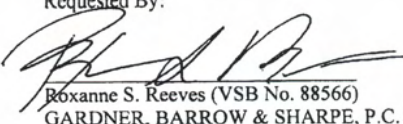
It is further ORDERED that this Order be published once a week for four (4) successive weeks in the Henry County Enterprise, a newspaper of general circulation in the City of Martinsville and Henry County; that a copy of this Order be posted at the front door of the courthouse wherein this court is held,

Enter this 24th day of November, 2025

ORDER OF PUBLICATION  
CASE NO.: CA25-12

  
Jennifer Ashworth, Clerk  
Henry County Circuit Court

Requested By:

  
Roxanne S. Reeves (VSB No. 88566)  
GARDNER, BARROW & SHARPE, P.C.  
4th Floor Fidelity Bank Building  
231 East Church Street  
Martinsville, Virginia 24112  
Telephone: (276) 638-2455  
Fax: (276) 638-2458  
Email: [roxanne@ggbslawfirm.com](mailto:roxanne@ggbslawfirm.com)  
Counsel for Petitioners

## LEGAL

**VIRGINIA: IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF HENRY COUNTY**  
*IN RE* THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WILL AND *INTER VIVOS* TRUST OF GEARY LEE SMITH, DECEASED  
EVERBLESS FOUNDATION, A VIRGINIA CORPORATION, *ET AL.*  
PLAINTIFFS,  
v.  
RICHARD K HALL, *ET ALS.*  
DEFENDANTS.

This day came the Plaintiffs, EverBless Foundation, a Virginia Corporation *et al.*, upon Plaintiffs’ request for an Order of Publication pursuant to Va. Code Ann. §8.01-316; and upon the presentation of this Order to the Court for entry.

UPON CONSIDERATION WHEREOF it appearing to the Court that:

1. Plaintiffs have filed a Complaint to Establish a Will and *Inter Vivos* Trust of Geary Lee Smith, deceased (hereinafter the Decedent), in this Court.

2. Plaintiffs seek an Order of Publication to effect service of process for a) those Defendants whom Plaintiffs possess a last-known address, but despite such, personal service could not be obtained, b) those Defendants for whom Plaintiffs have no known address and cannot attempt personal service, c) unknown heirs of deceased named beneficiaries, c) unknown trustees of a cemetery trust and unknown officers or trustees of a volunteer fire department and e) Defendants John Doe and Jane Doe who represent unknown intestate heirs of the Decedent, all of whom are parties in interest and who are “parties unknown”, pursuant to Va. Code Ann. §8.01-316 (A) (2).

**I. DEFENDANTS WITH KNOWN ADDRESSES FOR WHOM SERVICE OF PROCESS COULD NOT BE OBTAINED**

3. Defendants identified below are interested parties in this action for whom Plaintiffs obtained a last known address but, such notwithstanding, personal service of process could not be effected on such Defendants:

CARA YOWELL	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 2074 STONES DAIRY RD. BASSETT, VA 24055
KAREN KISER SMITH	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 1108 KNOLLWOOD PL MARTINSVILLE, VA 24112
DONALD WAYNE INGRAM	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 525 FRANKLIN HEIGHTS RD. BASSETT, VA 24055
DONNIE INGRAM	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 525 FRANKLIN HEIGHTS RD BASSETT, VA 24055
ELIZABETH H. EDWARDS	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 2316 TRENT HILL DR BASSETT, VA 24055
BOBBY SMITH	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 609 DILLON FORK RD BASSETT, VA 24055
DAVID A. SMITH	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 19291 VIRGIL GOODE HWY ROCKY MOUNT, VA 24151
LORRIE CLARK A/K/A LORI ANN DODSON	-	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: 364 SMITH ROAD BASSETT, VA 24055

4. Such Defendants need to be served by Order of Publication.

**II. DEFENDANTS WITH NO ADDRESSES**

5. Defendants identified below are interested parties in this action for whom Plaintiffs could not obtain an address despite due diligence:

CLARICE SMITH DEHART  
JEFF SMITH A/K/A JEFFREY THOMAS SMITH  
DAVID GOODMAN  
ETHAN EDWARDS  
LARRY DOUGLAS SMITH  
BRENDA SMITH REIN  
LIZ LUTKWITTE

6. Such Defendants need to be served by Order of Publication.

**III. UNKNOWN BENEFICIARIES OF DECEASED NAMED BENEFICIARIES UNDER THE JUNE 12, 2013, WILL**

7. Unknown Defendants identified below are interested parties to this action because they are the heirs of deceased named beneficiaries under the June 12, 2013, will:

HEIRS OF BETTY SUE LAPLANT, DECEASED  
HEIRS OF GLORIA GOODMAN, DECEASED  
HEIRS OF JAMES C. SMITH, DECEASED  
HEIRS OF ANN SMITH, DECEASED  
HEIRS OF GLORIA GOODMAN, DECEASED  
HEIRS OF LAWRENCE ELDEAN MOORE, DECEASED

8. Plaintiffs were unable to identify such interested parties and obtain an address for such parties despite due diligence.

9. Such Defendants need to be served by Order of Publication.

**IV. UNKNOWN TRUSTEES OF THE BLACKBERRY BAPTIST CHURCH CEMETERY FUND AND UNKNOWN OFFICERS OR TRUSTEES OF SANVILLE VOLUNTARY FIRE DEPARTMENT**

10. The Blackberry Baptist Church Cemetery Fund and The Sanville Voluntary Fire Department are interested parties.

11. Plaintiffs have not been able to identify the trustees of the Blackberry Baptist Church Cemetery Fund or the officers or trustees of the Sanville Voluntary Fire Department.

12. Such Defendants need to be served by Order of Publication.

**V. UNKNOWN PARTIES WHO ARE THE INTESTATE HEIRS OF THE DECEDENT**

13. If this Court determines that the Decedent died intestate, his real and personal property would pass to those persons set forth in Va. Code Ann. §64.2-200 (Virginia’s law of intestate succession).

14. Plaintiffs have no knowledge of the identity of the Decedent’s intestate heirs and have named Defendants John Doe and Jane Doe to represent such persons.

15. John Doe and Jane Doe are interested parties to this proceeding.

16. Such Defendants need to be served by Order of Publication.

UPON FURTHER CONSIDERATION WHEREOF it appearing to the Court that:

1. Plaintiff’s counsel has submitted an affidavit detailing efforts made to identify interested parties to this litigation including named beneficiaries, heirs of deceased named beneficiaries, and heirs of the Decedent, and their respective addresses.

2. Plaintiffs have requested that service be effected on all of the above-referenced Defendants, known and unknown, by publication in accordance with Virginia Code Ann. §8.01-316.

3. Pursuant to Va. Code Ann. §8.01-316, when a party or parties to a legal action cannot be identified or cannot be located after due diligence, the Court may order service by publication.

4. Plaintiffs have demonstrated compliance with the statutory requirements, including the submission of an affidavit detailing the efforts made to identify and locate such Defendants .

It is therefore ORDERED that service of process by publication shall be made upon the Defendants identified above in this Order, including *John Doe* and *Jane Doe*, who represent the unknown parties in this proceeding; and

It is further ORDERED that such publication shall be made in the *Henry County Enterprise*, a newspaper of general circulation in Henry County, Virginia, to be published once a week for four consecutive weeks; and

It is further ORDERED that such publication shall include the language set forth in an Addendum to this Order entitled “**TEXT OF PUBLICATION**” which is attached to and incorporated into this Order, to include the name of this Court, the abbreviated case style of this case, the case number of this case, a brief statement of the object of the suit, a notice to the named Defendants for whom personal service of process could not be effected and all Defendants who could not be identified; that they may appear and defend their interests at a hearing before this Court on February 27, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., and

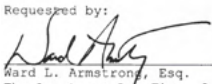
It is further ORDERED that Plaintiffs shall file proof of publication with the Court upon completion of the publication process.

The Clerk of this Court is directed to ensure compliance with this Order and to take all necessary steps to facilitate the publication.


The Clerk of this Court is further directed to send an executed copy of this Order to counsel for Plaintiffs.

Entered on December 01, 2025.

Requested by:

  
Ward L. Armstrong, Esq.  
The Armstrong Law Firm of Va., PLLC  
One Walnut Street  
P.O. Box 1431  
Martinsville, VA 24114-1431  
TEL: (276) 632-7022  
FAX: (276) 632-2935  
EMAIL: [ward@gotarmstronglaw.com](mailto:ward@gotarmstronglaw.com)  
VSB #19510

Counsel for Plaintiffs

  
Judge

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# Piedmont Arts celebrates the holidays with festive community events



Guest soloist LaTetra Lewis performs with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Holiday Pops Spectacular on Dec. 7. Photo by Beth Marshall of VisitMartinsville.



The Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Chorus perform at the Holiday Pops Spectacular on Dec. 7. The event is presented annually by Piedmont Arts. Photo by Beth Marshall of VisitMartinsville.



Guests gather around the Art Garden Christmas Tree at the tree lighting event on Dec. 4. Photo by Beth Marshall of VisitMartinsville.

Piedmont Arts welcomed the holiday season with a trio of community celebrations in December.

The festivities began Dec. 2 with a food drive supporting the Grace Network food pantry. Community members are encouraged to donate nonperishable food items and hygiene products, which may be dropped off at the museum through Dec. 13.

Around 150 visitors gathered in the Gravey-Lester Art Garden for the museum’s annual tree lighting on Dec. 4.

Gale Buck, dressed as Santa Claus, entertained families with Christmas stories, while the Martinsville High School Jazz Band performed holiday classics. Members of the museum’s Teen Arts Council led a free children’s craft and hid handmade ornaments throughout the garden for guests to discover. The Piedmont Arts Guild also distributed free children’s books collected during a recent book drive.

The centerpiece of the evening — the Art Garden Christmas tree — stood out as a work of art in its own right. Created by artist Ian Hogg, the 30-foot structure features more than 3,000 lights and will illuminate the garden nightly through New Year’s Day.

The tree lighting was sponsored by Brightspeed, Carter Bank, Chip Wyatt of State Farm, and Press Glass.

The Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, under the baton of Maestro David Stewart Wiley, returned to perform a mix of seasonal favorites at Piedmont Arts’ annual Holiday Pops Spectacular on Dec. 7 at Martinsville High School Auditorium.

Guest soloist LaTetra Lewis captivated the audience with her vocal range, while songwriter Randy Brooks amused concertgoers with a live rendition of his humorous hit, “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer.” Volunteers from Altrusa International of Martinsville-Henry County assisted with collecting food drive donations during the event.



Songwriter Randy Brooks performs his hit song, “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer,” as Maestro David Stewart Wiley conducts the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Holiday Pops Spectacular on Dec. 7. Photo by Beth Marshall of VisitMartinsville.



Gale Buck, dressed as Santa Claus, poses with children at the Art Garden Tree Lighting on Dec. 4. Photo by Beth Marshall of VisitMartinsville.

“The Holiday Pops really ushered in the holiday spirit this year,” said Executive Director Heidi Pinkston. “We are so grateful to all our volunteers, everyone who attended, and to Ms. Lewis, Mr. Brooks, and the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Chorus for their incredible performance.”

The Holiday Pops Spectacular was sponsored by Brightspeed, with additional support from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Guests are invited to visit the Christmas trees in the Art Garden and the museum lobby through New Year’s Day. Visitors can also enjoy the exhibits “Peace Post,” “Legible Earth: The Fire Tapestries,” “Depicting the Moment:

Paintings by Donald Towns,” and “Inspired Creations” by members of Lynwood Artists on view through Jan. 10 in the Piedmont Arts galleries. Exhibit admission is free.

Piedmont Arts is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The Art Garden is open from dawn to dusk each day.

Piedmont Arts holiday hours:  
- Dec. 24-25: Closed  
- Dec. 26: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
- Dec. 27: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
- Dec. 31: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
- Jan. 1: Closed  
For more information on exhibits and events, visit [PiedmontArts.org](http://PiedmontArts.org).

## Keep Warm (cont. from page 9)

inspect seals around edges, vent stacks, skylights and chimneys. Remove debris and clean gutters, downspouts and drains. Downspouts should divert water at least 3 to 4 feet from the foundation.

Snow and ice can weigh down trees, so keep limbs trimmed, away from the house and remove any dead or dying trees. Insulate outdoor faucets, turn off valves, drain and store hoses, and shut off sprinklers.

Keeping you and your family safe is paramount too. Be proactive by having an emergency communication plan in the event of a severe winter storm or power

outage. Keep an emergency kit with water, nonperishable food, blankets, flashlights, first aid kit and backup heating source, Price advised.

Tune into local weather forecasts to stay updated on severe weather alerts, and know where to seek warm shelter, if needed.

Finally, know what your insurance policies cover, and document belongings and valuables in the event of a loss. Scheduling a call with your insurance agent can ensure your coverage is current and your property remains protected.

Visit [ibhs.org](http://ibhs.org) for a complete winter checklist.

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A photograph of a granite headstone for the Johnson family. The stone is white with black lettering. It features the name "JOHNSON" at the top. Below it, there are two sections for "MARTIN L. FEB. 13, 1927 JAN. 4, 2006" and "RUTH D. JAN. 8, 1929 AUG. 22, 2010". In the center, there is a small circular emblem with "APR. 14, 1949" and a heart. At the bottom, it says "TOGETHER FOREVER".

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





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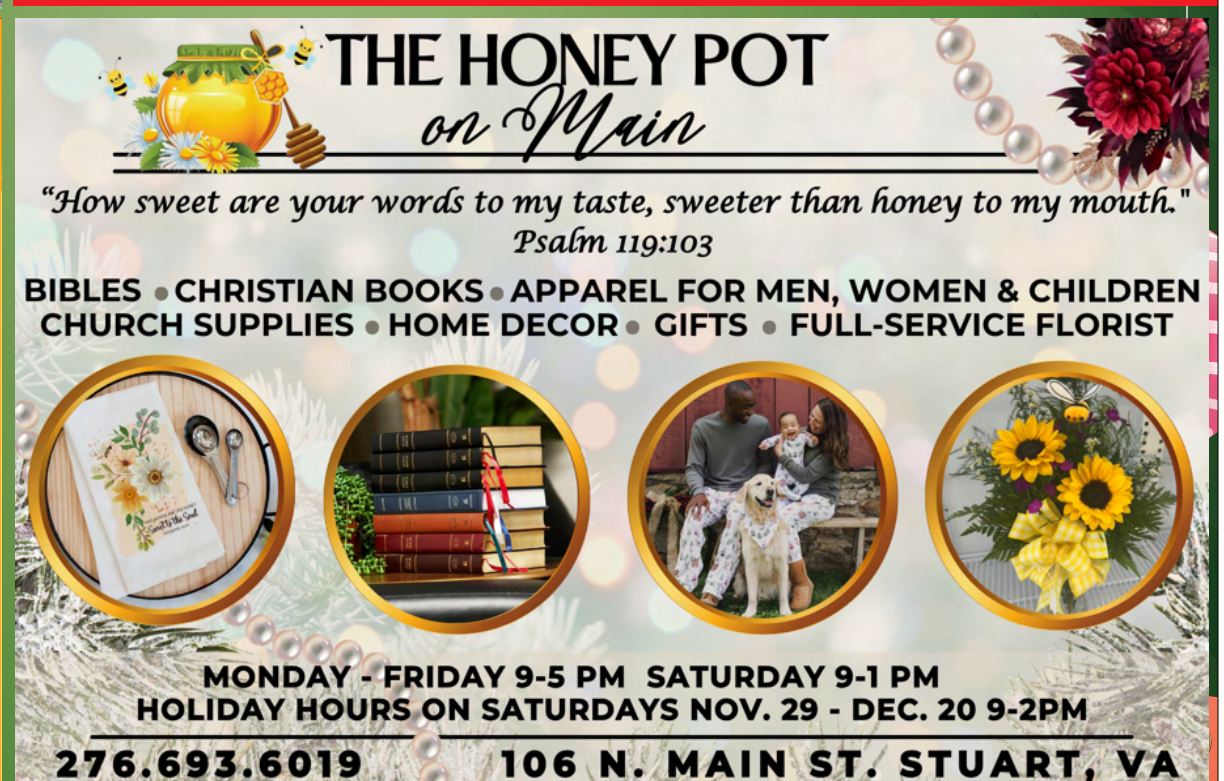
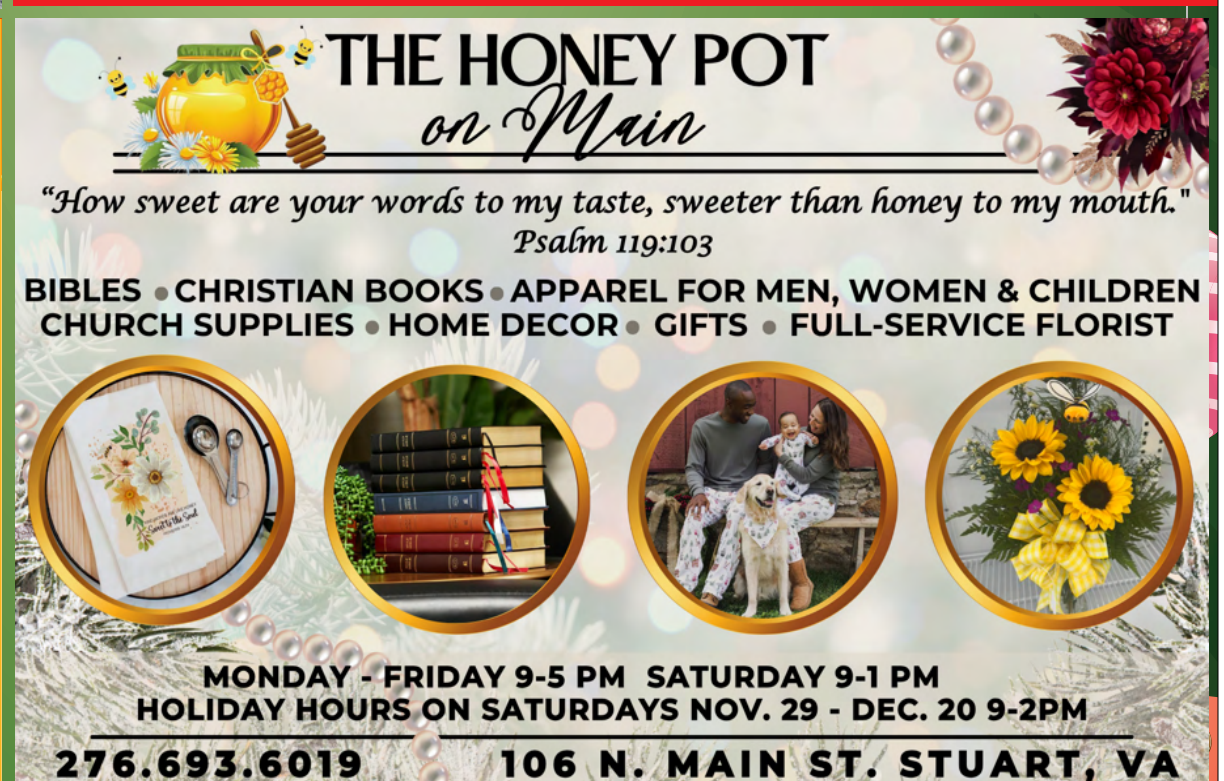
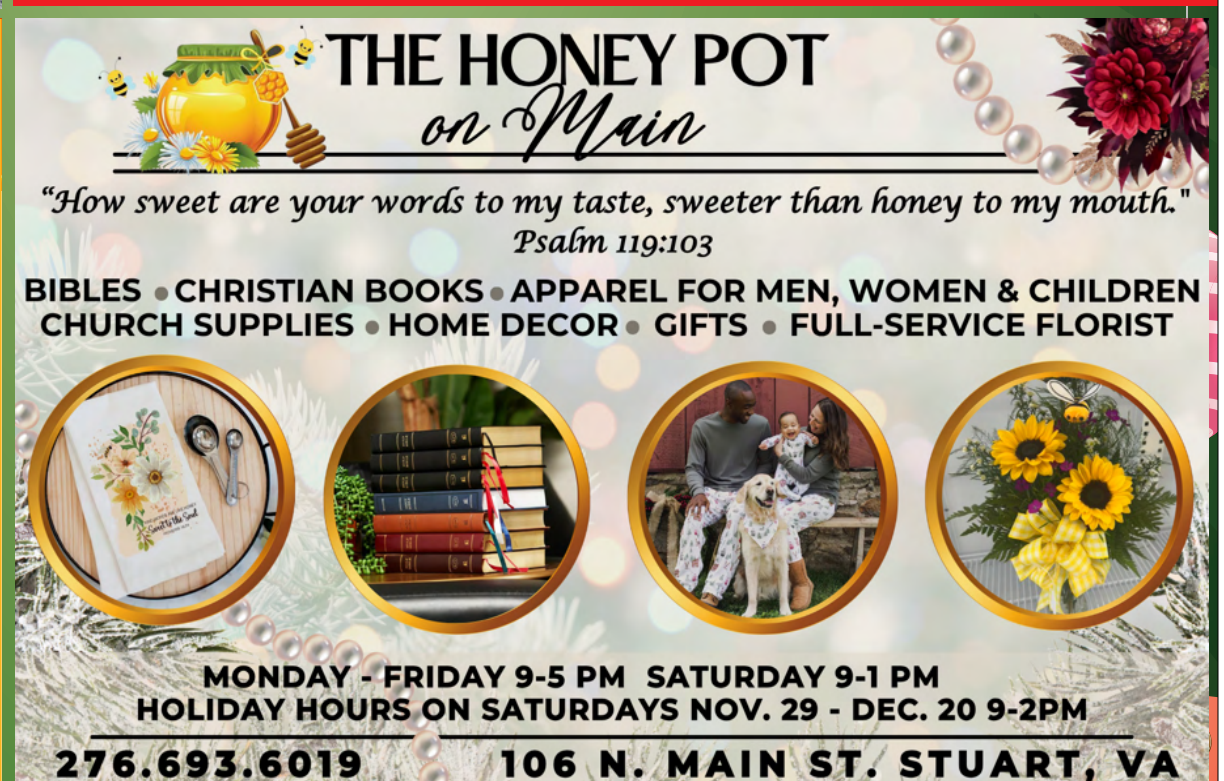
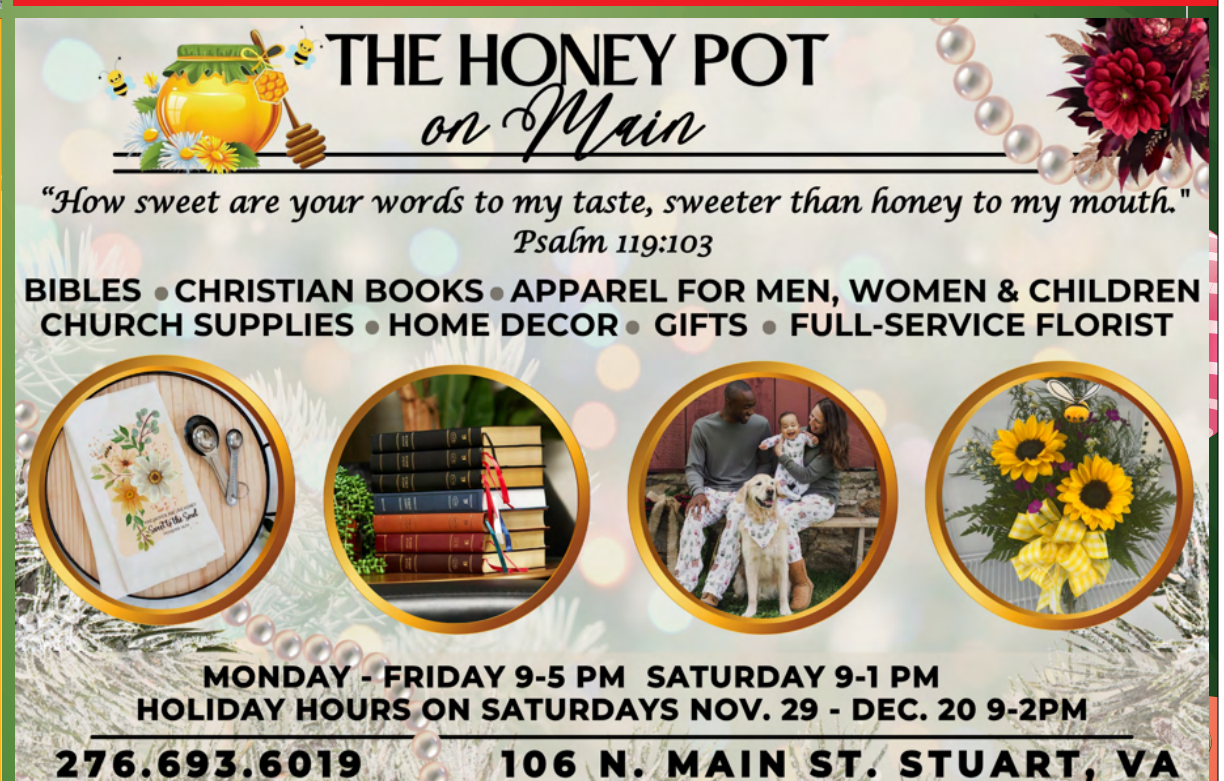
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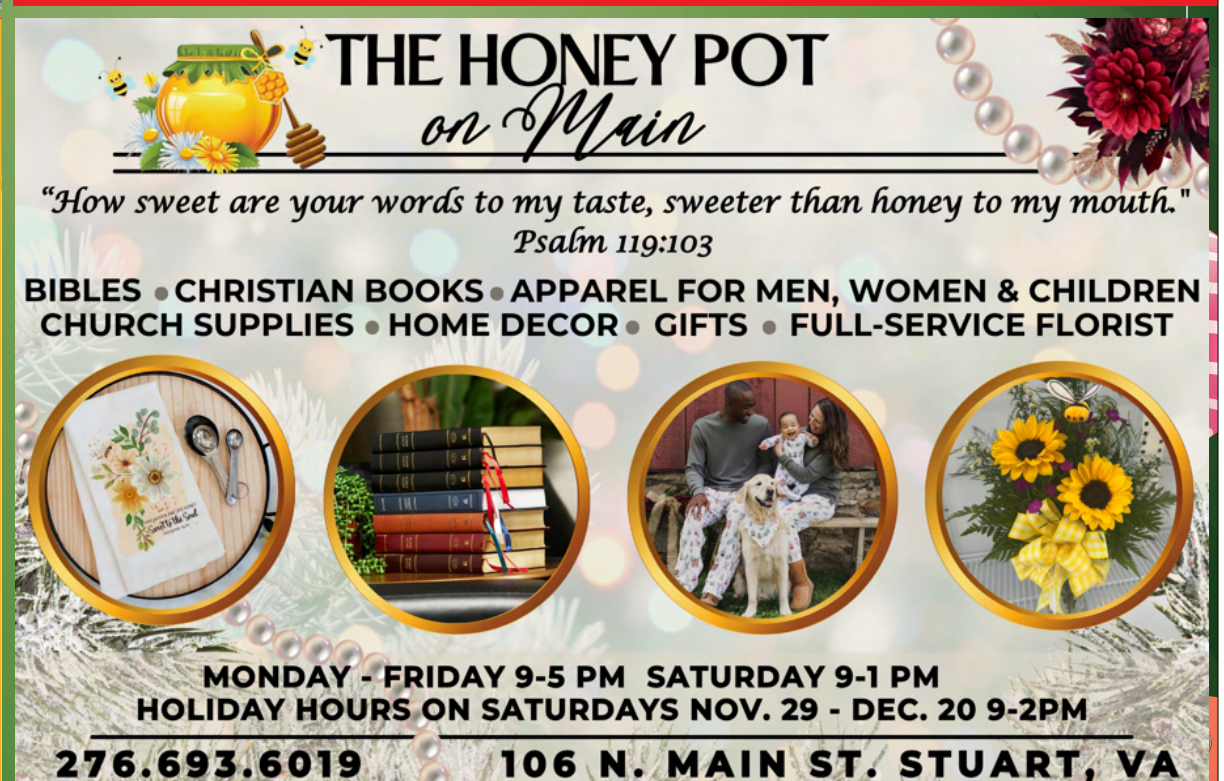
"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth."  
Psalm 119:103

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