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Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery wreath ceremony honors veterans laid to rest

Lori Graham
Contributing writer

The Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery Wreath Laying Ceremony was held Saturday, Dec. 16, and was attended by a large crowd in recognition of the sacrifice many veterans have made for freedom.

The ceremony is highlighted by the placement of a live wreath on their stone marker, as well as the veteran's spouses buried there. The more than 1,700 live wreaths are shipped from Maine and delivered to the cemetery within a few days of the ceremony.

A founding member of the volunteers and ambassadors' programs is Mary Lou Summers, who has tirelessly devoted time and energy to the cemetery. She started her work at the SWVA cemetery 11 years ago and will be retiring at the end of 2023.

"The volunteers are the people who are the main branch of the group. They are in charge of collecting donations to support the wreath program. We have a brand-new project coming up, a \$250,000 bell tower, so they do all of that work. They meet monthly and are all non-profit and volunteers," Summers said. "The ambassadors are a separate group who takes one day out of the month, a weekday, to set aside so that every single veteran who is buried here has a friend at their burial so that no veteran is ever buried alone."

Some people can serve in both positions but are all a part of the big organization that keeps the programs for the cemetery running.

"There are more than 2300 people buried here," Summers said. "It is possible that a husband and wife are in the same gravesite, and there are more people buried here than we actually have gravesites. We have the Scatter Gardens, then we have the Memorial

Gardens for people who their bodies were never returned... then in-ground cremation, the Columbarium, and then the gravesites."

Under a blue sky and temperate weather, family, friends, volunteers, and many local organizations assembled in respect of veterans who have passed.

"One of the interesting things today is, we are featuring the youth. So, we have all these groups of young people who will hand out the wreaths to families; we call them wreath distributors," Summers said.

Local junior ROTC groups and youth organizations were on site to assist in handing out the wreaths.

Summers was recognized as a founder member of the SWVA Veterans Cemetery during the ceremony. Summers is also the wife of the late Rear Admiral John Summers who was buried at the Arlington National Cemetery. Mary Lou Summers, upon seeing the ceremony of honor conducted at the Arlington cemetery for her husband, brought many ideas to the SWVA region's veteran cemetery. Her goal was to see that no veteran is buried without someone present to pay them respect. The 2023 ceremony was dedicated in her honor and dedication and given a token of appreciation for her service.

Fundraising is ongoing for a bell tower that will be located at the entrance of the cemetery. The bell is currently housed in the administrative building on the cemetery's property.

Barbara Spence, Deborah Zimmerman, and Ann Crawford are some of the volunteers and ambassadors who provide many hours of service to the SWVA Veterans Cemetery. Zimmerman has both her mother and veteran father buried in the cemetery, and Spence has a cousin also interned at the cemetery.

See Wreath, page 2



The SWVA Veterans Cemetery Volunteers and Ambassadors give an incredible amount of time and effort to the maintenance and improvements of their programs.



Andrew Meeks plays the bagpipes during the wreath laying at the SWVA Veterans Cemetery in Dublin as family, friends, and volunteers assure every veteran's stone marker is adorned.



SWVA Veterans Cemetery Ambassadors and Volunteers (left to right) Ann Crawford, Deborah Zimmerman, and Barbara Spence register family and friends at the ceremony on Dec. 16, 2023.

PHOTOS BY LORI GRHAM

Study shows economic impact of Radford University



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF RADFORD UNIVERSITY

RADFORD – According to a New River Valley Regional Commission study, the total economic impact of Radford University on the Commonwealth of Virginia was \$421.7 million in FY2022, with \$390 million remaining within the region.

President Bret Danilowicz expressed his enthusiasm about the university's economic impact.

"Public institutions like Radford University enhance financial health not just for their students or alumni, but for all Virginians," he said. "We are proud of the economic impact Radford has on Southwest Virginia and the entire commonwealth. As we use this study to understand our strengths and guide future strategies, we expect that great outcomes are on the horizon."

This impact is derived from direct expenditures for goods and services by the university, its faculty, staff, students and visitors, along with the indirect and induced impacts of those dollars being re-spent in the state and regional economies. According to the study, for every \$1 allocated to Radford University in FY2022, the university returned \$6.35 in economic impact to the statewide economy. When factoring in

the human capital improvements to FY2022 graduates, that benefit increased almost four times to \$23.80.

"As a regional comprehensive university and an anchor institution, we believe it is our responsibility to create pathways to economic mobility and contribute to the well-being of our community," said Angela Joyner, Vice President of Economic Development and Corporate Education. "This study demonstrates our continued commitment to economic development."

Among the key findings, Radford University's impact includes:

The university's employment impact totaled 5,561 jobs in the Commonwealth. These jobs included not only direct employment by the university (1,574 jobs), but also jobs that were stimulated in Virginia through spending by the institution and its employees, students, and visitors (3,987 jobs).

Radford University students played a pivotal role, injecting an estimated \$85.7 million into the statewide economy in FY2022, with a substantial 94% of spending occurring within the region. Additionally, students dedicated over 7,600 hours annually to community service, resulting in an estimated volunteerism impact of \$229,109.

Visitors to the university made a significant contribution, infusing approximately \$7.1 million into the regional economy in FY2022 through local spending on lodging, food and beverage, retail shopping and recreation.

Highlighting the enduring impact of a Radford University education, Highlander alumni are

estimated to contribute a substantial \$2.2 billion annually to the Virginia economy through consumer spending. Impressively, 70% of Radford University alumni reside in Virginia.

More than 2,000 individuals graduated with a degree from Radford University in FY2022, enhancing their earning potential in the job market. The human capital improvement of these graduates is estimated to bring an extraordinary \$1.16 billion in additional income to the Virginia economy over the course of their careers.

"The study highlights the many ways in which the university contributes to local, regional, and statewide economies," said Charlie Jewell, Director of Economic Development and Community Engagement. "The university is committed to being an engaged economic development partner and we look forward to identifying new and creative ways to expand our impact in partnership with businesses, governmental entities, and nonprofits."

The Radford University Division of Economic Development and Corporate Education contracted with the New River Valley Regional Commission to produce the 2022 Economic Impact Study. The New River Valley Regional Commission developed the study utilizing IMPLAN software, an economic data, analytics and modeling tool that is widely used in estimating economic impacts.

Radford University



PHOTO COURTESY OF PEGGY TAYLOR

Pictured (back, from left): Jutta Green, Ray Wurzbarger, Chris Pugh and (front, from left): Wes Adcock and Peggy Taylor

Radford Fairlawn Daily Bread receives donation from longtime group of friends

Heather Bell
Editor

RADFORD – The "Atlanta Five" has made their annual gift to Radford Fairlawn Daily Bread, giving the gift of food for the holiday season. This group of friends and

former co-workers at New River Community College bonded due to their love for the Atlanta Braves more than 20 years ago. Each year, they donate money to a charity instead of exchanging Christmas

See Donation, page 2

Radford University earns re-accreditation from SACSCOC

RADFORD - Radford University has completed a successful accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

(SACSCOC), earning a 10-year reaffirmation from the SACSCOC Board of Trustees during its annual

See SACSCOC, page 2

Florida woman dies after crash on I-81 in Montgomery County

MONTGOMERY, CO. - A 72-year-old Florida woman has died after being hit by a tractor trailer Friday, Dec. 15 on I-81 in Montgomery County near Radford.

"Virginia State Police is investigating a three-vehicle crash which resulted in a fatality," according to the Virginia State Police. "The crash occurred Friday, (Dec 15), at 1:40 a.m. on the southbound side of Interstate 81, at the 108-mile marker in Montgomery County."

According to the VSP, "a 2022 Hyundai SUV was traveling south at the 108-mile marker, when the vehicle ran off the right side of the roadway and

struck the guardrail. The SUV came to rest in the right travel lane. The driver of the SUV exited the vehicle and was struck by a 2023 Peterbilt tractor trailer which was also traveling south. The tractor trailer then struck a 2008 Dodge Caravan on the right shoulder."

The driver of the Hyundai was identified as Pamela Ann Crockett, 72, of Hawthorne, Fla. Crockett died at the scene. The Virginia State Police Crash Reconstruction Team assisted with the crash. The crash remains under investigation.

Staff report

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, Dec. 20:

CommUNITY Yoga for Self-Care for Adults
At the Radford Public Library; 5:45 – 6:45 p.m. Join Kelly McCoy of The Whole You for an all-level yoga class for adults. Learn poses to help strengthen and lengthen your muscles as well as some breathing and meditation techniques to help calm the nervous system. This class is free to the public and is funded by grant money via the Virginia Department of Health.

Thursday, Dec. 21:

Photo Club meeting
The Radford Photo Club will meet at 6 p.m. at Radford Public Library. Bring your three favorite photos from 2023 on a thumb drive to share and select one as a print for the photo contest.

Friday, Dec. 22- Tuesday, Dec. 26:

Radford Public Library closed
Radford Public Library will be closed Friday, Dec. 22 through Tuesday, Dec. 26. RPL will close early at 5 pm on Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 27 and 28.

Sunday, Dec. 24:

Town of Blacksburg holiday hours
The Blacksburg Community Center and Aquatic Center closed. Blacksburg Transit will operate on reduced service with service ending at 6:45 p.m.

Monday, Dec. 25:

Town of Blacksburg holiday hours
All town administrative offices will be closed. The Blacksburg Community Center and Aquatic Center will be closed. There will be no Blacksburg Transit service. There will be no trash pickup in the SE quadrant. Make-up service will be Wednesday, Dec. 27. Please have all

materials to the curb by 7 a.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 26:

Town of Blacksburg holiday hours
All town administrative offices will be closed. The Blacksburg Aquatic Center will be closed. The Blacksburg Community Center will be open regular hours. Blacksburg Transit will operate on reduced service.

Wednesday, Dec. 27:

CommUNITY Yoga for Self-Care for Adults
At the Radford Public Library; 5:45- 6:45 p.m. Join Kelly McCoy of The Whole You for an all-level yoga class for adults. Learn poses to help strengthen and lengthen your muscles as well as some breathing and meditation techniques to help calm the nervous system. This class is free to the public and is funded by grant money via the Virginia Department of Health.

Sunday, Dec. 31:

Town of Blacksburg holiday hours
Blacksburg Transit will operate on reduced service. The Blacksburg Community Center will be closed. The Blacksburg Aquatic Center will be open regular hours.

Monday, Jan. 1, 2024:

Town of Blacksburg holiday hours
All town administrative offices will be closed. The Blacksburg Community Center and Aquatic Center will be closed. There will be no Blacksburg Transit service. There will be no trash pickup in the SE quadrant. Make-up service will be Wednesday, Jan. 3. Please have all materials to the curb by 7 a.m.

Radford Public Library closed
RPL will be closed on Monday, Jan. 1, 2024 for the New Year holiday.

On-going:

Dec. 14- Jan. 15:

Blacksburg Transit reduced service
Blacksburg Transit will operate on reduced service for the holiday season beginning Dec. 14. Reduced service will remain in effect until Jan. 15. There will be no bus service on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. For more information, please contact 540-443-1500.

Dec. 15 – Jan. 1:

Free downtown Blacksburg parking
Free holiday parking will be in effect downtown. Normal parking rates will resume on Tuesday, Jan. 2.

Blacksburg stormwater utility credit application deadline

Deadline for Stormwater Utility Credit Applications is Jan. 1, 2024. If you are located within the Town of Blacksburg and have a stormwater management facility on your site, you may qualify for a credit on your monthly stormwater utility fee. Go to www.blacksburg.gov/stormwaterfund and review the Stormwater Utility Credit Manual to know more. Stormwater management facilities are typically ponds (either dry ponds/dry detention basins or wet retention basins). Other types include underground storage structures (usually located under parking lots in commercial areas), vegetated areas like bio-retentions, and mechanical filters that remove oil and sediment from stormwater runoff. Questions, contact stormwater@blacksburg.gov or call 540-443-1354.

Blacksburg Comprehensive Plan Amendment application process

In 2021, Town Council adopted the updated Comprehensive Plan. As part of the mid-way evaluation between five-year updates, the town accepts privately initiated applications for amendments to the plan. Amendments include changes to Future Land Use Map designations or the text of the Plan. Applications due on Jan. 15, 2024. A pre-application meeting is required prior to submittal. Contact Maeve Gould, Comprehensive Planner, at (540) 443-1300 or CompPlan@blacksburg.gov, with questions, or to schedule a pre-application meeting.

Wreath from page 1



PHOTO BY LORI GRHAM

The United Auto Workers bring Volvo trucks and motorcycles to the event, wrapped by Volvo showing their respect for veterans of past and present.

Each marker has a wreath placed by a family member, friend, or volunteers so that every service member is recognized during the Christmas holiday season. "A lot of people still don't know that this cemetery is here," Spence said. "This is a veteran's

cemetery." The SWVA Veterans Cemetery provides some burial options that are no-cost to the veteran or their spouse and can be applied for at any time, including before the service member's end of life. The Virginia Department of Veterans Services website

at www.dvs.virginia.gov provides full details and an application link for anyone interested in finding out more information.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) 2069th Chapter of the Veterans Committee were present as well with William "Willie" Price currently serving as their chairperson. Committee members were present to park cars and provide support in the wreath laying ceremony.

"We bring trucks, we bring motorcycles, and we partner with the cemetery and try to help them meet a lot of their needs in raising...if they have events that need volunteers," Price said. "Whatever that needs to be done."

The trucks are owned and wrapped by Volvo, Trucks North America, located in Pulaski County, and members of the committee are made up entirely of current or retired employees.

The SWVA Veterans Cemetery is located at 5550 Bagging Plant Road in Dublin and has a Facebook page with more information along with additional pictures from the recent wreath laying ceremony.

Donation from page 1

gifts and for the past several years have donated to RFDB, for which one of the group members, Peggy Taylor, serves as a member of the board of directors.

"The "A5" continue to love and support our mission...and I love them for it," said Taylor.

The A5 donated \$600 to RFDB this year, helping the organization continue its mission of providing a hot lunchtime meal to hundreds of people each week Monday through Friday, which it has been doing for 30 years. Today, the group includes four of the original members, including Jutta Green (business professor), Ray Wurzbarger (accounting professor), Wes Adcock (chemistry professor), and Taylor (retired

Director of Student Services). Chris Pugh, who worked at New River initially and then went to Ruritan National where she still works part-time, joined the group around 2005. The group lost math professor Tom Flohr to a brain tumor in 2005.

"We would love to encourage others to donate because we believe so strongly in their mission and service to our community, and we know how much these donations mean," said Taylor. In a 2022 interview. "We also think Christmas is the perfect time to share our gifts with those in need."

To learn more about RFDB, go to <https://www.radfordfairlawndailybread.org>.

SACSCOC from page 1

meeting on Dec. 3.

"This important accomplishment proves that people can trust the high quality of a Radford University education," President Bret Danilowicz said. "We welcome any opportunity to improve the effectiveness of our institution and deliver the best possible experiences for our students. I am proud of the members of our university community who gave the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Committee a candid look into our programs and services, and demonstrated the high standards that made our reaffirmation a success."

"I am impressed by the excellent collective effort that went into earning this reaffirmation of accreditation," Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Bethany Usher said. "The reaffirmation leadership team led by Dr. Jessica Stowell, members of the reaffirmation advisory committees, and the individuals who participated in the on-site visit should be commended for their work. Our efforts to enhance equity in educational outcomes will benefit students from all backgrounds who choose our university."

Stowell, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Quality Improvement, led the process, which included a year-and-a-half of planning prior to a visit from the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Committee in March of 2023. Over a two-day period on March 26 and 27, the committee met with students, faculty, staff, administrators and Board of Visitors members, and reviewed evidence. During the interviews, they investigated policies, finances, faculty qualifications, distance education, general education, evaluation of faculty and administration, assessment, and the Realizing Inclusive Student Excellence (RISE) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). In addition to spending two full days

on the main campus, committee members visited three sites: Radford University Carilion (RUC), the Roanoke Higher Education Center and the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.

The RISE QEP, approved in March by the reaffirmation committee, was implemented at the start of fall 2023. The topic which inspired the QEP, "Belonging and Student success in required 100 and 200 level courses," sought to close equity gaps in student performance in foundational courses. RISE will enhance student learning and success through faculty development and fostering student-faculty relationships. Each academic college and RUC will have a RISE Community Action Team (R-CATs) consisting of students, faculty, and staff who will examine college-level data and create outreach events to build community and belonging within their units.

Radford will undergo an interim review and submit a QEP impact report to SACSCOC in September of 2028. The university's next reaffirmation of accreditation takes place in 2033.

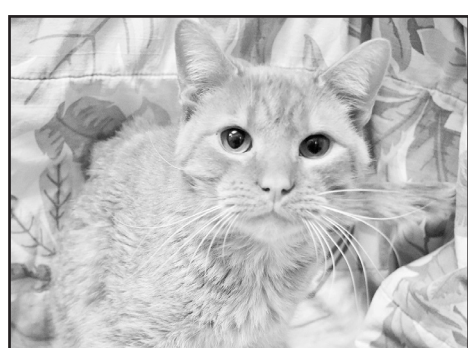
SACSCOC is the recognized regional accrediting body in the eleven U.S. Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia) and in Latin America for those institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees. To maintain accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must comply with the standards and requirements in The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement and with the policies and procedures of the Commission on Colleges.

Radford University

PETS OF THE WEEK

These pets and many others are available for adoption at the Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center, 480 Cinnabar Rd., Christiansburg. Phone: (540) 382-5795.

Bobo is a happy boy who is ready to go home for the holidays! He is capital "C" Cute, especially with that single "sock" he wears. Bobo is curious, likes attention, and will gladly sit for a tasty treat.



Nog is a sweet feline looking for his furever home. He is friendly and would enjoy a scratch on the chin or the chance to nuzzle against his favorite human's leg. Stop by the Animal Care and Adoption Center to see if he is your purrfect match!

OBITUARIES

Wiggert, Mildred Laitinen

Mildred Laitinen Wiggert died on Dec. 12, 2023. She was born on May 8, 1931, the sixth child of Albin and Hilma Fredman Laitinen in Negaunee Township, Mich.



Hannah Katharina Wiggert Duban.

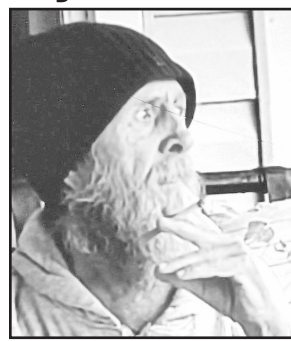
She grew up in this rural Finnish community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She received her Bachelor's of Arts in education from the University of Michigan and later received her Master's of Arts in elementary education from Virginia Tech.

Besides her parents and siblings, she was preceded in death by her husband, James Miller Wiggert, and granddaughter,

and Jamie Wiggert; great-grandchildren, Hannah Renee Bishop and Landon Wayne Bishop; special daughter Trang Le (Thai Dao) and numerous nieces and nephews. A memorial will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, anyone wishing to do so may send a contribution to: Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, 600 Prices Fork Rd., Blacksburg, VA 24060; or League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, P.O. Box 10133, Blacksburg, VA 24060; or Alzheimer's Association, P.O. Box 96011, Washington, DC 20090.

Gregory, Allan Wayne

Allan Wayne Gregory, 67, passed away Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023, at his home in Pulaski. He was preceded in death by his parents, Charles and Ellen Gregory; brothers, Richard Garland and James Alvis Gregory; sisters, Patricia Dawn Gregory and Kennetha Diane Gregory Melton; and infant twins, Alan, Jr. and Bryan.



Gregory; brother, Carl Gregory; and sister, Barbara Ann Burnette

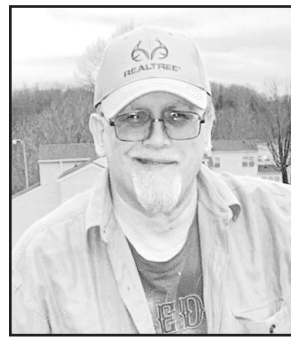
(Charles); nieces, Kimberly (Brad) Nester and Latisha C. Fox; nephew, Jason Allan Gregory; and many other relatives and friends.

The family received friends Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023 at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Services will be private.

The Gregory family is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford.

Shrewsberry, Tony Dwayne

Tony Dwayne Shrewsberry, 59, went to be with the lord Sunday, Dec. 10, 2023, at his home in west end, Radford.



He was a standing member of Bro. Dale Akers church Peak Creek Ministries in Pulaski, Va. Tony was preceded in death by his father, Robert Shrewsberry; stepfather, Keith "Marty" Martin; and brother, Stephen Shrewsberry.

His survivors include his wife, Dana Shrewsberry; his mother, Lettie "Carlene" Martin; his loving daughters and sons-in-law, Gena Leigh Shrewsberry (Wayne Lucado), Brooke Nicole Akers (Josh Akers), Tiffany Paige Shrewsberry (David Fields), and Chloe Beth

Shrewsberry; stepson, Christopher "Jonah" Pagan; his many grandkids and bonus grandkids, Greyson, Haley, Raleigh, and Rozalynn; his brother, Kevin Martin; sister-in-law, Melinda "Sue" Shrewsberry; and many other loving relatives and friends.

Tony loved the Lord and instilled his faith in his children as much as he could. He grew up and spent

most of his life in west end Radford where he made a career for himself through New River Heating and Air. He has always loved to work and help others unless he just couldn't. He had such a sense of humor and would talk with you for hours if he could. He will forever be missed by many, but now he walks the streets of gold with his heavenly father.

The family received friends Monday, Dec. 18, 2023 at West Radford Church of God, 1824 W Main Street, Radford, VA 24141. Funeral services followed with Pastor Danny Newman officiating.

The Shrewsberry family is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford.

Huffman, Donald Arthur

Donald Arthur Huffman was born in Montgomery County on April 18, 1941 to Arthur Lee and Viola Lovern Huffman and died Dec. 13, 2023.



Huffman and Kathy Huffman.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife, Joanne Barker Huffman and his former wife, Martha Oliver Huffman; two brothers, Audrey Lee Huffman and Danny Ray Huffman; and granddaughter, Cordelia Elizabeth Huffman. He is survived by two sons, Cory Stewart Huffman and Jon Michael Huffman and his wife Jennifer Sickles Huffman; his granddaughter, Kaylee Jayne Huffman; his daughter, Jennifer White and her husband George; two sisters, Linda Phillips and her husband Hoyt, and Wanda Wright and her husband Jimmy; and two sisters-in law, Sue

period of March 27-29, 1964. Don volunteered to enter the Anchorage Alaska Communication System Toll Building, which had been declared unsafe and perform the emergency duties of telephone operator. He remained on duty day and night to provide essential communications during a period of great need.

Don and Joanne were avid Hokie Football fans. They had season tickets and never missed a home game. They also traveled to many away and bowl games. Even after they could not go to the stadium, they watched all televised games.

Michael Hill, his nephew, will officiate the funeral at noon on Wednesday, Dec. 20 at Horne Funeral Home. Burial will follow at Roselawn Memorial Gardens.

The family wishes to thank Dr. Greg Beato, D.O. of Medical Associates of Southwest Virginia for his excellent care and availability for Butch.

The family will receive friends 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, at Central Church in Radford, located at Eighth and Wadsworth St. Memorial services will begin at 12 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to County of Pulaski, Randolph Park, 5100 Alexander Road, Dublin, VA 24084. Please reference PCP and R Golf.

The White/Cox families are in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford.

and Beck Thacker. Butch loved his family and his church. He had a strong faith in God.

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Vest, Ellen Bennett

Ellen Bennett Vest, of Christiansburg, left to light the way for all who loved her on Nov. 29, 2023. Born in Radford, she attended school in Christiansburg and attained a degree in Nursing from Bridgewater College.



Ellen believed strongly in the importance of family and friendship. Her loving, nurturing, and gracious nature made all feel treasured and appreciated. Her generosity lifted moods with humor, eased grief through compassion, and banished loneliness with companionship. For most of her adult life she utilized her medical training and experience as a care giver, helping many loved ones through sickness and infirmity.

Ellen lived to bring joy to others, often through thoughtful gifts and cards, and of course food. Wherever she went, she brought the most marvelous food. She made it with heaping spoonfuls of love and an artist's eye toward aesthetics. Ellen's motto was always, "Presentation, presentation, presentation!"

Ellen also loved nature. She gardened organically,

kept bird feeders full, and adored her sweet dog Oakley. Chickens, peacocks, swans, sheep, and llamas all occupied parts of her life, and she even loved guinea fowl, which is something few of us can say.

Preceded in death by her father, William Bennett, mother Thelma Lucas, step-father Sam Lucas, husband Clay Vest, and great-aunt Bertha Sassaman, she is survived by her uncle Donald Bennett, uncle John Flory (Joan), step-brother Lt. Col. (Ret) Nathan Lucas (Karen), step-sister Myran Moore (Doug), step-daughter Jessica Brevard (Chris); step-grandchildren Caleb, Emma, and Anna; and many loving nieces, nephews, and cousins. Ellen is also survived by

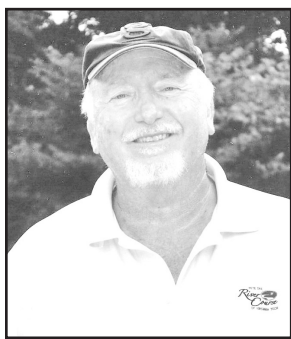
loved ones Wayne Goff, his daughter Kristin Goff and son-in-law Mitch Sutphin, and their son Ryker. Furthermore, memories of Ellen will be deeply cherished by the Vest family of Floyd, and by her many friends too numerous to mention.

All who knew her are left searching for ways to honor Ellen, to make her proud of us. Since she always felt that blooms and bouquets should be given to the living, in lieu of flowers, please donate to the Humane Society of Montgomery County, 1183 Flanagan Dr., Christiansburg, Va 24073 or to the Tunnel to Towers Foundation, 2362 Hylan Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10306.

A memorial service will be held on Jan. 13, 2024, at the Christiansburg Presbyterian Church at 2 p.m. Ellen's family will receive friends and well-wishers afterwards in the church's Fellowship Hall. Online condolences may be made at Gardnerfuneralhomefloyd.com. The family is being served by Gardner Funeral Home.

White, III, Jesse Lee

Jesse Lee White, III (Butch/Coach), beloved husband of Catherine Cox, passed away on Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2023, with his wife and son, Eric White, at his bedside. Even with exceptional medical care after heart surgery, there was no progress in his medical condition.



many golf tournaments. He was well loved not only by family but by his students, golfers, and friends.

Butch taught math for 37 years at Pulaski County High School and also taught math for years at New River Community College. He coached both football and basketball, but his primary interest was his golf team and taking the players to competitions at various courses. Butch was an avid golfer himself and believed in following the rules of golf whether playing with his buddies or playing in competition. Over the years, he has won

He was preceded in death by his parents, Elsie and Jesse White, Jr. He is survived by his wife, Catherine Cox; his son, Eric White; stepson, Matthew Cox; granddaughter and spouse, Alexis and Rick Thacker; grandson, Dustin White; and great grandchildren, Adaliz

and Beck Thacker. Butch loved his family and his church. He had a strong faith in God.

The family wishes to thank Dr. Greg Beato, D.O. of Medical Associates of Southwest Virginia for his excellent care and availability for Butch.

The family will receive friends 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, at Central Church in Radford, located at Eighth and Wadsworth St. Memorial services will begin at 12 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to County of Pulaski, Randolph Park, 5100 Alexander Road, Dublin, VA 24084. Please reference PCP and R Golf.

The White/Cox families are in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford.

Merry Christmas!



For over 50 years, we have been proud to be a part of the community and serve our friends with the best prices and selection of electrical and lighting needs.

Thank you for your loyal support and friendship over the years.

Electrical Supply Inc.

594 Depot Street, Old Cambria Section, Christiansburg • Phone: 540-382-6179 electricalsupply@verizon.net

May God bless and watch over you and your loved ones at Christmas and always. We hope the holiday season finds you together, sharing with family and friends.

We wish you a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory

120 West Main Street Radford, VA 24141 540-639-2456

Glad Tidings to You!

Wishing you and yours a happy holiday season filled with good times, good friends and good memories.

We thank you for your support this past year and look forward to serving you in the new year.

Price's Body Shop

2592 Ellett Rd., Christiansburg 382-7300

Rejoice in the Gifts of the Season

May Christmas deliver the best gifts of all to you and yours this year: Peace, Love, Health, Happiness & Friendship

Merry Christmas, and best wishes for a blessed New Year.

Price's Service Center

1107 N. Main Street Blacksburg 540-552-5041

OPINION

Trains an important part of growing up in Christiansburg

Evans "Buddy" King

Columnist

I drove the "back way" to work one day last week, through an area called Summit Park. I go this route often to avoid the "rush hour" traffic.

I'm a little tongue in cheek when I refer to "rush hour," since I live in North Central West Virginia, a largely rural area dotted by a few recovering rust-belt cities, and my commute has rarely taken more than 15 minutes through a couple of home moves and an office relocation. But the intersection of I-79 and Route 50, about two miles from my house, is said to be the busiest intersection in the state, and getting through it and onto I-79 North to my office park can become a death-defying fete. Plus, the "back way" is beautiful and while driving it I have probably seen every animal indigenous to North America at one time or another.

As wildly interesting as this story is, the reason I think it is "column worthy" is because I got stopped by a train, a long train, this particular morning. I cross these tracks every time I go this route of course, but rarely get caught by a real live train. While sitting and checking emails and texts and making phone calls, my mind wandered back to my Christiansburg youth and to the sound of trains.

As every self-respecting Christiansburger knows, trains were very important to the development of the town. Like most of everything I write, this is not intended to be a well-researched history of Christiansburg's history with trains, so forgive factual errors. This column is just a collection of feelings and memories.

My main memory of trains is of hearing the whistle at night and the clanking of railcars as they passed through Cambria depot while I was lying in my bed

safe and warm on Cherry Lane. The home I was raised in was probably a good two miles from the tracks, but the Christiansburg of those days was small and quiet and lacking in ambient noise. Depending on which way the wind was blowing, you could hear the rumbling of the cars almost as if they were at the end of the street. I think everyone in town went to bed at night to the music of the Norfolk & Western.

My Dad taught me to distinguish the empty cars from the full ones by the sound of the rumbling - a shallower, whinier rhythm for the empties, a fuller, more robust sound for the full ones. The empties were headed to West Virginia, the full ones were headed east, to Norfolk, carrying coal to be loaded and shipped out of one of the world's largest ports.

It may not sound romantic now, not in this time of war on fossil fuels, but the sound of the distant trains carrying coal made me think about the world, interconnectedness, commerce. It was comforting to me for some reason to fall off to sleep on a cold January night to the sound of the clanking of train cars taking coal that had been pulled out of the ground in the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia and loaded into cars that then passed through my hometown on the way to Europe, to heat homes and make things.

Another thing my parents would talk about when we listened to the trains was their fathers and the roles trains played in their lives. I have very little memory of my grandfather Charlie King, who died when I was six years old, and none at all of my mother's father, Joseph Weaver, who died many years before I was born. But I do know that Grandfather Charlie often worked in the mines in southern West Virginia, repairing railcars when "money was hard to come by," and that Grandfather

Joe Weaver died while working as a conductor for the Virginia Western Railroad in a train accident in Wyoming County, West Virginia. So, I guess I had love and respect and awe for trains in my blood.

Cambria depot (annexed into Christiansburg in the 1960's) was where people boarded while train travel was in its heyday. Many a Tech student traveling from the east (i.e., most) came into Christiansburg, on the N & W and then took a "spur" - the Huckleberry as it was known - on to Blacksburg, to a dead end. I remember taking the train out of Cambria with my Cub Scout troop to Radford, at a cost of \$.10 for a round trip. I'm also pretty sure I rode the Huckleberry.

Perhaps my best memories of those train tracks in Cambria are of the two great "crushes" of my high school years, names withheld to protect us all. This was a time and a place when the greatest entertainment for teenagers was "driving around." And for many young guys like me, who were scared of dating but prone to pining, driving past the homes of the crush du jour was the highest form of entertainment. Perhaps our affections would pass by osmosis. So, I spent many an hour with my friends John or Bob or Greg sitting "at the tracks," coming or going from Cambria and the objects of my secret affection. Not sure if I was hopeful or fearful of actually seeing them in their yards!

Late in my Christiansburg years, I-81 was completed up behind Mockingbird Hill, where my aunt and cousins lived, at the top of Cherry Lane, much to the chagrin of my parents and others who enjoyed the tranquility of our little town. We could hear the tractor trailers roaring by on the Interstate, a sound that lacked the romance and the promise of adventure of the clackety clack of the train. It was not the same.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Tackling gun violence meaningfully

Unfortunately, Delegate Jason Ballard's opinion piece "Addressing the underlying problems related to gun violence is important," (Dec. 6, 2023) is not only far off target, but worse, does nothing to address the problem he rightly acknowledges.

He claims that House Bill 2 is an "attempt by

those on the left to criminalize lawful and responsible ownership of so-called "assault firearms," but that's a divisive misrepresentation. The attempt of the Bill is to take weapons that are clearly designed to do nothing more than kill people out of the hands of private citizens. Nobody needs a semi-automatic rifle for hunting or self-defense.

I've never hunted, but my friend the hunter tells me, "It's not sporting to hunt with AR platform rifles, period."

Common sense tells me that if a hunter misses that deer with the first shot, he sure isn't going to hit him with the second, unless spraying bullets machine-gun style.

"Those rifles are meant to hunt people," my friend continued. "AR rifles fire repeatedly and they will basically just tear the deer up."

Sporting hunters use single-shot bolt-action rifles, muzzle-loaders or even bows and arrows. I can't imagine anybody who hunts for sport would use an assault rifle, or a muzzle compensator or a high-capacity magazine. Or would find these lethal enhancements necessary.

Delegate Ballard rightly suggests that safe storage of firearms to keep them from the hands of minors is critical, saying he has submitted a bill this year to expand tax credits to those who purchase a gun safe.

But if your gun is in a safe, how can he claim it is necessary to provide protection?

"And finally," he opines, "we should be focusing on mental and behavioral health treatment that lessens the prevalence of violence in our communities." Indeed, this is an absolutely necessary part of the solution. But why then does his party consistently block funding for our mental health institutions which are chronically ill-equipped and understaffed? Our state government recently returned a surplus of funding to the citizens. If mental health is the problem the delegate claims it to be, why not spend that money there?

In closing, in a point of gobsacking hypocrisy, the Delegate calls this legislation "an example of government overreach," while his party seeks the ultimate overreach, ripping Virginia women's reproductive health care decisions from them, their families, and their doctors.

If the Delegate recognized gun violence as the real problem that all of us believe it to be, he'd ditch his hypocrisy and divisive finger-pointing. And then propose effective, workable solutions and ways to implement and fund them.

Michael Abraham
Blacksburg

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"Building Blocks for Virginia Families" will help families with child care

In last week's column, I wrote about several pieces of legislation that I plan to introduce in the 2024 legislative session that would benefit our region's localities. While I had intended to inform you of some additional bills that I plan on submitting in this week's edition, a recent announcement from Governor Glenn Youngkin relating to child-care deserves your attention.

Something I hear often when I'm

in the community is that the lack of affordable/accessible childcare is preventing economic growth and presenting real hardships to families. It's now more common than in past years for two parents to have to work to make ends meet. Single parent households are at even more of a disadvantage when it comes to accessing childcare, due to both availability and cost.

In response, Governor Youngkin recently announced his "Building Blocks for Virginia Families" (BBVF) plan, which will build upon existing programs to help make childcare and early learning more accessible for all Virginians.

Governor Youngkin's plan will ensure that every low-income working

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- Blaze
- Sea eagles
- Tails in Italian
- Monocot genus
- Mother or father
- The Jungian inner self
- Covered with gold
- Residual oil
- Signs up for school
- Furniture for daily meals
- Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand
- Lower limb
- Guy (slang)
- Get free of
- Snake-like fish
- Adult female bird
- Formal window coverings
- Break into small pieces
- "1836 siege" of U.S.
- Made violet-red
- Food chopper
- Removes writing
- Ethiopian monetary unit
- Wine bottle
- Containers
- English prelate
- Wm. Ralph
- Small storage
- structure
- A jelly-like substance
- CLUES DOWN
- A brief comment
- Sultanate of NW Borneo
- Importune
- Forelimb
- Models of ethical behavior
- Harangues
- This (Spanish)
- Springfield Area Mobile Intensive Care
- Sang at Christmas door to door
- Partly or nearly blind
- Posterior pituitary gland hormone
- American Nurses Association (abbr.)
- The 7th Greek letter
- Strives to equal
- Toff
- Coleoptera insects
- The color of blood
- Slipped by
- Of she
- A short musical passage
- CNN's founder Turner
- Radioactivity unit
- Excultation defense
- Walking back and forth
- Come forth from
- Oxalis
- A soft twilled fabric of silk
- The two large chest muscles

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RADFORD SPORTS

Area's racing son returns home, Hagan celebrates world title in Christiansburg



Matt Hagan's Camping World championship trophy was on display Saturday during a year-end celebration at the Motor Mile Toyota car dealership.



National Hot Rod Association world champion Matt Hagan greeted fans Saturday in Christiansburg, signing autographs and snapping selfies.



PHOTOS BY MARTY GORDON

Native son, Matt Hagan, was back in the area this past weekend to celebrate his recent NHRA world title. He made an appearance Saturday at the Motor Mile Toyota dealership.

Marty Gordon

NRVsports@ourvalley.org

Professional race car driver and area native Matt Hagan says he can remember when he could not give away his autograph. Now, it has all changed after he won his fourth world championship this past National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) season.

Saturday, he saw over 500 people line up and wait hours in Christiansburg to gain a photo op or his signature. The event was held at his father's Motor Mile Toyota car dealership.

"Those early years were tough," Matt told reporters.

The year was 2010, and Hagan was still learning to drive a race. "We had a lot of growing pains that put it in perspective."

But Hagan preserved and is the 2011, 2014, 2020 and 2023 NHRA Funny Car World Champion. He has had a total of 49 Career Event titles, 87 Career Final Rounds, and 21 Career No.1 qualifying positions.

In 2021, he was announced as the Funny Car driver for Tony Stewart Racing.

This year, Hagan clinched a Fourth NHRA Funny Car World Championship at the Camping World Series finale in Pomona, CA on November 12. Hagan's title places him in an elite group of only four racers to have won four funny car championships in the history of the

sport. Racing greats John Force (15 championships), Don Prudhomme (4), and Kenny Bernstein (4) round out the list.

Hagan's fourth title is the first for the TSR Nitro organization, owned by Indy/NASCAR champ Tony Stewart, who made the move to NHRA team ownership two seasons ago.

Stewart and his wife, NHRA dragster driver and Hagan race mate, Leah Pruett, also made a stop in the New River Valley for this special event. They also took time to sign autographs and take photos with fans.

Stewart was enthused about Hagan's success and suggested the new race team has helped take some of the stress off him.

"I think we have created a (good) culture and atmosphere that he can enjoy and be successful," the car owner said.

"Yes, Tony takes a lot of the stress off," Hagan said. "We are now turning sponsors away. We have a great chemistry as a team."

This weekend, fans were given the opportunity to meet Matt and see the Dodge Power Brokers Funny Car Hagan piloted in the season finale in Pomona.

After last month's clinching of the world title, Hagan thanked his crew chiefs, staff and new car owner. "It was great to get Tony Stewart his first championship in their second year out here in the NHRA." Many of those

contributors were there this weekend, when he took a moment to look back at the season.

"I couldn't have done any of this without them," Hagan said.

"We worked very hard in the off season to make it happen."

The off season will start again in a month, and Hagan is looking forward to going for a ring for the thumb, a number five world championship. "I liked to get one for all 10 fingers," he joked with reporters.

On Saturday, Hagan spent over two hours signing autographs and meeting appreciative fans. Many were anxious to grab a snapshot with the driver, who was sporting a new mustache.

"This is important for me. They (the fans) are just unbelievable at the track or special events."

Hagan stood, not sitting down or taking a break, during the entire time, taking time to greet and smile each of his fans.

"It's great to be here and celebrate with the local fans," he said. "I can't thank them enough."

His autograph is now in high demand, a big difference than those early years when he was just getting his feet wet in the world of racing. Those were times when people and fellow racers, according to Hagan, were scratching their heads wondering who he was. They know who he is now.



PHOTO BY BRYANT ALTIZER

Radford football coach Michael Crist led his team to a state Class 2 championship with a victory over Riverheads, and now he has been honored as the top coach in the state of Virginia.

Radford's Clark, Davis top players in state

Marty Gordon

NRVsports@ourvalley.org

Radford High School capped off an undefeated football season with a state Class 2 title, and now several Bobcats are receiving well-earned accolades.

The Virginia High School League has announced its All-State Class 2 team, and Radford's Landon Clark is the state's offensive player of the year, while linebacker Charlie Davis is the state's defensive player of the year.

Head coach Michael Crist, who is 33-6 in his first three seasons at Radford, was named the Class 2 coach of the year.

Clark was joined on the first-team offense by his battery-mate in center Nolan Dalton and his favorite receiver in Max Kanipe.

Clark will finish his Bobcat career with 3,363 yards passing in his senior year going 206 of 339 with 40

touchdowns. He will also finish this season with 1,207 yards rushing to lead the team on 134 carries with 26 touchdowns.

Kanipe will finish his season with 74 receptions for 1,598 yards with 17 touchdowns. Taylor added 51 for

804 yards. Davis has tallied 157 tackles this season with 62 solos.

Davis was joined on the first-team defense by Clark who was named as a defensive back. The Elon-commit Clark was also named to the second team as a punter. Davis was a second team offensive lineman. Radford's Ricky Bailey was named second team defensive lineman.

Earlier Clark and Davis received the regional honors for offensive and defensive player of year respectively. Coach Crist was also named the Region C coach of the year.

Clark was joined on the first team all-region by center Nolan Dalton, offensive lineman Charlie Davis and receiver Max Kanipe.

Davis led the region at linebacker and was joined by teammates, Ricky Bailey at defensive lineman and Clark at punter and defensive back.

Second team all-region honors were given to several Bobcats. On the offensive side of the ball, runningback J.D. Grubb was joined by receivers Luke Woodward and Sincere Taylor along with tight end Brandon Thompson.

Lineman Dawson Martin and linebacker Brandon Thompson were named second team for defense.

East Mont, Auburn players honored

Marty Gordon

NRVsports@ourvalley.org

The Pioneer District has announced individual honors from this past year's football season. Eastern Montgomery's Gage Akers was named first team linebacker while Xavier Brown was first team running back.

Akers led Eastern Montgomery with 79 total tackles, 67 solos, two forced fumbles and three tackles for loss. Meanwhile Brown had 736 yards rushing on 110 attempts with nine touchdowns, playing in only seven games.

Brown was also named the second team

in the linebacker position, along with punter Cameron Gray. Akers, who rushed 123 times for 646 yards with eight touchdowns, was named second team running back along center Austin Tate.

Brown finished the season with 77 total tackles, which included 63 solos and seven tackles for loss.

The Mt. Empire District also released in 2023 all-district football squad with two players from Auburn being named to the list. Running back Austin Stump was named second team running back, while teammate Matthew Wheeler was second team linebacker and offensive line.

Evans named to all-state team

The Virginia High School League has announced its 2023 Class 3 all-state football team.

Christiansburg's Tanner Evans was named to the first team as both an offensive and defensive specialist. His teammate, Carter Stallard, was named second team offensive lineman.

LCA junior running back Gideon Davidson is the Class 3 Offensive Player of the Year, and Lafayette senior defensive end Peter Cook is the Class 3 Defensive Player of the Year. LCA head coach Frank Rocco is the Class 3 Coach of the Year.

The 6-0, 185-pound Davidson rushed for 2,716 yards for a whopping 13-yard average per carry, with 46 total touchdowns for the Bulldogs this season. Davidson is the 76th player nationally and the No. 4 running back in the country from the 2025 recruiting class, according to 247Sports Composite rankings, committed to Clemson in June. In three seasons for the Bulldogs, he has rushed for 5,343 yards and has totaled 87 touchdowns. In the state championship game against Lafayette, Davidson rushed for 302 yards and three touchdowns, including a 90-yard run for a score in the 28-14 win.

The 5'0", 190-pound Cook led a stingy Lafayette defense that only allowed 119 points, including six shutouts and allowing only one touchdown in four other games. He

finished his senior year with 124 tackles, 25 tackles for loss, 22 sacks, three forced fumbles, and recovered seven fumbles, along with two touchdowns. In the state title game, Cook recorded five tackles (3 solo/2 asst.). He remains uncommitted.

Head Coach Frank Rocco led LCA to a 14-0 record and the school's first-ever VHSL state football championship with a 28-14 win over Lafayette in the Class 3 finals played at Liberty University's Williams Stadium. Rocco has guided the Bulldogs to a 175-32 record, taking over the program in 2004, stepping away for a few years, and returning in 2015. He has a career record 266-84-2, including six state championships in the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association (VISSA).

The all-state football team consists of 32 players (Offense: one quarterback, four linemen one center; three running backs, three receivers; one tight end, one kicker, one kick returner, one all-purpose offensive player (Defense: four defensive linemen, five linebackers; four defensive backs; one punter; one punt returner; one all-purpose defensive player).

Only those players selected to the all-region first-team are eligible for selection to the all-state team. The all-state selection committee comprises eight coaches, with two from each region.

Staff report

RU's Sohrabi named to Top-20 coaches in D1

Radford women's soccer head coach Ben Sohrabi collected yet another recognition this week as he was named one of the Top-20 Division I Women's Soccer head coaches by Chris Henderson's NCAA WoSo Coach Rank.

Sohrabi moved up seven spots from 2022's coaches rankings and now sits at 18th among all Division I women's soccer coaches with a 54.00 ranking of sustained success. The ranking list is a three to five year average that measures conference performance, NCAA Tournament qualification and NCAA Tournament performance for NCAA women's soccer. Sohrabi is one of just three other mid major programs to have a coach ranked within the top-20 of 60 teams listed. Of those 60 teams, Sohrabi is the only Big South coach ranked and

one of just four coaches in the state of Virginia ranked.

Sohrabi just wrapped up an impressive 28th season at the helm of Radford's women's soccer program that culminated in the program's sixth Big South regular season championship, ninth Big South tournament championship and tenth NCAA Tournament appearance. Sohrabi was also named Big South Coach of the Year at the conclusion of the 2023 regular season for the fifth time in his career. His five coach of the year awards are now two more than the next closest coach in Big South history.

Radford University Athletics

See Sohrabi, page 8

Sohrabi from page 7



PHOTO COURTESY OF RU ATHLETICS

Radford University women's soccer coach Ben Sohrabi is not one of the best to lead a team in the Big South, now he is being recognized as one of the tops in the nation.

Next year's football schedules unchanged

Marty Gordon
NRVsports@ourvalley.org

The 2023 high school football season just ended, and next year's opponents will not really change for all our area schools.

Christiansburg will open at Floyd on Aug. 30 and then host Abingdon. On Sept. 13, the Blue Demons will begin a two game road trip in Roanoke with games against William Byrd and Cave Spring.

Back-to-back home games will be Sept. 27 against Pulaski and Oct. 4 against state semi-final Riverheads.

Christiansburg will then travel to cross-county rival Blacksburg on Sept. 11. On Sept. 18, they will host Hidden Valley before a road game at Patrick Henry. The season will end on Nov. 1 when Christiansburg will host Salem.

Blacksburg will open with a benefit game against Glenvar on Aug. 23 and then host Giles in the regular season opener on Aug. 30.

The Bruins will then take a trip to Lord Botetourt to begin the September part of their schedule before returning home on Sept. 13 to host Floyd.

A trip to Rockbridge will follow before Blacksburg hosts two straight home games against Cave Spring and Christiansburg.

On Oct. 18, the team will travel to Pulaski and the following week to Hidden Valley. A home game on Nov. 3 will be against Patrick Henry before the season finale at Salem.

Auburn will open the season with a

home benefit game against Holston on Aug. 23 and then travel to Narrows to start the season on Aug. 30.

Craig County will travel to Riner on Sept. 6 before an open Friday night. Eastern Montgomery will host Auburn for the Golden Helmet Game on Sept. 20 with Auburn on the road for the next two against Galax and Giles.

They will return home on Oct. 11 for two straight against Bath County and Ft. Chiswell. On Nov. 1, Auburn will travel to Grayson County before ending the season with two home games against Eastside and George Wythe.

Radford will open the season at George Wythe and Giles before playing Virginia High at home on Sept. 8. Trips to Galax and Alleghany will be sandwiched in the regional championship rematch with Glenvar in Bobcat Stadium.

Radford will then travel to James River on Oct. 6 and play Patrick County at home on Oct. 13. The next three include a trip to Floyd, a home contest against Carroll County and then a road trip to James River.

Eastern Montgomery will open the 2024 season at home against Holston before two straight road games at Rural Retreat and Northwood. The team will then host Auburn on Sept. 15 in a span of three at home including Ft. Chiswell and Craig County.

On Sept. 13, Eastern Montgomery will travel to Bath before returning home to face Narrows. The season will end with two road games at Twin Valley and Parry McCluer.

Families from page 4

family that currently receives public support will continue to have access to early childhood and afterschool programs. BBVF will incorporate new levels of funding, to include \$1 million toward the administration of an early learning and childcare account housed on a digital platform. Every Virginia family with children under the age of five will have access to this platform, and it will continue to be funded by employers, charities, local governments, families, and any other stakeholder that wishes to support the

success of Virginia's early learners.

Equally exciting is the Governor's proposal for a \$25 million fund for capital investment in "childcare deserts." These are regions where supply of childcare is low, leading to ever increasing demand and a subsequent rise in price of childcare services. Many of Virginia's two and four-year colleges and universities are located in close proximity to these childcare deserts, which creates the opportunity to transform unused or underutilized higher education spaces into high-quality learning centers. This funding will also help launch new or expand the capacity of existing early learning hubs, which will increase access for families currently without options.

As with many of the Governor's initiatives, important reporting metrics will be gathered to ensure that early childhood

programs are meeting parental demand. I would encourage you to visit the Governor's website if you'd like to learn more about how Building Blocks for Virginia Families could help you.

It is my honor to represent you in Richmond, and I want you to be fully informed what your government is doing for you. As the Delegate representing the 12th District (soon to be the 42nd District due to redistricting), your concerns are my greatest priority. If ever I may be of assistance to you and your family, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at DeljBallard@House.Virginia.Gov. You can also follow me on Twitter @JasonBallardVA or like my Facebook page, Jason Ballard for Delegate, to keep up to date with what I am doing in Richmond and in our community on your behalf.

Delegate Jason Ballard

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Hokie wrestlers prove electric

It was a dominant showing Sunday afternoon in Blacksburg for the No. 11 Virginia Tech wrestling team as they defeated visiting No. 19 Stanford, 29-7 to close out the 2023 dual meet season at home.

Redshirt sophomore Cooper Flynn was pulled out of Olympic redshirt and upset No. 4 Nico Provo to highlight the Hokies' victory that saw seven other Tech wrestlers pick up victories on the afternoon.

Cooper Flynn was to take an Olympic redshirt this season for the Hokies – that all changed when he took on Stanford's No. 4 Nico Provo on Sunday afternoon. The Hokie redshirt sophomore put the country on notice with a 5-2 decision victory over the Cardinal who is just two weeks removed from winning the 2023 Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational. In a highly tactical chess match, Flynn managed to lead early via a stall point against Provo and wouldn't look back as he pushed his lead in the second period with lone takedown of the bout in the second period. Flynn would manage an escape in the third and show his stalwart defense in the closing frame to upset the No. 4 wrestler in the country and open the dual with a win for the Hokies.

Another Hokie making his season debut on Sunday afternoon was fan-favorite, Cody Howard. Howard toed the line at 184-pounds against highly-touted recruit Jack Darrah in what proved to be another trademark Junk Yard Dog performance. The Hokie redshirt senior showed Tech fans his relentless motor to the tune of four takedowns to secure the 13-3 major decision win for the home team and would effectively seal the dual.

Newly graduated Hokie, No. 26 Connor Brady, picked up an upset victory over No. 16 Hunter Garvin in a controlling bout at 165-pounds. In a bounce back showing after a disappointing Cliff Keen invitational, Brady flashed promising offense in each period - securing an early high crotch takedown to open the bout and would add two more takedowns plus an escape to notch the 10-3 victory over the higher-ranked Stanford Cardinal.

Securing another win over a ranked opponent – his second over the same foe – was freshman Sonny Sasso. Sasso took on No. 14 at 197-pounds Nick Stemmet in what was a rematch from the consolation bout at Cliff Keen in what was a very different bout compared to their last meeting. In Las Vegas, Sasso secured an early takedown and

four swipes en route to an eventual first period fall. Sunday afternoon proved to be a grittier performance for the Hokie as he would battle to an 8-4 decision that saw him secure the victory late in the match. Sasso would secure the first takedown of bout off a counter, Stemmet would add two reversals to take the lead, but it was the young Hokie who would find an escape to take the lead and secure a gritty takedown to ice the win for his fifth-ranked win of the season.

At 133-pounds, No. 6 Sam Latona returned to action after a sustained injury at the NWCA All-Star Classic with a dominant 12-3 major decision against No. 16 Tyler Knox. Latona kept momentum rolling with an early takedown to lead the Cardinal in the first period and would then add a reversal plus another takedown in the second period to push his lead. Latona would then jump at the opportunity to push for bonus points for the team with another well-timed takedown and secure the riding time point in the third period to push the dual to a 7-0 lead.

It was a battle between familiar faces to Bound Brook, New Jersey as No. 2 Mekhi Lewis returned to the mat since the All-Star Classic to face No. 20 Lorenzo Norman at 174-pounds. After a scoreless first period, it was Lewis finding an escape and then finding a takedown of his own via absurd defense to close out the second period. The Cardinal would elect to start the final period in neutral which Lewis capitalized on to pick up a takedown and secure riding time advantage en route to the 8-0 major decision, giving the Hokies their third bonus point win of the afternoon.

Moving up to No. 2 in the country at 149-pounds after a strong Cliff Keen showing, Caleb Henson continued his strong sophomore season with a 20-5 pummeling over Stanford's Dawson Sihavong. Henson started early with a quick takedown but would give up a reversal in the first thirty seconds of the bout. From there it was all action for the Hitman – racking up five takedowns and a stall point to effectively end the bout at 5:38 via technical fAt heavyweight it was No. 20 Hunter Catka closing it out for the Hokies with a controlling 8-4 decision over Peter Ming. Catka secured two takedowns and over 2:30 of riding time to handily defeat the Stanford Cardinal and give the Hokies the exclamation point on the dual victory.

Virginia Tech Athletics

Average Virginia gas prices dip below \$3 a gallon

Average gasoline prices in Virginia have fallen 7.4 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$2.95/g today, according to GasBuddy's survey of 4,081 stations in Virginia. Prices in Virginia are 17.7 cents per gallon lower than a month ago and stand 3.9 cents per gallon lower than a year ago. The national average price of diesel has fallen 9.2 cents in the last week and stands at \$3.99 per gallon.

According to GasBuddy price reports, the cheapest station in Virginia was priced at \$2.29/g yesterday while the most expensive was \$4.29/g, a difference of \$2.00/g. The lowest price in the state yesterday was \$2.29/g while the highest was \$4.29/g, a difference of \$2.00/g.

The national average price of gasoline has fallen 8.6 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$3.03/g today. The national average is down 26.9 cents per gallon from a month ago and stands 6.8 cents per gallon lower than a year ago, according to GasBuddy data compiled from more than 11 million weekly price reports covering over 150,000 gas stations across the country.

Historical gasoline prices in Virginia and the national average going back ten years:

- December 18, 2022: \$2.99/g (U.S. Average: \$3.09/g)
- December 18, 2021: \$3.18/g (U.S. Average: \$3.31/g)
- December 18, 2020: \$2.09/g (U.S. Average: \$2.22/g)
- December 18, 2019: \$2.33/g (U.S. Average: \$2.56/g)
- December 18, 2018: \$2.21/g (U.S. Average: \$2.37/g)
- December 18, 2017: \$2.26/g (U.S. Average: \$2.41/g)

- December 18, 2016: \$2.12/g (U.S. Average: \$2.24/g)
- December 18, 2015: \$1.84/g (U.S. Average: \$2.00/g)
- December 18, 2014: \$2.36/g (U.S. Average: \$2.46/g)
- December 18, 2013: \$3.14/g (U.S. Average: \$3.20/g)

Neighboring areas and their current gas prices:
 Roanoke- \$2.88/g, down 11.4 cents per gallon from last week's \$2.99/g.
 Richmond- \$2.90/g, down 8.5 cents per gallon from last week's \$2.99/g.
 West Virginia- \$2.99/g, down 11.7 cents per gallon from last week's \$3.10/g.

"As the nation's average price of gasoline has fallen for the 13th straight week, we're on the cusp of potentially seeing a \$2.99 per gallon average for the first time in years, most welcome just in time for the Christmas holiday," said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy. "While the declines may soon come to an end as the price of oil has rebounded from recent lows, we could see a gentler 2024 at the pump for motorists. Gasoline could see its average fall below \$3 this week while the price of diesel has just fallen below \$4 for the first time since July, also very welcome news for the economy as nearly all goods are impacted by the price of diesel. All in all, the news continues to be good in terms of fuel prices as we enter into the closing innings of 2023. GasBuddy will be releasing full details on the year ahead in the coming weeks, giving motorists valuable insight on what to expect in 2024."

Submitted by GasBuddy

AARP Virginia fraud alert: AI for good and bad

The holidays are a time when friends and family of all ages gather together, share updates on their lives and recount cherished memories. One thing to add to that list this year: a conversation on how to stay safe from fraud.

We know that scammers target people of all ages. Last year 40% of all scams reported to the Federal Trade Commission were from people under the age of 40, and victims over the age of 60 lose the most money to scams on average. So, we are all vulnerable to these criminals, and we could all use a little help and guidance. Here are two fraud topics to talk about with your family this holiday season.

What is a question, story or phrase that no one other than your close family would know? Scams targeting parents and grandparents are only becoming more believable with the adoption of Artificial Intelligence,

but no matter how realistic a voice may sound it won't know this private memory or password. Passwords are another critical topic. We all have so many passwords that it's hard to keep straight. This leads many to choose simple passwords or use the same one repeatedly. A quick chat about how you choose and protect your passwords could save someone you love a lot of money.

Lastly, be willing to share. Too many victims of fraud suffer in silence because they are ashamed to admit what happened to them. The truth is that scammers are sophisticated criminals and for victims sharing their story is the best way to protect others and get the support they need.

Be a fraud fighter! If you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam.

Virginia AARP