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Radford state senator succumbs to COVID-19

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State Senator Augustus Benton (Ben) Chafin, Jr., died on New Year's Day from COVID-19 complications.

Chafin, of Russell County, served the City of Radford as



state senator of the 38th district. A Republican, he was elected to the Virginia State Senate in 2014 as previously the 4th District delegate in the Virginia House of Delegates.

In a statement following Chafin's death, Governor Ralph Northam recalled him as a "kind and gracious man."

"With the passing of Senator Ben Chafin, Southwest Virginia has lost a strong advocate—and we have all lost a good man," said Northam. "I knew Ben as a lawmaker, an attorney, a banker, and a farmer raising beef cattle in Moccasin Valley, working the land just as generations of his family had done before him. He loved the outdoors, and he loved serving people even more. He pushed hard to bring jobs and investment to his district, and I will always be grateful for his courageous vote to expand health care for people who need it."

"Pam and I are praying for Lora and their children, and I have ordered the Virginia state flag to be lowered immediately over the state capitol in his honor and to remain at half-staff until sunset on the day of his interment," Northam continued. "This is sad news to begin a new year with the loss of a kind and gracious man. May we all recommit to taking extra steps to care for one another."

Republican Party of Virginia Chairman Richard L. Anderson also issued a statement.

"Virginians everywhere are saddened tonight by the news of the passing of a great public servant, Senator A. Benton Chafin, Jr.," said Anderson. "Ben was a man for all seasons and was broadly respected throughout Southwest Virginia and across the Commonwealth of Virginia."

See Chafin, page 5

New laws in Virginia went into effect Friday

With the start of the new year, several new Virginia state laws went into effect.

1. Surprise Medical Billing

Patients enrolled in managed care health plans previously could receive medical bills for more than their plan's cost-sharing amounts directly from out-of-network medical service providers. Under the new law, state employees and those enrolled in a healthcare.gov plan will be notified by the out-of-network provider about how the patient is protected, when surprise billing may come into effect, and what to do if the patient is billed too much.

2. Worker Misclassification

A new state law will further define the difference between independent contractors and employees to keep employers from misclassifying workers, which can lead to under-compensation and other unfair employment practices.

3. Undocumented Immigrant Driver Privilege Cards

People in Virginia who cannot provide proof of legal residency will be able to obtain a driver privilege card. This new law will help keep the commonwealth's roads safer and break down barriers to employment and education that previously unfairly held back undocumented communities.

4. License Suspension for Nonpayment

The DMV can no longer suspend a person's driver's license for failing

to pay fines or court costs associated with a conviction or violation of law. The law also requires the department to reinstate any licenses previously suspended. Previous to this law, licenses suspended for nonpayment unfairly targeted those without the means to pay their fines, making it harder for certain populations to get to work or school safely and legally.

5. Distracted Driving

Holding a device while driving on a highway in Virginia is now prohibited with a potential fine of \$125 for a first offense and up to \$250 for subsequent offenses. Previously, holding a device was prohibited only in active construction zones, which now carries a mandatory fine of \$250.

6. Reckless Driving Threshold

The new reckless driving threshold for speeding is raised from 80 mph to 85 mph, complying with the already-existing law of 20+ mph above the speed limit constituting reckless driving. There are no speed limits above 75 mph in Virginia, so the law is now equal. However, there will still be a \$100 increase to any speeding ticket issued for speeds between 80 and 85 mph.

7. Photo Speed Monitoring

Speeding by more than 10 mph in active construction zones and school zones may now be subject to a speed camera that can be implemented by cities and counties. Tickets will be issued by mail.

Library kicks off 2021 with reading challenge

RADFORD - The Radford Public Library has launched a Radford Reads Reading Challenge for 2021, encouraging people to expand their horizons and read more.

The library recently asked for submissions from patrons for what types of reading challenges should make the list.

"You all had so many great ideas for reading challenges," reads the library's most recent electronic newsletter. "It was hard to pick, but we narrowed it down. We challenge you to read at least 12 books this year and to broaden your horizons by reading books that meet these criteria (See accompanying graphic to today's story.) You can read them in whatever order you like, but we'll have recommendations each month to keep you full of ideas."

"You may have noticed a distinct theme to our recent posts, 'New Year, New Genre,' and that's the first challenge on our list: Read a book outside of your usual genre."

Other challenges include reading a book by a local author, one with at least five words in the title and "a book you were supposed to read in school, but didn't."

- Heather Bell

- Read a book outside of your usual genre
- Read a book with an animal on the cover
- Read a biography of someone you admire
- Read a book of short stories
- Read a book published in the last 5 years
- Read a book by a local author
- Read a book with at least 5 words in the title
- Read a book you were supposed to have read in school
- Read an Audiobook or Graphic Novel (check out Hoopla!)
- Read a book about another culture or a translated book
- Read a Juvenile Fiction or YA novel
- Read a book by a Nobel Prize winner

Survey: NRV manufacturers persevere through pandemic, sector outlook positive

NEW RIVER VALLEY, VA - In late 2020, Onward New River Valley conducted a survey of manufacturing companies in Virginia's New River Valley that revealed several insights into the region's industry.

Survey responses were collected during a two-week period. The survey was sent to 35 manufacturers in Virginia's New River Valley (NRV) with 48% responding.

The goal of the Industry Competitiveness Survey was to better understand how local manufacturing companies were operating and adapting

in the wake of COVID-19. The survey was intended to identify common challenges among local companies and expose best practices that would support the overall competitiveness and continued growth of the local manufacturing industry.

Among the insights gained through the survey:

Overall, manufacturers in the NRV have persevered through the COVID-19 pandemic with varying impacts on their operations. The vast majority (76%) of respondents reported operating at or above pre-

pandemic capacity, while 24% indicated operating at about half capacity. Roughly half of respondents indicated a decrease in their sales pipeline (43%) and overall revenue (52%).

Survey respondents seemed to signal that their supply chains had only been moderately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Less than one-third of respondents reported increased costs for either inputs/raw materials (29%) or freight (27%). Almost half of respondents reported experiencing an increase in supplier lead times (48%) and a reduction in the availability of inputs/raw materials (43%).

However, these changes in the supply chain do not seem to be affecting production levels for NRV manufacturers. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported stable or increasing production levels.

Employment through manufacturing companies in the NRV has remained mostly stable during the pandemic. The majority (62%) of respondents said their number of employees remained the same or increased since the beginning of the pandemic. Of the 38% of respondents that reported a reduction in employees since the beginning of the pandemic, the majority (63%) anticipated rehiring eliminated positions

See Survey, page 5

Women charged in Fairlawn robbery

Pulaski County authorities have announced charges against two women, one from Radford, in connection with a robbery that took place at a Fairlawn apartment complex on December 23.

Breana N. Thompson, 26, of Radford and 21-year-old Ariela D. Alderman, of Christiansburg, face two counts of robbery and one count each of burglary, vandalism and assault.

According to reports, Alderman was arrested on Christmas Eve, and Thompson was taken

into custody on December 26. The incident apparently took place at a residence on Schooler Hill Drive.

Thompson is also charged with stalking and identity fraud for an incident in November. It is not known if the earlier charges are connected to the recent ones.

The women are being held without bond at the New River Valley Regional Jail in Dublin. An April 19 preliminary hearing is scheduled in Pulaski County General District Court.

News Brief: Arrest made in Blacksburg explosives threat

As of Sunday evening, Jan. 3, a suspect who made delusional statements regarding explosive devices in the 2100 block of N. Main St. in Blacksburg had been taken into custody and the road had been reopened.

Blacksburg police responded to the scene of the threats shortly after 11 a.m. Sunday. As officers arrived, the suspect fled on foot. A perimeter was established with assistance from officers from the Virginia Tech Police Department, the Christiansburg Police Department,

the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, and the Virginia State Police.

Investigators from the Virginia State Police Explosives Unit also responded to the scene and checked out the subject's vehicle and the surrounding area.

About two hours after he fled the scene, the subject was taken into custody. Early Sunday evening, officers determined the area was safe and North Main Street was reopened to traffic.

The investigation is ongoing.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, Jan. 6: Monday, Jan. 11:

Talking About Books: Virtual Meeting
Christiansburg Library, 11 a.m. - noon. Discussing American Dirt by Jeanine Cummins, virtually.

STEM Club
Join the Christiansburg Public Library for a virtual STEM club; 1- 2 p.m. Please pick up the activity materials by Saturday, Jan. 9. Email shodges@mflr.org for information on the library's Go-To Meeting.

Thursday, Jan. 7:

Chamber of Commerce Eggs & Issues
Panel discussion with local law enforcement via Zoom, 8 - 9 a.m.

American Legion meeting
Harvey-Howe-Carper Post 30 will meet at 7 p.m. at the VFW Post Home on 102 Watts St. in Radford. In the event of heavy snowfall or ice, the meeting will be canceled. For further information, please contact 250-2283 or 239-9864.

Tuesday, Jan. 12:

Talking About Books
Join the Blacksburg Public Library for a discussion of "Harriet Tubman, Secret Agent" by Thomas Allen; 11 a.m. - noon. Call ahead to reserve a copy and learn more.

Sons of Confederate Veterans meeting
Stuart Horse Artillery Camp 1784 will meet at 7 p.m. at Aly's Family Italian Restaurant on 3204 Riner Road. Jonathan McPeak will present the "History of

the 24th Virginia Infantry Regiment." Members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy are also invited to attend. For further information, please call 320-4315 or 239-9864.

Talking About Books
Join the Christiansburg Public Library virtually for a book talk with Monica Rodden about her first book, "Monsters Among Us" 7 - 8 p.m. Email sullivan@mflr.org for a link to the event.

Wednesday, Jan. 13:

Talking About Books
Christiansburg Library discussing "Red at the Bone" by Jacqueline Woodson, virtually; 11 a.m. - noon.

Thursday, Jan. 14:

Virtual Knitting Group
Join Blacksburg Library for a

demonstration of easy knitting techniques in a Knitting 101 virtual program; 5 - 6 p.m. The perfect craft for a long winter, knitting is based on only two stitches. Knitting 101 will cover purl, knit, and casting on. Grab some needles and yarn and knit along. A troubleshooting discussion will follow. Call 540-552-8246 for more information.

Ongoing:

Throughout January:

StoryWalk
All month at the Christiansburg Library. Brains and bodies get exercise by reading and walking the trail. The walk begins at the library at the College Street entrance of Downtown Park. This month's book is The Emperor's Egg.

Through Thursday, Jan. 21:

Girl Scout Cookie Sales
The Girl Scouts of Virginia Skyline Council are taking orders for cookies that will be delivered in mid-January. Gift certificates can be purchased through Jan. 14, 2021, by emailing info@gsvsc.org or calling 540-777-5100. Girl Scout cookies are \$5 a box. To locate a Girl Scout to take an order, contact the girl scouts at info@gsvsc.org or 540-777-5100. When the cookies arrive in the region in mid-January, Girl Scouts will be delivering them in different ways: masked drop-offs to the customer's door; cookie booth drive-thrus; online ordering with shipping via Digital Cookie; cookie delivery service (The details are being worked out with a national food delivery service. They will be announced on Jan. 12.); and voice-activated sales via Echo home systems.

VT faculty, students are answering the call for affordable housing

Home ownership has long been a hallmark of the American Dream. But the rising costs of homes, land, and materials — coupled with stagnating incomes, a growing population, increased housing demand, skilled construction labor shortages, a straining rental market and a global pandemic — have pushed the dream of home ownership even further out of reach for many Americans.

Through two vanguard public-private partnerships, Virginia Tech faculty and students in the Myers-Lawson School of Construction (MLSOC) are pursuing low-cost, high-tech and data-driven approaches to making home ownership more attainable. They are exploring the use of concrete 3D-printing technology in building affordable homes in Virginia.

The Virginia Center for Housing Research (VCHR) is an interdisciplinary research center within the College of Architecture and Urban Studies and the official housing research and information center for the Commonwealth of Vir-

ginia, is helping pilot two initiatives to determine whether 3D-printed concrete homes and manufactured factory-built housing are viable answers to the housing affordability crisis in Virginia and across the nation.

The first project, "Printing for Affordable Concrete Housing and Training (PACT)," aims to design and produce a 3D-printed single-family concrete home in the greater Richmond metropolitan area. Researchers will print the 1,400-square-foot home on site using a massive, modular 3D-printer called COBOD2, a technology pioneered by the Danish that readily adapts to any location and design.

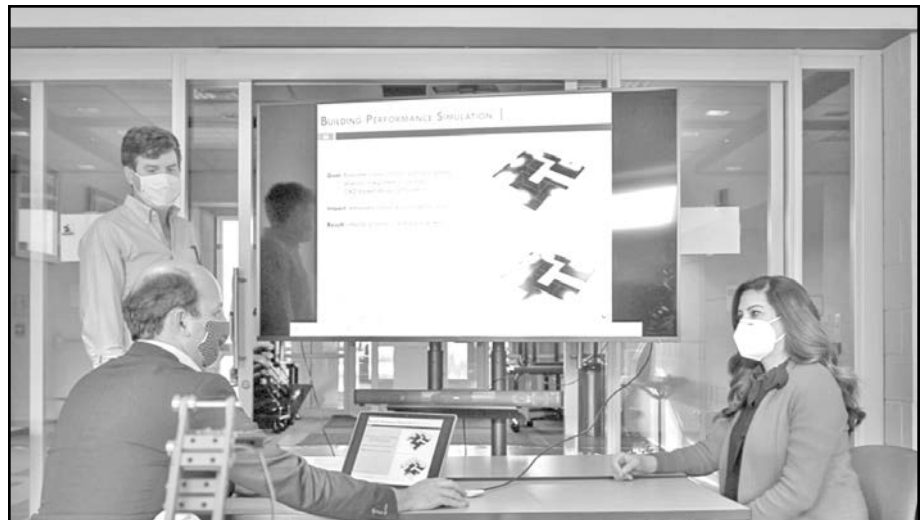
The study will be the first 3D concrete build in Virginia and the first in the nation to explore the potential of 3D-printed concrete homes for superior cost-efficiency, build time and durability versus traditional stick-built homes in affordable housing.

The Virginia Tech team includes co-principal investigator Philip Agee, an

assistant professor cross-appointed in the Department of Building Construction and VCHR. He will study simulated and measured building performance outcomes such as energy use and indoor environmental quality, as well as the human factors resulting from automating common construction tasks.

Virginia Tech students in the Vecellio Construction Engineering and Management program will participate as part of the research team in the designing, printing and evaluation of the home. They will also help determine appropriate future markets and applications for 3D-printing. Virginia students in grades K-12 will be invited to watch as the home is printed and learn about the emerging field of 3D technology in housing construction.

In a second project, Agee is the principal investigator for "Innovations in Manufactured Housing," which will study new factory-built modular homes as higher-quality, affordable alternatives to older mobile and stick-built homes.



Philip Agee, Andrew McCoy and Kereshmeh Afsari (left to right) are leading a project that aims to design and produce a 3D-printed single-family concrete home in the greater Richmond metropolitan area. The pilot project will explore the cost savings and efficiencies of using concrete 3D-printing technology to build affordable homes in Virginia and beyond. Photo by Chiravi Patel for Virginia Tech.

Virginia Tech students will get hands-on experience using building information modeling (BIM) to design and develop 3D models and digital twins of the homes. They will use BIM to evaluate and compare the production process, energy efficiency and operational performance of both site-built and off-site manufactured homes.

"Manufactured housing represents the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the U.S., so increasing the supply of quality manufactured housing will help us more quickly address affordability and home ownership challenges in our state and nation than other housing supply approaches," Agee said. "This study aims to demonstrate

that the manufactured housing of today is a high-quality, affordable housing option."

Work on both projects is already underway with the 3D-printed home slated for completion in summer 2021 and the first manufactured housing units completed in late 2021.

— Written by Marya Barlow

VT scientists uncover mechanisms that help quell brain hyperactivity, seizures and mental illness

A research team led by Michael Fox, a professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, has identified the type of brain

cell that produces collagen 19, a protein that is crucial for the formation of inhibitory circuits in the brain.

The study, published in

the Journal of Neuroscience, depicts a previously unknown molecular mechanism underlying healthy brain development.

Neurons and glia are the most abundant types of brain cells. Glia, in particular star-shaped glia called astrocytes, release molecules that support the growth and maintenance of healthy synapses, the chemical communication structures between neurons and their targets including other neurons. Yet in this study, Fox's team discovered that a type of neuron called an interneuron, a cell type that processes information, produces the majority of brain-derived collagen 19 to stimulate synapse formation.

"At a time when many studies are identifying interneuron-like roles for astrocytes, we've identified an unexpected astrocyte-like role for interneurons," said Fox, who is also the director of the School of Neuroscience in Virginia Tech's College of Science.

In previous research, Fox's team discovered that mice lacking the gene that encodes collagen 19 exhibit a loss of inhibitory synapses surrounding neuronal cell bodies located in the brain's hippocampus and neocortex. In humans, these brain regions are involved in cognitive functions, such as reasoning, language, perception, memory and learning. In mice, these regions have been shown to be involved in sensory perception, learning and memory.

small segments of ribonucleic acids (RNA) that bind to complementary segments of RNA — to look for different cell type markers in normal mice, wild-type and mice with the genetic mutation. This method revealed that the majority of brain-derived collagen 19 is produced by a type of interneuron.

"Initially when we proposed this, some people thought it was far-fetched that one neuron could influence another cell's development when they're not synaptically coupled," Fox said.

Roughly 20 percent of a person's body mass is made of collagens, which form the matrix of connective tissue that wraps around organs, muscles and cellular structures. Because of the complex molecular structure of collagens, just a small genetic variation alters the protein's shape, rendering the collagen

molecule useless waste that cells destroy and recycle for parts.

Collagen genetic mutations are linked to a litany of connective tissue disorders, but Fox says they're still underexplored in the brain.

Fox's lab plans to build on this discovery by working to develop new ways to restimulate inhibitory synapse growth in diseased or injured brains. The team previously found that a small peptide derived from this collagen, matricyptin, is sufficient to promote the growth of inhibitory synapses in cells lacking collagen 19.

"We want to translate what we're learning about how these circuits develop into therapeutics," Fox said. "We've found a peptide that shows some promise in stimulating inhibitory synapse formation and are studying ways to employ it."



Michael Fox, a professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC and director of the School of Neuroscience in Virginia Tech's College of Science, led a study that may help reveal the molecular underpinnings of seizures and psychiatric disorders.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

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| CLUES ACROSS | music | CLUES DOWN | 29. Small constellation |
| 1. Homestead | 34. Pharmacy chain Duane | 1. Grave | 35. Indicates near |
| 5. More (Spanish) | | 2. Alright | 36. Consumed |
| 8. Type of notification | 39. First responders | 3. Sharp tooth | 37. Criticize |
| 12. Approves | 42. Mysterious | 4. Bird genus | 38. Shock therapy |
| 14. Mandela's party | 44. Leisurely stroll | 5. Important | 40. Type of cigarette |
| 15. "Mom" actress Faris | 46. Most naughty | 6. One who studies carefully | 41. The fashionable elite |
| 16. Predatory insects | 47. Plant tissue | 7. Not very big | 42. Shed tears |
| 18. Where honey goes | 49. Small fish | 8. Astronomy unit | 43. Arm or branch of a bone |
| 19. Canadian flyers | 50. Men's fashion accessory | 9. A way to open up | 44. Quell anger |
| 20. Of an earlier time | 51. Distant planet | 10. Trap | 45. Where rock and rollers play |
| 21. Indigenous people of Australia | 57. Location in Norse mythology | 11. Handle of a knife | 47. "The Alchemist" author Coelho |
| 22. Organize | 58. One who is deliberately cruel | 13. Indicates one from a part of W. Africa | 48. Choppers |
| 23. All over | 59. ___ Romeo, car | 17. Lucky number | 49. Lacks brightness |
| 26. Made it through | 60. Of the ear | 24. Doctor of Education | 52. Port in Yemen |
| 30. Between-meals food | 61. Former name of Tokyo | 25. Legendary Cubs broadcaster | 53. Brood of pheasant |
| 31. A quantity upon which an operation is performed | 62. Male children | 26. Female parent | 54. Approves food |
| 32. German mythological god | 63. French/Belgian river | 27. Mimic | 55. A type of sign |
| 33. "Heavy" type of rock | 64. Tide | 28. Connects to the rim | |

Virginia Farm Bureau president: Broadband is path to prosperity for rural Virginia

The president of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation said he's proud of the accomplishments of farmers and his organization during the COVID-19 pandemic, but much more needs to be done to give farmers and rural Virginians access to high-speed Internet service.

"Just like farms needed electricity and phone service a century ago, rural Virginia will not fully thrive without broadband Internet," Wayne E. Pryor told farmers from across the state in a recent annual meeting of the Virginia Farm Bureau's voting delegates. "The nation's modern economy is totally dependent on this essential service, and anyone offline is missing connections to buyers, suppliers, news, educational resources and vital medical

services." Millions of dollars in federal grants boosted efforts to expand broadband Internet into rural Virginia in 2020, and farmers are grateful for that, Pryor said.

Despite about 85% of Farm Bureau employees being forced to work from home during the pandemic, Pryor reported that quick and efficient service to members has continued. One mark of confidence was reached late in the year, when the organization reached 129,985 members, several hundred above this 2020's goal.

One way Farm Bureau works to support all Virginians surfaced this past spring when the Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom program moved quickly to enhance its video resources.

"When local school systems began sending students home last spring, Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom stepped up and did a tremendous job of offering online resources for educators as well as parents thrust into the role of teaching at home," Pryor said. "AITC's efforts quickly became a social media success story, and they continued to share resources this fall for home and classroom use."

Pryor also noted that while the 2020 State Fair of Virginia was canceled, the Farm Bureau, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia 4-H and the Virginia FFA Association all pitched in to hold youth livestock competitions this past fall.

"Sadly, we were unable to hold the fair this year. That



was one of the hardest decisions our state board had to make during the pandemic," Pryor said. "But we were able to host about 300 4-H and FFA members over two weekends for a modified youth livestock show. We're

very grateful to all our sponsors of the State Fair Sale of Champions who made it possible for this year's sale to raise a record \$90,000 for the fair's scholarship program."

With members in 88

county Farm Bureaus, VFBF is Virginia's largest farmers' advocacy group. Farm Bureau is a non-governmental, nonpartisan, voluntary organization committed to supporting Virginia's agriculture industry.

Brighten your wintertime mood, lessen stress with houseplants

Aesthetically pleasing houseplants can add a little nature to indoor living spaces and help make the cold, dreary months more bearable.

"They brighten the mood," said Chris Mullins, a Virginia Cooperative Extension horticulturist. "They make people feel better."

Plants also add humidity to dry interiors. Humidity is low during wintertime. Dry skin, chapped lips and static electricity on certain surfaces in the home are all symptoms of dry winter air.

"Houseplants can help alleviate that a little bit and, to some degree, give you a little more moisture in the air," Mullins said. Plants emit moisture as a product of photosynthesis, he said, thus acting as natural humidifiers.

While plants filter out dust and toxins and release

oxygen, recent studies have shown that "other than increasing humidity indoors, the effect on air quality is actually quite small," said Dr. Josh Kardos, a horticulture instructor at Virginia Tech's School of Plant and Environmental Sciences.

"A single indoor plant in a room has essentially no impact," he said. "You'd need many plants to see any kind of measurable effect on indoor air quality, practically transforming your space into a jungle."

Instead, the real benefits are subjective, harder to measure, but still important. Indoor plants can have a calming, relaxing effect, and provide a hobby, Kardos said. "Plants can help with mental health by giving people something to care for and providing a sense of purpose

and accomplishment."

Kardos, whose introductory class on indoor plants is always at capacity with more students on a waiting list, said he witnesses this when students email him pictures of their plant collections, illustrating their joy in growing plants. "My students are so proud of the fact that they're not only keeping their plants alive, but the plants are growing and even thriving," he said.

Several indoor plant varieties are low-maintenance and forgiving when it comes to their growing requirements, Mullins said. Even those would-be horticulturists without a green thumb can have success cultivating these plants.

"There's something for everybody," he said.

Christmas cactuses have

beautiful blooms that add pops of color to an environment, Mullins said. Like their name suggests, they bloom during winter months and "are one of those kinds of plants that probably will do best if you just leave them alone."

Peace lilies are another flowering option that will grow well in low to bright light and some humidity. Pothos, a trailing vine with heart-shaped, variegated leaves can add dimension and drama. The ZZ plant, with its wide, dark green leaves, is hardy and tolerates low light.

Other recommendations include spider plants, whose long, grassy leaves thrive under a variety of conditions, and rubber trees and snake plants, which can add visual interest and height to any space.



A study published in the Journal of Physiological Anthropology discovered that tending plants lowered blood pressure and reduced psychological and physiological stress.

"If you don't believe me, just try it," Kardos said. "Buy one or more of the easy-to-grow indoor plants and see if you don't feel more relaxed and find more enjoyment with them in your environment."

In fact, a 2015 study published in the Journal of

Physiological Anthropology discovered that tending plants lowered blood pressure and reduced psychological and physiological stress. Participants reported feeling soothed and comfortable working with plants compared to working on a computer.

Virginia Tech community prepares for spring semester amid COVID-19

As students, faculty, and staff return to Virginia Tech's campuses in January, they are encouraged to take note of several key aspects of the spring semester plan.

Coming to campus

Students are asked to commit to a 10-day self-quarantine prior to returning to campus to minimize the chance of transmitting COVID-19.

Students are strongly encouraged to secure a negative COVID-19 test result within five days prior to returning to campus.

Residence halls open for move-in at noon on Jan. 16.

The academic calendar

The semester begins on Jan. 19 with online instruction; on Jan. 25, in-person and hybrid instruction begins.

Five spring break days will be observed on Feb. 5 and 25, March 17, and April 6 and 26. On these days, no classes, assignments or assessments will be conducted.

Classes end on May 5, Reading Day is May 6, final examinations are on May 7-12 and commencement ceremonies are on May 13-15. Details on the nature of the commencement ceremonies will be shared at a later date.

Testing

The spring semester strategy includes voluntary and mandatory testing along with adaptive approaches as needed. The university has also increased laboratory capacity for the spring semester.

Voluntary testing for the Greek life move-in period will begin Jan. 7.

Residential move-in testing will be conducted Jan. 16-24.

Random prevalence testing for students will begin Jan. 25 and continue through May 7.

The complete testing schedule for students will be finalized and released

closer to the beginning of the semester.

Surveillance testing for high-contact employees began Jan. 5 and will continue through May 7.

Voluntary testing for students, faculty and staff is occurring Jan. 5-8 and Jan. 11-15 and then daily (Monday through Friday) from Jan. 25 through May 7.

Pre-sign-up walk-in testing for students, faculty and staff will occur on Sundays beginning Jan. 31 through May 2 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Schiffert Health Center testing began Jan. 4 and will continue through May 14, for all symptomatic students and students who have been contact-traced or have a known exposure.

Testing out of quarantine for students will be handled through Schiffert. Testing out of quarantine for employees will be cleared through the Environmental Health and Safety office, based on ArcPoint testing.

Pods

Student Affairs is introducing a pods registration program to enrich the collegiate experience. These small groups will allow students to interact more closely in a more relaxed, unmasked environ-

ment.

Isolation and quarantine spaces

During the fall semester, Housing and Residential Life expanded from 430 to 513 beds and did not experience any capacity issues. In the spring semester, the 513-bed capacity will be maintained.

Vaccinations

Virginia Tech is prepared to partner with the Virginia Department of Health to address the challenges of storing and distributing COVID-19 vaccinations.

Continued vigilance

Shared and well-known behaviors -- such as avoiding close contact, crowds and poorly ventilated spaces; wearing masks; and getting a flu shot -- will apply throughout the spring semester.

Meanwhile, the university continues to evaluate and enhance its practices for cleanliness, student programming and services, event guidelines, accommodations and support for employees, health and well-being services and communications.

The university's full operational plan is being updated and finalized for the spring semester. The plan and its principles reflect the university's accumulated learning and

adapting to the pandemic over the spring, summer and fall months of 2020.

The strategies seek to balance the traditional Virginia Tech experience with the safety and well-being of the com-

munity. As a result of these proven strategies and the community's commitment to wellness, Virginia Tech was able to manage the impacts of the disease spread within the Blacksburg campus

community, resulting in a seven-day moving average positivity rate of less than 10 percent by mid-September that decreased to 1.4 percent by the end of in-person instruction on Nov. 20.

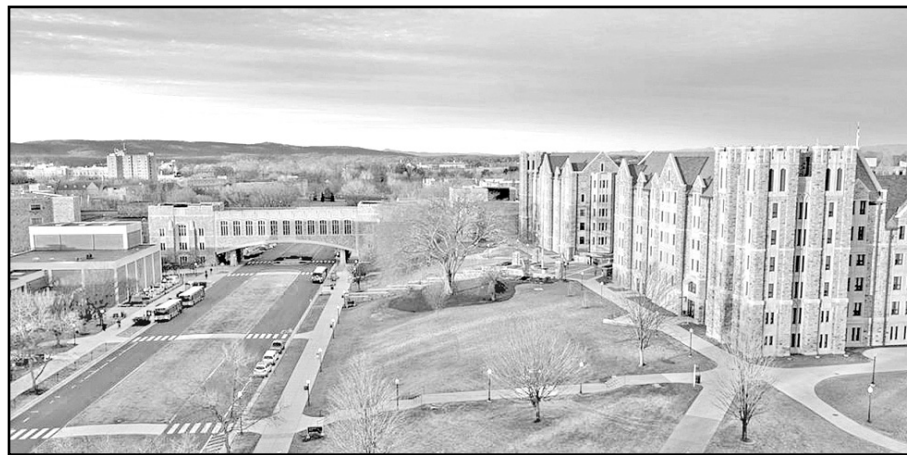


PHOTO BY DAN MIROLLI FOR VIRGINIA

Aerial view of Alumni Mall on the Virginia Tech Blacksburg campus.

ONLINE ONLY AUCTION

Ending Thursday January 28th 2021 @ 4 PM
Rental Investment Property in Christiansburg VA
101 North Pepper St. Christiansburg VA 24073
Bid Online Now at VaAuctionPro.com



You have the opportunity to purchase an income producing apartment building for sale in Christiansburg VA. The building was built in 1988 has a total of 3,456 square feet of space and 4 units. There are 4 heat pumps, 1 for each unit. The building is on town water and sewer. There is an upper and lower parking lot which hold approximately 4 cars each. Don't miss out on this awesome income producing opportunity!

Preview Dates: Thursday January 14th at 4 PM & Saturday January 23rd at 10 AM

Terms: 10% Buyer's Premium will be added to final high bid to arrive at contract price. Earnest Money Deposit of \$10,000 required on day of sale. Close on or before March 15th 2021. Subject to seller confirmation. Property sold as is where is any and all faults. Buyer is expected to complete their own due diligence. Property is being sold by Online Only Auction with a SOFT CLOSE. Auction starts ending at 4pm on January 28th, 2021. Please note that during the last two minutes of bidding, if a new bid is placed, the clock is automatically extended an additional two minutes. Auction ends once bidding ends. Download Bidder Information Pack for complete terms and conditions, purchase contract and maps.

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OPINION

Better late than never: New Year's resolutions

Those who know me well will probably agree when I say I'm a little slow on the uptake sometimes. Actually, a lot of the sometimes.

Thus, it's not surprising that I got around to making New Year's resolutions into 2021 rather than before 2021 began as is usually the case.

Nevertheless, I do have some resolutions I have made. What makes these different from the run-of-the-mill resolutions is that I am absolutely sure I will keep each and every one of them. Now how many folks can say that?

So, here they are, coming at you with grit, determination, and a will of iron:

I resolve to eat less squash, spinach, broccoli and fewer artichokes this year.

I resolve not to pull for the

Florida Gators this year.

I resolve not to exercise any less in 2021. Of course, I also resolve not to exercise any more, too.

I resolve to remain one of Dude's most faithful and loyal customers this year. The same holds true for Gardner's once they open back up. I don't understand why an ice cream place feels compelled to close for the winter. Heck, it's not like we all stop craving ice cream just because the temperature drops a little bit. Cold weather won't stop someone like me from eating it. If they were open. Which they're not. Dadgummit.

I resolve to also remain among the loyal and faithful for Mission BBQ. A quick dash to Roanoke to eat there is a highlight of my week. I

can't imagine how many times I'll eat at the one that's opening up in Christiansburg in the spring. It could get real scary. And fattening.

I resolve to eat pizza in 2021. How much remains to be seen.

I resolve to visit my sister, Lynn, in South Georgia and my son and two grandsons over by D.C. in 2021.

I resolve to kiss my wife goodnight before we turn out the light. I further resolve to take her on at least one romantic weekend getaway this year.

I resolve to tell that same wife I love her at least once every day.

I resolve to attend church regularly.

I resolve to watch all televised Georgia Bulldog and

Virginia Tech football games in 2021.

I resolve to eat schnitzel in a German restaurant at least once this year. Twice would be even better.

I resolve to travel once COVID sets us free.

I resolve not to make promises I can't keep.

I resolve to have a big, real Christmas tree in 2021 just like we did this year and every year of my life. It was tacky, but it was beautiful. And I resolve to spoil my wife at Christmas in 2021 just as I did this year. And just as I have every year for the past 36 years. Of course, turnabout is fair play since she spoils me, too. Rotten.

I resolve not to take any yoga classes this year. Or dance classes. Or jazzercise.

Or any class that could possibly cause me physical discomfort or make me sweat.

I resolve to be a better person this year. That certainly leaves me a wide swatch in which to operate, doesn't it?

I resolve to thank God every day for blessings so innumerable I can't count them all, let alone even think of them all.

Well, I guess that about does it. I know I have set myself up for some tough challenges here, but I believe I have the strength, the integrity, and the willpower to make it through no matter how daunting it gets. Yay, me.

The author is a man of a certain age who relishes the chance to meet head-on the demanding trial he has laid out for himself in 2021. He is positive he can do it. Up and at 'em.

Congressman Morgan Griffith: Operation Warp Speed: A success story of 2020

The year 2020 was a difficult one, but as the year draws to a close, I want to highlight something about the year that went right.

Operation Warp Speed accomplished what had been considered nearly impossible: the development, manufacture and distribution of a safe and effective vaccine to combat COVID-19.

President Trump announced Operation Warp Speed in May. His

administration recognized that meeting the challenge posed by the coronavirus pandemic would require the investment of federal government resources; partnership between the public, private and scientific sectors; and cutting red tape that would impede delivery of a safe and effective vaccine.

This effort was supported by almost \$10 billion in funding included in the CARES Act passed

by Congress with my support.

The project focused on six vaccine candidates. Seven months after Operation Warp Speed was launched and less than one year after COVID-19 began spreading widely around the globe, two vaccine candidates were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for emergency use.

On Dec. 11, the FDA approved for emergency use the first vaccine created by Pfizer. After clinical trials including over 43,000 participants, the vaccine was found to be 95 percent effective.

A vaccine developed by Moderna was subsequently approved for emergency use on Dec. 18. Thirty thousand people participated in its clinical trials, and its efficacy rate is 94.5 percent.

These vaccines are the fastest ever produced

for a novel pathogen. In fact, the average development timeline for a vaccine is eight to twelve years. Operation Warp Speed reduced the time needed by maximizing the number of participants in Phase 3 trials and manufacturing vaccine doses while waiting for the FDA's emergency use authorization order.

While bureaucratic hurdles were lowered, the vaccine development process did not skimp on safety.

As a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over health matters, I was briefed repeatedly throughout the process or was involved in hearings featuring public health officials at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health and the FDA, as well as the vaccine manufacturers. I

am confident that they maintained high safety standards as they pursued a vaccine.

While the vaccines were under development, the Trump administration planned ahead for their delivery and administration to Americans. It purchased millions of doses of the prospective vaccines and made agreements with pharmacies that would be able to vaccinate people.

While enough vaccine doses will be manufactured to cover most of the population, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended the priorities for vaccination while supplies remain limited. It suggested health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities be first in line, followed by older adults and frontline essential workers, all groups with a higher susceptibility

to the coronavirus than other parts of the population.

The vaccines are broadly safe, but caution is appropriate for people with allergic reactions and certain other conditions. The CDC recommends that you talk to your doctor if you have had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines or injectable therapies to determine if a COVID vaccine is a safe decision for you. Further, if you have had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in a COVID vaccine, the CDC recommends not getting that vaccine.

I also believe that vaccinations should not be mandatory. This would be true particularly for people who object to taking it due to their religious principles or as a matter of conscience. I also reject the idea of individuals being required

See Griffith, page 5

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Town of Christiansburg Cares Act

During 2020 many of us, particularly the Christiansburg business sector, have had tremendous personal and financial problems.

If I were not on the Christiansburg Town Council, I would not be aware of some of the measures the town has implemented through the Cares Act, to try and support our local businesses.

Here is a list of the grant funding that the town has distributed

to local businesses during the pandemic:

Small Business Recovery Grant \$285,515, Nonprofit Recovery Grant \$261,501, Childcare Providers Recovery Grant \$261,501, Hotel/motel Recovery Grant \$169,500, Dining Expansion Grant \$192,519.

Total \$1,054,000

Hopefully the grant funding with the stimulus checks that are

currently being allocated will help protect Christiansburg businesses until the end of the pandemic, which I hope is on the horizon

*-Steve Huppert
Christiansburg Town Council*

The attached comments are mine and do not represent those of the Town of Christiansburg or the Christiansburg Town Council.

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Griffith from page 4

to carry around a vaccination certificate, which is too close to the identification papers of highly restricted societies for my comfort.

Operation Warp Speed is just one component of the federal government's efforts to

combat the coronavirus. Other therapeutics and treatments have also been developed at a rapid pace and are also being deployed as the pandemic still inflicts widespread sickness.

The United States has long excelled at scientific innova-

tion, but even among our country's long list of achievements, from the light bulb to the first manned landing on the moon, Operation Warp Speed stands out for its scale, speed, safety and ultimately lives saved. Amid all the bad

news of 2020, this accomplishment is one worth praising.

If you have questions, concerns or comments, feel free to contact my office. You can call my Abingdon office at 276-525-1405 or my Christiansburg office at 540-381-5671.

To reach my office via email, please visit my website at www.morgangriffith.house.gov. Also on my website is the latest material from my office, including information on votes recently taken on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Survey from page 1

within a year of the survey date.

Over half (62%) of respondents reported having unfilled job openings. The types of unfilled positions varied among respondents, but a need for both production workers and engineers was a consistent theme. There is clearly a continuing need for talent recruitment and retention efforts across the manufacturing industry in the NRV.

Over three-fourths of the survey respondents indicated that at least 90% of their employees

were working on-site. With most employees in the NRV manufacturing industry working in person amid the pandemic, it is no surprise that a large majority (81%) of respondents reported that health and safety was one of their current top three concerns for their business. Manufacturers have devoted significant attention to implementing new public health policies and technologies to keep their employees safe and their operations running during the pandemic.

NRV manufacturers have increased the number of employees that are working remotely to help mitigate these health and safety concerns. Pre-pandemic, only one respondent reported having more than 5% of its employees working remotely, which increased to 62% of respondents by the time of the survey. This increase in remote work for some employees could be designed to offset the increased needs for physical space to comply with regulations and distancing requirements. One survey

respondent stated that "physical distancing mandates are only feasible with a partial remote workforce."

Manufacturing leaders signaled an overall positive outlook for the coming year. Almost three-fourths (71%) of respondents anticipated that the remaining duration of COVID-19 impacts on their business would resolve within one year from the survey date.

Respondents were asked to give their overall outlook on the status

of their company over the next 6-12 months. The vast majority (90%) of respondents reported that they had a steady or positive outlook for their company during that time period.

Leaders were also asked to forecast how many employees they anticipated having within six months to one year. Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents expected a modest or significant increase in employment levels within a year with no one anticipating a reduction in employees.

Chafin from page 1

"I was privileged to serve with Ben in the Virginia House of Delegates before his election to the Senate of Virginia," he added. "The citizens of both the 4th House District and 38th Senate District were fortunate to have his able representation in the Virginia General Assembly for many years.

"Ben made his mark on our Commonwealth as an attorney, a farmer, and a selfless public servant. He will be forever remembered for his

conscientious commitment to serving his fellow man, and he will be especially remembered as a man of civility who treated others with simple human kindness and respect.

"The Republican Party of Virginia, and all those who knew and served with Senator Chafin, thank his family for sharing him with our Commonwealth for so many. Our prayers go out to his wife, Lora, and their children at this very difficult time. May

we remember Ben always for his legacy of service to the Commonwealth of Virginia that he loved so deeply."

Chafin was born on May 18, 1960 and named after his late father, A.B. Chafin. He leaves behind his wife of 38 years, Lora Carr Chafin, mother, Mary Miller Chafin, and sister, Justice Teresa M. Chafin, and three adult children, Sophia Chafin Vance, Audra Chafin Hobart and Augustus Benton Chafin III (Gus).

Chafin was a generational cattle farmer and a lawyer. He was also a long term board member of the First Bank and Trust (which his father helped found) as well as an "avid outdoorsman and the very doting grandfather" of granddaughter, Abee Vance, and grandson, Tipton Vance, according to his obituary.

Chafin first served in the Virginia House of Delegates in 2013 and was elected to the state senate in 2014.

"He had a distinguished

legislative record and a very high rate of passed legislation. He advocated jobs in his district, particularly in the coalfields where the decline of coal has devastated local economies," Chafin's obituary reads. "He was a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, economic development and health care coverage for hundreds of thousands of low-income Virginians."

At Chafin's request, a formal burial service will not be held.

OBITUARIES

Albert, Olivia "Polly"

Olivia "Polly" Albert, 67, of Christiansburg, passed away peacefully on Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, at the home of her stepson.

She was preceded in death by her mother, Libby Rutledge; her father, Charles Ratcliff, Sr.; and brothers Houston and Joe Rutledge.

She is survived by her son, Michael; a daughter, Kim; a stepson, Andy Albert; sisters and brother-in-law, Debbie Taylor and Tammy and Mike Meador; brothers and sisters-in-law Randy and Brenda Ratcliff, Thom and

Angie Rutledge and Chris Rutledge; and several grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

The family would like to extend a special thanks to her stepson, Andy and his daughter, Ashley, for their love and care during her final days and to the staff at Kindred Hospice for their care and support.

A graveside service will be held on Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021, at 2 p.m. at Centennial Christian Church Cemetery. Arrangements by McCoy Funeral Home, Blacksburg.

Shaver, Judith "Judi" Cremeans

Judith "Judi" Cremeans Shaver, 71, of Pulaski, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020.

She was a former social worker and a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Judi was preceded in death by her parents, Ezra C. and Jewell Ester Bates Cremeans; a granddaughter, Taylor Rae Cultice; and four brothers and a sister.

Survivors include her husband, Danny M. Shaver; her sons and daughters-in-law, Shane and Tracy Cultice and Jeremy and Crystal Cultice; eight grandchildren: Jennifer, Isaac, Jordan, Zander, Michael, James "Nick," Larry and Kurstin; 11



great-grandchildren: Susie, Conner, Peyton, Lennon, Anthony, Carter, River, Dustin, James, Georgia and Aiden; a brother, Howard Cremeans; sisters Wanda Serin, Nora Morgan and Lori Garrow; and many other relatives and friends.

The family received friends on Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, from noon until 1 p.m. at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services began at

1 p.m. with Pastor Vinnie MacIsaac officiating. Interment followed in Roselawn Memorial Gardens in Christiansburg.

The Shaver family is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford. www.mullinsfuneralhome.com.

Moore, James Edward

James Edward Moore, 69, of Christiansburg, passed away on Monday, Dec. 28, 2020.

James was a member of the Alleghany Church of Christ in Christiansburg. He was a fan of NASCAR and word search books.

He was preceded in death by his parents, James Franklin Moore and Mary Ellen Wilder. James is survived by his wife, Merlie Hurst Moore; sons Joseph Moore (Tiffany) and Jason Moore (Sally); grandchildren Brandon Stanley, Isaiah Moore, Angelica Moore, Aiden Moore, Aubree

Moore, Levi Moore and Jace Moore; siblings Louise Thomas and Roy Moore; nieces and nephews Frank Thomas, Mary Jane Linkous, Billy Moore, Bobby Moore and Samantha Harden; and numerous other nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held on Monday, Jan. 4, 2021, at the Alleghany Church of Christ.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Alleghany Church of Christ in James' memory. Arrangements by Horne Funeral Home & Crematory 540-382-2612.

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Prince, Stephen Robert

Stephen Robert Prince, 65, of Blacksburg died, Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Jean Lummis Prince.

He is survived by his father, Robert Emmett Prince, of Sykesville, Md., a sister and brother-in-law, Cynthia Jean Prince Kazyak and John



Christopher Kazyak, Sr., of Manila, Ark., nieces and nephews William Joseph Kazyak, John Christopher Kazyak, Jr., and Marie Bernadette Kazyak, all of Manila, Ark., and girlfriend Susan Mullins Sanders of Blacksburg.

Services will be held privately. Arrangements by McCoy Funeral Home, Blacksburg.

Reed, Shirley Tester

Shirley Tester Reed, 84, passed away at her home in Radford on Friday, Jan. 1, 2021.

She was a member of Calvary Baptist Church. She was an amazing mother who will best be known for her tremendous faith in God and her beautiful giving nature and infectious smile.

She was preceded in death by her parents, W. D. and Thelma Tester; and her husband, Daniel Reed.

Survivors include her sons and daughters-in-law, Danny Reed of Radford, David and Terri Reed of Charlotte, N. C., Daran and Angela Reed of Radford, and Steven and Mitzi Reed of Radford; numerous grandchildren



and great-grandchildren; and many other relatives and friends.

The family will receive friends from 11 a.m. until noon on Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021, at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services will begin at noon with Pastor Timothy Worles officiating. Interment will follow in Highland Memory Gardens in Dublin.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to missions at Calvary Baptist Church.

The Reed family is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford. www.mullinsfuneralhome.com.

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Legals - Botetourt County

ORDER OF PUBLICATION
Commonwealth of Virginia VA. Code Ann. §§ 8.01-316, -317
Case No. 20-649
Botetourt County Circuit Court
Mary Elizabeth McKenney v. Richard Lee McKenney
The object of this suit is to: Obtain a divorce based on separation of 1 year. It is ORDERED that Richard Lee McKenney appear at the above-named court and protect his/her interests on or before 02/01/2021. 12-28-20

Sherry Perry
Deputy Clerk

Legals - City of Salem

Public Notice
Notice is hereby given that the City of Salem, Community Development is requesting authorization from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to amend VMRC permit (2019-1802) issued for this project, to include the installation of temporary work platform, measuring 27 feet by 45 feet, suspended beneath the Mill Lane Roadway Bridge a minimum 12-inches above the Ordinary High Water mark of the Roanoke River to allow access for bridge repair work.

Send comments/inquiries within 15 days to: Marine Resources Commission, Habitat Management Division, 380 Fenwick Road, Building 96, Fort Monroe, VA 23651 or jpa_permits@mrc.virginia.gov

Legals - Craig County

ORDER OF PUBLICATION

Commonwealth of Virginia VA CODE § 8.01-316
Case No. JJ002182-04-00, JJ002182-05-00, JJ002182-06-00
CRAIG COMBINED COURT- JUVENILE
Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Commonwealth of Virginia, *in re* PAITSEL, RAYNE, AKA BABY GIRL GARMAN
The object of this suit is to:

The object of this suit is to terminate the residual parental rights of the father of Rayne Paitzel, aka Baby Girl Garman thought to be either Daniel Garman, Christopher Allen Paitzel or Unknown Father pursuant to Virginia Code Sections 16.1-283 B and C, and which child is under the age of twelve (12) months and was born to Kristen Nicole Garman. Residual parental rights are defined in Section 16.1-228 of the Code of Virginia (1950, as amended) as the rights and responsibilities remaining with a parent after the parent loses custody of a child, including but not limited to the right to visitation, consent to adoption, the right to determine religious affiliation, and the responsibility for support. The termination of your residual parental rights will permanently end all of your rights and responsibilities to the child named in the petition. The ties between you and your child are severed forever and you become a legal stranger to the child.

It is ORDERED that Daniel Garman, Christopher Paitzel & Unknown Father appear at the above-named Court and protect his or her interests on or before 02/17/2021 09:30 AM.

12/29/2020
Patty Taylor
Deputy Clerk

Legals - Montgomery County

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC is requesting a permit from Virginia Marine Resources Commission to install turbidity monitors in multiple streams with drainage areas greater than five (5) square miles, which are considered to be State-owned subaqueous bottomlands of the Commonwealth, to monitor suspended stream sediment levels along the designated pipeline corridor in Giles, Montgomery, Franklin, Roanoke and Pittsylvania Counties for the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) project. Send Comments/inquiries within 15 days to: Marine Resources Commission, Habitat Management Division, 380 Fenwick Road, Building 96, Fort Monroe, VA 23651 or jpa_permits@mrc.virginia.gov.

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RADFORD SPORTS

Blacksburg High swimmers headed to William and Mary

Marty Gordon
NRVsports@ourvalley.org

Blacksburg High School swimmers Lexi Nussbaum and Julie Anderson will continue their swimming careers together at the College of William and Mary after they committed to the Tribe.

Both are four-year letter winners for the Bruins. Anderson was third at this past year's state meet in the 200-free and 100-fly events. She holds the school record in 100 fly and 200 medley-relay with Nussbaum and the 400 free-relay. She was named the most outstanding swimmer for the last two years at BHS.

Nussbaum holds the school record in the 200 medley-relay with Anderson and placed in the consolation finals in the breaststroke at the state

meet last year.

Nussbaum, who swims with H2okie Aquatics, most recently earned four best times at the HOKI Winter Meet. She raced in three events at Virginia Seniors back in March and recorded a best time in the 100m breaststroke at Virginia LCM Seniors in the summer of 2019.

Representing Blacksburg High, Nussbaum raced at the Virginia 4A State Championships the last three years. She placed 15th in the 100-breaststroke as a junior after taking 16th in that event her freshman season.

The Bruin swimmers both chose W&M because of its outstanding swim team and its academic opportunities.

Nussbaum hopes to break the BHS school record in the 100 breaststroke and make a Na-

tional Club Swimming Association cut during 2021's winter competition. "In college, my goal will be to train hard to improve my breaststroke, intermediate medley and all my strokes," she said.

Anderson hopes to improve her times and be an encouraging teammate through her last semester of high school. "In college, I am hoping to make the conference meet, to continue to support my teammates and to continue to learn and grow as a swimmer and a person" she said.

Like other high school athletes, the pair had to adjust during the COVID-19 pandemic as pools were closed during the spring and part of the summer.

Nussbaum took up biking and running to help with her training. Anderson said that

having a senior year in the midst of a pandemic has changed her goals and perspective a bit. "I am now just hoping that my team will be able to have high school meets this year," she said. "I have learned to focus on the most important aspects of this sport, which for me is the process of working hard, being supportive and improving as an athlete and a person."

The two swimmers sang the Christiansburg Aquatics Center's praises as a wonderful facility that is working to make sure COVID restrictions are being taken seriously. "Overall, while COVID-19 has definitely affected our season, we have a wonderful facility that has been able to support us in doing practice and meets safely," Anderson said.

The William and



FILE PHOTO

Blacksburg High School swimmers Julie Anderson (left) and Lexi Nussbaum (right) will remain teammates in college as both have committed to swim at William and Mary in Williamsburg.

Mary women finished second at this past year's Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) Championships, which were held at the Christiansburg Aquatics Center.

After originally announcing it would cut the swimming and diving program after the 2020-21 season, the university decided to

reinstate the women's team to preserve Title IX balance.

At W&M, Anderson hopes to major in neuroscience or psychology with plans to either perform research or become a psychologist. Nussbaum plans to major in biology with a double major or minor in kinesiology and health sciences.

Blue Demon assistant football coach Brandon Buchner headed for college ranks

Marty Gordon
NRVsports@ourvalley.org

Brandon Buchner, who has been on the Christiansburg High School football coaching staff since 2017, recently graduated from Virginia Tech and will join the staff at the University of Tennessee-Martin in the spring as an offensive assistant.

Buchner delivered some special thanks to Christiansburg Head Coach Alex Wilkens for taking a chance on him.

"Wilkens is an amazing friend, mentor, coach and human being,"

Buchner said. "The staff he assembled is one of the best in Virginia. The culture is outstanding and growing at Christiansburg, and I am so thankful and blessed to work with those kids and coaches and to have been a part of it."

UT-Martin competes in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) with Richmond and James Madison. Buchner will be working with running backs and special teams as of right now.

He graduated in December with a bachelor's degree in history with plans to be a high school coach and teacher, but when

the college opportunity rose, he jumped at it.

"I love football, I love people, and most importantly I love the opportunity to develop good human beings," Buchner said. "Coaching and teaching are opportunities to positively help grow people and impact communities."

UT Martin, which has a current enrollment of 7,296, posted a 7-5 record while going 6-2 in the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) in 2019 to finish one game out of first place. Like other FCS schools around the country, because of

the COVID-19 pandemic, they plan to play a spring schedule that will feature a round-robin format, including the eight teams that elected to play a spring OVC schedule. UT-Martin will play seven conference games over an eight-week period.

Buchner's goals as a collegiate coach are the same as those during his time as a high school coach: to grow and to learn every day while being the best human he can be.

"I think some of the biggest things I learned as a high school coach," Buchner said, "are that

you can truly learn at least one thing about anything every day; that having a growth mindset is vital; that you may not like where you're at or how things are, but they will get better if you work hard and are a good person; that having all the talent in the world as an athlete doesn't mean a thing if you're not willing to lead, lift weights, do the little things and/or focus on the details."

For now, Buchner is not looking too far down the road. He doesn't know if the move means coaching college football for one year or 50.

Let the kids play



From the Sidelines

Marty Gordon

Can anyone remember that it was nine months ago that the Auburn High School boys' basketball team was less than an hour away from playing for a state title? The game never took place thanks to COVID-19 shutting down the

Virginia High School tournament. No high school sports have been played since.

There is a fine line, maybe finer than anyone wants to admit, in what we are going through thanks to the pandemic.

Should they play or not? The spread of the coronavirus or its non-spread of course has to be a top priority, but there is an underlying negative effect that might be causing a larger

long-term problem. The bigger issue is getting our children back to school.

Intertwined in this is athletics. The lack of sports, we cannot deny, has a negative effect on these youngsters. They are not getting physical activity, which is also taking a mental toll on them.

Travel and AAU teams continue to play, but not high school and middle school athletics. The county says the COVID numbers remain too high.

If others can play with restrictions, why can't the athletes in Montgomery County?

The procedures have been laid out as to how each school can play, but so far, they have not had the chance to be used. I believe they will work, and we need to give them a chance to do so.

COVID cannot win. We must strive together to get our kids back on the courts and the mats and in the pool.

Honestly, sports are in serious trouble and may never be able to recover. I just hope youngsters will

not give up on the dream of playing in college or at a higher level.

Not playing means they will never be given that chance. Canceling athletics means some of these youngsters will have no reason to study and or desire to go to school.

Again, we need to give them some hope. They are even more vulnerable right now, and we need to change that.

The Facebook page "Let Them Play -- MCPS" was created to gather the Montgomery County community together to ask the county school

board to allow our students to compete in sports this season.

So far, 400 people, mainly parents, have joined the page and have expressed their outrage to the county for shutting down athletics.

This lockdown cannot continue.

The kids have suffered enough, and the school system must believe their COVID plan will work.

These student-athletes need some hope and should be playing. They need it for both their mental and physical health.

Let them play!

COVID cases force UVA-Tech cancellation; RU women lose games to pandemic

Marty Gordon
NRVsports@ourvalley.org

As many as a dozen Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) contests were cancelled or rescheduled this past weekend because of positive COVID-19 tests, including the Virginia Tech at UVA men's game, cancelled following a positive test, subsequent quarantining and contact tracing within the UVA program.

The decision to cancel the game came late Friday. In a prepared statement, the ACC said, "Teams are adhering to the outlined protocols within the ACC Medical Advisory Group report."

Those protocols require that in all high- and intermediate-risk sports other than football, a molecular (PCR) test shall be administered three (3) calendar days prior to the competition. The visiting team must have results from

the test performed within three days prior to the competition before the team travels to the site. In high-risk sports, a test shall be administered within 48 hours of the conclusion of a game and may be either a molecular (PCR) or antigen test.

This is the second time this season COVID has shut down the UVA program. Unlike football, one positive case can lead to postponements and a quarantine

period for the basketball programs.

As a result, the basketball programs in both the ACC and the Big South are struggling to maintain a January schedule, and many programs are not expecting the protocol to change. Both the ACC and the Big South, of which Radford University is a member, have been plagued with these shutdowns.

Radford's women's program

has lost three games in the early part of their schedule because of COVID. Radford head coach Mike McGuire was even diagnosed with the virus in the past two months.

The Big South announced Saturday another pause in the Radford program and its current schedule because of another COVID case. This includes postponements of both the Hampton and Charleston Southern series.

Big South, ESPN announce basketball broadcasts schedule on ESPN3

The Big South Conference Sunday announced its annual exclusive regular-season basketball broadcasts on ESPN3 and the coverage plans for the Hercules Tires Big South Basketball Championships in March.

The telecasts are among the more than 315 total broadcasts featuring Big South men's and women's basketball programs during the 2020-21 campaign.

Eight men's basketball league matchups and six women's basketball conference contests will again make up the Big South's exclusive ESPN3 "Game of the Week" package beginning in January. All remaining home Big South contests will be carried on ESPN+ for

the third consecutive year.

First-round games of the 2021 Hercules Tires Big South Basketball Championships will be carried on ESPN3: three games each for the men (March 2) and women (March 9). Quarterfinal coverage will continue on ESPN3 with four men's games on March 4 and four women's contests on March 11. The semifinal round for each will air on ESPN+ (men's - March 5, women's - March 12). ESPN will televise the men's championship game for the fifth consecutive year on Sunday, March 7. ESPN+ will carry the women's championship game on Sunday, March 14. Both championship games will be contested

on the home court of the highest remaining seed.

Women's Basketball on ESPN3 (unless otherwise noted)

Sat., Jan. 16 - Winthrop at Longwood, 6:00 p.m.; Sat., Jan. 23 - USC Upstate at Gardner-Webb, TBA; Sat., Jan. 30 - Hampton at High Point, 4:00 p.m.; Sat., Feb. 6 - Campbell at Radford, 3:00 p.m.; Sat., Feb. 20 - Presbyterian at Charleston Southern, 5:00 p.m.

Hercules Tires Big South Championship games

Tues., March 9 - First Round (campus sites), TBD; Thurs., March 11 - Quarterfinals (at No. 1 seed). TBD; Fri., March 12 - Semifinals (at No. 1 seed),

TBD (ESPN+); Sun., March 14 - Championship (at highest remaining seed), TBD (ESPN+).

Men's Basketball on ESPN3 (unless otherwise noted)

Sat., Jan. 9 - Campbell at Longwood, 6:00 p.m.; Sun., Jan. 10 - USC Upstate at Presbyterian, 2:00 p.m.; Thurs., Jan. 14 - ESPNU Wildcard Selection, 7:00 p.m.; Fri., Jan. 15 - Charleston Southern at UNC Asheville, 2:00 p.m.; Tues., Jan. 19 - ESPNU Wildcard Selection, 7:00 p.m.;

Mon., Jan. 25 - Gardner-Webb at USC Upstate, 5:30 p.m.; Thurs., Jan. 28 - ESPNU Wildcard Selection, 7:00 p.m.; Fri., Jan. 29 - High Point at Hampton, 6:00 p.m.; Thurs., Feb. 4 - ES-

PNU Wildcard Selection, 7:00 p.m.; Fri., Feb. 5 - Hampton at Longwood, 6:00 p.m.; Fri., Feb. 12 - Winthrop at Radford, 6:00 p.m.; Thurs., Feb. 18 - ESPNU Wildcard Selection, 9:00 p.m.; Fri., Feb. 19 - UNC Asheville at Winthrop, 6:00 p.m.

Hercules Tires Big South Championship games

Tues., March 2 - First Round (campus sites), TBD; Thurs., March 4 - Quarterfinals (at No. 1 seed), TBD; Fri., March 5 - Semifinals (at No. 1 seed), TBD (ESPN+); Sun., March 7 - Championship (at highest remaining seed), TBD (ESPN).

--Big South Conference