



New NRV passenger rail service feasibility study launched

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRRA) has announced the launch of the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Feasibility Study, which is a study of potential passenger rail station locations in and around the New River Valley.

The following information provides a brief highlight of activities to-date that have led to the launch of the study:

On May 5, 2021, the Governor of Virginia announced that the commonwealth had reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern to extend passenger rail service along the former Virginian line from Roanoke to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979.

The governor's announcement outlined Virginia's intent to purchase 28.5 miles of right-of-way and tracks along the former Virginian Line from the Salem Crossovers west of Roanoke to Merrimac (Christiansburg) from Norfolk Southern and

to increase and extend passenger rail service from Roanoke to the New River Valley through infrastructure improvements along the existing rail line and move forward a new passenger station.

In the fall of 2021, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority began a feasibility study to examine five potential station locations in and around the New River Valley. The station locations are along existing Norfolk Southern railroad corridors that are currently operated for freight trains only.

The New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Feasibility Study reflects on previous work conducted for the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station locations in the region while examining what station location opportunities are possible following the governor's May 2021 announcement.

The feasibility study will examine and screen potential station locations to

inform a Federal Railroad Administration National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Class of Action determination.

The authority has created various ways for the general public and key stakeholders to learn more about the new feasibility study and to provide input: a dedicated website, <https://transformingrailva.com/projects/new-river-valley-station/>, hosts all project-related information including survey links and public meeting details; a community meeting in the winter with a target date of February to present the results of the feasibility study to the public. Details will be posted on the project website as the date for the meeting nears. Post-meeting material will be archived and available on the project website; a social media campaign to advertise and broadcast the study, focusing on key outreach milestones and ways the public can play a role in this important planning process.

Finally, two surveys will engage stakeholders, property owners, and the general public during the planning process. Survey 1 will solicit public input and will allow the authority to consider the public's priorities and knowledge about the locations as part of the location screening process. Survey 1 launched Dec. 22 and close Jan. 31. The survey is available on the project website and also by visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewRiverValleyStationSurvey>.

Survey 2 solicits public input about the study results to interpret stakeholder feedback after the community meeting.

For more information on the study, go to <https://transformingrailva.com/projects/new-river-valley-station/>.

The timetable for the project is development in 2022 with engineering in 2022-2023 and construction in 2023 through 2025



Paula Alston (right) of the Rotary Club of Blacksburg and chair of Rotary District 7570's Hunger Initiative, hands a donation check to Randy Holden, (left) Director of Volunteer Services for Feeding Southwest Virginia. Looking on is Emma Beaver, grants manager for the food bank.

Blacksburg Rotary Club district donates to Feeding Southwest Virginia

Rotary International District 7570, of which the Blacksburg Rotary Club is a part, has made an \$11,327 donation to Feeding Southwest Virginia in Salem to help alleviate the problem of hunger and food insecurity in Southwest Virginia over the holidays. In addition, members of the Blacksburg

Rotary Club helped bag potatoes for distribution.

Feeding Southwest Virginia is part of Feeding America and covers 26 counties and nine cities in Southwest Virginia. This is also part of the Rotary district, which runs from Winchester to Johnson City, Tenn.

Christiansburg Jersey Mike's to open today, Dec. 29

Jersey Mike's Subs, known for its fresh sliced/fresh grilled subs, will open at 2745 Market St. in Christiansburg today, Dec. 29.

Franchise owners Gordon Pannill and Mookie Golden will hold a grand opening and fundraiser on Friday, Jan. 7, and Saturday, Jan. 8, to support Habitat for Humanity. Twenty percent of all proceeds each of those days will be donated to Habitat for Humanity.

Guests can place take-out orders in-store or for pickup through the website or through the Jersey Mike's app. Delivery is available in most areas through the Jersey Mike's app or through third-party delivery partners. Curbside pickup is available for orders placed in Jersey Mike's app.

Jersey Mike's premium meats and cheeses are sliced on the spot and piled high on in-store baked bread. Authentic cheesesteaks are grilled fresh.



are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week. Customers can contact this location directly at 540-251-5235.

Since 2010, Jersey Mike's locations throughout the country have raised more than \$68 million for local charities. In 2021, the company's 11th Annual Jersey Mike's Month of Giving in March raised over \$15 million for more than 200 charities nationwide.

With more than 2,000 locations nationwide, Jersey Mike's Subs serves authentic fresh sliced/fresh grilled subs on in-store freshly baked bread, the same recipe it started with in 1956. Passion for giving in Jersey Mike's local communities is reflected in its mission statement: "Giving ... making a difference in someone's life."

NRV Public Health Task Force named preparedness alliance outstanding partner

The New River Valley Public Health Task Force has been selected by the Near Southwest Preparedness Alliance (NSPA) as the 2021 recipient of its Outstanding Partner Award.

This award is presented to an individual or organization that exemplifies outstanding service in regional healthcare emergency management. The task force was singled out for its highly effective, multi-discipline, "all-in-this-together" approach that led to greater regional healthcare preparedness in the face of COVID-19.

The New River Valley Public Health Task Force was formed in March 2020 as a collaborative effort to provide residents of Montgomery County, Giles County, Floyd County, Pulaski County, and the City of Radford with effective guidance about COVID-19 and other health issues. Specifically, the task force was recognized for sourcing local volunteers (including task force members) to staff local hospitals, utilizing emergency medical services, assisting with testing and vaccination clinics, working directly with employers to ensure that testing was "accommodated without being disruptive to healthcare," and coordinating a community-wide message for critical COVID-19 information.

The task force draws members from five counties and includes law enforcement, local public health, local hospitals, business associations, local emergency management, public schools, local elected officials, and public information officers.

The New River Valley Public Health Task



From left: Robert Hawkins, executive director of the Near Southwest Preparedness Alliance, presents Blacksburg Police Chief Anthony Wilson and Dr. Noelle Bissell, director of the New River Health District, with the Outstanding Partner Award. Wilson and Bissell led the founding of the New River Valley Public Health Task Force.

Force was responsible for drive-through testing events early in the pandemic and self-serve testing stations throughout the region; readily available personal protective equipment (PPE) for hospitals and public safety infrastructure; large-scale vaccine clinics early in 2021; distribution of more than 369,000 branded, cloth masks across the region; a call center for testing and questions about COVID-19; a business continuity team; the "Working Safe Resource Guidebook" for businesses; safe and memorable high school graduations for five local school divisions in the spring of 2020; tabletop exercises for all local school divisions; the "Be committed. Be well" campaign; digital and bus ads, signs, banners, posters, social media and website content with campaign

messaging and guidance; and six virtual town halls and a series of podcasts to address residents' questions and concerns.

Organizations who participate in the task force organizations include LewisGale and Carilion hospitals and healthcare systems; New River Community College; Radford University; Virginia Tech; the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM-VA); the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski, the City of Radford, and the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg.

Additional members include representatives from local law enforcement and first responder agencies, New River Valley Community Services, the New River Valley Regional Commission, local public school divisions, and area mer-

chants' associations and chambers of commerce.

The Near Southwest Preparedness Alliance supports "the healthcare infrastructure of Southwestern Virginia with disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation resources." The NSPA is a coalition of hospital and healthcare leadership professionals who understand the critical nature of preparedness efforts during health crises to conduct business and facilitate patient care.

The Near Southwest Region includes the counties of Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Henry, Montgomery, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Pulaski, and Roanoke, and the cities of Covington, Danville, Lynchburg, Martinsville, Radford, Roanoke and Salem.

Robbery charge nets Burke man seven years in prison

A 41-year-old Burke man, Justin Christopher Narcisse, has been sentenced to prison after entering an Alford Plea in connection with the robbery of the Little River Market on Peppers Ferry Road in Christiansburg.

Narcisse entered his plea Thurs-

day in a Montgomery County Courtroom to charges of robbery, assault and battery, malicious use of pepper spray, and destruction of property. By entering the Alford plea, Narcisse maintained his innocence but admitted there was enough evidence to find him guilty.

Judge Mike Fleenor sentenced him to 15 years in prison but suspended all but seven.

Investigators say in 2020 Narcisse approached the night clerk around 10 p.m. in the store's parking lot, pepper sprayed him, and took the night deposit bag.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Now through Jan. 3:

United Way Festival of Trees

Visit the Old Town Mall in Downtown Christiansburg to see the beautiful trees in person.

Holiday Trees & Gingerbread Houses on Display in Kent Square Lobby

Get in the spirit, take beautiful photos, and enjoy the creativity of this display.

Now through Jan. 21:

Apply now for NRV Master Gardener Program

The New River Valley Master Gardener Program is seeking applicants for the 2022 Master Gardener Training class. The classes will be held on Tuesday and

Thursday afternoons from Feb. 15 through May 5 on the Virginia Tech Campus and at the Montgomery County Government Center. Topics covered include basic botany, plant propagation, herbaceous plants, houseplants, vegetables, fruits, pruning, landscape design, floral design, lawn care, woody plants, entomology, plant pathology, abiotic stresses, soils, and pesticide use and safety. The cost for the course is \$185.00 and participants perform 50 hours of volunteer service. Contact Wendy Silverman at the Montgomery County Extension Office at 540-382-5790 for more information. Applications are due Jan. 21, 2022.

Now through Feb. 28:

Montgomery-Floyd Re-

gional Library Adult Winter Reading Program

The Montgomery Floyd Regional Library Adult Winter Reading Challenge offers patrons to read during January and February and keep track of their reading on the library's Beanstack site. Earn badges with each book read and activity completed. <https://mfri.beanstack.org/>.

Wednesday, Dec. 29:

Teen Nerf Battle

At the Christiansburg Library at 6 p.m. Join in an epic Nerf battle at the public library. To be played are Nerf versions of capture the flag and humans vs. zombies and more. Players should bring their own Nerf blaster (some available), and the library will supply the elite style darts. Free snacks will be pro-

vided. Ages are 11 to 17. Registration and a waiver are required.

Thursday, Dec. 30:

American Red Cross Blood Drive

At the Christiansburg Library at 11:30 a.m. Walk-ins are welcome or donors may sign up at <https://www.redcross-blood.org/give.html/donation-time>.

Friday, Dec. 31:

Radford City Holiday Closing and Sanitation Schedule

Radford City Offices will be closed on Friday, Dec. 31, 2021, for New Year's Eve. The sanitation scheduled for New Year's Eve will be on Monday, Jan. 3, 2022. The Drop Center is closed Friday, Dec. 31, and Saturday, Jan. 1.

Blacksburg Holiday Closings

All town administrative offices are closed. The Blacksburg Community Center is closed.

Saturday, Jan. 1:

Blacksburg Holiday Closings

The Blacksburg Community Center is closed. The Blacksburg Aquatic Center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. There is no Blacksburg Transit service.

Monday, Jan. 3:

Sock Snowmen

At the Christiansburg Library at 2 p.m. Make sock snowmen that do not require any sewing. For all ages. Registration is required.

Tuesday, Jan. 4:

Crafternoon: Tape Resist Painting

At the Meadowbrook Public Library at 3 p.m. Spend the afternoon painting. Participants will create designs on canvas board using painters tape and paints. All supplies will be

provided. Registration is required. Contact spahl@mfrl.org for more information.

Movie Matinee

At the Blacksburg Library at 1 p.m. A Yeti is convinced that the elusive creatures known as "humans" really do exist. Join this movie matinee with crafts. Rated PG.

Wednesday, Jan. 5:

Computer Basics: Part 1

At the Meadowbrook Public Library at 10:30 a.m. This is a computer class for beginners that will cover types and parts of the computer and information about hardware, software, and applications. This course will also demonstrate saving and organizing files, safe Internet use, and emailing.

Talking About Books: "Apples Never Fall"

At the Christiansburg Library at 11 a.m. To be discussed is "Apples Never Fall" by Liane Moriarty. Meeting in-person and virtually.

Sensory Playtime

At the Blacksburg Library at 2 p.m. An hour of sensory playtime. All supplies will be provided and all ages are welcome.

Oreo Taste Test

At the Christiansburg Library at 3 p.m. Try several new limited Oreo flavors and rate them. All ages are welcome. Supplies are limited, registration is required.

Talking about Books: "The Night Tiger"

At the Meadowbrook Public Library at 6 p.m. To be discussed is "The Night Tiger" by Yangsze Choo. Call (540) 268-1964 for more information or to reserve a copy.

Thursday, Jan. 6:

American Legion meeting

American Legion, Harvey-Howe-Carper Post 30, will meet at 7 p.m. at the VFW Post Home

on 102 Watts St. in Radford. If Radford City Public Schools are closed on Thursday or Friday of this week due to weather, the meeting will be cancelled. For further information, call 250-2283 or 239-9864.

Tuesday, Jan. 11:

Sons of Confederate Veterans meeting

The Sons of Confederate Veterans, Stuart Horse Artillery Camp 1784 will meet at 7 p.m. at Aly's Family Italian Restaurant at 3204 Riner Rd. Members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) are invited to attend. The guest speaker will be Mr. Scott Gardner of the Glencoe Museum, who will give a talk on Gen. Gabriel Wharton. If Montgomery County Public Schools are closed on Tuesday or Wednesday of this week due to weather, the meeting is cancelled. For further information, call 320-4315 or 239-9864.

Wednesday, Jan. 12:

Brown Bag Book Club

At the Radford Public Library; from noon to 1 p.m. A book discussion on the second Wednesday of each month. Participants may bring a lunch if you like. To be discussed this month is "Nomadland" by Jessica Bruder.

Ongoing:

Free COVID-19 Test Kits

Now available at all branches of Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library and the Radford Public Library, curbside only: free, rapid at-home COVID-19 antigen test kits. The easy-to-use kits can be gotten through our curbside pickup service. Tests are available at no cost, no library card needed. This pilot program is made possible by a partnership with the Virginia Department of Health. Users will need a Wi-Fi connection, a form of ID, and mobile device or computer to complete the test.

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Ends Thursday January 20th @ 4 PM

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Sunny Ridge Rd Floyd VA 24091

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You have the opportunity to purchase this great investment property! This property features 12 10x10 storage units for sale in Floyd County VA. The units were built in 2004 and are in great condition. The lot consists of .21 acres and is easily accessible. They are located right next to a set of green boxes (dumpsters) which is very convenient for cleaning out units! Storage units are in high demand in Floyd County. These units are rented on a month - to - month lease for \$45 / mo., but similar units in the area are getting around \$100 / mo. 9 out of 12 of the units are currently rented - seller using the other 3 for personal use.

Directions - From Town of Floyd - 221 north towards Roanoke - Left on Bethlehem Church rd. - right on Sunny Ridge rd. - property on immediate right past green boxes. See signs

Terms - 10% Buyer's Premium will be added to final high bid to arrive at contract price. Earnest Money Deposit of \$5,000 required on day of sale. Close in 30 days. Subject to seller confirmation. Property sold as is, where is with any and all faults. Buyer is expected to complete their own due diligence. 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. Download Bidder Information Pack for complete terms and conditions, purchase contract, and maps at VaAuctionPro.com

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OBITUARY

Elliott, Urcle Wayne

Urcle Wayne Elliott, 76, died Dec. 21, 2021, with his family by his side.

Wayne was born on March 21, 1945, in Portsmouth, Va., to Hubert Urcle Elliott and Mattie Virginia Clark Elliott. Born of humble beginnings, he made it his goal from early on to make a good life for his family, and he did. He was a believer in the power of hard work and perseverance.

Wayne was very involved in his community and worked to make it a better place. He served as President of the Montgomery, Blacksburg, Christiansburg Development Corporation; the Christiansburg Chamber of Commerce; and as vice president and president-elect of the Blacksburg Chamber of Commerce. He also helped create the Montgomery County Economic Development Commission and served as its first chairman for many years. It was the first non-bank organization to receive funding of its kind to start the Corporate Research Center at Virginia Tech.

Wayne was involved with Rotary Clubs and the Red Cross. His in-



volvement with those organizations was during his 20-year career in banking and his 35-year career as a realtor. His interests included family, local Civil War history, genealogy, and fishing and home remodeling.

Wayne was predeceased by his parents and his brother, Robert Myles Elliott, in addition to his special aunt and uncle, Marshall and Carmen Smith. He is survived by his wife of 55 years, Doris Huff Elliott; his sister, Linda Akers (Doyle); his daughters, Sheri Altizer (Todd) and Carmen Recupero (Peter); his grandchildren, Jack Elliott Thompson, Jace Andrew Thompson, Reese Anne Altizer, Bowman Wayne Harris Altizer, and Ainsley Mae Altizer; his

brother-in-law, Bob Huff (Doris Ellen); and sisters-in-law Betty Jones (Jay) and Kitty Byrd (Mike).

A memorial service to honor Wayne's life will be held at St. Paul United Methodist Church, Christiansburg, at 2 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 6, with visitation beginning at 12:30 p.m. Due to flu and COVID concerns, masks are requested.

For anyone wishing to further honor Wayne, the family would greatly appreciate a donation to St. Paul United Methodist Church at 220 West Main St., Christiansburg, VA 24073 or to the NET Research Foundation, 31 St. James Avenue, Suite 365, Boston, MA 02116 for the Neuroendocrine Tumor Research Foundation.

Community rallies around chiropractor's project to give back to children for the holidays

Dr. Holly Welty-Miller, a chiropractor based in Pulaski, Va., is normally the one delivering care to patients. The last couple of years, however, she began her own journey as a patient in her battle against cancer. Throughout her treatment, she has continued working, bolstered by the support of her patients.

"I'm not sure a day goes by that someone doesn't ask me if there's anything that they can do for me," said Dr. Welty-Miller. "My answer is simply pray. Pray for those that have to fight this battle."

Heading into the holiday season, Dr. Welty-Miller was inspired by the ongoing support from her community and wanted to find a way to give back. With the help of one of her patients, she determined a way to do just that.

"Personally, I know the toll that cancer takes on a family, and over the last six months, I have prayed that God would guide me in a direction to help," Dr.

Welty-Miller said. "One of my patients suggested a toy drive for hospitalized children to ease the financial burden that comes this time of year, allowing families to focus on their children's care. That was a perfect fit."

A small group pulled together the drive as a way for Dr. Welty-Miller's patients to give back in honor of her own battle with cancer. Thanks to their work, some of Carilion's youngest patients who are hospitalized over the holidays will have their own special celebration.

On Thursday, Dec. 23, volunteers dropped off an entire trailer of donated toys to Carilion Children's Hospital in Roanoke.

"I am absolutely speechless and humbled by the response, support, and generosity of our community," Dr. Welty-Miller said.

"Each and every one of my patients stepped up and made this Christmas Wish a success. I love the New River Valley. It has been home

to me for 22 years, and over those years I have received more love and support than I could ever repay."

The toys will be given to children throughout the holidays and then

some.

"We use donations like this with our pediatric patients throughout the year," said Carli Holtzhauer, child-life specialist with Carilion Children's. "Toys like

this make a huge difference for patients, allowing kids to be kids even while they're hospitalized. Incorporating play into care hugely benefits their experience and outcomes."

And as for Dr. Welty-Miller, she considers her Christmas wish made.

"My patients and friends have given me the best gift I could have ever asked for – the gift to help others," she said.



Inspired by the support she has received during her ongoing battle against cancer, Dr. Holly Welty-Miller, a chiropractor based in Pulaski, decided to launch a toy drive for children hospitalized at Carilion Children's Hospital in Roanoke.

Java Brothers, Nobody's Business to be featured during NRCC jamboree Jan. 8



The Java Brothers mix standard bluegrass with newgrass and original tunes in their live shows.

The music of Java Brothers and Nobody's Business will be featured during New River Community College's Fiddle, Banjo and Dance Club Jamboree on Sat., Jan. 8, 2022.

The music will begin at 6 p.m. in 117 Edwards Hall at NRCC in Dublin. NRCC requires all individuals to wear masks indoors, and social distancing protocols will be observed.

The Java Brothers bluegrass band members met during a Monday Night Radford Fiddle

and Banjo jam. Their musical influences include Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, Jimmy Martin, Old and In the Way, The Seldom Scene, Sam Bush, Tony Rice, JD Crowe and Doyle Lawson. The band mixes standard bluegrass and newgrass with fiery original tunes in their live shows. Java Brothers is Joe Abercrombie on banjo, Ralph Berrier on fiddle, Chris Burgoyne on mandolin, Doug Capobianco on string bass, and Wayne Frye on guitar.

Nobody's Business is an old-

time band from the Grayson Highlands mountain region of Southwest Virginia where the state meets North Carolina and Tennessee. The band is steeped in the traditions of rural old-time mountain music that have been passed down through generations in this unique area of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The band's shows feature a diverse and entertaining collection of hard-driving fiddle/banjo tunes, mountain ballads, old time sacred songs, and square dance music. Performing with the band will be

Jackson Cunningham on guitar and mandolin, Trevor McKenzie on fiddle, Stu Geisbert on bass, and Hanna Traynham on clawhammer banjo, backup guitar and harmony vocals.

Corporate sponsors of the jamborees are Anderson Audiology, Dublin; August Jewelers & Boutique, Inc., Radford; Castle Rock Insurance Agency, Pearisburg; Estes Auto & Truck Parts Inc., Pilot; First Community Bank, Pulaski; Food City; Gregory Seeding and Landscaping Company, Pu-

laski; Martin's Pharmacy, Pulaski; Pepsi Cola Bottling Co., Dublin; The Pulaski Patriot, Pulaski; SERVPRO, Montgomery and Pulaski counties; and Southern Furniture Warehouse, Radford.

The doors open at 5 p.m. for the show. Admission is free; however, donations will be accepted to help offset the travel expenses for the musicians.

The jamborees are typically held the second Saturday of each month through April at NRCC, a Crooked Road affiliated venue.



Nobody's Business is an old-time band from the Grayson Highlands region of Southwest Virginia.

Checkpoint strikeforce campaign aims to reduce holiday-related impaired driving

Virginia's checkpoint strikeforce campaign through New Year's Day combines law enforcement with research-based messaging to remind Virginians to make responsible decisions when drinking.

116 Virginia law enforcement agencies will participate in the holiday wave of Virginia's checkpoint strikeforce campaign. Law enforcement officers will increase the police presence in high-risk areas and establish 55 sobriety checkpoints across the commonwealth.

"Keep your family, your community, and yourself safe by not drinking and driving this holiday season," said Virginia Governor Ralph Northam. "You can always designate a sober driver, call a

taxi, or use public transportation and rideshare services. We owe our thanks to law enforcement professionals for keeping people safe this holiday season. Together, we can reduce impaired driving and save lives."

In 2020, Virginia lost 272 lives in alcohol-related crashes. Since Checkpoint Strikeforce's inaugural campaign in 2001, alcohol-related crashes have decreased 41.2 percent, fatalities have decreased by 24 percent, and injuries have decreased by half.

"The holidays traditionally pose an increased risk for fatalities involving alcohol-impaired driving," said Richard D. Holcomb, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and the governor's highway safety

representative. "Our goal is to ensure each and every Virginian gets home safely to their families this holiday season. Between Thanksgiving 2020 and New Year's Day 2021 alone, 14 Virginians lost their lives in alcohol-related crashes. Our message is simple: As you celebrate with loved ones this holiday season, don't put lives at risk by getting behind the wheel after drinking."

Virginia State Police will work through the holidays as part of Operation CARE, the Crash Awareness Reduction Effort, a nationwide, state-sponsored traffic safety program that aims to reduce traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries caused by impaired driving, speeding, and failing to use seatbelts.

Send community news and photos

to communitynews@ourvalley.org

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OPINION

COVID update: Hospitals report 38 COVID patients, primarily with Delta variant, increase in cases expected

Dr. Noelle Bissell, Director of the New River Public Health District, told the media Tuesday at her weekly press conference that the New River Valley is still dealing primarily with the Delta variant of COVID and that local hospitals reported 38 COVID positive patients Tuesday morning.

"Our hospitals are very busy," she said. "They are often full with patients waiting in the emergency department for beds to become available. We are asking everyone to choose behavior that reduces the spread of infection and protects our healthcare systems.

"We do expect cases to increase significantly in the New River Valley over the coming weeks as Omicron arrives," she told the media. "Case numbers are becoming even less reliable as more people do at-home tests and don't report results, and as

people assume they have COVID without getting tested or attribute symptoms to something else and don't get tested.

"Rapid test availability is slowly improving, and the health department has PCR test availability," Dr. Bissell said. She then took a look at the weekly trends in the New River District.

"All of our communities in the New River Health District are considered to be at high community transmission as defined by the CDC," she said. "We expect to remain that way for a while as we go through our holidays and as we encounter the Omicron variant. Please remember that the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry requires that all employers mandate indoor masking in areas of substantial or high transmission regardless of distancing and vaccination status.

"We are living the pandemic real-time and will continue to

follow things closely, but there are encouraging signs that Omicron does not cause as serious disease as prior variants," the health district director told the press. "Data from South Africa show that about 1.7% of Omicron cases end up hospitalized, compared to 19% with Delta. The length of stay for people under 40 is three to four days and for those over 40 it's averaging four to five days. With the earlier variants, hospital stays have often been measured in weeks. New York City and areas on the West Coast, where Omicron is already much more prevalent, are not seeing as many hospitalizations as with previous variants.

"We do have to remember that with Omicron being so much more contagious, more people will get infected," Dr. Bissell cautioned. "We still may see higher absolute numbers of hospitalizations and deaths because a small

percentage of a large number is still a lot of people.

"The good news is that the vaccine looks like it is still protective against severe disease, hospitalization or death.

"We continue to encourage everyone to get a vaccine. They are widely available at local pharmacies and many medical practices. The New River Health District offers vaccination clinics every weekday at different facilities.

"Please note that we are closed Dec. 23, 24, and 31. There will be no vaccine clinics on those days.

"COVID is here and it's not going to go away. The CDC has acknowledged that we will not achieve herd immunity, which means we are moving to where COVID is endemic, and, as one person said, 'we need to learn how to dance with COVID.' This means that each individual,

each household, and each family needs to perform a risk assessment that informs their own behavior, just like we do when flu and other diseases are spreading in a community.

"A number of people are asking us how to plan safe family get-togethers for the holidays," Dr. Bissell said. "Each family needs to do its own risk assessment. If you want to gather with people at higher risk for poor outcomes, elderly relatives, or young children not eligible for vaccination, you will want to employ more safeguards. Stay outdoors and bundle up if it's cold, open windows, stay home if you have any symptoms at all, use good respiratory hygiene and wash your hands. If you don't know the vaccination status of everyone at the gathering, you are always safer wearing a double layer, well-fitting cloth mask, or a surgical mask."

Virginia vehicle insurance coverage requirements change Jan. 1

Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, the minimum insurance coverage required for vehicles in Virginia will increase.

Senate Bill 1182 raises the minimum insurance coverage requirements over the next three years, the current requirements

for liability insurance are \$25,000 for the injury or death of one person, \$50,000 for the injury or death of two or more people, and \$20,000 in property damage coverage.

As of Jan. 1, the requirements for the first two coverage amounts have increased to \$30,000 and \$60,000 for policies effective Jan. 1, 2022, through Dec. 31, 2024. For policies effective on

or after Jan. 1, 2025, the coverage requirements have been increased to \$50,000 for the injury or death of one person, \$100,000 for the injury or death of two or more people, and \$25,000 in property damage.

The bill applies to vehicle insurance policies issued or renewed on or after Jan. 1, 2022.

To purchase license plates and title and regis-

ter a vehicle in Virginia, a customer must certify the vehicle is covered by the minimum insurance requirements or pay the uninsured motor vehicle fee.

Vehicle owners caught driving without insurance or who have not paid the uninsured motor vehicle fee will have their driving and vehicle registration privileges suspended (Code of Virginia § 46.2-707). To have those privi-

leges reinstated, vehicle owners must pay a \$600 noncompliance fee, file a Financial Responsibility Insurance Certificate (SR-22) with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles for three years, and pay a reinstatement fee.

Virginia drivers are encouraged to contact their vehicle insurance provider to ensure they have the minimum insurance coverage on their vehicles.

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The News Messenger is a newspaper of, by and for the people of Montgomery County. We encourage letters from our readers on topics of general interest to the community and responses to our articles and columns. Letters must be signed and have a telephone number where you can be reached for verification. All letters will be verified before publication. We reserve the right to deny publication of any letter and edit letters for length, content and style.

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OBITUARIES

Weeks, Rosie McPeak

Rosie McPeak Weeks, 84, passed away Friday, Dec. 24, 2021, at her home in Pulaski County. She was preceded in death by her parents, William and Ollie McPeak; a son, Johnnie Ray Weeks; a brother, Elwood McPeak; and sisters Alma Suthpin and Margaret Waller.

Survivors include her daughters and sons-in-law, Rose and Doug Yett, Roxane

and Tim O'Donnell, and Lilly Bechtel; four grandchildren; multiple great- and great-great-grandchildren; sisters Nancy Ogle, Meritha Waller, and Mildred Vires; and many other relatives and friends.

Services will be private.

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

Lawson, Larry Dean

Larry Dean Lawson, born June 25, 1942, died on Dec. 22, 2021.

Larry was preceded in death by his parents, Garnet K. and Blanche, and his siblings, Garnet M., Geraldine, and infant Ronald.

He is survived by his children, Dean and Andrew; his grandchildren, Tyler, Trevor, and Logan; his great-grandchild Oaklyn; his siblings Paul, Priscilla, and Cindy; and many nephews and nieces.

Larry was a veteran of

the US Navy and served on the first crew of the USS Enterprise during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He retired from the US Postal Service where he was employed as a carrier for many years. He was particularly devoted to Tyler, Trevor, and Logan and was a good Paw Paw to them. Larry will be greatly missed.

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

Send community news and photos
to communitynews@ourvalley.org

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

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CLUES ACROSS

1. Loud cheer
5. Defensive nuclear weapon (abbr.)
8. Type of cell
11. Oblong pulpits
13. Pitching statistic
14. Uncommon
15. Liabilities
16. Thin, straight bar
17. Oh goodness!
18. Competitions
20. Jima, WW II battlefield
21. Professional assn. (abbr.)
22. Italian mountain range
25. Taking possession of
30. Used in cooking and medicine
31. Water (French)

32. Parent a child
33. Sun-dried brick
38. One point south of due east
41. Female fashion accessory
43. A way of making a copy of
45. A way to debilitate
47. Wings
49. Social insect
50. Dull brown fabrics
55. Indian musical pattern
56. N. England university
57. Portable stands for coffins
59. Iranian district
60. Envision
61. Passerine bird genus
62. Container
63. Falter
64. Tunisian city

CLUES DOWN

1. Cool!
2. Passover offering
3. Swedish rock group

4. Collegiate military organization
5. Large nests
6. Beloved baked good
7. 1980s pop legend
8. Finger millet
9. Hillside
10. Surrender
12. Midway between south and southeast
14. Long, narrow strap
19. Discount
23. A type of cast
24. Large, tropical lizard
25. Half of "Milli Vanilli"
26. Single
27. Big truck
28. Midway between east and southeast
29. Et _ : indicates further
34. Insecticide
35. Luke Skywalker's mentor _-Wan
36. Cast out
37. Breakfast food
39. By reason of
40. One who makes thread
41. Baseball stat
42. Breezed through
44. Frothy mass of bubbles
45. Tony-winning actress
46. Made of fermented honey and water
47. Member of a Semitic people
48. Monetary unit of the Maldives
51. Run batted in
52. Makes publicly known
53. Disagreement
54. Soluble ribonucleic acid
58. Single-reed instrument

Elliott, Danny L.

Danny L. Elliott, of Blacksburg, passed away on Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021.

He was the son of the late Raymond F. and Delcie J. Elliott. He was a painter by trade.

He was preceded in death by two brothers, Fred and David Elliott. He is survived by his two sons, Nick Elliott, of Blacksburg, and Darrell Elliott, of Christiansburg;

a granddaughter, Marissa; and a great-grandson, Grayson; four brothers, Kyle, Mikel, Sidney, and Larry Elliott; two sisters, Geniva Dorman and Judy Snider; and companion and caregiver, Ellie Spradlin.

A memorial service will be planned for a later date. Arrangements by McCoy Funeral Home, Blacksburg.

Gravely, Delores Ann

Delores Ann Gravely, 79, of Floyd, passed away Friday, Dec. 24, 2021.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Raymond and Oma Cales; her sister, Mary Blevins; and her brothers, Ronald and James Cales.

She is survived by her sons, William Rhoades and wife Cindy, Joseph Rhoades, and Freddy Rhoades; grandchildren Christopher (Hanna) Rhoades, Corey (Alicia) Rhoades, Cody (Sarah) Rhoades, Casey Rhoades, Greyson Hamel, and Cheyenne Rhoades; great-grandchildren Saige, Carolyn, and Lillian; sister Phyllis Sumler; brothers Wil-

liam, Stanley, and Everett Cales; special nieces Donna and Brittany Cales; along with several nieces and nephews.

The family received friends on Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2021, at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services will be at 2 p.m. today, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021, at the funeral home with Pastor Mark Miller officiating. Interment will follow in Highland Memory Gardens in Dublin.

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

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MONTGOMERY SPORTS



Auburn High School's Kylee Turman (left) and Lauren Bittinger have been named to the Class 2 all-state cheer team.

Auburn cheerleaders named all-state

Marty Gordon
NRVsports@ourvalley.org

The Virginia High School League has announced its 2021 Class 2 all-state cheer team, and it includes two cheerleaders from Auburn High School. Kylee Turman was named first-team, and Lauren Bittinger was named second-team.

Twenty individuals were chosen on the first team, and 20 individuals were selected for the second team. Only those individuals ranked one through 10 to all-region teams were eligible for selection to the All-State team.

Turman started all-star cheer with Valley Elite All-Star when she was eight years old and has been active all four years of high school. The Auburn senior said she feels honored to be named to the all-star listing.

"It took a lot of hard work and dedication to the team," Turman said. "I've been cheering since I was eight years old,

so taking all the information I've learned over the years and being able to help my teammates was so worth it."

Bittinger started cheering as a sideline cheerleader when she was five. "I've always wanted to cheer for my high school, and now that I am it's so amazing and so much fun," she said. Bittinger is a sophomore at Auburn High School.

Being named all-state feels unreal to Bittinger. "I'm so thrilled about it, though," she said. "To get to this spot takes a lot of dedication, and I have found it helps to have a motivation. For me my motivation was wanting to win."

The Auburn competition team finished in second place in the region competition, which was won by Riverheads, the region representative at the state level. Auburn nevertheless qualified two athletes for All-State recognition because of the Eagles' placement in the region.

Both Turman and Bittinger hope to cheer in college.



Blacksburg High School alum and current Virginia Tech sprinter Cole Beck had a moment to remember this past year, winning the ACC 100-meter race.

Cole Beck has record-breaking year on track

As the 2021 calendar year comes to a close, Virginia Tech Athletics spent the month of December celebrating the Hokies' standout achievements from the past 12 months in a campaign called "Moments of Excellence."

The "Moments of Excellence" campaign serves as a look back to the historic highlights and memorable accomplishments in Tech Athletics during 2021.

The men's outdoor track and field program had a stellar performance from sprinter Cole Beck, who won gold in the 100-meter dash.

Three days of brilliant track and field performances from the Hokies culminated as the Hokies earned themselves second- and seventh-place team finishes.

"Fantastic seventh by our team," Director of Track and Field Dave Cianelli said.

"We fought to the very end, and with the people we brought to this meet, we got 100% out of each person. To finish second with the men was a great effort. This outdoor season our team has been hit with some injuries and illness, but that is life, and you deal with it. I am so proud of how this team has persevered this spring and performed here this week."

The runner-up finish for the men's team marks the sixth consecutive outdoor championships in which the Hokies have finished in the top three on the men's side.

Beck followed his preliminary pole win in the 100m with a school record and title-winning performance, posting a time of 10.11 seconds. His time broke the previous Virginia Tech record of 10.14 seconds, set by Darrell Wesh in 2013.

Christiansburg girls fall to Cave Spring



Blythe Akers zooms up court with a rebound to score two points for the Lady Blue Demons. Cave Spring took the 58-48 win. Akers finished with seven points.



Christiansburg's Sathara Kane makes a three-point attempt in the loss to Cave Spring as she scored six points in the game. Niqua Banks led Christiansburg with 14 points while Katie Hoover added 10.



Makenzie Sherman (left) and Makenzie Harris (right) shut down a Cave Spring play.

2021 was good year for Hokie wrestling

As the 2021 calendar year comes to a close, Virginia Tech Athletics spent the month of December celebrating the Hokies' standout achievements from the past 12 months in a campaign called "Moments of Excellence."

The "Moments of Excellence" campaign serves as a look back at the historic highlights and memorable accomplishments in Tech Athletics during 2021. Each varsity sport program will have an outstanding moment featured during December on the official Virginia Tech Athletics website and @HokieSports social media properties.

The wrestling program defeated No.-3 NC State to clinch the ACC Championship title this past spring serving as its moment. The win was by a 17-16 score after a takedown and near fall in the final seconds of the dual by redshirt freshman Sam Latona.

With the No.-8 Hokies trailing the No.-3 Wolfpack 16-13 going into the final matchup at 125 pounds, eighth-ranked Latona stunned fourth-ranked Jakob Camacho at the buzzer to not only steal the match, but the night.

Latona's takedown with seconds left tied the meet at 16, but it was the near fall at the very end that put the Hokies ahead on the third criteria, 49-48 in total match points.

With the win, the Hokies clinched at least a share of the ACC Dual Meet Championship and are the only undefeated ACC team remaining. This is the second time in as many seasons that Tech has knocked off the No.-3 team in the country after defeating third-ranked Ohio State on Nov. 17, 2019.

Latona's win over Camacho was the first of his career over a top-5 opponent. The Alabaster, Ala., native is now 7-0 on the season and is 2-0 against ranked opponents.

In what is seeming automatic, Korbin Myers got a major decision win over a ranked opponent Friday night with a 13-5 victory over No. 13 Jarrett Trombley. The eighth-ranked 133-pounder in the country has now knocked off the No. 11, No. 12, and No. 13 wrestlers by major decision three straight weeks.

At 149 pounds, Bryce

Andonian claimed an important decision over Ed Scott, winning 9-5 and grabbing three team points for the Hokies. The sophomore is now 24-7 in his career and 14-4 in dual matches.

Mekhi Lewis kept his winning streak alive and pushed it to 27 straight matches in a 5-0 shutout over No.-15 Thomas Bullard. Lewis is the only Hokie at 8-0 on the season and now has three wins over ranked opponents on the year.

In the highest-ranked matchup of the night, No. 2 Hunter Bolen defeated No. 4 Trent Hiday at 184 pounds for the third time in his career. Bolen beat Hiday 2-1 Friday night, the same score as the 2020 ACC Championship, to move to 3-0 vs. Hiday without surrendering a takedown.

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Blacksburg wrestlers win at Big Orange Tournament



Blacksburg's Tharun Svetanant (pictured) took Friday's title at 138 pounds at the Big Orange Tournament in Roanoke. Blacksburg's Chris Johnson won the Barry Trent coaches award at the tournament. Garrett Henderson was also the Big Orange champ at 132.



PHOTOS BY BRIAN HOFFMAN

Blacksburg's Robert Baker finished as the runner-up at 145 in the Big Orange Tournament at William Byrd High School. Blacksburg as a team finished in third place. Braden Henderson was also runner-up at 126. Lord Botetourt took the team title, followed by Liberty Christian. Radford finished in 10th place.

VT football team delivers with Touchdowns for Turkeys campaign



PHOTO COURTESY OF VT ATHLETICS

In cooperation with Kroger, members of the Virginia Tech football team last week packaged and delivered 450 turkeys to Feeding Southwest Virginia.

Last week, with players from the Virginia Tech football team packing the boxes making the deliveries, Kroger donated 450 turkeys to Feeding Southwest Virginia

that will go to local families who rely on food banks and food pantries to feed their households.

The donation is a result of Touchdown for Turkeys, a

campaign in which Kroger pledged to donate 10 turkeys for every touchdown scored by the Hokies during the 2021 football season. Virginia Tech finished the season with 35 touchdowns, and Kroger kicked the "extra point" and donated an additional 100 turkeys to up the total to 450.

"Kroger is proud to partner with Virginia Tech football and Feeding Southwest Virginia to provide 450 turkeys for those in need through the Touchdowns for Turkeys program," Kroger Mid-Atlantic Division corporate affairs manager James Menees said. "We are also appreciative of the student-athletes and athletic department staff who volunteered their time to help facilitate the turkey delivery and pack food boxes to provide families with meals over the holidays. Touchdowns for Turkeys is one of our favorite partnerships and truly makes a difference in our communities."

Feeding Southwest Virginia was founded in 1981 and serves 26 counties, including nine city regions, providing food or meals to those in need.

Kroger's Mid-Atlantic Division operates more than 100 stores in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. Based in Richmond, Virginia, the division employs about 18,000 associates.

Kroger is dedicated to eliminating hunger in the communities it serves through partnerships with nine Feeding America food banks and numerous local organizations. The grocer's Zero Hunger| Zero Waste efforts are aimed at ending hunger in Kroger communities and eliminating waste in stores by 2025.

Kroger also supports breast cancer research, the military, and their families, and more than 4,000 nonprofit organizations. Last year, Kroger Mid-Atlantic donated 16.5 million meals to charity and 3,606,296 pounds of food to food bank partners.

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- ★ December 7: Pearl Harbor Day
- ★ January 6: U.S. Capitol Day

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Santa Slam tournament lands toys for Carilion Children's Oncology



Mountain Top Sports recently held its annual Santa Slam Basketball Tournament at the Radford and Christiansburg recreation centers. As part of the tournament, each team along with their parents and fans collected toys for the Dr. Holly Welty-Millers collection for the Carilion Children's Hematology and Oncology Department. Winning the toy drive were the River City Hustlers (fifth-grade boys), Knights Basketball Academy (sixth-grade boys), NRV Jam (seventh-grade boys), and NRV Jam (eighth-grade boys).



NRV Jam claimed first place in the eighth-grade division of the Santa Slam Basketball Tournament played at the Radford Recreation Center. Pictured from left are (front row) Noah Farley, Jayden Fitzgerald, Brodrik Gunter, and Rylan Lavinder; (back row, left to right) Seth Carter, Ashton Taylor, Xavier Kennard, Ashton Crigger, and Adam Dawson.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

NRV Jam claimed first place in the seventh grade division played at the Christiansburg Recreation Center. Pictured (front row, left to right) are Brodrik Gunter, Jayden Fitzgerald, Rylan Lavinder, and Dawson Williams, (back row, left to right) Reece Honaker, Noah Farley, and Seth Carter.

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