

Supervisors begin FY27 budget talks at recent planning session

The Henry County Board of Supervisors held its annual budget planning session Feb. 9 at the Henry County Department of Public Safety Training Center, launching discussions on the Fiscal Year 2027 budget and hearing funding needs from county departments.

The session opened with a review of priorities funded in FY26, including new positions for Building and Grounds maintenance, the Sheriff's Office Animal Services Division, and Public Safety. Additional investments included Circuit Court records preservation, district impact funds to address blight, new vehicles for the Sheriff's Office, overtime for deputies supporting Parks and Recreation events, and replacement of aging emergency radio system equipment.

Board members then reviewed long-term investments in education, public safety, and economic development. Since FY14, total school funding has increased from

just over \$70 million to nearly \$120 million in FY26, with local contributions rising from \$16 million to nearly \$24 million. Sheriff's Office funding grew from approximately \$10 million to nearly \$25 million, largely due to the construction and operation of the Adult Detention Center. Support for Public Safety increased from about \$2 million to approximately \$5.5 million, while Economic Development funding rose from \$5 million to roughly \$8 million, fluctuating year to year based on grant-funded projects.

"The Board of Supervisors has made a deliberate and consistent investment in our schools and in public safety, and residents are seeing the results of those decisions," said County Administrator Dale Wagoner. "In particular, the Sheriff's Office has significantly increased enforcement efforts targeting drug trafficking and violent offenders, actions that have been strongly supported by the commu-

nity. Those efforts don't happen by chance. They are the result of stable funding, staffing, and long-term planning. Continued progress on these challenges requires continued public investment, and the Board has demonstrated a strong commitment to using taxpayer dollars responsibly to improve quality of life across Henry County."

Much of the session focused on

the county's financial health, debt service, and reserve policies. In FY25, Henry County's unassigned fund balance stood at about \$40 million. County financial policies require maintaining reserves equal to 18 percent of the annual budget, leaving roughly \$13 million available for potential spending priorities.

(See Supervisors p. 2)

Review ongoing for petition to remove Martinsville mayor

By Taylor Boyd

Martinsville Commonwealth's Attorney Patrick Flinn continues reviewing a citizen petition seeking to remove Mayor LC Jones from his elected position on City Council, more than three weeks after it was filed with Martinsville Circuit Court.

According to a Jan. 22 press release from Flinn, the General Registrar certified the petition as properly filed.

In that release, Flinn said his top priority is promptly reviewing the petition and determining whether valid grounds exist for Jones' removal.

"I know some people in the public got a kick out of the top priority thing, but it really is true. Ninety percent of what I'm doing is just working on this. I still have to make the office run, but I'm chasing down everything I can with this within my realm of influence and power and what I can legally do,"



Martinsville Commonwealth's Attorney Patrick Flinn continues reviewing a citizen petition seeking to remove Mayor LC Jones from the City Council.

he said.

Flinn said part of the challenge is handling the review largely on his own.

"I don't have my own investiga-

(See Review p. 2)

Former delegate Charles Poindexter remembered as devoted public servant

By Taylor Boyd

Former House of Delegates representative Charles Douglas "Charlie" Poindexter died at his home on Wednesday, Feb. 4. He was 83.

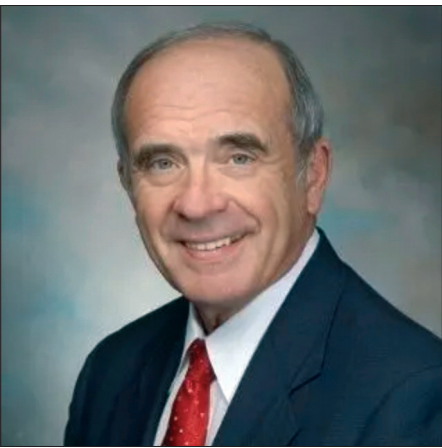
Poindexter served in the House from 2008-2022, representing the 9th district, which included Patrick, Henry, and Franklin counties.

He also represented the Union Hall District on the Franklin County Board of Supervisors for eight years.

The House of Delegates adjourned in Poindexter's honor on February 5.

Will Pace, Poindexter's legislative assistant for eight years, said his tenure working for Poindexter will always be among the highlights of his life.

"In 2014, I left a dream job in Washington, D.C. to take a chance of working in state government. Charles and his wife Janet, wel-



Former Del. Charles Poindexter passed away at age 83 on Feb. 4. He served as the 9th District House of Delegates representative for 14 years, from 2008-2022.

comed me like family, and it was like a family. Honestly, I was worried at first (a new job will do that), but I cherished the experience working for Delegate Poindexter,

(See Poindexter p. 5)



Henry County supervisors Pam Cobler and Chris Lawless (right) visited Richmond to advocate for Mayo River State Park funding and other county priorities. Lawless and Cobler, along with County Administrator Dale Wagoner, left, met with Sen. Bill Stanley, R-Moneta.

Henry County officials press for Mayo River funding in Richmond

By Jessica Dillon

Henry County supervisors Chris Lawless, of the Collinsville District, and Pam Cobler, of the Reed Creek District, recently traveled to Richmond, where they advocated funding for Mayo River State Park and other county priorities.

The trip marked Lawless's first time observing the legislative process in person.

"It's our job to go up there to represent the people of Henry County with the legislative agenda for Mayo River and more funding for fire and EMS," Cobler said. "It's a privilege to go up. We are networking and representing Henry County and getting visibility for them to hear what we need for law enforcement and public safety."

Lawless said the experience was eye-opening.

"It was totally new for me," he said. "It was overwhelming at

first."

He said he quickly learned how the process works — and how easily bills can fail.

"The day we were there, five bills got killed, and they were all for Southside Virginia," Lawless said.

He also noted the efforts of lobbyists and Del. Eric Phillips, R-Martinsville.

"A lot of lobbyists are working to make a difference, make a change," he said.

Both supervisors emphasized the importance of securing funding for Mayo River State Park.

"We desperately need the Mayo River because it will bring economic growth to Henry County," Lawless said. "It will allow people in North Carolina to spend money here in Virginia."

"We need to keep that present. Henry County is a speck on the map, and we need to be a bigger speck on

the map," he added.

County Administrator Dale Wagoner also attended the visit.

"Dale is a huge asset to our county in my opinion," Lawless said.

Lawless said he continues to push his Trash and Grass program while exploring ways to improve clean-up efforts without using county or state funding.



Several people helped celebrate at a ribbon-cutting for The 9th House in Uptown Martinsville.

The 9th House opens Uptown boutique after weather delays

By Jessica Dillon

After weather-related delays caused by snow and ice, the 9th House officially opened in Uptown Martinsville with a ribbon-cutting hosted by the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce.

Located at 15 E. Church St., just below Uptown Pinball and above The Ground Floor, the boutique offers curated home goods, clothing, and apothecary-style items designed to bring a sense of calm into the home.

"It is a goods and apothecary. We've got home accents, books, herbs and salts, and clothing. Just a nice little place for people to come and hang out and find good things," owner Kathy Kitzmiller said of the business that offers a space for expansion, intention, and meaning.

"We have lots of books, we've got pillows, we've got things for

mom, we've got things for people who practice, we've got cookbooks, we've got lots of stuff for your house, pillows, everything is like a luxury brand, and then there's lots of clothing in the clothing room so make sure you check out each individual room because those are pretty cool too."

Kitzmiller said the apothecary concept draws from a long tradition.

"Apothecaries are really old school. They are a place where you can go and get yourself herbs, salves, salts, anything for your body that maybe is more homeopathic than from the store, like at Night Quilt. You can come here and get lavender, chamomile," and other goodies.

She said plans are already in place to manage both The 9th

(See The 9th House p. 11)

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Bluefield University teams with NCI to expand online access

Bluefield University has entered into a new partnership with New College Institute (NCI) to expand access to affordable online education and strengthen workforce and community growth across Southwest Virginia.

Through the partnership, eligible NCI graduates, individuals who complete NCI programs, and their immediate family members may receive a 15% tuition discount on Bluefield University Online programs, helping learners take the next step from training to degree completion.

“This partnership is about creating opportunities for students in our region,” said Harrison Rice, Associate Vice President for Online Learning at Bluefield University. “When people can move from training to a degree without leaving home, it creates opportunities for career growth. We’re proud to work with New College Institute to expand opportunity for learners across Southwest Virginia.”

New College Institute (NCI) is a premier educational institution located in Martinsville, Virginia.

It offers a wide range of academic programs, professional development opportunities, and community engagement initiatives. NCI is dedicated to empowering individuals and transforming communities through accessible, innovative, and high-quality educational opportunities.

The Institute advances education and workforce development by connecting learners to training, credentialing, and higher education pathways aligned with regional workforce needs.

“This partnership strengthens the bridge between workforce training and higher education,” said NCI Executive Director Joe Sumner. “By reducing financial barriers and expanding access to online degree programs, we’re helping learners and families in Southwest Virginia turn skills into credentials, credentials into careers, and careers into long-term economic stability.”

Prospective students can learn more about Bluefield University Online programs at info.bluefield.edu.

Review

(cont. from page 1)

tors, and I can’t really go asking for help from the police department and the Sheriff’s department because of all the conflicts here. So I am doing a lot of the legwork myself, and that is taking a good bit of time,” he said.

Flinn noted he has received cooperation from some people and none from others.

“The silver lining — the curse — of someone being cooperative is that it gives even more information that I then need to parse through,” he said.

He also said the process is complicated because removing an elected official is nearly unprecedented in Virginia.

Recently, Flinn said he spent some time going through the case law and researching other facets of the case. “We’re kind of writing the book as we go with this because there isn’t a lot of history on it. There are some cases here and there, but we’re kind of figuring this out as we go together, so it is a long process, it’s a challenging one, but I’m working as hard as I can on it,” he said.

Flinn said in the press release that there is no time limit on the review.

“This review must be thorough. As required by the statute, I will act promptly,” the release states.

While he could not give an estimate on when the review will be complete, Flinn said it will not stretch on indefinitely.

“It’s just not feasible. From my part, I need to get back to running the office and doing all the stuff that I ran on, and implementing some stuff. This isn’t going to take till the summer to get to the next stage, whatever that stage may be,” he said.

Flinn added that regardless of his decision, he plans to submit a detailed written explanation to the judge.

“That’s going to take a little bit too. I think even when I get it summed up, I still need to put it in a nice, polished bow, if you will,” he said.

Even if his review concludes soon, Flinn said the overall process could still take time as it moves through the legal system.



Sheriff honored for supporting deputies in uniform and overseas

Henry County Sheriff Wayne Davis has received the Patriotic Employer Award from the U.S. Department of Defense’s Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program, recognizing his support of employees who serve in the National Guard and military Reserve.

The award is presented to employers who demonstrate strong support for service members by helping them balance civilian employment with military obligations.

According to the release, deputies credited Davis with maintaining communication during mobilizations, prioritizing family time and

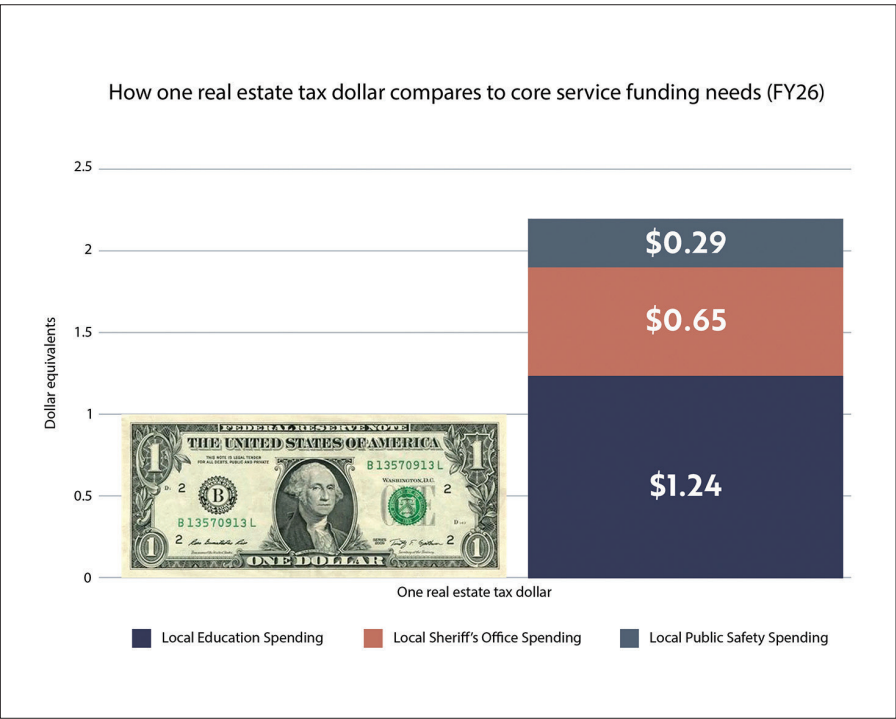
personally welcoming them back to work. Under his leadership, military service members are supported in advancing their careers, pursuing training opportunities and continuing professional growth within the department.

Davis also participates in community events that support veterans and promote awareness of veteran suicide prevention, the release stated.

The award reflects the Henry County Sheriff’s Office’s ongoing commitment to supporting employees who serve both their community and their country.

Supervisors

(cont. from page 1)



This chart shows that local real estate taxes cover only a fraction of what it costs to fund core services—education, the Sheriff’s Office, and public safety—requiring about \$2.19 in local funding for every \$1 raised from real estate taxes.

David Rose of Davenport Public Finance, the county’s financial adviser, stressed the importance of strong reserves to maintain favorable credit ratings from Moody’s, Fitch, and S&P. Strong credit ratings allow the county to borrow at lower interest rates, reducing costs for major capital projects and helping stabilize services. Rose also noted disciplined financial planning helps local governments weather economic downturns without sudden tax increases or service reductions.

Davenport representatives also discussed the need to address structural budget challenges. In

FY25 and FY26, unassigned fund balance was used to balance operating budgets, a practice described as unsustainable. County staff identified an annual operating shortfall of approximately \$5.5 million, which would require setting the real estate tax rate at about \$0.48 to restore balance and avoid future reliance on reserves. Even at that rate, Henry County would remain below the median tax rate of comparable jurisdictions.

The board also discussed financing options for future school construction, including use of low-interest debt to manage costs and offset construction inflation.

Uncertainty with the state budget was another key topic. Because the Commonwealth has not yet adopted a budget, the county faces potential mandates including salary increases for state-supported employees, increased local school funding responsibilities due to changes in the Local Composite Index, higher required contributions to the local health department and Department of Social Services, and a projected 18 to 25 percent increase in Children’s Services Act costs.

Department heads then outlined funding requests and operational needs, including staffing and pay adjustments for Parks and Recreation; capital maintenance and staffing for Building and Grounds; additional cybersecurity staffing in Information Technology; support staff increases in Finance; a new position to administer the Erosion and Sediment Control program in Planning, Zoning and Inspections; expanded staffing and volunteer support for Public Safety; and administrative, enforcement and equipment needs within the Sheriff’s Office. Across all de-

partments, nearly \$9.5 million in capital improvements were requested, along with increased funding for outside agencies.

The session concluded with a discussion of revenues, rising property assessments, and tax rate options. Without using reserves, the county projects a \$4.79 million increase in costs next fiscal year, not including possible state mandates or departmental requests.

A \$0.48 tax rate would generate enough revenue to maintain current service levels and meet debt obligations, while a revenue-neutral rate of \$0.37 would require significant service reductions. Supervisors also discussed potential changes to the personal property tax and elimination of the motor vehicle license fee.

The FY27 budget process will continue in the coming months, with additional public discussions and opportunities for community input before adoption later this year.

For more, visit <https://www.henrycountyva.gov/Document-Center/View/1627/2026-Planning-Session-Presentation-PDF?bidId=>.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

Events

Friday, February 13
Music Night at Spencer Penn, with the White Oak Ramblers Bluegrass Band in the Alumni Hall. Gate opens at 5 p.m.; the band starts at 6:30 p.m. Admission is a \$5 CASH donation. Concessions will be sold.

Sunday, February 15
Before the internet, local residents had a myriad of ways to keep connected, and the MHC Heritage Museum will delve into the history of the area’s media in “Connected Community,” at 3 p.m. The program covers newspapers, radio, television stations, company newsletters and more. Speakers will be Ginny and Mike Wray, former editor and photographer of the Martinsville Bulletin, on newspaper, and Bill Wyatt, owner and operator of WHEE, on radio and TV. The program is part of the Sunday Afternoon Lecture series, and admission is free.

Tuesday, February 17
The regular monthly meeting of the Martinsville Henry County Republican Committee will be held in the Summerlin Room, main floor of the Henry County Administration Building, 6:30 p.m. The meeting will be cancelled if there is inclement heavy weather as the building may likely be closed in that event. All interested Republicans are welcome.

Saturday, February 21
The Rangeley Ruritans will hold a Pancake Breakfast from 7 till 10 at their Ruritan building. Pancakes and sausage will be served. Eat in or carry outs welcome. Donations accepted. Proceeds go to community

projects.

Kearfott Memorial Baptist Church is hosting a basket bingo to benefit Justin who needs a handicapped accessible van. Doors open at 4:30, 1403 Rivermont Heights, Martinsville.

Thursday, February 26
Art Talk with Gail Doyle Smith, 12:15 p.m., at Piedmont Arts. Smith will speak about her exhibit, “Act II: Paintings by Gail Doyle Smith,” which is on view at the museum through March 28. RSVP attendance to Piedmont Arts at 276-632-3221 or online at PiedmontArts.org.

Ongoing

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.

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, 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 mhcdcv.org/meeting-rsvp for Zoom link.

Local agencies say governor’s order won’t affect operations

By Taylor Boyd
Henry County Sheriff Wayne Davis said there has been confusion in the community following Gov. Abigail Spanberger’s recent executive order outlining statewide law enforcement standards, but emphasized the directive does not apply to local sheriff’s offices.
“There has been some confusion within the community about what Governor Spanberger’s Executive Order means for Henry County,” Davis said. “I want to be very clear: this order applies only to state law enforcement agencies — primarily the Virginia State Police and the Department of Corrections. It does not apply to sheriffs or sheriff’s offices in the Commonwealth.”
Davis added his office “will continue to cooperate fully with all federal law enforcement agencies, including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Our mission, our authority, and our partnerships remain unchanged.”
Martinsville Police Chief Chad Rhoads said the governor’s action effectively resets the state’s directive to where it stood late last year.
“Political back and forth is what it is. It doesn’t really affect the way we do things. It doesn’t affect

the way we do business,” Rhoads said.
Gov. Spanberger’s order directs state law enforcement agencies to align policies and training with principles focused on public trust and community safety and ends certain federal immigration enforcement agreements.
Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith echoed that assessment, saying Spanberger’s executive orders pertain only to state agencies.
“She’s their boss. Nothing was changed with us,” Smith said.
Smith noted individual localities decide whether to cooperate with ICE.
“Anytime we have somebody in our jail that is an illegal alien that has detainers on them, we’ve always cooperated in the past, and we will continue to do so,” he said.
U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, criticized the order, saying cooperation among local, state and federal agencies is essential.
“Law enforcement officials are important public safety servants in Virginia’s Ninth District. A core function of their mission is to protect Virginia communities, and I believe cooperation between local, state, and federal officials helps ac-

complish that goal,” Griffith said.
“I believe Governor Spanberger’s action to terminate 287(g) agreements directly undermines this goal and potentially pits local communities, state law enforcement, and federal law enforcement against each other. This creates danger for all involved,” he said.
“This executive directive can be seen as encouraging behaviors and actions that obstruct federal law enforcement,” Griffith added.
“Because the public safety needs of our communities are in Virginia’s best interest, I urge Governor Spanberger to rescind this harmful executive directive.”
Spanberger, a former federal law enforcement officer, said the order

issued last week is based on core values that emphasize preserving human life, protecting vulnerable people, and upholding the U.S. and Virginia constitutions.
The order outlines six guiding principles, including prioritizing public trust, avoiding fear-based policing, focusing on criminal enforcement rather than civil status, strengthening officer training and recruitment, and building partnerships among law enforcement, residents, educators, faith leaders, businesses and local governments.
The executive order directs state law enforcement agencies to review all policies, training and practices to ensure they align with those standards.

Outdoor burning restrictions begin Feb. 15

Virginia’s 4 p.m. burning law takes effect Feb. 15 and runs through April 30.
The law prohibits open-air burning before 4 p.m. if the fire is within 300 feet of woods or dry grass that could carry flames into forested areas. Burning is allowed between 4 p.m. and midnight, provided the person starting the fire takes proper precautions and remains in attendance at all times.
Some localities may have ad-

ditional outdoor burning restrictions. Residents are encouraged to check with their local government before starting any outdoor fire.
Officials remind residents that anyone who starts a fire is responsible for suppression costs if it escapes, even if permits were obtained and precautions were taken.
Violations of the law are a Class 3 misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$500.

Collinsville man charged after spikes found in roadway



Elden Douglas Duncan

The Henry County Sheriff’s Office on January 6 responded to the

area of Murphy Road and Virginia Avenue following reports of tire deflation devices (metal spikes) intentionally placed in the roadway. As a result of the devices being present in the roadway, at least two vehicles sustained tire damage.
An investigation was initiated to determine who was responsible for placing the devices. During the investigation, Elden Douglas Duncan, 64, of 569 Murphy Road, Collinsville, was identified as a potential suspect.
On February 2, a search warrant was subsequently executed at Duncan’s home. During the search, deputies allegedly located packaging materials consistent with the purchase of the tire deflation devices. Additionally, several boxes of various types of ammunition were

found inside the residence, according to a release. Investigators also discovered a crudely constructed improvised explosive device along with remnants of additional detonated improvised explosive devices, authorities alleged.
Due to the presence of the improvised explosive device, bomb technicians with the Virginia State Police were requested to respond and render the device safe prior to its removal from the residence. The device was seized and is currently being analyzed by the Virginia State Police to determine the most appropriate charges.
As a result of the investigation into the tire deflation devices, and due to Duncan’s status as a convicted felon, he has been charged

with two counts each throwing or depositing certain substance upon the highway and damage property, and one count each possession of ammunition by convicted felon and devices for puncturing motor vehicle tires.
Duncan is currently being held at the Henry County Adult Detention Center without bond.
The investigation is ongoing, and additional charges are expected. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources was also contacted regarding the illegally possessed hide and feathers of a red-tailed hawk. A conservation officer responded to the residence and took possession of the bird’s remains. Charges related to this offense are pending.

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OPINION

Health Care Progress



Morgan Griffith

Representative

At the beginning of February, Congress passed an appropriations package to fund various federal agencies and projects.

I helped secure federal funding for Ninth District communities through some of the 12 appropriations bills. Some of this funding will support local communications equipment upgrades, nuclear energy research and transportation infrastructure.

The February government funding measure, which I supported, not only included some of the needed appropriations bills but also featured important health care policies.

One such policy concerns Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) reform.

I have written about the problems of PBMs in the past and previously co-sponsored legislation.

PBMs, which are responsible for negotiating drug prices, serve as an intermediary between insurers, drugmakers, and patients.

In many cases, PBMs account for the drug price increases that patients and pharmacies face. These increases are fueled in part by PBM rebates, hidden fees and other actions.

The government funding measure contained provisions that challenge the practices of these middlemen, which sometimes cause consumers to pay more out of pocket costs. This is in spite of the fact that PBMs were originally formed to lower consumer costs.

Congress has acted to compel PBMs, group health plans and issuers to provide

more prescription drug spending data.

We also give the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) authority to impose monetary penalties on PBMs that violate certain contract terms related to Medicare Part D and to track payment trends to pharmacies.

I believe these transparency reforms will help efforts to bring accountability to our drug pricing system, weed out unfair, predatory practices and reduce drug prices across the country.

The same week that Congress passed the most recent government funding package, one major PBM, Express Scripts, agreed to a settlement with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

As part of the agreement, Express Scripts will take several actions to increase transparency for plan sponsors and rein in its practices that led to artificially inflated list prices.

The PBM reforms Congress passed hopefully builds off this momentum.

Another target of our government funding measure? Cancer.

Congress expanded Medicare coverage of multi-cancer early detection screening tests. On screening, the tests do have significant false positives so don't panic if it says you have cancer, but for the first time we have tests that can pick up cancers like pancreatic cancer before there are no viable treatments.

The package also funded research efforts into pediatric cancer.

I was proud to help advance these bills from the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health.

Other provisions in the government funding bill extend the authorities of a number of key health care programs and services.

Rural health stands to benefit!

One of the program extensions protects the Medicare-dependent Hospital program.

This program provides boosted reimbursements to small, rural hospitals that serve a high proportion of Medicare patients. As a result, these hospitals can better support their communities in these rural areas.

As our rural communities age and our reliance on Medicare persists, some hospitals in our part of the state will qualify for this program and the federal dollars that come with it!

These are not the only in-person medical operations in Virginia's Ninth District supported by the government funding extensions.

A second health extender supports the work of Community Health Centers (CHCs).

Because of the lack of a sufficient presence of health care providers in rural Virginia, CHCs help fill some of this void. There are 61 in Virginia's Ninth District alone!

CHCs will continue to play a major role in serving the medical needs of Virginia's Ninth District.

While support for rural community access to in-person providers is essential, some still face barriers.

That is why in the government funding measure, Congress also extends program authority for telehealth flexibility.

Rural communities, which lack sufficient and immediate access to in-person providers, can receive more prompt attention and care via telehealth services.

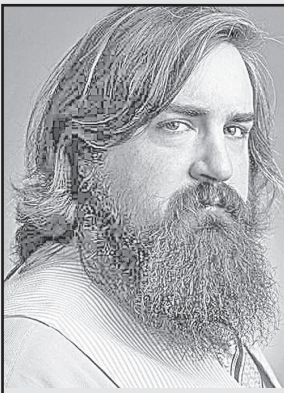
As a staunch advocate of rural health care solutions, this extension will allow many communities in rural America to more easily access health care services.

It is great that this Congress has extended these program authorities. The above policy reforms and extensions continue the critical work of our health care professionals to deliver necessary care, resources and support to rural America.

I will continue using my position as Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee Chairman to protect these programs for rural America.

These programs are a piece of the puzzle to meaningful rural health care solutions. They represent my interest to make health care more affordable, more accessible and more accountable for you.

Race to the bottom



By Ben R. Williams

By the time this column goes to print, it's likely that America will have moved on to a brand-new outrage or crime or against humanity. Despite that, I think it's worth lingering for a moment on the racist video that President Donald Trump posted to Truth Social.

Late on the night of Thursday, Feb. 5, Trump posted a now-deleted video to Truth Social. The brief clip talked about supposed election fraud in Georgia, and then, for a couple of seconds at the end, showed a clip of former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama as cackling apes in a jungle.

People were outraged at this overt bit of racism, and rightly so. Almost immediately, Trump and his inner circle of apparatchiks offered explanations and justifications for the video, all of which were mutually exclusive.

One explanation was that an aide posted the video to Trump's social media account. Cool; they should be summarily fired. If I posted a video depicting the former President and First Lady as monkeys to the social media of any business I have ever worked at, I would be fired so fast that flames would be licking off of me as I was escorted from the building.

Another explanation: the racist snippet of the video was actually taken from a much longer video depicting a number of politicians as jungle animals with Trump as a lion, the king of the jungle.

I actually watched the original video that the clip was taken from. Every animal choice is intentional. Hillary Clinton is a pig (get it?). J.B. Pritzker is an elephant (haw haw, he's fat!). Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a donkey ('cause she's a jackass!). It was a deliberate choice to depict Barack and Michelle Obama as apes. There is a long, deeply racist history of depicting black people as apes and monkeys. The original context does not improve the situation at all.

And on a side note, I've heard a few people defend the video by saying that "it may not be politically correct, but it sure was funny!" I'm going to throw my hat over the fence here and say that if you are over the age of six and find this video knee-slappingly hilarious, you probably lack the intellectual capacity to meaningfully engage

with an episode of Hee Haw. This is a level of entertainment about a half-step above someone jingling their keys in your face. If you find that statement offensive, good. That was how I intended it.

Another explanation from Trump himself: he didn't watch the whole video and posted it without realizing it ended with a deeply racist jab at the former President and First Lady. I don't believe this excuse for a minute, but let's assume it's true. The absolute best-case scenario here is that the President of the United States of America spends about as much time vetting his sources as your least-favorite aunt who has a profile photo of a sunset and a lot of thoughts about immigrants that come out when she's downed a half-bottle of Boone's Farm. Yeah, that's the person I want in charge of international diplomacy.

The only thing that surprised me about Trump's racist video is that anybody is surprised by it. Some folks seemed shocked to see evidence that Donald Trump might be a racist. I assume those same folks might be shocked to learn that the Pope is Catholic. Racism is Trump's brand and a big part of his appeal.

Trump comes from a long line of racists; his father, Fred Trump, was so racist that Woody Guthrie wrote a song about how he wouldn't rent to black tenants. It's called "Old Man Trump."

In 1989, Donald Trump ran a full-page ad in all four major New York City newspapers calling for the state to bring back the death penalty, implying that the punishment should be used on five black men charged with raping a white woman in Central Park. All five men were later exonerated after the actual attacker confessed, but Trump maintains to this day that they're guilty. That seems pretty racist.

In the late 2000s, Trump became a vocal mouthpiece for the birther movement, claiming that Barack Obama was born not in Hawaii but in Kenya. He doubled down on this assertion even after Hawaii released Obama's long-form birth certificate. That seems pretty racist.

In the lead-up to the 2024 Presidential election, Trump claimed that Haitian migrants were eating dogs and cats off the street. That seems pretty racist.

Have you ever noticed that the only immigrants Trump hates are the ones who aren't white? Have you ever noticed that when Trump is criticizing an opponent who's a person of color, he always, always calls them "low IQ?"

The question is no longer "is Trump racist?" The question is, "can Trump ever be racist enough to suffer a consequence for it?"

If someone wanted to damage Trump politically, their best course of action might be to find a way to prove he's NOT racist. That's the only thing left that might actually hurt his approval rating.

Column Sponsored by: Dr. Mensink

Greetings from Richmond

This week in Richmond has been deeply concerning. What should be a legislative session focused on economic relief, affordability, and protecting individual liberty has instead been dominated by an aggressive push that threatens the constitutional rights of law-abiding Virginians and places new burdens on hardworking families.

Rather than addressing the real challenges facing our Commonwealth like runaway inflation, the rising cost of living, and excessive regulation, the Democrat majority has chosen to prioritize a slate of gun control bills that undermine the fundamental right to keep and bear arms. I serve on the Public Safety Committee where these bills are coming through. I have voted and will continue to vote against measures that threaten our Second Amendment rights. Several of these proposals are especially troubling:

*HB 21 exposes firearm manufacturers, wholesalers, and dealers to civil liability through vague and undefined "standards of responsible conduct."

*HB 110 establishes civil penal-



Del. Eric Phillips

ties for leaving a handgun in an unattended vehicle.

*HB 217 would ban the sale, manufacture, importation, and transfer of a broad range of commonly owned semi-automatic firearms based on arbitrary features and magazine capacity, with violations classified as Class 1 misdemeanors.

*HB 229 criminalizes lawful possession in certain hospital settings, even for citizens simply visiting a loved one.

*HB 871 imposes criminal penalties related to firearm storage within the home when minors are present.

These bills are being advanced with little regard for constitutional limits or their impact on everyday Virginians. Republican members
(See Richmond p. 5)

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Michael Showell

EDITOR

Debbie Hall - dhall@theenterprise.net

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Wendi Craig - advertise@mainstreetnewspapers.com

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OPINION

A cat who lived hard, loved harder



Holly Kozelsky

Mister lived fast and hard, an unapologetic heathen on a constant pursuit of physical pleasure and comfort.

He lived for cuddles, caresses and food.

Mr. Purrs-A-Lot came from a clowder of feral cats in Collinsville. One night as we dropped off my daughter’s friend, this scraggly black kitten walked right up to us in the middle of a road. On a whim we took him with us, in shock at what we had done. We did not need a third cat.

My daughter spent a few days trying on different names inspired by his color – “Midnight,” “Blackie,” “Asher” – until she confidently proclaimed: “He purrs all the time. His name is Mr. Purrs-A-Lot.”

He never stopped purring. As soon as we’d arrive home from work or school, he would hop up on a lap, raise up on his hind legs and hug the lucky one around the neck with his front paws, rubbing his head against the person’s neck.

Then he’d spend all day, and all night, sitting on the lap of one of us, then the other. He made it hard to use the computer on the sofa or even hold a book, but it was worth it.

Mr. Purrs-A-Lot ate and ate and ate and

grew and grew and grew. For years we laughed at how fat he was.

Until it wasn’t funny anymore. Nine years of gluttony caught up with him.

Around Christmas he didn’t seem as fat as he normally was. Then one day in January he stopped eating.

Tests revealed that he had kidney disease. We went home with the prescription medicine and the prescription food and the confidence that we all could ride this out for the next few years.

But instead of getting better, he got worse. We saw our little bundle of love suffer, and nothing we did offered relief.

A mere five days after the diagnosis, Mister was gone. He chose to live life fully, and when he was done, he was done: No dragging it on.

Nearly a decade went by in the blink of an eye: the splendid cat; and also my daughter’s childhood, and my middle-aged years. Never again will the three of us be piled up together in a corner of the sofa, just relishing each other’s company.

Mr. Purrs-A-Lot, the heartbeat of our household, betrayed us. He died young, pushed to the edge by his gluttonous eating which apparently was too much for his

body to handle.

But oh what a life he led. He never passed up a moment’s opportunity for pleasure.

What a treasure of a cat, who had the personality of a dog – pure loyalty, and attention and affection – and what a strange, nearly missed twist of fate that brought him to us.

We are glad to have given this otherwise doomed stray the kingly life he so clearly thought he deserved.

--

I wrote that during that sad week, last month. While we were mourning our once-in-a-lifetime magnificent a friend asked if we would get another cat.

Another cat? We had two others. But no cat ever in the history of catdome had been as unique and marvelous as Mister.

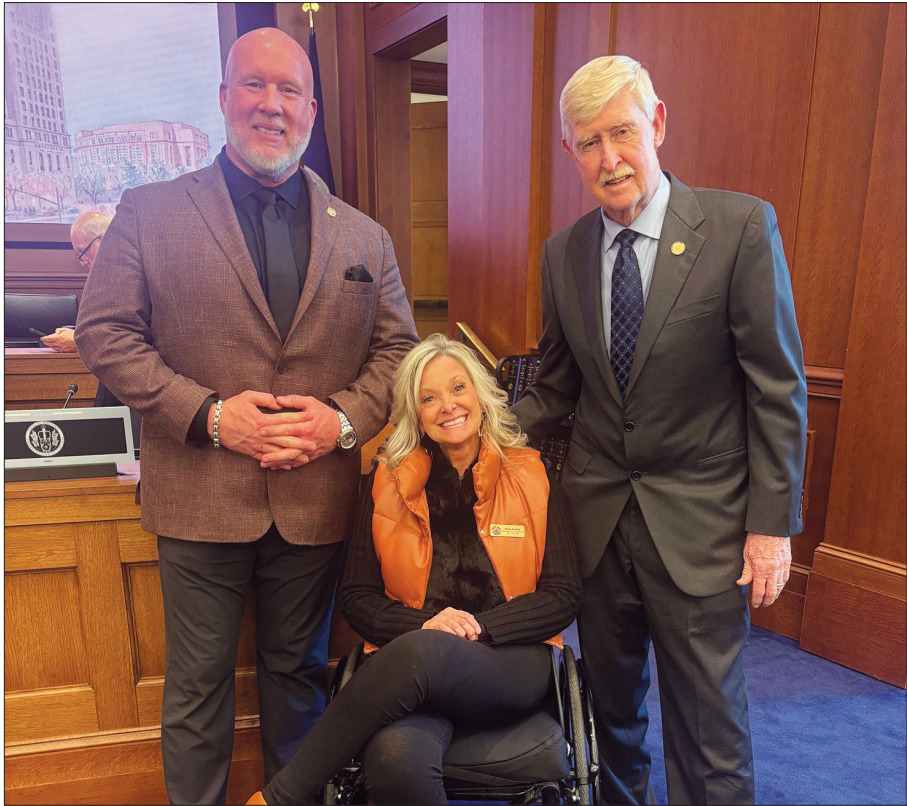
However, there has been an unexpected shift in the dynamics of our household.

Now that Mister is not here anymore, the other two cats can shine. Sprinkles doesn’t like any other cat, so she stays in the closet all day and evening while Blondie, the affable one, sits with us – not on top of us, like Mister did, but next to us. Then Sprinkles stays the night in one of our rooms (admittedly, bribed there with cat treats and the transition made easier by her wearing a cat-calming collar).

Apparently, Mister just never gave them a chance. And now he has bowed out gracefully to let them enjoy being pet cats for a while.

Richmond

(cont. from page 4)



Pam Cobler, who represents the Reed Creek District on the Henry County Board of Supervisors, was among those meeting with Del. Eric Phillips (left), last week.

have consistently warned that this approach invites costly legal challenges while trampling on the Second Amendment rights of responsible citizens.

As your Delegate, I am fighting back against these extreme policies. My Republican colleagues and I remain committed to advancing good policy, protecting individual liberties, and delivering meaningful tax relief for Virginia families.

Legislation and Resolutions

On Friday, I am happy to say that HB1053 passed the House floor and is heading to the Senate. As I mentioned last week, this reinstates a previous law that allows localities to use Tobacco Commission grants as matching funds for GO Virginia grants. This helps our region and many projects that are coming down the pipeline.

Poindexter

(cont. from page 1)

especially making new friends in Franklin County. When I was elected in 2016 to the Chatham Town Council, he provided important advice and lessons to serve in elected office,” he said in a Facebook post.

Pace said he tries to emulate Poindexter, who never asked for the spotlight or attention, but just wanted to get the job done to help his community.

“Virginia would be better off with many more Charles Poindexters, and it is unfortunate that we have fewer people in elected office like Charles Poindexter. I learned so much from Charlie. I will always be grateful to Charlie and the impact he has had on me. I have lost a father-figure, mentor, colleague, and friend. I love you, Charlie, and I am going to miss you. Janet, Sherrie, Walker, his brother Gary, and the entire Poindexter family are in my thoughts and prayers. May God bless the Gentleman from Franklin County, Charles Poindexter,” Pace wrote in a social media post.

State. Sen. Bill Stanley, R-Moneta, spoke about Poindexter during the February 5 session.

, and described him as “one of the finest men Southwest Virginia ever produced.

“Charlie Poindexter was the real thing. He was a man of deep conviction, quiet strength, and unwavering devotion to his community, his Commonwealth, and his country. He was a farmer, an engineer, a father, a husband, and for more than two decades a dedicated public servant who never forgot where he came from and never forgot who he was serving,” he said.

For all his accomplishments on the national stage, which he accomplished with his typical no-nonsense approach, Stanley said Poindexter’s heart was always in the hills of Franklin County.

“He never stopped farming that family land there nearby to my farm in Glade Hill. It was the 1792 Poindexter Family Homeplace. On hot summer days when most of us were staying inside and staying cool in the air conditioning, you could find Charlie out there on a tractor harvesting hay, doing hard work that his father had done before him,” he said.

Stanley said Poindexter wasn’t a politician, but a true citizen legislator.

“His staff would tell you he never changed from the day-to-day when he walked into the General Assembly building to the day that he left and went back to the farm. Charlie always remained true to himself, true to his values, and true to his constituents,” he said.

U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, said Poindexter was a dedicated public official whose service to Franklin, Henry, and Patrick Counties lasted more than a decade.

“I enjoyed working with him in the House of Delegates to promote

the Republican Party and deliver solutions for rural communities. I am praying for his wife, Janet, his family, and his community as we mourn the loss of a good man, legislative leader, and rural community advocate,” he said.

Stuart Vice-mayor Dave Hoback said he worked with Poindexter during his tenure with the West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC).

“I always found him to be a very cooperative and affable individual. One of the things that I remember about him most distinctly was every year the PDC would develop a legislative agenda that would map out our positions and views and different legislative issues, and would typically invite every member of the General Assembly from the region to attend. I think Charlie came every time, I don’t think he ever missed one, and we were very appreciative of that,” he said.

Hoback said Poindexter was also a straight shooter.

“If he thought he could help you with something, he would tell you that. If he didn’t think he could help you or was not in favor of what you were asking, he would tell you that as well,” he said.

Hoback noted this attitude isn’t always commonplace with legislators.

“Hearing something honest and direct was always appreciated,” he added.

Veteran Service Organization member W.C. Fowlkes described Poindexter as “a mighty fine fellow.

“I was chairman of the Republican Party when he came into the district, and I had the honor of working with him just about the whole time he was here. He was well-liked, well-known, well-accepted, and that just sums it up,” he said.

Del. Wren Williams, R-Stuart, said Poindexter dedicated more than two decades of his life to public service in Southside Virginia.

“Charlie was a farmer, a man of deep conviction, and a tireless advocate for the communities he loved, and I ask that you join me in keeping his family in your thoughts and prayers,” he said.

Del. Eric Phillips, R-Martinsville, said Poindexter did a lot for Virginia’s 9th district, including securing funds for the U.S. 58 expansion in the Meadow of Dan area.

“That was a lot of Charlie Poindexter’s work, so obviously, it’s always sad to see someone like that go. He was a good guy who did a lot of good things for our area,” he said.

When he saw Poindexter give speeches, Phillips said he always liked the way he delivered them because Poindexter seemed to become a different person.

“He would really perk up when he gave a speech, and he always ... used a little humor. I always thought about that when I thought of Charlie,” Phillips said.

Arrington sets sights on land speed record

By Jessica Dillon

Joey Arrington is working to break the world land speed record, currently set at 244.9 mph. The target speed is 250 mph, and the effort has drawn support from local businesses, Martinsville City and now the University of Virginia, which signed on as a sponsor Feb. 7.

If successful, the project — dubbed Virginia 250 — would put Martinsville and Henry County on the national motorsports map, while creating hands-on learning opportunities for engineering students and showcasing the region’s growing interest in innovation and economic development.

“One thing, the tie-in that maybe Henry County’s got with the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson’s dad was a surveyor, and he was the first one to survey Henry County, and when he came across the Smith River, he named it the Irwin River, and I don’t know how it got switched to the Smith River,” said former Martinsville Mayor Danny Turner.

“We’re going to make the Virginia 250, and I hope we’re all a part of, and also, there’s a guy by the name of Kyle Petty. He’s going to drive this IHRA bullet, and we’ve got to make sure that we’re

safe, and we’re going to do all the necessary things for it to reach 250, maybe faster. We’ll have to figure out if that’s going to be possible or not,” Arrington said.

Virginia Motorsports, the University of Virginia’s Formula SAE team, is partnering on the VA250 project, giving students real-world experience while contributing engineering support to the record attempt.

Team members toured the museum’s Speed Center and met with Arrington as part of the collaboration.

Riley, a member of the Formula SAE team, said the partnership will help advance their work on a new aerodynamics system.

“Yeah, absolutely. So, the support that the VA250 project is allowing us the opportunity, we’re developing a new aerodynamics system for this year. So, the support for buying material, also the data that we get through the project as well, to help support the assumptions that go into this, help us make better engineering decisions, and ultimately perform better.”

Arrington said the formula for reaching a record-breaking 250 mph is “top secret.”

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Smyth County doctor faces child exploitation charges

A 68-year-old doctor, who worked at Smyth County Community Hospital and allegedly had a sexual relationship with an underage female coworker that included exchanging explicit images with the victim, was arrested last week by the FBI.

Michael Kevin Patrick, of Sugar Grove, Va., was charged via federal criminal complaint with receipt of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

A criminal complaint is merely an accusation. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

According to court documents, Juvenile Victim 1 (JV1) began working at Smyth

County Community Hospital in December 2023, when she was 16 years old. Shortly after starting her job, JV1 met Patrick in an elevator. JV1 told Patrick she was 17 years old, in high school, and interested in the medical field. The two began talking regularly at work.

In late 2024, JV1 and Patrick started eating lunch together and communicating regularly via text messages and phone calls. Eventually, Patrick and JV1 engaged in sexual conversations with one another and exchanged nude pictures of themselves via text message.

In addition, Patrick started having a phys-

ical relationship with JV1 at his home and at work. During that span of time, JV1 was 16 years old. Patrick told JV1 that he was "looking forward to" her birthday, that the relationship had to be "secret," and that he "needed" her. After JV1 turned 17, and after Patrick believed JV1 had turned 18, Patrick had sexual intercourse with JV1.

Patrick and JV1 exchanged more than 19,000 text messages with one another. After Patrick's activities were discovered, he deleted his text messages with JV1.

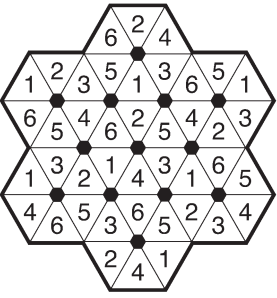
The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Marion Police Department.

Be sure to like the Henry County Enterprise on Facebook

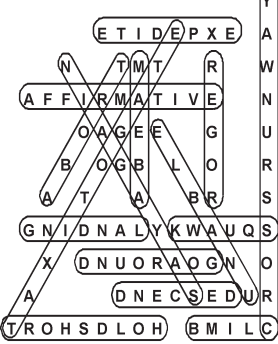
Puzzle Answers!

SNOWFLAKES

solution



WORDS HEARD IN A CONTROL TOWER



SCRAMBLERS

solution

1. Agenda; 2. Cache;
3. Gleam; 4. Rapid

Today's Word

BALONEY



answer



Weekly SUDOKU

Answer

5	6	1	2	7	4	9	8	3
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Super Crossword

Answers

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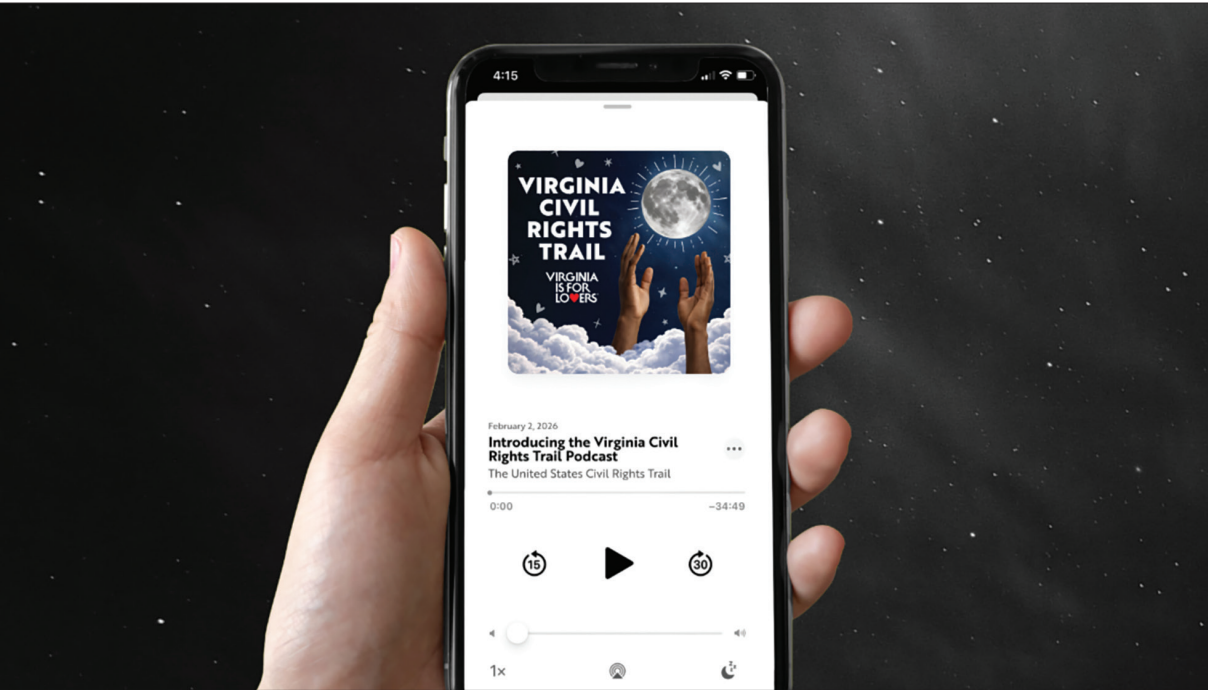
Tourism corporation launches new podcast

The Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) will launch a new Virginia Civil Rights podcast series, highlighting the Commonwealth’s pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement while amplifying the voices of individuals and communities who helped shape the fight for equality. The Virginia-focused episodes are part of the broader U.S. Civil Rights Trail Podcast, a nationally recognized, narrative-style podcast series.

The podcast explores significant moments and movements across the Commonwealth, sharing stories of everyday citizens whose courage and resilience drove lasting change. Through first-hand accounts, expert commentary, and historical context, the series examines key events in Farmville, Fredericksburg, Danville, and Richmond, featuring voices of those who lived the history alongside historians and scholars who continue to study its impact.

“Virginia’s civil rights story is essential to understanding the broader U.S. Civil Rights Movement,” said Rita McClenny, president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. “Through this podcast, we are honoring the individuals who stood up for justice, often at great personal cost, while inviting listeners to engage more deeply with the places and stories that shaped our shared history. These narratives are powerful reminders that Virginia’s communities played a critical role in advancing civil rights in our nation.”

“We were thrilled to have participated in the USCRT Podcast,” said Cainan Townsend, executive director of the Moton Museum. “Being added to the trail in 2017 was a tremendous accomplishment for our institution, as it allows us to share a fuller and more cohesive narrative of the civil rights movement. People often do not associate civil rights history with the Commonwealth of Virginia, but I hope these episodes illuminate these stories and demon-



strate the crucial role Virginia played in the fight for equality.”

Episode Highlights

Episode 1: Students Take a Stand

A teenage Barbara Johns leads a student protest at her segregated school in Farmville—an act of courage that would help change legal history in Virginia and beyond.

Featuring: Joan Johns Cobbs, Claude Jones Cobbs, Skip Griffin, Cainan Townsend, and Gary Flowers

Locations featured: Farmville, Richmond

Episode 2: The Movement Arrives

Stories of individuals who sparked real change through school protests and department store sit-ins.

Featuring: Ambassador Pamela Bridgewater, Lateefah Muhammad, Mary Malone, Clarence Todd, and Dr. Gaila Sims

Location featured: Fredericksburg

Episode 3: The Price of Protest

An in-depth look at Bloody Monday, a public library protest, and organized marches that were met with violent backlash.

Featuring: Karice Luck-Brimmer, Sherman Saunders, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, and Dr. Robert Vinson

Location featured: Danville

How to Listen

The Virginia Civil Rights podcast series is available as part of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail Podcast. Listeners can find the series by searching for “U.S. Civil Rights Trail Podcast” on all major podcast platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, and iHeartRadio.

Visit virginia.org/VACivilRightsTrail for more information.



Dr. Leslie Sheridan in the LightSpring office

Virtual vet launches statewide practice

Dr. Leslie Sheridan has opened LightSpring Virtual Veterinary Care, Virginia’s first privately owned, telehealth-only veterinary practice approved by the Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine.

The clinic operates entirely online, offering 30-minute video appointments for \$75. Each visit includes a treatment plan, with medications shipped directly to clients through the practice’s online pharmacy.

Sheridan, who has more than 30 years of experience in veterinary medicine, said virtual care allows her to reach animal owners who may struggle to access traditional clinics.

“Telehealth allows me to provide quality care while meeting clients and their animals where they are,” she said. “Virtual consultations make veterinary care accessible to more animal owners across Virginia.”

LightSpring launched in June 2025 and serves both small and large animals. Sheridan said telehealth is especially helpful for people with transportation challenges, anxiety about clinic visits, or pets that become stressed in traditional settings. The service also helps fill gaps in rural areas where large-animal veterinarians are scarce.

Sheridan grew up on a 200-acre farm in Tennessee and graduated from the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in 2002. She spent 13 years working at Commonwealth Veterinary Clinic in Fishersville before teaching in Blue Ridge Community College’s Veterinary Technology Program for seven years.

Her experience with online teaching prepared her for virtual veterinary care long before the pandemic.

“Teaching through video calls gave me the skills to connect and communicate through a screen,” Sheridan said.

After working for a national telehealth provider, Sheridan decided to open her own practice, citing frustration with rushed appointments.

“That kind of time crunch doesn’t allow for the personal care I value,” she said.

While virtual care has limits — animals needing X-rays, blood work or surgery still require in-person visits — Sheridan said telehealth offers meaningful support for many everyday health concerns, including skin issues, mobility problems, behavior questions and follow-up care.

To maintain hands-on skills, Sheridan continues practicing in person every other Friday at the Animal Clinic of Verona.

She has also volunteered internationally with Christian Veterinary Mission in Ecuador, Tanzania and Bangladesh, experiences she said deepened her understanding of the bond between people and animals.

As a mother of three, Sheridan designed LightSpring to balance family life with her career while expanding access to veterinary care.

Virginia residents can book appointments at lightspring.vet. Visits are available mornings and evenings, and typically can be scheduled at least an hour in advance. Each consultation includes a written summary and treatment plan.

Spanberger’s “Affordable Virginia Agenda” advances in the General Assembly

Eight of the bills rolled out by Gov. Abigail Spanberger and Virginia legislators in December as part of their “Affordable Virginia Agenda” have already passed through the House of Delegates or Senate — including legislation to protect the long-term supply of affordable housing, improve grid efficiency to lower prices for ratepayers, and expand programs that help Virginians improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

“Virginia families deserve leaders who are fully focused on delivering relief and making the Commonwealth more affordable. That’s why I got to work before day one — together with House and Senate Democratic leadership — to roll out our Affordable Virginia Agenda. My administration is focused on working with our partners in the General Assembly to lower healthcare, housing, and energy costs for Virginians in every community across our Commonwealth,” said Spanberger. “I look forward to signing these bills — and every piece of legislation in our agenda — into law to bring down costs for Virginians.”

In the opening days of her administration, Governor Spanberger is using the full power of her office to make life less expensive for Virginians. On her first day in office, the Governor signed executive orders to start building

a stronger, more affordable future — including by directing her cabinet secretaries and all executive branch agencies to quickly identify ways to reduce costs for families. Governor Spanberger also made clear in her first joint address to the General Assembly that she will work with anyone — from either party — to drive down costs.

A list of the “Affordable Virginia Agenda” legislation passed by the Virginia House of Delegates or Senate includes:

- HB2 (Del. Carr) — Reducing heating and energy costs for Virginians who need it most
- HB3 (Del. LeVere Bolling) — Establishing a Virginia Weatherization Task Force to improve energy efficiency
- HB4 (Del. Bennett-Parker) — Empowering localities to preserve and protect the long-term availability of affordable housing
- HB15 (Del. Price), SB48 (Sen. Rouse) — Improving protections for Virginia renters (passed by House and Senate)
- HB220 (Del. Hope), SB630 (Sen. Carroll Foy) — Eliminating additional fees on healthcare premiums (passed by House and Senate)
- HB 434 (Del. LeVere Bolling) — Optimizing grid utilization to get more out of the current distribution system.

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PUZZLE TIME



FEAR KNIGHT

By: rj johnson

DOUBT? ...OR DARE!

AMN
ARTLEE
♥NOLRE
♥ATHE
PRITMO
SDI
VAAL
HDTIC
♥APL
♥HERVIS
PLIME
♥DERU

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

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

Differences: 1. Tail is smaller. 2. Arms are longer. 3. Pocket is different. 4. Log is different. 5. Hatlap is longer. 6. Rabbit's ear is moved.

MAGIC MAZE

● IN A CONTROL TOWER

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

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. Unlisted clue hint: CLEARED FOR —

Abeam
Abort
Affirmative
Climb

Cross runway
Descend
Expedite
Go around

Hold short
Landing
Roger
Say again

Squawk
Taxi to gate
Unable

Super Crossword

NBA PLAY

ACROSS

1 Relatives of pistachios
8 Mail-related
14 Baio and Turof
20 Wife of Nero
21 Fingers-in-ears syllables
22 Headwear for Mr. Peanut
23 Golden State hoopster who lives for Saturdays and Sundays?
25 Existence
26 Days of yore, archaically
27 Ruling group
28 Schlepped through the entrance
30 Ballesteros of golf
33 Groom, e.g.
35 Exemplary Houston hoopster?
38 San Antonio hoopster scaling a mountain?
42 Suffix with lion
43 Guy in the fam
44 High peak
45 Heavenly
46 Health club
48 Gyro bread
49 Semi fuel

51 Cowardly Denver hoopster?
55 "Mom"
58 actress Jaime
59 Org. against pollution
60 Redding of R&B
61 Event for stunt pilots
64 — — Z (total)
65 Foot part
68 Brooklyn hoopster using a rod and reel?
71 Phoenix hoopster preparing a typeface for printing?
74 Frau's "Oh!"
75 Girl in the fam
76 Name originally proposed for Utah
78 Gas guzzler
79 Reindeer kin
80 Notion, to Fifi
81 Damsels
84 Los Angeles hoopster originally from New England?
90 Train in the pool
92 All exited
93 Mtn. stat

94 Tested for fit
97 "— culpa!"
98 "Stillmatic" rapper
99 Footed vase
101 Sacramento hoopster holding power?
103 Eco-conscious Charlotte hoopster?
107 Livy's lang.
108 Words in an analogy
109 Some nobles' domains
110 Jamaican pop genre
112 Baby wolf
114 Justification
116 Chicago hoopster devoid of spontaneity and emotion?
122 Sock with diamond patterns
123 "Seinfeld" character
124 Shrunken Asian lake
125 Some vowel sounds
126 Phrase structure
127 Lower than

DOWN

1 Mooing beast
2 High card

3 Fr. holy woman
4 Olajuwon of the NBA
5 Daredevil
6 Power sources with spinning sails
7 Tearful
8 Strategy
9 Rowers' tools
10 35mm camera inits.
11 Alteration pro
12 Not silently
13 Huge
14 Directs
15 Buyable apartments
16 Vision-related
17 Have high aspirations
18 Bit of ink art
19 Pigpen
24 Flying needs
29 Collect bit by bit
30 Cousin of a jack mackerel
31 Oval-shaped
32 Spiteful
34 Even one
35 Capital of Bavaria
36 One-named Deco master
37 Exactly
39 Pollen eaters
40 "Get 'em, Spot!"

41 Syllable after "oom"
46 Broiling bar
47 Church seat
48 Club swingers' gp.
50 Meeting period, informally
52 Picked
53 — pot (sinus-cleaning product)
54 "Once — a time ..."
56 Dillydallies
57 Dark half of a Chinese circle
60 Birds — feather
62 News aggregation website
63 Precipitous
64 "— girl!"
65 Giant waves
66 Paid more than
67 Musician Brian
69 Capri, e.g.
70 Adidas rival
72 Pro —
73 Celtic speaker
77 Piece for seven
79 Heart test, for short
80 Ailing
82 Apathetic response

83 Ding- —
84 Light half of a Chinese circle
85 Lab gelatin holders
87 Body of rules
88 Verdi's "— tu"
89 Fix illegally
91 Pudding starch
95 China's Zhou
96 Day, in Peru
99 Open, as a new rug
100 Some French wines
101 Make a new digital image of
102 Dry dog food
104 Class that's a cinch
105 "Blue" singer LeAnn
106 Hockey great Cam
110 Capital of Yemen
111 Lego alternative
113 — Bator
114 Jogged, e.g.
115 History unit
117 Smack
118 Taxi
119 D.C.'s nation
120 Tennis call
121 "— -di-dah!"

Weekly SUDOKU

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

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

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- The cubicle got its name from the Latin "cubiculum," meaning bed chamber.
- When your "inner voice" speaks in your head, it triggers small muscle movements in your larynx.
- Harriet Tubman was the first woman to lead a U.S. military raid.
- Java junkies, take note: The American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 handbook classifies caffeine withdrawal as a mental disorder.
- A newborn blue whale gains about 200 pounds a day during its first year.
- Jim Henson made his first Kermit puppet using his mother's old coat and two halves of a ping-pong ball.
- Sometimes it snows on Mars, but the snowflakes are made out of carbon dioxide, not water. The flakes don't fall, but create a fog-like effect.
- Australia is home to approximately 170 kinds of snakes, including some of the world's most venomous. The good news? Snake bites aren't common and are rarely fatal. One study estimated that snake bites account for just two deaths per year in Australia.
- Scottish band the Bay City Rollers chose their name after sticking a pin in a map of America, which landed on the city Michigan.
- Actor Benedict Cumberbatch is the second cousin, 16 times removed, of King Richard III, whom he portrayed in the 2016 BBC miniseries "The Hollow Crown."
- Members of the Secret Service's Presidential Protection Division always travel with bags of blood in the motorcade in the event a transfusion is needed.
- Wisdom teeth serve no purpose. They're left over from hundreds of thousands of years ago. As early humans' brains grew bigger, mouth space was reduced, crowding out this third set of molars.
- One of Walt Disney's first art jobs was drawing cartoons for a local barber in exchange for haircuts.

SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

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

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

♦ Easy ♦♦ Medium ♦♦♦ Difficult

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SCRAMBLERS

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

King
HICLAP

Inset
ALIYN

Weight
REDBUN

Feint
ODDEG

TODAY'S WORD

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Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

DRAWING THE BALL FROM RIGHT TO LEFT ADDS DISTANCE BY REDUCING HEIGHT AND INCREASING ROLL.

FIRST INGREDIENT IN LEARNING TO SHAPE SHOTS THAT WAY IS KNOWING WHAT YOU MUST ACHIEVE AT IMPACT.

THE DRAW IS PRODUCED BY THE CLUBHEAD TRAVELING INTO THE BALL FROM IN TO OUT ACROSS THE TARGET LINE, WITH THE FACE SLIGHTLY CLOSED TO THAT SWING PATH.

SO, BE SURE TO SET UP AND SWING IN A WAY THAT PROMOTES THOSE TWO FACTORS WHEN YOU SEEK THE "STRONG" SHAPE.

Snow can play helpful role in garden soil enrichment and root insulation

Beneath the ice-glazed blanket of snow testing Virginians’ patience is the promise of a verdant spring. While frozen conditions disrupt life on the street level, plants and grasses are insulated from extreme cold as slow-melting snow provides steady moisture and atmospheric nutrients. Depending on conditions, soil-enriching elements like nitrogen and phosphorus attach to snowflakes falling through the atmosphere, explained Scot Ferguson, a Virginia Cooperative Extension agent in Hanover County.

Homeowners can be intentional in utilizing “the poor man’s fertilizer.” When clearing snow onto garden beds and mulched areas, a tiresome chore becomes a down payment for spring. Moving snow to landscaped and natural areas can introduce “a little bump of nitrogen,” he said. “You’d want to relocate snow along the drip line of the shrub or tree, kind of like you would with mulch.” As snow melts, fertilizing nutrients are slowly released into the soil. And come spring thaw, the gradual melt is a steady source of moisture for roots. “Plants are probably not getting super waterlogged, and you’re not dealing with runoff,” Ferguson said. “They will be quite hydrated and trying to transpire!” Landowners in rural Virginia man-

aging pasture and grassland typically spend between \$4 and \$10 per acre for professional nutrient management planning. Ferguson said they welcome the gentle deposit of nutrients resulting from snowfall. “And for bigger landowners with cover crop programs, that’s where they find the bang for their buck,” he said. Native plant species are adapted to Virginia’s climate, but some ornamentals like boxwood or tender perennials can sustain cellular damage from a quick-moving cold front. Even a modest layer of snow protects soil from extreme temperature fluctuations, reported North Carolina Cooperative Extension. This insulating effect stabilizes soil temperatures, preventing harm to plant roots. “And if it’s warm enough under there, the snow forms an insulating blanket, and grass will certainly grow,” Ferguson said. “Snow still allows sunlight to penetrate its surface. If the plant can move water, if the ground isn’t frozen, then plants and grass can probably photosynthesize!” Though six more weeks of winter weather is predicted, temperatures can fluctuate. “Your flowering plants may come into bloom when we have warm weather,” said Mark Viette, retired host of In the Garden, a video series presented by Virginia Farm Bureau



Federation. Milder days may be followed by “a real cold spell.” He advised protecting flowering plants with a sheet or soft cover, warmed with an incandescent lamp rated for outdoor use.

Student Briefs

Wilson named to ETSU Gatton College of Pharmacy fall 2025 dean’s list
Christian Wilson, of Axton, was named to the fall 2025 dean’s list at East Tennessee State University Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy. Wilson is among more than 100 students named to the college’s fall 2025 dean’s list. To receive this honor, students from Gatton College of Pharmacy must successfully complete a minimum of 12 hours and earn a grade point average of at least 3.5 or above with no grade below a B-.

Bennett named to the ETSU fall 2025 dean’s list

Ashlyn Bennett, of Martinsville, was named to the East Tennessee State University fall 2025 dean’s list. Bennett is among more than 4,700 students named to the fall 2025 dean’s list. To receive this hon-

or, undergraduate students must pass a minimum of 12 credits (excluding audits, incompletes, repeats and pass/fail) with no grade below B- in any course taken, and a grade point average of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale.

LEGAL

ORDER OF PUBLICATION Case No. CJ 26-100
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
VA. CODE § 8.01-316
HENRY COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT
Commonwealth of Virginia, *in re* Adalynn Fisher
Henry - Martinsville DSS v. Unknown father of Adalynn Fisher
The object of this suit is to:
Terminate the residual parental rights of the unknown father of Adalynn Fisher, a minor child born to Sierra McChesney on March 16, 2016. Said termination pursuant to VA Code Sec. 16.1-283.
It is ORDERED that the defendant appear at the above-named court and protect his interests on or before May 21, 2026 at 10:30 a.m.
2/3/2026
Katharine Selgado
[X] CLERK [] JUDGE

LEGAL

- The Commissioner of the Revenue’s Office announces Business License renewal forms are due by March 2. There is a penalty for late filing.
- Return of Machinery/Tools forms are due by April 1.
- Elderly/Disabled Real Estate Tax Relief Applications are due by May 1.
- Business Personal Property Tangible forms are due by April 1. Please send in a list of equipment that you use to operate your business. You may mail your forms to PO Box 1077, Collinsville, VA 24078 or put your forms in the yellow box or bring your forms to the Commissioner of the Revenue’s Office located at the Henry County Administration Building at 3300 Kings Mountain Road, Martinsville, VA 24112. You may fax your forms to 276-634-4521. Please contact our office at 276-634-4690 if you have any questions.

LEGAL

**COUNTY OF HENRY
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**
Pursuant to Section 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia, a public hearing has been scheduled for **February 25, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.** in the Summerlin Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, Kings Mountain Rd, Collinsville, Virginia. The purpose of this public hearing is to receive citizen input into the possible issuance of a Special Use Permit for the following case.
Case S-26-01 Richard Raione
A request for a Special Use Permit was received under Section 21-302 of the Henry County Zoning Ordinance to allow for the establishment of a private campground facility to accommodate up to 4 sites. The property is located at 681 Oak Level Rd in the Reed Creek District, is zoned Agricultural District A-1, as shown on Tax Map 28.4(102)/P. The use of the property would comprise approximately 0.24-acre of the 25.9-acre lot. The application for this request may be viewed in the Department of Planning, Zoning & Inspection between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.
Lee H. Clark, AICP
Director of Planning, Zoning & Inspection

LEGAL

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
CITY OF MARTINSVILLE**
Notice is hereby given in accordance with Virginia Code Section 15.2-2204 that the City Council of the City of Martinsville, Virginia, will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 7:00 PM in the City Council Chambers in the Municipal Building, 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville, Virginia, to consider the following proposed amendments to the City’s Zoning Ordinance to remove height restrictions from the zoning ordinance. As a result of the proposed amendments, height requirements of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code would continue to apply.
The proposed amendments would apply to the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance.
• Section I. Administration and Enforcement;
• Section III. General Provisions;
• Section IV. Site Plan Regulations;
• Section V. Nonconformity;
• Section IX. R-E Estate Residential District;
• Section X. R-N Neighborhood Residential District;
• Section XI. R-C City Residential District;
• Section XII. R-T Residential Transitional District;
• Section XIII. C-N Neighborhood Commercial District;
• Section XIV. C-UB Uptown Business District;
• Section XV. C-C Corridor Commercial District;
• Section XVI. ED-MA Economic Development District - Medical and Academic;
• Section XVII. ED-G Economic Development District - General;
• Section XVIII. ED-I Economic Development District - Intensive;
• Section XIX. TND - 0 Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District;
• Section XX. EC-0 Entrance Corridor Overlay District;
• Section XXIII. Off Street Parking and Loading.
Full documents of the proposed Zoning Text Amendment are available for inspection at the City Offices, 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville, Virginia, during regular business hours.
Any person desiring to express his or her views with respect to the proposed text amendment is welcomed appear at the aforesaid time and place.

LEGAL

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
Pursuant to Virginia Code §§ 15.2-1800 and 15.2-1813, the Martinsville City Council will hold a public hearing on February 24, 2026, at 7:00 PM in Council Chambers of the Martinsville City Municipal Building, 55 West Church Street, Martinsville, Virginia 24112. The purpose of the public hearing shall be to hear public comment regarding the following ordinance:
**ORDINANCE NO. 2026-3
AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CITY BUDGET
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026**
WHEREAS, in accordance with the provisions of §§ 15.2-2507 and 15.2-1427 of the Code of Virginia (1959), as amended, the Martinsville City Council has duly advertised and conducted a public hearing on **February 24, 2026**, at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at the Martinsville Municipal Building to consider amendments to the City’s budget for Fiscal Year 202-2026; and
WHEREAS, the City council has determined that it is necessary to amend the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 budget to properly account for additional revenues, required local matching funds, and corresponding expenditures;
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MARTINSVILLE, VIRGINIA, that the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 budget be, and hereby is, amended as follows:
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 General Fund Capital revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$60,000 to recognize funds received through the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) Hazard Mitigation Grant.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 General Fund Capital Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Tools and Equipment expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$60,000.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 General Fund Sale of Surplus revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$8,390.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department Telecommunications expenditure budget be and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$8,390.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$1,100 to recognize Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funds recorded as DCJS Miscellaneous revenue.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department Investigative Supplies expenditure budget be and hereby is, increased by \$1,100.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$18,726 to recognize funds awarded through the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Police Traffic Services Grant.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department Radar Units expenditure budget be, and here by is, increased in the amount of \$2,886.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Police Department Overtime expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$15,840.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Schools’ “Other State Funds” revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$44,207 to recognize state funds received through the School Security Officer Grant, with a Local Match of \$12,680, for a total award of \$56,887.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 School Security Services - Salaries and Wages expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$40,002.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 School Social Security Payments expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$2,480.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 School Security Services - Medicare (FICA) expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$580.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 School Security Services - Hybrid VRS Professional Rate expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$1,145.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Fire Department CIP - State Fire Programs Fund revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$55,040 to recognize funds awarded through the PPE Grant Program.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Fire Department Safety Supplies and Equipment expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$55,040.
• That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Grant ST - Library of Virginia revenue budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$19,860 to recognize funds awarded through the Library of Virginia Indexing Grant.
- That the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Clerk of Court - General Professional Services expenditure budget be, and hereby is, increased in the amount of \$19,860 for indexing and related professional services.
That funds are hereby appropriated in accordance with the above-described budget amendments. This ordinance shall take effect immediately upon adoption.
The purpose of the public hearing will be to receive public comment on the proposed ordinance. Those seeking further information are invited to contact the City Manager’s office, 55 West Church Street, Martinsville, Virginia 24112, Telephone: 276-403-5000

LEGAL

Notice of Public Hearing
The City of Martinsville Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on February 18, 2026, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at the City of Martinsville Municipal Building located at 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville, VA, 24112, for those parties in interest to the following request:
1) REQUEST for REZONE - The City of Martinsville is requesting to rezone approximately thirty-nine (39) parcels located along Chatham Heights Road and Bob Gregory Street from C-C, Commercial Corridor District, and R-N, Neighborhood Residential District, to R-T, Residential Transitional District to correct existing non-conforming uses and to implement best zoning practices. The rezoning of parcels requires review by the Martinsville Planning Commission and review and approval of Martinsville City Council.
Questions or comments regarding this matter can be directed in writing to Hannah Powell at hpowell@martinsvilleva.gov.
Notice Submitted By:
Hannah L. Powell, CZA
Community Development Specialist

LEGAL

**HENRY COUNTY PUBLIC NOTICE
INTENT TO REMOVE AN UNSAFE STRUCTURE**
RECORD OWNER: Yo Daddy’s Properties, LLC
Pursuant to Section 6-300 of the Henry County Code, NOTICE is hereby given that the owner shall remove the structure which might endanger the public health or safety of other residents of the County on or before thirty (30) days following this publication and failure to do so will result in the County having to remove the structure and the cost or expense shall be charged to an paid by the owner and collected as taxes are collected.
PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION - Unsafe structure
OWNER - Landowner: Yo Daddy’s Properties, LLC
PROPERTY LOCATION AND TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER - 1460 Carver Rd - Ridgeway District
Henry County, Virginia
Tax Map: 51.6(000)000/104J,
Account Number - 006920002
County of Henry
Charles Campbell
Chief Building Inspector
Telephone (276) 634-4615

LEGAL

**HENRY COUNTY PUBLIC NOTICE
INTENT TO REMOVE AN UNSAFE STRUCTURE**
RECORD OWNER: Yo Daddy’s Properties, LLC
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PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION - Unsafe structure
OWNER - Landowner: Yo Daddy’s Properties, LLC
PROPERTY LOCATION AND TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER - 1460 Carver Rd - Horsepasture District
Henry County, Virginia
Tax Map: 50.2(000)000/114 ,
Account Number - 185560000
County of Henry
Charles Campbell
Chief Building Inspector
Telephone (276) 634-4615

Social Security as a Child

By Russell Gloor

Obviously, minor children normally aren't working and contributing to the Social Security program toward their future retirement, but that doesn't mean Social Security isn't there to protect them.

In real life, there are two main situations where minor children can collect Social Security benefits based upon a parent's earnings record – 1) if the parent is living and collecting their personal Social Security retirement (or disability) benefit, or 2) if a parent is deceased and was eligible for Social Security benefits.

This is a real life stories about minor children who are the surviving dependents of a parent entitled to (but not necessarily collecting) Social Security retirement or disability benefits.

Minor Child Benefits from a Deceased Parent: “Three young sisters”

Cheryl and Bernie had three little girls – Jennifer (8); Rebecca (6); and Danielle (4). Bernie was a corrections officer, and Cheryl was an Administrative Assistant for a prestigious local law firm. But one day while battling a bad cold, Cheryl developed a severe, debilitating headache and went to the local hospital Emergency Room for treatment. Turned out Cheryl had bacterial meningitis, an infection which caused her brain to swell, putting her into a deep coma from which she never recovered. Cheryl succumbed several days later at only 35 years of age, leaving behind a devastated family, including her three young daughters.

The trauma was obviously severe for Cheryl's entire family, but through the dark cloud of the family's loss, Social Security was there. Although Cheryl had been in the workforce only about a dozen years, she had been contributing to Social Security from her earnings during

those years, thus entitling her surviving minor children to Social Security benefits from Cheryl's earnings record.

As Cheryl's surviving spouse, Bernie contacted the Social Security Administration and applied for surviving minor child benefits for each of his girls, which were readily approved after Bernie provided Cheryl's death certificate and his daughters' Social Security Numbers to the Agency. And though it could never make up for the loss of their mother, each of Cheryl's daughters shared a portion of the Social Security benefit Cheryl had earned up to the day she died.

How much did each of Cheryl's children get? Well, the maximum benefit available to a surviving minor child is 75% of the deceased parent's full entitlement, but whenever there are multiple dependents the Family Maximum applies.[1] Each of Cheryl's children received an equal portion of Cheryl's personal Family Maximum. And, although each received less than 75% of Cheryl's earned entitlement, each child collected their share until they were 18 years of age (thus no longer minors).[2]

Who Received the children's Social Security?

Bernie was appointed Representative Payee for each of his girls and was obligated to use funds received only for the girls' behalf, which Bernie chose to do by creating a college (“529 plan”) savings fund for each girl into which each child's Social Security benefits were deposited.

Jennifer's minor child benefits stopped when she became 18 and, at that time, Cheryl's Family Maximum was shared only by Rebecca and Danielle (making each of their payments higher). And when Rebecca became 18, Danielle re-

ceived her full 75% of Cheryl's earned entitlement. Monies accumulated over the years were saved and used to help fund each girl's college tuition.

As an aside, Bernie – still in his late 30s – was technically entitled to Social Security “child in care surviving spouse benefits” but could not collect that benefit because he continued to work full-time. Further, Bernie claiming child-in-care surviving spousal benefits would have only detracted from the amount his daughters could collect because the total amount of benefits paid by Social Security were limited by the Family Maximum.

The rest of the story

Although SS benefits were paid to Bernie as Representative Payee, that additional money did not impact Bernie's income tax obligation. The Social Security money was used for the children's benefit (even saving it counts), so it is not taxable by the IRS.

[1] The “Family Maximum restricts how much can be paid on one parent's SS record.

[2] Minor children can collect benefits until they are 18 years of age, or up to 19 if they are still in High School.

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Former Danville officer appointed Chief Deputy Director of VADOC

Gov. Abigail Spanberger appointed Jermiah “Jerry” Fitz as the Chief Deputy Director of the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC), effective February 3.

“I want to thank Governor Spanberger for the chance to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia and work alongside Director Walters as we move the agency forward,” said Chief Deputy Director Fitz. “The field of corrections sees both the best times and the most challenging times for the people we encounter. Long-lasting public safety depends upon our agency doing the right things for the right reasons.”

Fitz brings nearly 30 years of experience in corrections and public safety to this role, hav-

ing served in a variety of leadership positions throughout the agency.

He began his career in 1997 at District #14 in Danville, Virginia as a Surveillance Officer, and rose to the rank of Chief Probation Officer in Chesterfield County in 2013, later serving in Henrico County. Fitz has led VADOC's Central Region as Regional Administrator for Community Corrections and later the Eastern Region as Regional Administrator for Institutions. His experience also includes serving as the agency's Legislative Liaison, Corrections Operations Administrator, and most recently, Deputy Director of Community Corrections since March 2025. Fitz earned his B.S. in Criminal Justice from Old Dominion University.

Virginia is a top state for wildlife-vehicle collisions, and this bill could help reduce them

By Elle Cota

Capital News Service

Virginia, which ranks among the top 10 states for wildlife-vehicle collisions, could soon have a voluntary grant fund for wildlife corridors that better protect drivers and animals.

Del. Shelly Simonds, D-Newport News, introduced House Bill 597 this legislative session, to create a nonreverting grant fund in the state treasury, supported by voluntary contributions, to be used for wildlife corridor and wildlife crossing projects.

Because the fund is nonreverting, any deposited money would remain available across fiscal years, including the use of voluntary contributions and grants rather than general tax increases.

If passed, the director of the Department of Wildlife Resources will administer the fund in collaboration with the state's Transportation, Conservation and Recreation, and Forestry departments. Eligible applicants would include state agencies, local governments, metropolitan planning and nonprofit organizations, regional transportation authorities, Indian tribes and academic institutions.

“There's already this wildlife corridor action plan,” Simonds said. “Now, the question is having some funding that's stable to try to implement some of these goals.”

The fund could also receive voluntary contributions through the Department of Motor Vehicles and individual state income tax checkoffs, as well as donations and grants and any future appropriated funds.

The DMV would provide an electronic donation option and clearly state contributions are optional. The income tax checkoff would follow existing rules for entities entitled to voluntary contributions, including a \$10,000 minimum contribution over three years.

“It's a really appropriate opportunity for people to be able to donate to a fund when they're renewing their driver's license or doing operations at the DMV,” Simonds said.

Simonds added the proposal supports collaboration between agencies and data-sharing to help local-level planning, while also training staff on the cost and safety benefits of wildlife crossings.

“Sometimes moving the needle on issues like this takes time, but we are here,” Simonds said. “We are all committed to doing this.”

Improved data collection helps determine where wildlife crossings are most effective, as many collisions go unreported, said Connor Ransom, conservation associate for Environment Virginia, the state chapter for a national organization.

Ransom suggested expanding tracking systems statewide, like VDOT's carcass removal data, to provide a clearer picture and improve planning.

A dedicated fund could help Virginia leverage federal matching grants for wildlife crossing projects, allowing state contributions to be paired with federal dollars and maximizing the impact of voluntary donations without requiring large allocations from the state budget, Ransom said.

Virginia already has wildlife crossing proj-

State commits \$14.5 million annually to boost college internships

Virginia has launched a new statewide program aimed at expanding paid internship opportunities for college students while helping employers build a future workforce.

The initiative, called InternshipsVA, will provide guidance, grants and recruitment support to Virginia businesses interested in creating paid internships. The state has committed \$14.5 million annually to fund the program.

InternshipsVA is part of a broader effort to attract and retain workers in Virginia. Funded through the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund and Program, it offers financial incentives and technical assistance to employers, particularly small and mid-sized businesses.

Participating employers may qualify for grants covering up to 50% of undergraduate interns' wages. The program also provides regional internship managers to assist with program design and recruiting, free internship postings through a partnership with Handshake, and training resources for employers.

Gov. Abigail Spanberger announced the program in Richmond alongside leaders from the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Business Higher Education Council and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

“Virginia's students need more hands-on opportunities to connect with real-world careers,” Spanberger said, adding that the program is designed to help students gain experience before graduation while encouraging them to stay in the state for work.

Employers seeking more information about InternshipsVA can visit vedp.org/internshipsva.

ects near the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Chesapeake, under the Fairfax County Parkway at Fort Belvoir, and on Interstate Highway 64 west of Charlottesville, where fencing helps guide animals to underpasses.

Simonds also introduced HB 596, which focused on implementation rather than funding. The bill directed the secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, in coordination with the secretary of Transportation, to convene an interagency group to advance priorities in the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. HB 596 did not advance out of the House rules studies subcommittee. A budget proposal of \$100,000 was connected to the bill.

HB 597 follows earlier wildlife corridor legislation by Sen. Dave Marsden, D-Fairfax. Measures establishing the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan in 2020 and requiring agencies to incorporate corridors into planning in 2021 were enacted, while similar grant fund proposals in 2024 and 2025 did not advance.

HB 597 was assigned on Jan. 20 to the Appropriations subcommittee on Commerce, Agriculture and Natural Resources, where it remains under consideration.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Communication. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

The 9th House

(cont. from page 1)



Refreshments were on display during the ribbon-cutting celebration for The 9th House. House and Be Wicked Diner, her restaurant located down the street. “My husband is going to be tag-teaming with me, and I have my right hand here. She’ll be managing with me on the weekends,

and then I’ll be here pretty much every day. This is going to be like our home space. There are offices in the back and stuff, and there’s a nice little room that we can set up so our kids can homeschool here. And it’s only one block



The 9th House offers curated herbs, clothing, and home goods at its new Uptown location. down, so it works.” Kitzmiller said the boutique is meant to serve local shoppers who might otherwise travel out of town. “I would say it’s for the seeker at home. So instead of traveling to places like Greensboro and Roanoke, you can stay here in Uptown and come check it out. And then while you’re here, check out

all the other boutiques here because there are a lot of us.” “I look forward to what this store here is going to bring, the other stores have been a success, and I’m just appreciative to have them if they have accomplices,” Kitzmiller said. “We’re going to be 11 to 5, and currently we’re going to be every day until we figure out what people like.”

Stay safe on snow- and ice-covered roads

The recent winter storms blanketing much of Virginia in snow and ice created dangerous road conditions for drivers. While the snow, sleet and freezing rain ended, hazardous road conditions lingered as low temperatures kept roadways icy and slowed clean-up efforts. According to Virginia State Police, troopers responded to over 500 crashes during and after the snowstorm a week ago. “We certainly see a spike in claims during wintry weather,” said John Agee, Virginia Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co.’s director of casualty claims. In addition to broken-down vehicles, “accidents involving slick conditions flood our inboxes.” Drivers are urged to stay off roadways until they’re cleared, Agee said. But if traveling is unavoidable, motorists should first ensure their vehicles are clear of snow and ice, especially windows, headlights, mirrors and the vehicle roof. “You need to see clearly when driving,” Agee said. “And debris should not fly off your vehicle, which may put someone else in a hazardous situation.”

Always slow down and increase following distance so there’s time to react to hazards or stop. And if encountering any snowplows, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration advises staying far behind and using caution if passing. Plows often drive slow, make wide turns, overlap lanes and exit roadways frequently. “Be careful of those around you,” Agee added. “If a vehicle is going faster than they should, give them space and just let them go! Keep an eye out for disabled vehicles on and alongside roads, large trucks, farm equipment and pedestrians.” If you’re stopped or break down during a winter weather emergency, NHTSA urges staying with your vehicle. Don’t overexert yourself and let your car be seen with bright markers on the antenna or windows, and keep the interior dome light on. Risk of carbon monoxide poisoning increases during winter weather, so ensure your exhaust pipe is clear of snow, and only run your car occasionally—just enough to stay warm. Don’t run the car for long periods with the windows up or in an enclosed space.



“If you find yourself in an accident, check yourself and others for injuries,” Agee added. “Move your vehicle off the road if you’re able, turn on your hazard lights to alert others of the dangerous situation, and call 911 for help.” Have a winter emergency kit in your car with blankets, phone charger, water, food, medications, flashlights and alert devices like

flares. Keep jumper cables, a snow shovel, broom, ice scraper and sand or kitty litter. Finally, check in with your insurance agent to make sure your car’s coverage is up to date before venturing out. For more on safe winter driving and preparing your vehicle for icy conditions, visit [nhtsa.gov](https://www.nhtsa.gov) and [exchange.aaa.com](https://www.exchange.aaa.com).

Families swarm Science Saturday: Bug Day at the museum



Preserved insects and specimens were displayed throughout the museum during Bug Day.

By Jessica Dillon After weeks of snow and ice, families turned out Feb. 7 for Bug Day at the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH), a hands-on event highlighting insects, their role in the environment, and ways residents can protect habitats at home. The indoor program featured educational displays, preserved specimens and interactive activities de-

signed especially for children. “It’s been great. Virginia’s Museum of Natural History has festivals yearly. We do basically one every quarter,” said research technician Marshall Boyd. “This was kind of a special science Bug Day. So, it’s not planned to be a full-run festival, but it has actually kind of turned into one of those, where we had at least a few hundred.”



Visitors came from Martinsville, Henry County and surrounding areas. Boyd said recent winter weather may have helped boost attendance. “We’ve got everything from our entire entomology or recent invertebrate staff that is sharing all of our recent collection specimens that are from Paraguay, from Texas, Vietnam, new things that are

coming into the museum, our ooh and ah specimens, so like amorphous butterflies, they are beautiful blue coloration,” Boyd said. The museum’s education department offered microscope stations and close-up looks at insects, along with discussions on dung beetles and backyard conservation. “We have our education department (See Bug Day p. 12)

THANK YOU FOR READING

Bug Day

(cont. from page 11)

ment that’s talking about things that you can look into the microscope, getting to see bugs up nice and close ... but also things you can do in your own backyard,” Boyd said.

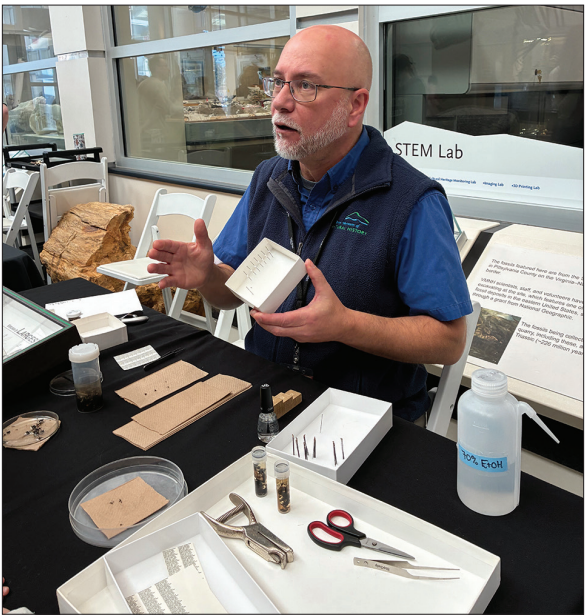
Representatives from Philpott Lake and Martinsville’s Tree Board also attended, sharing information on preserving natural habitats by leaving fallen leaves and logs in place.

Attendees circulated through tables set up throughout the main room.

“This one was less logistically planned, and we kind of did a set of tables — I call it buffet style — where it’s kind of table off table off table,” Boyd said. “So, people, unfortunately, end up kind of queuing a little bit more.”

Boyd said engaging children is a key goal of museum events.

“We try to make sure that we always have plenty of things for the kids to do and kind of fun things that pull them into learning about, and get your hands on stuff,” he said. “Those kids



Museum Director Joe Kieper demonstrates how to pin insects during Bug Day at the Virginia Museum of Natural History.



A preserved butterfly collection showcases the wide variety of species on display.

are very tactile and want to see things, and then kind of give the information that we know as the re-

search impression staff see, things from behind the scenes that people don’t usually see.”

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