



# News Messenger

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Saturday, February 3, 2024

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## Montgomery County Public Schools presents draft FY 2024-25 budget

Lori Graham

Contributing writer

Dr. Annie Whittaker, Deputy Superintendent of MCPS presented information on the 2023-24 school year, providing an overview of what was accomplished for students, employees, and staff with the school's budgetary funds along with looking towards a proposed next year's budget based on current state funding.

Montgomery County Public Schools provided a 5% salary raise for employees in the fall of 2023, with an additional 2% raise that will appear in paychecks beginning in the first month of 2024.

"We were able to provide salary corrections for individual staff members after completion of a staff study that was conducted by the human resources department that allowed individuals who had been placed differently. So, one year being given one year of experience for two years of experience, it was able to place them correctly on those scales," Whittaker said.

Self-funded health insurance, without an increase in premiums, along with hiring four full-time athletic trainers and four additional custodians were also part of the current academic year's budget.

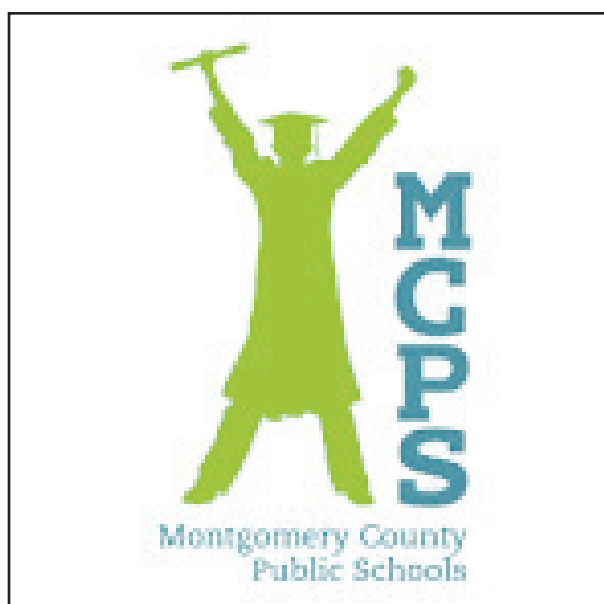
A decrease in student population is forecasted for

the next academic year, 2024-2025, with a total of 9200 students. That is a reduction of 364 students, according to Whittaker.

"Based on the governor's proposed budget that we are going to receive an additional \$5.4 million in funding from the state," Whittaker said. "It does fund the staffing requirements of the Literacy Act. It provides a 1% bonus in fiscal year '25, with a proposed 2% salary increase in fiscal year '26. There is also funds to bolster the teacher retirement fund."

Superintendent Dr. Bernard Bragen said, "First and foremost is to continue the programs that we currently have and make sure that we can ensure we're providing the highest caliber of quality educational programs for the student, all of our students, within the County and that we're adhering to our strategic plan."

Other important issues Bragen pointed out to the school board members were the need to discuss a potential 5% raise for employees to remain competitive in maintaining and recruiting instructional staff and employees. Additionally, in response to previous County employee comments, there is a need to increase pay for some staff members who are currently making less than \$15 an hour, which Bragen said is "not appropriate". Paraprofessionals and nurses had expressed



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF MCPS

concerns about their workdays not matching their paid hours and Bragen stated that this should be

See **Budget**, page 6

## Unveiling Black History

CI, Inc. and MCCRC launch speaker series on cultural preservation advocacy in Montgomery County

Christiansburg Institute (CI, Inc.) invites the public to join us for a captivating evening on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at The Lyric Theater in Blacksburg.

This marks the launch of our inaugural speaker series, a collaborative project between CI, Inc. and the Montgomery County Community Review Council (MCCRC).

Delve into the intricate cultural tapestry and history of Roanoke, exploring its profound connections to Montgomery County through the lens of Jordan Bell—a distinguished community historian, professional educator, and dedicated cultural organizer. A Roanoke native deeply immersed in the region's history, Jordan currently serves as the Program Coordinator at Apple Ridge Farms and is the Founder and President of Gainsboro Revisited. Additionally, Jordan holds board positions at the Harrison Museum of African American Culture and the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation.

Bell's passion for African American cultural heritage, history, and storytelling is palpable through extensive research and preservation efforts, particularly focused on Gainsboro—a historically Black community in Roanoke. Prepare for an engaging experience as Jordan delivers a dynamic presentation, setting the stage for an immersive panel discussion featuring local community members.

Generously sponsored by the Black Studies Center at Radford University and the More Than A Fraction Foundation, this event promises an enlightening exploration of the region's heritage. Join us as we embark on a journey through time, unraveling the layers of history that define our community.

Christiansburg Institute, Inc.



Mama Julz, an Ogala Lakota protestor, locked herself to a Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) helicopter on Poor Mountain early Thursday morning.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF APPALACHIANS AGAINST PIPELINES

## Pipeline protestors jailed from Elliston site

ELLISTON — Two protestors were arrested Thursday following a protest on Poor Mountain related to the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

According to the Appalachians Against Pipelines group, "Mama Julz, an Ogala Lakota land defender and water protector, locked herself to a Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) helicopter to prevent the transportation of pipeline workers onto a remote work site on Poor Mountain."

Julz "prevented MVP's use of the helicopter for multiple hours before she was extracted from her blockade and arrested, along with one other person." Both Julz and the supporter were charged with one misdemeanor; both were denied bond and were being held in jail as of Thursday afternoon.

"Without water there is no life," said Julz. "Violence upon our Mother Earth is violence against our sisters."

As the founder of Mothers Against Meth Alliance and an active voice in the MMIWG2ST movement, she has fought meth dealers in her homelands and ways pipeline workers prey upon women and other relatives. The red dress on the helicopter represents these missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, and trans folks.

See **Pipeline**, page 3

## Calling all LEGO architects

Announcing the LEGO Home Building Contest at the 2024 NRV Home Expo

NEW RIVER VALLEY - Registration is now open for The New River Valley Home Builders Association (NRVHBA) LEGO Home Building Contest, sponsored by Carter Bank & Trust, taking place at the 2024 NRV Home Expo March 23 and 24

at the Christiansburg Recreation Center.

Kids and adults ages four and up from the New River Valley are invited to submit entries of their best custom home creation. New for the 2024 Lego Home Building Contest, entries from 18 and up architects



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NRVHBA

Last year's LEGO design contest produced several impressive entries. Registration is now open for this year's contest.

See **LEGO**, page 6

## School board votes for third party review of events surrounding deaths of BHS students

The Montgomery County School Board voted Tuesday to start a third-party review of the events surrounding the deaths of two Blacksburg High School students in November.

"At a special meeting on Jan. 30, 2024, the Montgomery County School Board voted to initiate a third-party review of circumstances related to the off-campus deaths of two Blacksburg High School students on Nov. 7, 2023," reads a statement released by Montgomery County Public Schools. "Our goals are

to work expeditiously in support of this review and to take responsible and appropriate actions based on any recommendations returned."

"The School Board intends for this review to aid in better understanding of the factual circumstances of the matter and to assess the school division's legal and regulatory obligations in matters such as these," the statement continues. "The School Board will not comment further until the review has been completed."

The school board vote follows the presentation of a petition to the board initiated by community members asking for the independent review.

Dr. Wendy Eckenrod started a petition, established on www.nextdoor.com, calling for an independent investigation into how Montgomery County Public Schools' employees responded to domestic violence issues that had been occurring between the two students and had been reported prior to the murder-suicide. The bodies

of the two students were discovered Nov. 7, 2023, a teacher workday for Montgomery County Public Schools, in a Blacksburg parking garage.

Eckenrod is a professional counselor and Radford University professor, working in the School of Teaching Education and Leadership and is the parent of a Blacksburg High School student.

Staff report

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Saturday, Feb. 3:

### Book Sale

There will be a book sale at the Radford Public Library 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Lots of selections and low prices. Come and support the Radford Library.

### Southwest Virginia High School Art Show

The art of high school students from throughout Southwest Virginia will be on display at The Art Museum on Tyler (214 Tyler Ave., Radford) Feb. 3 – Feb. 17. Opening reception: Saturday, Feb. 3 at 1 p.m. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 12–4 p.m. Saturdays.

## Sunday, Feb. 4 – Sunday, Feb. 25:

### Black History Month speakers

Asbury United Methodist Church, 500 Stuart St., Christiansburg, will observe Black History Month each Sunday in February starting at 11 a.m. during church services. The theme “Community - Bringing Hope to a Weary World” will be shared by guest speakers: Feb. 4, 2024- Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin; Feb 11, 2024-Ms. Stacie Wright; Feb. 18, 2024- Dr. Frederick Douglass Dixon; Feb. 25, 2024- Ms. Demiah Smith. Asbury UMC regular services are each Sunday at 11 a.m. Rev. Lance Presley, Pastor. Please join us! For additional information, please call 540-382-0743.

## Saturday, Feb. 10:

### Mount Tabor Ruritan Biscuit Breakfast

Mount Tabor Ruritan Club will be serving up hot biscuits topped with delicious sausage gravy, or with the latest batch of our “world-famous” apple butter. We will also have scrambled eggs, orange juice and coffee. Breakfast will be served in the Fellowship Hall of Slusser’s Chapel, 1543 Mount Tabor Rd, Blacksburg; 8 – 10 a.m. This is below the sanctuary, on the lower church parking lot level. This is a fundraiser for our club to help us as we serve our community, and donations will be accepted for the breakfast. More information at <https://fb.com/MtTaborRuritan>

## Monday, Feb.12:

### Radford City Council meeting

The Radford City Council will hold its regularly

scheduled meeting at 7 p.m. in council chambers at the Radford Municipal Building, 10 Robertson St., Radford. See the agenda at [www.radfordva.gov](http://www.radfordva.gov).

### Montgomery County Board of Supervisors meeting

Public meetings are the second and fourth Monday of each month at the Montgomery County Government Center, 755 Roanoke St. in Christiansburg. Closed sessions begin at 6 p.m. if needed. Open sessions begin at 7:15 p.m. Citizens are invited to attend and allowed to speak at each meeting. All regular meetings of the Board of Supervisors are rebroadcast on Montgomery County Comcast and Shentel Channels 190 daily.

## Tuesday, Feb. 13:

### Blacksburg Town Council meeting

The council meets in regular session the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the Roger E. Hedgepeth Chambers of the Blacksburg Municipal Building, 300 S. Main St. These meetings are open to the public and televised live on WTOB Channel 2.

### Christiansburg Town Council meeting

Regular Town Council meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month beginning at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers of Town Hall (100 E. Main St.). The public is welcome and encouraged to attend, with a citizen hearing time reserved at each meeting for residents to bring any matter they desire before the entire council.

## Thursday, Feb. 15:

### 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, 3204 Riner Rd. Members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) are also invited to attend. Member Will Reed will speak on “Animals of the War Between the States”. If Montgomery and/or Floyd County Public Schools are closed on Thursday or Friday of this week due to weather, the meeting will be cancelled. For further information, please call 540-320-4315 or 540-239-9864.

## Saturday, Feb. 17:

### Community Garden planning session

At the Meadowbrook Library; 1 – 3 p.m. First meeting for people interested in a community garden

in the Shawsville/ Ellison area.

## Sunday, Feb. 18:

### Quaker Open House

What is a Quaker? The Blacksburg Friends Meeting (Quakers) welcome all to find out at our Open House, 9:45 - 11 a.m. Join us at our Meeting house at 404 Mount Tabor Rd, Blacksburg, for a tour and question/answer period at 9:45 a.m., short open worship (with activities for children) at 10 a.m. and fellowship. Children are welcome with accompanying adult. Our underlying principles revolve around the belief that there is that of God in everyone. This leads us to promote peace, simplicity, equality, integrity, community and stewardship. For more information about the Blacksburg Friends Meeting and the event, please visit [www.blacksburgfriends.org](http://www.blacksburgfriends.org).

## Monday, Feb. 19:

### The Dinos are coming!

Looking for a fun, family-friendly activity to enjoy together? Join us 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Blacksburg Community Center for Dino Squad! Explore fossils, cast replicas and museum models of dinosaurs during this interactive, educational program. \$3/child, \$2/ additional child. Adults free when accompanying a child. Register in advance online, or in-person at the door. Keyword search “Dino Squad”, activity number: 201014. For more information, call 540.443.1100.

## Saturday, February 24:

### Soul food tasting event

Celebrate Black History Month and take a step back in time at the 7th annual Soul Food Sampling at historic St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall (SLOFH), where generations met to enjoy delicious food, music, and fellowship. In this spirit, you will receive generous portions of traditional soul foods at dinner table settings, learn about the history of soul food, and enjoy discussions with former New Town residents. There are three time slots for the event, each capped at 18 people: 12 – 1:45 p.m., 2 – 3:45 p.m., and 4 – 5:45 p.m. Discounted tickets for Blacksburg Museum & Cultural Foundation members open until Feb. 3. Tickets will then be released at \$37 per person and available at the SLOFH Soul Food Sampling Page.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NRCC

The work of Radford artist Heather Renee will be on display at New River Community College.

## NRCC to host Radford artist Heather Renee

The work of artist Heather Renee will be on display at NRCC’s Fletcher Gallery on campus in Dublin in Godbey Hall 145 until March 15.

The show, “Twinklings of a Journey,” will display Renee’s digital photography work.

A meet-the-artist event will also take place on Monday, Feb. 5 from 12 noon – 2 p.m. in the gallery.

“Having grown up in the small town of Grundy, Va., nestled deep within the Appalachian Mountains, I spent most of my childhood exploring the natural wilderness around me,” said Renee. “It was here that I discovered a sense of wonder and found myself captivated by the small details and moments that often go missed in a fast-paced

world. I knew that I wanted to capture those moments - from the tiniest of creatures to the purest expression of a real smile.”

Renee is a Radford-based artist who specializes in both two- and three-dimensional mediums. Renee obtained her Bachelor of Arts from Bluefield University in 2016 and then taught art to students in grades 8 - 12. Renee decided to return to college and then earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Radford University in 2021. Since then, Renee has turned her artistic focus to capturing photographs of her many nature excursions and creating three-dimensional resin pieces with materials found on her journeys.

“I began pursuing my passion for photography

using a basic Kodak film camera, with flash being its only function aside from taking photographs - I still own it, by the way,” she said. “I took it everywhere, taking as many photos as I could. It was my high school journalism teacher’s recognition of these photographs and his enthusiasm for them that gave me the confidence to pursue this passion further.”

“He let me borrow his Nikon DSLR, giving me the opportunity to take photos of every school event I could attend,” she continued. “It encouraged my many nature photoshoot excursions, discovering the many functions the camera held as my experience grew.”

New River Community College

## Warm Hearth at Home welcomes new administrator

Warm Hearth at Home is proud to welcome Joshua Toney RN, BSN, as the new Administrator for Warm Hearth at Home.

Toney will oversee administrative and clinical functions of the agency ensuring that clients and families continue to receive outstanding care and services in their home.

Toney comes to Warm Hearth from Amedisys Home Health where he was the Regional Team Lead Remote Clinical Manager. He received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing from Mary Baldwin University and his Associate of Applied Science Degree in Nursing from New River Community College.

Warm Hearth at Home is positioned to grow tremendously under Toney’s leadership.

“I’m thrilled to learn and share the WHV commitment to excellence with our community,” said Toney. “From preventing hospital visits to offering support like wound care, medication help, and therapies – we’re here for our clients. Their well-being is our priority as is ensuring they can thrive in the

comfort of their own home.

Toney calls Montgomery County home and says he has a deep connection to bluegrass music having grown up playing it. His great-uncles even hold a special place in the Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

- Warm Hearth Village



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARM HEARTH VILLAGE  
Joshua Toney RN, BSN

# Business REVIEW

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# Eminent scientists say a child-centric approach is the blueprint to improve communities

Communities can prosper by providing attentive education and social services to their youngest residents — but the challenge is for leaders to work together.

That is the message of Craig Ramey and Sharon Ramey, Virginia Tech distinguished research professors of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, who presented on Dec. 1 details of a decades-long study that focuses on early childhood education and development.

In a research article in the journal Medical Research Archives, the official journal of the European Society of Medicine, the scientists discuss lessons learned from the Abecedarian Project, a study that followed the children who participated in an early intervention program initiated by Craig Ramey and colleagues in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1971.

“Coordinated education, health care, and well-thought-out social services with participation from the private sector make communities more attractive, bring in new business, and improve the quality of life for the people who are already there,” said Craig Ramey, an original founder of the Abecedarian Project. “Each segment of the community has to be included in these efforts because it allows for the scale-up that needs to occur for places that aspire to be a more attractive destination for families and businesses.”

The scientists have gathered extensive evidence of how the Abecedarian approach has improved the trajectories of children’s lives and suggest the findings can be used to realize more widespread improvements.

In the research article, the scientists present a set of vital standards associated with the successful implementation of child and family programs with the aim of integrating these scientifically validated approaches into a framework that leaders can use to enhance their communities.

“We’ve summarized 50 years of research since the landmark study began, pointing out successful replications of key interventions,” said Sharon Ramey. “We believe that what we’ve learned is ready for global application. There’s ample reason to keep moving forward in this direction.”

The Abecedarian Project has entered its fifth decade, examining the effects of educational, social, health, and family support services on high-risk infants who now are in their 50s.

In repeated interviews and examinations, the children who originally participated in the program displayed enduring benefits that have enhanced their careers, families, and social networks.

Some of the more recent findings from the Abecedarian Project show children who were given high-quality education



PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA TECH

**Craig Ramey and Sharon Ramey of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC have published a reflective view of key findings from the Abecedarian Project, a study that has spanned 50 years examining the effects of early childhood education and development.**

at an early age — starting at six weeks old and continuing through their first five years of life — are more likely to be employed full-time and have better relationships with their parents as adults.

Even more recently, researchers demonstrated that vulnerable children who received stimulating and emotionally

supportive learning experiences exhibit statistically significant changes in brain structure through middle age.

The Rameys are also professors in the Department of Psychology of the Virginia Tech College of Science.

*John Pastor for Virginia Tech*

# Good Samaritan Advanced Illness Care and Hospice receives 2023 Large Non-Profit of the Year Award

BLACKSBURG - Good Samaritan Advanced Illness Care and Hospice is announcing it was honored as the 2023 Large Non-Profit of the Year by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce on December 7, 2023 at The Inn at Virginia Tech. The Large Non-Profit of the Year was presented at the Annual Awards Celebration of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. Good Sam was selected

from among seven finalists, including Habitat for Humanity NRV, the NRV Community Foundation, and the Montgomery County Christmas Store.

“As the region’s only community based, non-profit

hospice, there is no greater honor than being recognized by the people in our service area,” said Aaron Housh, Good Samaritan President and CEO. “It speaks of exactly what we desire to be, the community’s advanced illness

care and hospice. We thank each and every person who voted and congratulate the nominees.”

*Good Samaritan Advanced Illness Care and Hospice*

## Pipeline

from page 1

“In my culture, the women are the backbone of our society, and right now it’s the women who are standing up in all these frontlines,” she said. “I keep coming

here because this land reminds me of my ancestral lands in the Black Hills, the rivers, the streams, the waterfalls.”

The Mountain Valley Pipeline is a

42-inch diameter fracked gas pipeline that will cover 303 miles of Appalachia once completed. Mountain Valley Pipeline has recently filed Strategic Lawsuits Against

Public Participation (SLAPP suits) against protestors at pipeline construction sites.

*Staff report*



# Marketplace

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### Legals - Montgomery County

#### LEGAL NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

#### OF THE TOWN OF CHRISTIANSBURG

#### TOWN COUNCIL

The Town of Christiansburg Town Council will hold a Public Hearing on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 7:00 PM in the Council Chambers of the Christiansburg Town Hall, 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia 24073. The purpose of the public hearing is to receive public comments concerning:

A. Conditional Use Permit request by Shah Development LLC, Property Owner, and Kevin Conner, Applicant, to allow single-family dwellings at a maximum of one single-family dwelling on each of three lots meeting the Residential District (R-3) standards on approximately 0.430 acres located at 685 Liberty St., NE, identified as Tax Parcels 528-(2)-46A; 528-(2)-48A; 528-(2)-50A; Parcel IDs 160387, 002758, 160388; zoned General Business District B-3. The property is designated as Residential on the Future Land Use Map of the 2013 Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan.

B. Conditional Use Permit request by Last Resort, Inc., Property Owner, and Joseph L. Simmons, Applicant, to allow multiple-family dwellings (apartments) meeting the Residential District (R-3) standards on approximately 4.841 acres located on the south side of Cambria St. NW, West of the Town of Christiansburg Recreation Center at 1600 N Franklin St. NW; identified as Tax Parcels 466-(A)-8C, 466-(A)-8C2; Parcel IDs

### Legals - Montgomery County

032702, 210032; zoned General Business District B-3. There is not a proposed number of units for the development. The maximum permitted residential density is 20 dwelling units per acre. The property is designated as Business/Commercial on the Future Land Use Map of the 2013 Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan.

C. Conditional Use Permit request by Roger Woody, Registered Agent, RWW 36 LLC, Property Owner, and Denise E. LaCour, Managing Director, Denstock LLC, Applicant, to allow a Planned Housing Development of 206 multi-family residential dwelling units on approximately 18.82 acres located at the terminus of Farmview Road NE, consisting of all of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-41, Parcel ID 017576; a portion of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-36, Parcel ID 021677; all of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-37, Parcel ID 032861; a portion of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-38, Parcel ID 021678; all of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-39, Parcel ID 021679; all of Tax Parcel 436-(A)-40, Parcel ID 021680; and a portion of 436-(6)-35, Parcel ID 033701; zoned General Business District B-3. The property is designated as Mixed Use with Buffer (Residential/Business) on the Future Land Use Map of the 2013 Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan. A copy of the applications, the Town’s Zoning Map, Zoning Ordinance, and Future Land Use Map may be viewed in the Planning Department Office, 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, VA 24073 during normal office hours of 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact

### Legals - Montgomery County

Andrew Warren, Assistant Town Manager, at (540) 382-6128, ext. 1130 or by email at [awarren@christiansburg.org](mailto:awarren@christiansburg.org), with any questions or if you require reasonable accommodations.

#### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 15.2-2204 & 15.2-2285 of the Code of Virginia of 1950, as amended, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors hereby gives notice of a public hearing to be held on February 12, 2024 at 7:15 p.m. in the County Government Center, 755 Roanoke St., Christiansburg, Virginia, in order to hear citizen comments regarding the Board of Supervisors’ intention to act on the following request:

A request by Shah Development, LLC (Agent: Foresight Design Services) to rezone 5.57 acres from Conservation (C-1) to Planned Unit Development - Residential (PUD-RES) and 21.148 acres from Manufacturing (M-1) to Planned Unit Development - Residential (PUD-RES), to allow for the development of a total of up to eighty-eight (88) single-family residential and two-family residential (duplex) dwellings, and twenty (20) single-family attached residential (townhomes) dwellings. The property is located on Houchins Road (State Rt. 758), approximately 0.15 miles east of the intersection of Houchins Road and Brammer Lane. The property is further

### Legals - Montgomery County

identified as Tax Map 080-A 46 (Parcel ID: 018437), 13.586 acres, and Tax Map 080-A 44 (Parcel ID: 018441), 13.132 acres, in the Shawsville Magisterial District. The property lies in an area designated as Urban Expansion in the 2025 Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan. Copies of the proposed plans, applications, ordinances or amendments may be examined at the Department of Planning and GIS Services, County Government Center, 755 Roanoke St., Suite 2A, Christiansburg, Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. or at <http://www.montgomerycountyva.gov/pendingapplications>

#### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 15.2-2204 & 15.2-2285 of the Code of Virginia of 1950, as amended, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors hereby gives notice of a public hearing to be held on February 12, 2024 at 7:15 p.m. in the County Government Center, 755 Roanoke St., Christiansburg, Virginia, in order to hear citizen comments regarding the Board of Supervisors’ intention to act on the following request:

A request by Shah Development, LLC (Agent: Foresight Design Services) to amend the proffered conditions approved as part of the rezoning of the property located at 3966

### Legals - Montgomery County

Prices Fork Road, originally approved by the Board of Supervisors on February 11, 2019. The proposed amendments would allow any of the following by-right uses, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, to be permitted on the property: automotive, light truck, sales, service, rental, and repair, without motor fuel sales; bed and breakfast inn; cabinet shop, furniture, upholstery, craft industry of less than one thousand two hundred (1,200) square feet; church; civic club; community center; conference or training center; day care facility; farm machinery sales and service; financial services; fire, police, rescue facility; garden center; general, convenience store less than three thousand (3,000) square feet, without motor

### Legals - Montgomery County

fuel sales; library; medical care facility; office, administrative, business or professional less than three thousand (3,000) square feet; park, unlighted; pet, household; post office; printing service; public use, public facility; public utility lines, other; public utility lines, water and/or sewer; restaurant; retail sales and services less than three thousand (3,000) square feet; roadside stand; school; school of special instruction; or telecommunication tower, attached. The proposed amendment to the proffered conditions also includes proposed conditions related to site improvements, landscaping, and lighting. The property is located at 3966 Prices Fork Road (State Route 685), at the intersection of Prices Fork Road and Kyle’s Way. The

### Legals - Montgomery County

property is further identified as Tax Map Numbers 052-A-32A (Parcel ID: 017475), totaling 1.5 acres, currently zoned Community Business (CB) in the Price’s Fork Magisterial District.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA TECH

**Alexandra DiFelicantonio, assistant professor with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC and associate director of the research institute's Center for Health Behaviors Research.**

# Instead of calories and macros, think about level of food processing, expert says

Scientific consensus is building around a clear recommendation: To improve health, we need to think differently about our diet of ultra-processed foods. Rather than focus on calories or macronutrients, consider how the food you eat has been physically and chemically modified, says Alexandra DiFelicantonio, an assistant professor with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC and associate director of the research institute's Center for Health Behaviors Research.

It's not as easy as it sounds. Processed foods have become a growing part of the American diet as manufacturers work to produce inexpensive, convenient foods with a long shelf life. "Given how prevalent these foods are -- they make up 58 percent of calories consumed in the United States -- there is so much we don't know," said DiFelicantonio said.

How to identify ultra-processed foods: Scientists at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil created the NOVA Food Classification system to help people group foods by their level of processing. Notably, ultra-processed foods lack fiber; include a significant amount of added sugar, salt and fat; and their nutrition labels include a long list of often unrecognizable ingredients.

Why this matters: When thinking about food choices, people often focus on calories in, calories out; macronutrients; and the prevalence of obesity. But for people of all sizes and activity levels, a diet high in ultra-processed foods has been associated with diabetes, cancer, and all-cause mortality. "We're eating things that hurt us," DiFelicantonio says.

Their effect on the brain: Ultra-processed foods share the addictive qualities of tobacco and other

substances, says DiFelicantonio, a neuroscientist. "Certain types of food affect people's brains in a way that may be similar to drugs of abuse. They have been engineered to be delicious." People can experience intense cravings, less control over intake, symptoms of withdrawal, and continued use despite negative consequences.

"If you're trying to quit drinking, you don't go to the bar. But you can't stop eating," DiFelicantonio says. Food advertising, vending machines, the checkout line at the grocery store, and even the cookies in the breakroom make ultra-processed foods difficult to avoid. The challenge is in defining which foods have the most potential for addiction and why, and determining how we can best change the modern food environment.

Virginia Tech

## News Messenger

Established 1869

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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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# Tax-time donations benefit biodiversity conservation, outdoor recreation

As one-third of animal and plant species face extinction nationwide, Virginia taxpayers have a chance to help the commonwealth make a difference.

This tax season, those who are passionate about biodiversity conservation and outdoor recreation may contribute to the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund by donating all, or a portion of, their 2023 state tax refunds.

A whopping 34% of plants and 40% of animals in the United States are at risk of disappearing, according to a 2023 report

by NatureServe. Forty-one percent of ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation, the state's lead natural resource conservation agency, manages the fund to support biodiversity conservation and expand and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. The agency works to protect Virginia's native plant and animal life and their ecosystems.

Half of the fund generated by the state individual income tax check-off program

is used to buy land for conservation and recreation, including the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System. More than 20 natural area preserves across the state offer public access for hiking, water access, birdwatching, nature photography and other low-impact recreation opportunities.

The other half is used for outdoor recreation grants to localities for projects that increase access to safe open space in Virginia's communities, including the Trail Access Grants program, which funds projects that

increase access to trail opportunities for people with disabilities.

To choose the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund, enter Code Number 68 on Schedule VAC (Virginia Contributions Schedule), Section II (Other Voluntary Contributions). This form accompanies the state individual tax return Form 760.

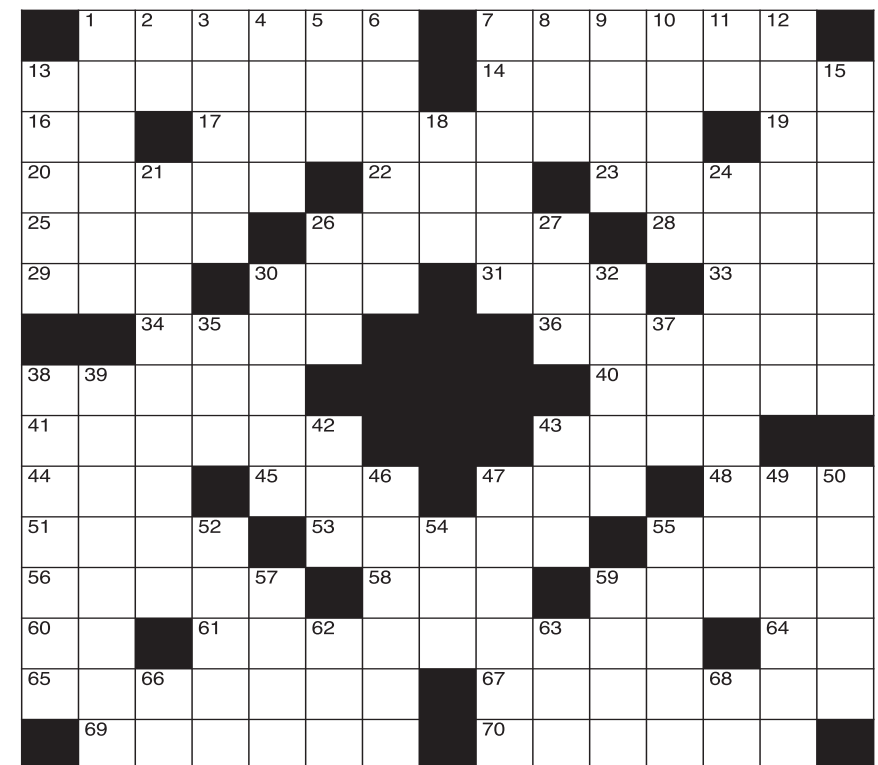
For more information, go to <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/checkoff>.

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Subscribe today!

540-389-9355

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p><b>CLUES ACROSS</b></p> <p>1. Got paid</p> <p>7. Sets free</p> <p>13. Domestic hybrid cattle</p> <p>14. Quality of one's character</p> <p>16. Doctor's helper</p> <p>17. Not holding back</p> <p>19. Type of degree</p> <p>20. Short but severe</p> <p>22. 007's creator</p> <p>23. Linguistics icon</p> <p>25. Large integers</p> <p>26. Upset</p> <p>28. Former</p> <p>29. Peyton's younger brother</p> <p>30. An Irish dance</p> <p>31. Title of respect</p> <p>33. Small lump</p> <p>34. Baroque musical instrument</p> <p>36. The third sign of the zodiac</p> <p>38. The 1st letter of the</p> | <p>Hebrew alphabet</p> <p>40. A group of nine</p> <p>41. Garment</p> <p>43. Capital of Yemen</p> <p>44. One point south of due east</p> <p>45. Drain</p> <p>47. Moved quickly</p> <p>48. Bar bill</p> <p>51. An idiot</p> <p>53. Indicates silence</p> <p>55. Protein-rich liquids</p> <p>56. Samoan monetary units</p> <p>58. "___ your i's, cross your t's"</p> <p>59. Forms the bottom</p> <p>60. Potato state</p> <p>61. Toy that spins around</p> <p>64. Barium</p> <p>65. Type of molding</p> <p>67. Closes again</p> <p>69. Sounds the same</p> <p>70. Come into view</p> <p><b>CLUES DOWN</b></p> <p>1. Nix</p> | <p>2. Indicates position</p> <p>3. Quantitative facts</p> <p>4. Strong and healthy</p> <p>5. Former measure of length</p> <p>6. Dads tend to be this</p> <p>7. Parts of a movie</p> <p>8. An animal's foot</p> <p>9. Expression of sorrow or pity</p> <p>10. Saudi Arabian money</p> <p>11. One billion gigabytes</p> <p>12. Smallest musical interval</p> <p>13. A rugged box (usually made of wood)</p> <p>15. Cheese dish</p> <p>18. An ugly, evil-looking old woman</p> <p>21. Widely used</p> <p>24. Makes into pages</p> <p>26. Afflict in mind or body</p> <p>27. Set up</p> <p>30. Toilets</p> <p>32. "Life of Jesus" theologian</p> | <p>35. A big deal on Wall St.</p> <p>37. Western Thai people</p> <p>38. Free from contamination</p> <p>39. Type of dog</p> <p>42. Revolver</p> <p>43. High schoolers' exam</p> <p>46. San Diego ballplayers</p> <p>47. Hit the sack</p> <p>49. Suitable for crops</p> <p>50. Red mineral</p> <p>52. Yellowish-brown</p> <p>54. Lowest point between two peaks</p> <p>55. Late TNT broadcaster</p> <p>57. Thin strip to align parts</p> <p>59. Swiss wind</p> <p>62. A way to chill</p> <p>63. Jewel</p> <p>66. Rhodium</p> <p>68. The top lawyer in the land</p> |
|---|---|--|--|



# News Messenger

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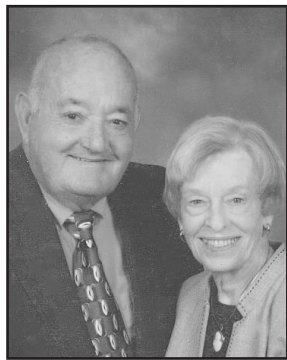
# Obituaries

## McPeake, William Douglas

William Douglas "Doug" McPeake, 85, of Radford, passed away Monday, Jan. 29, 2024.

Doug spent 19 years as an inspector with the State Highway Department as well as owning and operating Dandy Discount and Rustic Village Mobile Home Park. In his earlier years, he enjoyed racing boats which led to a love of being at Claytor Lake, as well as car racing and hunting. He was preceded in death by his parents, Raymond and Juanita McPeake.

Survivors include his loving wife, Sylvia "Sibby" McPeake; sons, Timothy McPeake (Janet) and Jeffrey McPeake; grandchildren, Zachary McPeake (Lindsay), Lauren McPeake, Erin McPeake (Tyler) and Carlie McPeake; great grandchildren, Isaiah and Ivy



McPeake; and numerous other family members and friends.

The family will receive friends 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, at the Fairlawn Presbyterian Church in Fairlawn. Funeral services will begin at 12 p.m. with Pastor Allison Unroe officiating. Interment with full military honors will be at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, at 11 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Fairlawn Presbyterian Church, 6900 Pulaski Ave., Fairlawn, Va. 24141.

The McPeake family is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home and Crematory in Radford.

## Ramsey, Suzanne Adams

Suzanne Adams Ramsey, 64, of Fairlawn, passed away Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Morris Lee and Ella Akers Adams; and her beloved husband, Kermit Weston Ramsey.

Survivors include her sons, Bryan Paul Ramsey (Rebecca), Weston Dean Ramsey, and Travis Justin Ramsey (Victoria); five grandchildren; siblings, Kristie



is in the care of Mullins Funeral Home & Crematory in Radford. Joey Jamison; and many other nieces, nephews, relatives and special friends.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5, 2024 at the Lighthouse Family Ministries, 365 Union Valley Rd., Riner, with Buford Linkous officiating.

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

Send community news and photos to community news @ourvalley.org

# LEGO

will be accepted.

Best in Show winners will be chosen from among three age groups for the kid's entries, and one from the 18 and up entries. The homes will be judged at the 2024 NRV Home Expo by NRVHBA members, receiving scores based on Overall Design, the Best Use of LEGO Elements, and the "Cool Factor" (overall creativity and originality).

An award will also be

given for the People's Choice for both the younger and adult groups. Attendees at the NRV Home Expo will be invited to vote for their favorite entry. Each age group winner and the people's choice winner will receive a custom-made medal and a \$50 gift card. Winners will be announced at the NRV Home Expo on Sunday March 24.

Let's get to brainstorming and dig

through the pile of Legos you've been storing just for this occasion! There is no entry fee. Entry spots are limited and available on a first-come, first-serve basis. For contest details, submission guidelines, and to sign up, please visit [www.nrvhomeexpo.com](http://www.nrvhomeexpo.com).

New River Valley Home Builders Association



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NRVHBA

# Legal Notice

### NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC OF A PETITION BY APPALACHIAN POWER COMPANY FOR A PRUDENCY REVIEW, PURSUANT TO § 56-585.1:4 H OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA, WITH RESPECT TO THE PURCHASE OF ENERGY CAPACITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES FROM SOLAR FACILITIES THROUGH POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENTS CASE NO. PUR-2023-00212

On January 11, 2024, Appalachian Power Company ("APCo" or "Company"), pursuant to § 56-585.1:4 H of the Code of Virginia ("Code"), filed a petition ("Petition") with the State Corporation Commission ("Commission") for a prudency determination with respect to three power purchase agreements ("PPAs") that the Company seeks to add to its portfolio of renewable energy used to comply with the Renewable Portfolio Standards ("RPS") established by the Virginia Clean Economy Act. Pursuant to Code § 56-585.1:4 H, the Commission must issue a final order regarding the Petition within three months of the date of filing.

The Company states that the PPAs and the solar projects ("Projects") that are the subject of this Petition are:

- Elliot Solar, which is a 5 megawatt ("MW") solar facility located in Tazewell County, Virginia, with an expected commercial operations date in late 2025. APCo and the developer, Inovateus, entered into a 20-year PPA for the facility's output.
- County Line Solar, which is a 150 MW solar facility located in Charlotte County, Virginia, with an expected commercial operations date in late 2026. APCo and the developer, Competitive Power Ventures, entered into a 20-year PPA for the facility's output.
- 7 Bridges Solar, which is an 80 MW solar facility located in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, with an expected commercial operations date in late 2026. APCo and the developer, Longroad, entered into a 30-year PPA for the facility's output.

The Company asks that the Commission determine that the execution of the PPAs will be prudent additions to the Company's RPS compliance portfolio. The Company asserts the PPAs were selected after a competitive and robust bidding process, due diligence and contract negotiations. According to the Petition, the Projects will help the Company comply at a reasonable cost with the RPS requirements (by producing approximately 1.0 million renewable energy certificates annually on a Virginia retail basis). The Company asserts that the PPAs will also allow APCo to reduce the amount of power purchased from the PJM energy markets. APCo further asserts that the PPAs will produce carbon-free energy thereby advancing the Commonwealth Clean Energy Policy.

According to the Petition, as the Projects are not expected to go online until after the rate year in the Company's next RPS compliance filing, expected to be filed in April 2024, the Company will not seek cost recovery related to the PPAs from Virginia customers until 2025.

The details of these and other proposals are set forth in the Company's Petition. Interested persons are encouraged to review the Company's Petition and supporting exhibits for the details of the proposals.

The Commission entered an Order for Notice and Hearing that, among other things, scheduled public hearings on APCo's Petition. A hearing for the receipt of testimony from public witnesses on the Company's Petition shall be convened telephonically at 10 a.m. on March 6, 2024. On or before February 26, 2024, any person desiring to offer testimony as a public witness shall provide to the Commission (a) your name, and (b) the telephone number that you wish the Commission to call during the hearing to receive your testimony. This information may be provided to the Commission in three ways: (i) by filling out a form on the Commission's website at [sec.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting](http://sec.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting); (ii) by completing and emailing the PDF version of this form to [SCCInfo@sec.virginia.gov](mailto:SCCInfo@sec.virginia.gov); or (iii) by calling (804) 371-9141. This public witness hearing will be webcast at: [sec.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting](http://sec.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting).

Beginning at 10 a.m. on March 6, 2024, the Hearing Examiner will telephone sequentially each person who has signed up to testify as provided above.

On March 6, 2024, at 10 a.m., or at the conclusion of the public witness portion of the hearing, whichever is later, in the Commission's second floor courtroom located in the Tyler Building, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, the Hearing Examiner will convene a hearing to receive testimony and evidence related to the Petition from the Company, any respondents, and the Commission Staff.

To promote administrative efficiency and timely service of filings upon participants, the Commission has directed the electronic filing of testimony and pleadings, unless they contain confidential information, and required electronic service on parties to this proceeding.

Electronic copies of the public version of the Petition may be obtained by submitting a written request to counsel for the Company, Noelle J. Coates, 1051 East Cary Street, Suite 1100, Richmond, Virginia 23219, [njcoates@aep.com](mailto:njcoates@aep.com).

On or before February 26, 2024, any interested person may submit written comments on the Petition by following the instructions found on the Commission's website: [sec.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments](http://sec.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments). Those unable, as a practical matter, to submit comments electronically may file such comments by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission, c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. All comments shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00212.

On or before February 16, 2024, any person or entity wishing to participate as a respondent in this proceeding may do so by filing a notice of participation at [sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling](http://sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling). Those unable, as a practical matter, to file a notice of participation electronically may file such notice by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Such notice of participation shall include the email addresses of such parties or their counsel, if available. The respondent simultaneously shall serve a copy of the notice of participation on counsel to the Company. Pursuant to Rule 5 VAC 5-20-80 B, *Participation as a respondent*, of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure ("Rules of Practice"), any notice of participation shall set forth: (i) a precise statement of the interest of the respondent; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; and (iii) the factual and legal basis for the action. Any organization, corporation, or government body participating as a respondent must be represented by counsel as required by Rule 5 VAC 5-20-30, *Counsel*, of the Rules of Practice. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00212.

On or before February 16, 2024, each respondent may file with the Clerk of the Commission, at [sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling](http://sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling), any testimony and exhibits by which the respondent expects to establish its case. Any respondent unable, as a practical matter, to file testimony and exhibits electronically may file such by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Each witness's testimony shall include a summary not to exceed one page. All testimony and exhibits shall be served on the Staff, the Company, and all other respondents simultaneous with its filing. In all filings, respondents shall comply with the Rules of Practice, as modified herein, including, but not limited to: 5 VAC 5-20-140, *Filing and service*, and 5 VAC 5-20-240, *Prepared testimony and exhibits*. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00212.

All documents filed with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission in this docket may use both sides of the paper. In all other respects, except as modified by the Commission's Order for Notice and Hearing, all filings shall comply fully with the requirements of 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Rules of Practice.

The Commission's Rules of Practice, the Commission's Order for Notice and Hearing, and other documents filed in the case may be viewed at: [sec.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information](http://sec.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information).

APPALACHIAN POWER COMPANY

# Budget

addressed as well in the upcoming budget.

Additional items discussed by Bragen were the inclusion of costs for custodial materials and adjustment of pay schedule for custodial staff from monthly to bimonthly. The purchase of eight new school buses will be added to the county's approximate fleet of 120 total as part of the new budget plan.

To meet with the educational plans and growth for the county, Bragen said, "access to a wide variety of CTE courses, robotics, drones, pharmacy tech, cosmetology, welding, cybersecurity, culinary arts, just to name a few. Our students have access to rigorous DE and AP courses that are all offered in all content areas. We have elementary and secondary coaches to support our teachers, particularly our new and provisionally licensed teachers."

These were among many other initiatives that the next year's proposed budget plan hopes to achieve.

The aggregate total from last year's budget was a total of just under \$135 million.

"The ask we're using this year is \$147.5 million, it's about \$5 million, \$5.4 million increase in state aid," Bragen said. "The ask from the county would be \$58,400,000."

The operating budget is separate from the school nutrition fund, which is expected to be \$5.6 million, according to Whittaker. Whittaker also explained the process moving forward for the approval and adoption of the proposed budgetary plan by the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors.

On Feb. 6, a presentation of the Superintendent Statement of Need will occur, and on Feb. 26, the County Board of Supervisors will be presented with the County School Board's funding requests.

The Board of Supervisors will then hold a budget adoption meeting at their April 9 meeting, followed by a budget public hearing on April 16. May 7 will mark the final annual budget approval.

Whittaker reminded everyone that these numbers can change and are based on what figures are provided by the Governor at this time. State funds can change in the future, and even as late as September of this year, Whittaker said.

School board members were asked to respond to the current proposed budget with questions, with Penny Franklin speaking first on both the need for a more detailed proposal as well as concerns about an across-the-board wage increase of staff to \$15 an hour.

"I appreciate the increase for our custodians and aids to a minimum of \$15, but for me that questions employees who have been working for the district for many, many years and now the salary of a starting employee will be the same as someone who's been here for many years," Franklin said. "Unless you can tell me that there is a scale where our employees have been compensated for their service throughout the years already."

Other board members shared their concerns about needing more detailed information to move forward with the budget, especially in the short time they are

being asked to review the 53-page booklet, which is expected to be by the next Board meeting in a couple of weeks.

Bragen and Whittaker plan to share a more detailed spreadsheet with in-depth information on the line items within the proposed FY 2024-25 budget.

**CROSSWORD ANSWERS**

C	A	S	H	E	D	S	P	A	R	E	S			
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V	I	O	L	G	E	M	I	N	I					
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T	I	D	W	H	I	R	L	I	G	I	G	B	A	
C	O	R	N	I	C	E	R	E	S	E	A	L	S	
R	H	Y	M	E	S			E	M	E	R	G	E	

# MONTGOMERY SPORTS



FILE PHOTO

**Christiansburg offensive lineman Carter Stallard muscled his opponent to allow Izaiah Cotto to sprint through a hole for a big gain during a game this past season.**

## Christiansburg lineman commits to Virginia Tech

**Marty Gordon**  
NRVsports@mainstreetnewspapers.com

Carter Stallard, who is the class 2025, has made his decision to play football at the next level at a place he calls home, Virginia Tech. The 6-8, 315 pounder announced Monday he was committing to play in his own backyard.

Stallard said Virginia Tech is home.

“Coach (Brent) Pry is building

something special at Tech and I want to be a part of that,” he said.

He has been named the all-county/all-city lineman of the year, while garnering second team all-state this past season.

Because of his size and wingspan, he has been recruited heavily by schools from around the country. Stallard is listed as a three-star prospect and the Number 18, 2025 recruit in the state of Virginia. He had offers

from Pittsburgh, Maryland and Louisville.

Stallard is also looking forward to working with Tech offensive line coach Ron Crook. “I believe he can help develop me into a great college level offensive lineman. My best play is yet to come and I’m excited about that.”

Stallard also shines in the classroom with a 3.89 grade point average. He hopes to major in business with a future career in coaching.

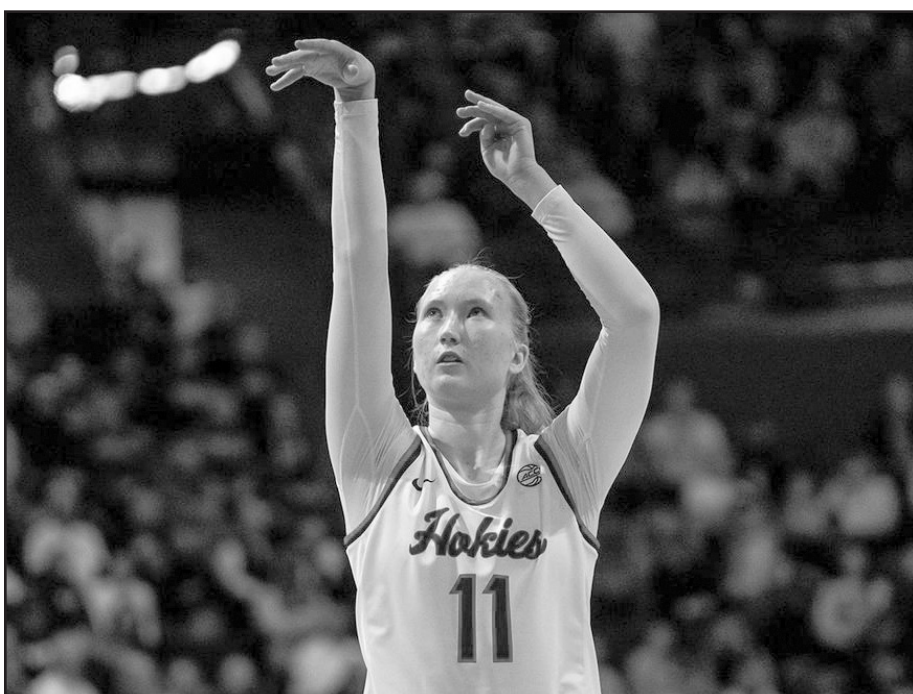


PHOTO COURTESY OF VT ATHLETICS

**Matilda Ekh transferred to Virginia Tech from Michigan State and is fitting in well on a Top-20 team here in Blacksburg.**

## Lewis elevated to associate head coach

Virginia Tech softball Head Coach Pete D’Amour announced the elevation of Mike Lewis to associate head coach Tuesday afternoon.

Lewis, who serves as the program’s recruiting coordinator enters his fourth season in Blacksburg. With Lewis on the staff, Tech has appeared in three straight NCAA Regionals, two Super Regionals and was crowned the 2022 ACC regular season champions.

“Since arriving in Blacksburg, Mike has elevated our program in every aspect,” D’Amour said about Lewis. “He’s established himself as one of the best assistant coaches in the country with his work ethic and desire to be the best in everything he does. I’m thankful that Mike calls his home Blacksburg and that we’re able to show

him how valuable he is to Virginia Tech.”

Lewis has had a significant impact on the program’s success over the past three seasons.

During his time in Blacksburg, the Hokies have an overall record of 122-45 and a 58-23 record in conference play.

Lewis has helped the Hokies become one of the most dominant offensive programs in the nation, including mentoring All-American outfielder Emma Ritter. Ritter is one of the toughest batters to strike out in Division 1, striking out only 18 times in her career. Throughout her time at Tech, she’s recorded a .354 batting average, 161 hits, 101 RBI, and stolen 56 bases. She is a two-time All-ACC player and two-time NFCA Mid-Atlantic Region First Team member. In

addition, she was named an NFCA All-American in 2022, alongside pitcher Keely Rochard, marking the first time in school history the Hokies have had two All-Americans in one season.

He was also part of the staff that witnessed Kelsey Bennett become the program’s all-time leader in RBIs with 170. In 2023, Bennett signed with the Women’s Professional Fastpitch team, Smash It Sports Vipers.

The Hokies begin the season Feb. 9, in Auburn, Alabama at the Tiger Invite against Illinois. Tech’s challenging schedule consists of 10 NCAA Regional Teams, including World Series participant Alabama. ACC play begins March 1st at TSP against Notre Dame.

*Virginia Tech Athletics*

## Swedish sensation making name for Lady Hokies

Virginia Tech’s shooting guard Matilda Ekh has never backed down from chasing big dreams, even if it means moving to a foreign country or transferring schools.

A two-time All-Big Ten performer during her time at Michigan State, Ekh brought her talents to Tech in the summer of 2023.

The Sweden native grew up surrounded by basketball. Both of her parents played, as well as her brother, which compelled Ekh to follow suit around the time she was eight years old. Her talent and love for the game developed quickly.

At just 15 years old, Ekh made the big decision to move away from home and attend a premier basketball school, where she made a name for herself by representing Sweden in several European basketball tournaments. Her big break came when she was named to the Swedish National Team for the FIBA Women’s EuroBasket 2021 tournament.

“I’ve been on the youth national team since I was 15, but that was such a shock for me to get invited to play with the seniors,” Ekh said. “I’ve been watching those players since I was 10, so getting to actually play with them was such an amazing experience.”

Ekh knew that relocating to the United States would help advance her basketball career. She heard good things from other players who had moved and saw tremendous value in a collegiate student-athlete experience.

Following her senior year of high school, Ekh landed at Michigan State as a starting wing under head coach Suzy Merchant.

It wasn’t an easy transition. Ekh had to learn a new language and adjust to the many cultural differences. Basketball had its differences as well, namely in the playing style and interest in the sport.

“Basketball is not very big in Sweden, and here it’s one of the main sports,” Ekh explained. “Pretty much everyone played basketball growing up and is interested in basketball. That’s just not how it is in Sweden.”

Ekh’s playing style shifted from playing at point guard to shooting more. She became notoriously dangerous from behind the arc, shooting 39% from 3-point range while knocking down 138 3-pointers as one of the top 3-point shooters in the Big Ten during her time in East Lansing.

At the end of her sophomore season, Coach Merchant and most of the coaching staff stepped down, prompting Ekh to explore other options for her remaining two years of eligibility. The success and family-centric aspects of Virginia Tech’s program stood out to Ekh when she considered her next steps.

“I always had a good feeling about

Virginia Tech,” Ekh said. “When I started talking to the coaches, Coach Rad (Radville Autukaite) and I connected instantly since we’re both from Europe and she understood my situation.”

Just 20 games into her career as a Hokie, Ekh has already made an impact, scoring 10.4 points per game, third on the team. During Tech’s 84-59 win at Rutgers in December, she led all scorers with 25 points, including seven 3-pointers.

“Matilda positively impacts the team both on and off the court,” Autukaite said of Ekh and the effect she has on the program. “Anytime she steps on the court whether it be at practice or in a game you know she is going to give it her all. Off the court she’s pleasant, mature, and a reliable teammate. She fits perfectly into the culture that Coach Brooks has built at Virginia Tech. We are extremely lucky and grateful that she is a Hokie!”

Ekh has found a lot to love about the program, on and off the court. The team’s foreign tour to Greece and the exhilarating home triumph against the then-No. 3 NC State both resonate with her as standout moments.

She vividly remembers the electric atmosphere in Cassell that day, unable to hear anything for hours after the game because of the deafening cheers from a sold-out crowd.

“Cassell is just amazing to play in,” Ekh said. “One of the refs actually came up to me a few games ago and commented on how much he loved the atmosphere. You don’t always see such an exciting environment in women’s basketball as you do in Cassell.”

Living far away from family still presents challenges, but Ekh now has a second home with the players and coaches. She enjoys rooming with grad student Olivia Summiel, who played for four years at Wake Forest and understands the transfer experience.

For Ekh, the people are what truly elevate her Hokie experience into something extraordinary.

“Coach Brooks cares about us so much off the court and wants to build a relationship with every one of us,” Ekh said. “I’ve also never been on a team with this little drama, where everyone genuinely cares for each other. It’s such a great culture.”

Ekh is looking forward to putting her skills to the test against the best of the best down the stretch as the Hokies enter into the final month of ACC play. She aims to pursue a career in the EuroLeague after graduation, recognizing that her time at Tech will pave the way for her success.

*Virginia Tech Athletics*

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF BIG SOUTH CONF.

## ESPNU tabs Winthrop at Radford as its Feb. 15 Big South wildcard selection

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – ESPNU has selected the Winthrop at Radford men’s basketball contest as its fourth Big South Wildcard broadcast of the 2023-24 season, the Big South Conference office announced.

The game will move from its current Wednesday, Feb. 14 date to Thursday, Feb. 15 and will tip at 8 p.m. inside the Dedmon Center in Radford.

Winthrop defeated Radford in triple-overtime, 92-88, in the first meeting of the season back on Jan. 13. The Feb. 15 match-up will mark the squad’s first all-time “Wildcard” meeting on ESPNU, as well as each program’s second appearance on the network this season.

Winthrop is 14-9 overall and 5-3 in the Big South following the

first half of the 16-game conference season. The Eagles rank second in league games with their 79.1 scoring average, as well as second in field goal percentage (49.2) and field goal defense (43.6) and are tops in three-point defense at 28.4 percent allowed. Kelton Talford is among the leaders with 18.0 points, 6.4 rebounds and a 66.7 field goal clip in Big South games.

Radford, which is 3-5 at the conference’s midway point and 13-10 overall, has suffered three of its five league losses by single digits. The Highlanders ranked first in Big South games in three-pointers made per contest and are second in scoring defense. Individually, DaQuan Smith - who has made two game-winning buzzer-beaters this season (West Virginia and USC

Upstate) - is averaging 15.8 points vs. league foes.

This is the 11th year of the Big South’s ESPNU Wildcard series, which again features six Thursday broadcasts - Jan. 11 (Radford 69, at Longwood 58), Jan. 18 (UNC Asheville 82, at Winthrop 77), Feb. 1 (Longwood at High Point), Feb. 15 (Winthrop at Radford), Feb. 22 and Feb. 29 - that are selected 14-21 days in advance. A total of 49 games have been played in the series that began in 2013-14, and while the home teams are 31-18, the 49 contests have been decided by an average of 9.24 points, with 29 (59.1 percent) of those being decided by single digits.

*Big South Conference*

# MONTGOMERY SPORTS

## Local swimmers compete at CAC



Blacksburg's Jillian Wiersema would win the 100-yard backstroke on Tuesday night with a state qualifying time.



Blacksburg's Brandon Hu swims breaststroke for the Bruins 200-yard medley relay during a Christiansburg Aquatic Center meet. Local teams were tuning up for a series of Regional Championship meets to be hosted next week at the CAC.



Christiansburg's Kaitlyn Brown swims breaststroke for the Blue Demons' 200-yard medley relay team.



Auburn's William Martin gets started in the 50-yard freestyle alongside Christiansburg's Gavin Winn.

PHOTOS BY JON FLEMING

## Radford boys slip by Glenvar



Jaden Hendricks beats the defense and score an easy layup against Glenvar in a Tuesday night win. Radford improves to 8-7 after the 48-46 win.



Radford Max Kanipe battles for an offensive rebound in Tuesday's game.



Reece Honaker scores in the paint for Radford in the fourth quarter.

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VT Fashion Illustration Jennifer King



Mekih Martin goes up for a sure layup with less than 10 seconds left to secure the 48-46 victory for the Bobcats. Martin led Radford with 14 points. Luke Woodard added 11 points in the win.

PHOTOS BY BRYANT ALTIZER

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