

News Messenger

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Blacksburg

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Blacksburg High School students petition for reinstatement of principal

Lori Graham
Contributing writer

BLACKSBURG - Blacksburg High School students are petitioning for the reinstatement of Principal Chris Stewart after receiving a statement that he would be taking a leave of absence from their school.

This is following a previous petition from Blacksburg students and parents calling for an investigation into a Nov. 7 2023, murder-suicide that resulted in the deaths of two Blacksburg High School students.

A statement from the Montgomery County School Board confirmed that an investigation into the actions of BHS would be initiated.

"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. 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 School Board will not comment further until the review has been completed," MCPS Public Relations Office said.

Parents and students then received notice that Principal Chris Stewart would be taking a leave of absence and Adam Simpson would be temporarily acting in the administrator's place at BHS as principal.

A later email was sent to parents that Assistant Principal Oliver Lewis was also placed on leave.

Students reacted with a TikTok video protesting the removal of Stewart. In the video, students are holding signs reading "We love (heart symbol) Stew", "Justice for Serenity", and "We Want Accountability" to the tune of Open Your Eyes by Illkan Gunuc and Osman Altun.

Additionally, a petition at www.change.org was started by a BHS student Jan. 28 2024, and has



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCPS

Blacksburg High School

almost reached their goal of 500 signatures as of Feb. 4. The petition on the website states that Stewart had only been the principal of BHS for a little over three weeks at the time of the tragic event and should not be held accountable for the events that led up to the students' deaths.

Dan Hamrick named Rotary Club of Blacksburg's Citizen of the Year



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF BLACKSBURG

Dan Hamrick (left) and Tom Ryan, Rotary Club President at the Citizen of the Year ceremony.

For over 30 years the Rotary Club of Blacksburg has presented a Citizen of the Year Award to a Montgomery Co. resident who exemplifies Rotary's values of business ethics, personal integrity and service to others.

The Award was presented to Daniel Hamrick at a recent Rotary Club ceremony. In describing why Hamrick was selected, words like Service, Duty, Honor, Ethics, Sacrifice were used often in describing Dan Hamrick. A Christiansburg native, Hamrick was characterized as an "All American Boy", known and admired throughout the community. He excelled in school and athletics; earned perfect attendance pins at church; achieved Eagle Scout rank in the Boy Scouts; left college to join the Army, serving in Viet Nam flying Huey helicopters.

He returned to the New River Valley and began a law career that has spanned over 40 years. In introducing Hamrick, the Rotary Club noted his exceptional core principals and high ethical standards, as well as his life of service to the community.

Hamrick thanked Rotary for presenting this Award each year, and said he was honored and humbled by this recognition, and appreciated his being considered.

Rotary Club of Blacksburg



Blacksburg United Methodist Church's 100 volunteers pack meals for Rise Against Hunger.

Community packs meals at Blacksburg United Methodist Church to target world hunger

BLACKSBURG - One hundred members of Blacksburg United Methodist Church and the greater community gathered Saturday in a meal packing event that provided 15,000 meals for Rise Against Hunger, an initiative to end hunger around the world.

The boxes contain a combination of rice, soy, vegetables, and vitamins. Meals will be distributed through school feeding programs in areas hard hit by hunger, providing the benefits of both food and education.

This is the third time Blacksburg United Methodist Church has sponsored a Rise Against Hunger event.

"This event is always a really fun and meaningful way to gather together and help children across the globe," said Dick Arnold, coordinator of the SERVE outreach ministries at BUMC.

After an opening prayer by Pastor Brad Dulaney, David Thomas-Bush of Rise Against Hunger, ran through the instructions and the mission of Rise Against Hunger.

"More than meals, our program works to provide a path out of poverty," said Thomas-Bush. "The work you do here supports education, skills training, and health services with every meal."

David's rocking playlist with hits from the 50's, 60's, and 70's made the time fly as volunteers scooped soy, rice, and dehydrated vegetables, added vitamin packets, sealed the bags, and packed boxes. With every 1000 meals packed, a gong sounded, and a cheer went up.

The enthusiastic volunteers included Virginia Tech students from the Wesley Foundation, members of The Common Ingredient, the BUMC youth group, and volunteers from age five to eighty-five from Blacksburg United Methodist Church and throughout the community.

"Our Sunday School class, Journey, is delighted to organize this inspiring event again," said Jennifer Cooper, a member of BUMC. "The mission is simple and powerful: come together with friends and neighbors to make a direct impact on the serious problem of hunger in the world."

Blacksburg United Methodist Church



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BUMC

A group of volunteers pack some of the 15,000 meals, which contain a combination of rice, soy, vegetables, and vitamins.

NRV named in 2023 Top 50 Metro Area for Economic Growth in the U.S.

NEW RIVER VALLEY - The New River Valley is one of the top 50 places in America for metro areas that are "hotspots for economic growth", according to Area Development.

The magazine recently released its rankings of the 2023 leading metro locations that are hotspots for economic growth.

The Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford metropolitan statistical area (MSA), also known as the New River Valley, ranked No. 49 overall and No. 21 among mid-sized metros with populations between 160,000 to 600,000. The New River Valley is the only location from Virginia that made the top 50.

According to Area Development, they ranked "384 MSAs across 24 economic and workforce indicators pulled from eight data sets — each set containing a five-year change, a three-year change, and a one-year change indicator — originating from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census, and JobsEQ by Chmura Economics & Analytics." The "Overall Ranking" was created by totaling the score across all data sets, with the five-year change indicators carrying the most weight and the one-year indicators carrying the least weight. The four primary indicators used to compile the rankings included Prime Workforce, Economic Strength, Year-Over-Year Growth, Three-Year Growth, and Five-Year Growth.

The "overall ranking" isn't a product of just



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF ONWARD NRV

one indicator, but all the factors combined. This shows the New River Valley's strength in a variety of different indicators that make it 'a natural fit' across the board. The region benefits from its emerging tech hub, high-tech advanced manufacturing, access to talent, great cost of living and many other key factors that make the NRV a great place to live and do business.

Onward NRV

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 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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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>.

Sunday, Feb. 11 –

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 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.

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.

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.

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. Tickets \$37 per person and available at the SLOFH Soul Food Sampling Page.

On-going:

2024 Blacksburg Citizens Institute

Do you want to learn more about the Town of Blacksburg? Are you a new resident, retiree, or just someone who wants to get involved in the community? Join us for the 2024 Citizens Institute to meet town staff and to learn about the functions of your local government. Classes will be held on Monday evenings from April – June 6- 8 p.m. Participants must be 18 years of age or older and must be residents of the Town of Blacksburg. Space is filling up fast! To register and to learn more, contact the Community Relations Office at cro@blacksburg.gov or call 540-443-1090.

2024 business license reminder

Town of Blacksburg business license renewal forms for 2024 are due by Friday, March 1, 2024. Businesses are assessed an annual license tax based on prior year's annual gross receipts. Renewals not filed and paid by March 1, 2024, are subject to a 10% penalty and interest at a rate of 10% per annum. Renewal packets were mailed Jan. 2, 2024. If you have not received the packet, email businesslicensegroup@blacksburg.gov or call 540.961.1108.

MEPS
Elementary School Student Art Show Opening Reception

You are invited!
FEBRUARY 8, 2024 | 4:30 - 6:30 PM

At Montgomery Museum of Art & History
4 East Main Street
Christiansburg, VA 24073

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF ART & HISTORY

Montgomery Museum of Art & History hosts Montgomery County Public School Student Art Show

The Montgomery Museum of Art & History is hosting Montgomery County Public Schools for a Student Art Show. This is the first year that the Museum has hosted art from most of Montgomery County's public schools. This show offers a combined vision of student art across the county and has been specially curated by elementary, middle, and high school art teachers. The elementary school show will include student art from Eastern Montgomery Elementary, Margaret Beeks Elementary, Christiansburg Primary, Belview Elementary, Price's Fork Elementary, Gilbert Linkous Elementary, Harding Ave Elementary, Falling Branch Elementary, and Auburn Elementary. The opening reception of the Elementary School Student Art Show will be held Thursday, Feb. 8, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m., with remarks at 5:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. The Elementary School art will be on exhibit through Feb. 28.

"The museum is very happy to offer a place for students to experience sharing

their artwork with the community in a gallery setting. We believe that this show is an important way the Museum can serve all of Montgomery County," said Sherry Wyatt, Assistant Director and Museum Curator.

The opening reception for the Middle and High School Student Art Show will be held on Thursday, March 7, 5 - 7 p.m., with remarks at 6 p.m. Art students from Auburn Middle, Blacksburg Middle, Christiansburg Middle, Shawsville Middle, Auburn High, Blacksburg High, Christiansburg High, Eastern Montgomery High, and Montgomery Central will be participating in the show which will run through March 23. Judging for the elementary show will be made by a local retired art educator and local artist Larry Bechtel will judge the middle and high school entries. Cash prizes for the students are generously sponsored by the Blacksburg Regional Art Association (BRAA).

Montgomery Museum of Art and History

NRCC Concert Series to hold free concert Feb. 10



Adam McPeak & Mountain Thunder

The music of Adam McPeak & Mountain Thunder and Gap Civil will be featured during New River Community College's Concert Series event on Sat., Feb. 10.

Music will begin at 6 p.m. in 117 Edwards Hall at NRCC in Dublin.

The band Adam McPeak & Mountain Thunder is composed primarily of young bluegrass musicians from Virginia, with mandolin player Adam at the helm. The band includes Mike McPeak, Adam's father, who plays guitar and sings lead and harmony vocals; Nikki Wright who plays fiddle and sings lead and harmony vocals; David Chrisley who plays bass and sings harmony vocals; Steve Chrisley, David's father, who plays banjo; and Lindsey Jackson, who sings lead vocals. The group began playing at fiddler's conventions and then went on to play their own shows and participate in competitions. They have also appeared on public television's "Song of the Mountains."

Gap Civil is an Appalachian Mountain

music band built on their motto of honor and innovate. They honor the mountain traditions that have shaped and rooted their music, and they take great pride in innovative and exciting original songs, tunes and arrangements. Fluidly blending the genres of old time, country, bluegrass and Americana, their music is sure to make you want to dance. Gap Civil was formed in 2017 based in Sparta, N.C. and features Todd Hiatt on guitar, Chris Johnson on banjo and bass, Lucas Pasley on fiddle and vocals, and Kyle Dean Smith on bass and lead guitar.

Corporate sponsors of the music events include Anderson Audiology, Dublin; August Jewelers & Boutique, Inc., Radford; CCKKY, LLC – Fazoli's, Dublin; Deanie Hall – State Farm Agent, Dublin; Estes Auto & Truck Parts Inc., Pilot; First Community Bank, Pulaski; Gregory Seeding and Landscaping Company, Pulaski; King Tire Service, Pulaski; Lee's Body Shop, Pearisburg; Martin's Pharmacy, Pulaski; Pepsi Cola Bottling Co., Dublin; Pulaski Patriot, Pulaski; SERVPRO, Montgomery & 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 travel expenses for the musicians. The music events are typically held the second Saturday of each month through April at NRCC, a Crooked Road affiliated venue.

For more information about the NRCC Concert Series, please contact Tim Jones at (540) 674-3625 or visit www.nr.edu/concerts.



Gap Civil PHOTOS COURTESY OF NRCC

OBITUARIES

Burke, Eldean Thornton

Eldean Thornton Burke, 87, went to be with her heavenly father Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024, at her home in Christiansburg surrounded by her loving family. She was a longtime member and secretary of Cornersview Pentecostal Holiness Church and worked at Thornton's Greenhouse in Snowville. Eldean was preceded in death by her parents, Herman and Gladys Phillips; and husband, Harold Thornton.



Survivors include her husband of 44 years, Ronald Lee Burke; children, Brenda Roop and Jack, Elaine Snuffer and Benny, Randy Thornton and Christy, and Darrell Thornton and Annette; sister and brother-in-law, Linda and Jerry Harper; grandchildren, Kim Vaughn and Mark, Christie Thornton, Jamie Thornton, Ashley Thornton, Michelle Collins and Delbert, Shauna Farrington and Brian, and Nicole Crowder and John; step grandchildren, Tammy Surface and Alan, and Brad Roop and Jenni; 15 great grandchildren; six great great grandchildren; nephew, Shane Harper;

care givers, Trea, Fannie, Stacey, Natasha, Kathy, Tammy, Julia and Crystal; church family; and many other relatives and friends.

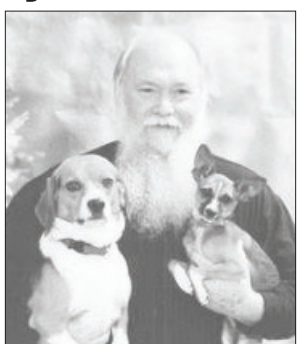
The family would like to thank Good Samaritan Hospice for all the love and compassion given to Eldean.

The family received friends Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services were held Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, at Cornersview Pentecostal Holiness Church in Snowville with Rev. Frankie Graham officiating. Interment followed in the Appalachian Conference Cemetery in Dublin.

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

Gravley, II, John Henry

John Henry Gravley, II, son of Bettie and Clarence Robert Gravley (Boots), left this life Jan. 30, 2024, after a short hard battle.



God's anointing was upon him. He was a member of Mountain View Seventh Day Adventist Church in Floyd. He loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. He struggled so hard these last few months but never gave up. Now, he's asleep, waiting for the Lord to come upon his appointed day.

John Henry always had a good sense of humor. He loved playing music and singing in

church. He was a friend to everyone. And we all loved him very much. To say he will be missed is an understatement! His presence and impact on those around him left impressions so strong

that he will never ever be forgotten.

He was preceded in death by his dad, Bootsie; brothers, Terry, Dustin, Jay, Jesse, and Beaver; and all aunts, and uncles. He leaves behind Bettie (mom), Toady (sister), Robert (brother), Karin (wife), sons, John, III, and Jason, daughter, Karina, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, church family, who he loved dearly.

A memorial service was held Monday, Feb. 5, 2024 at Parrott Church of God with Elder Billy Martin officiating.

Sterrett, Robert

Robert "Bob" Sterrett, 72, passed away peacefully Feb. 2, 2024.



He was born in Lexington, Va. Feb. 12, 1951, to the late William and Frances Sterrett. He spent his childhood in Richmond but found his true home in Blacksburg. Bob graduated from Blacksburg High School then received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Virginia Tech. After graduation, Bob became a teacher and coach until he switched careers into sales with Poly-Scientific. He finished his career as the Human Resources Director at Moog.

Bob loved to work, but once retiring, he found his true passion: golf. On any day of the week, he could be found at the Blacksburg Country Club playing a round with his long-time friends or just hitting balls in the evening. He also loved rooting for the

Hokies and vacationing with his family at Wild Dunes. Bob's kindness, and infectious personality touched all who met him. He loved life and fought courageously for it against cancer for two years. Despite this terrible disease, Bob never lost hope.

Bob was most proud of his family, especially his 48-year marriage to Julie. He is survived by her and their two sons Scott (Brittany) and Robert (Yamini) and three grandchildren

Charley, Drew, and Bobby. He is also survived by his brother Bill Sterrett (Cynthia) and brother in-law Jeff Jenrette (Dorothy) and his nieces and nephews Stephanie Guckenberger (Mark), Meredith Wojnowich (Gili), Jordan Jenrette, and Joseph Jenrette.

The family would like to thank everyone for their overwhelming support over the last two years. In lieu of flowers, please donate to Blacksburg Battles Cancer at <https://www.blacksburgbattlescancer.org/donate>.

A memorial service will be conducted Saturday, Feb. 10, 2024, at 11 a.m. at Blacksburg United Methodist Church, with the Reverend Brad Dulaney officiating. A visitation will be held Friday, Feb. 9, 2024, 4 - 6 p.m., at McCoy Funeral Home.

Varelos, Nicholas Michael

Nicholas Michael Varelos, 52, passed away Feb. 3, 2024, after a battle with Alzheimer's.



He is preceded in death by his father, Michael Nicholas Varelos; mother, Alice St. Clair Varelos; and other family members.

He is survived by his wife, Kelly King Varelos; daughters, Katherine Nicole and Alexis Paige Varelos, all of Blacksburg; sisters and brother-in-law, Elaine and Curtis Woods of Elliston, Angela Lance of Roanoke; mother-in-law and father-in-law, Susan and Cameron Craft of Blue Ridge; brother-in-law, Michael King of Blue Ridge; nieces and nephews, Sarah and

Zach Hill of Roanoke, Chloe and Justin Wan of Texas, Rachel and Brevin Thomas, and their daughter, Blair, of Texas, Victor Lance of Texas, and Andrew King of Daleville.

Nick was a 1989 graduate of William Fleming High School in Roanoke. After

graduation, he went on to work at his family's restaurant, Mike's Grill in Blacksburg. He worked in food prep, then as a cook, until becoming the owner in 2011. After closing the restaurant in 2016, Nick worked at Yokohama Tire as a production supervisor until Sept. 2020.

A funeral service will be held Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024, at 11 a.m. in the McCoy Funeral Home Chapel with Scott Obenchain officiating. A graveside service will follow at 1 p.m. at Blue Ridge Memorial Gardens, Roanoke. The family will receive friends from 5-7 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, at McCoy Funeral Home, Blacksburg.

Williams, Sharyn Dawne Poole

Sharyn "Sherry" Dawne Poole Williams, 78, of Dublin, passed away Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Ralph Willard and Frances Sawyers Poole; and her husband, Dennis Wayne Cox.

Survivors include her daughter and son-in-law, Lori Williams Maxfield (Torgler); former husband, Marshall Williams; sister and brother-in-law, Marsha Poole Simpkins (Donnie); stepdaughter and her husband, Ronda Lambert (Billy); nephew, Will Simpkins; niece

and her husband, Sarah Polcha (Greg); and many other relatives and special friends.

A memorial service will be held privately.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that

donations be made to the Pulaski County Humane Society, 80 Dublin Park Road, Dublin, VA, 24084.

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEWISGALE

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery receives fourth Magnet recognition

BLACKSBURG — LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has received Magnet designation, the highest national honor for professional nursing practice, from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) for the fourth time.

Receiving Magnet recognition is a tremendous achievement, as only a small, select group of healthcare organizations are recognized each year. Magnet recognition is awarded to organizations and nursing teams that meet rigorous standards for nursing excellence, leading to the highest level of treatment for patients. Very few hospitals in the country have four or more Magnet recognitions.

"This recognition is a great honor and reflects our commitment to delivering the highest quality of care to our

community," said Lauren Dudley, chief executive officer. "Earning Magnet recognition is a great accomplishment and incredible source of pride for our nurses. Our repeated achievement of this credential is the cornerstone of a foundation of excellent patient-focused, quality care."

Less than 10% of hospitals in the United States are Magnet recognized, and less than 1% of those have been designated four or more times. Research demonstrates that Magnet recognition provides specific benefits to healthcare organizations and their communities. These include higher patient satisfaction, lower risk of 30-day mortality, higher job satisfaction, and lower nurse turnover.

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery

PETS OF THE WEEK

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

Meet Pepperoni! This gal can be shy at first, but once comfortable, she enjoys cuddles and pets from her favorite humans. Pepperoni tends to act a little tough with other felines, so she may do best as the only cat in the home.



Buttercup won't break your heart. In fact, she'll fill it with sweetness and joy! She is a smart girl who knows basic commands, and she'll gladly roll over for a yummy treat. Buttercup also gets along with other dogs. Stop by the Animal Care and Adoption Center to meet her.

Business REVIEW

Time to Brag About **YOUR** Business!

YOUR story - YOUR employees - YOUR message in our Business Review Edition on February 28-29 Write your own story & advertisement with pictures of your staff and/or business - Deadline February 21st

TO ADVERTISE,

Call Wendi Craig (276) 340-2445

advertise@mainstreetnewspapers.com

118th ANNUAL PANCAKE SUPPER



February 13, 2024 • 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Grace Episcopal Church
210 Fourth Street, Radford, VA

Proceeds will benefit Radford/Fairlawn Daily Bread.
Cash or card donations accepted at the door.

OPINION

Salem Rebels were a fun part of local sports history

Evans "Buddy" King
Columnist

In the fall of 1967, professional ice hockey came to southwest Virginia in the form of the Salem Rebels,

an "expansion team" in the Eastern Hockey League. That was the year the Salem Civic Center opened. The small arena, located in the Salem sports center that today includes a minor league baseball park and a football stadium that hosted the Division 3

college football championship for several years (the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl), was initially named the

See **Rebels**, page 8

General Assembly "crossover" deadline coming soon

Del. Jason Ballard
Virginia General Assembly

The Virginia General Assembly continues its march toward the "Crossover" deadline; the date when legislation originating in the House of Delegates must pass to the Senate of Virginia (and vice versa). "Crossover" this year is February 13, and any legislation that doesn't pass from its originating body by that day is considered dead. This means that committees are working in overdrive to consider hundreds of bills to meet this hard deadline, and the days have certainly become longer.

As mentioned last week, several of my bills have received favorable committee hearings and have since passed through the full House of Delegates. This includes HB 292, which changes the name of Drug Treatment Courts to "Recovery Courts." HB 292 passed through the House of Delegates with a unanimous "yes" vote, and I look forward to presenting this bill to the Senate Committee on Courts of Justice soon. Also passing the House unanimously was my HB 299, which would allow localities to exempt from their animal license tax retired police K9's or

military working dogs. This local option is a great way for our localities to say "thank you" to our law enforcement and Veterans who wish to adopt their working dogs.

Additionally, I've received many emails from constituents in support of House Bill 906, which would protect consumers from utility shutoffs during a state of emergency declared by the Governor. During this bill's initial committee hearing, I harbored concerns that this law could open the door for abuse and intentional non-payment of utility bills, which could make everyone's electric bills more costly. However, those concerns have since been addressed, and I was happy to vote in favor of this bi-partisan piece of legislation on the House floor that protects us all from utility shutoffs during emergencies. HB 906 passed on a 76-24 vote in the full House, and it will now move on to the Senate for further consideration.

Unfortunately, House Democrats continue their overreach in several areas of public policy, to include such topics as the minimum wage and legislation restricting popular firearms. HB 157, which would eliminate exemptions for farm employees

and certain temporary foreign workers from Virginia's minimum wage law, passed through the House of Delegates on a 50-49 vote. Many—if not a majority—of those voting in favor of this bill have no experience with farming and agriculture is not a substantial industry in their districts. This bill will make our food more expensive and provide an additional incentive for automation, which does not help workers at all. Equally disappointing is House Democrat's fixation with banning so-called "assault firearms," which they seek to do through House Bill 2. Rifles of any kind constitute a very small percentage of firearms used in violent crimes. In fact, Virginia Department of Health statistics show that between 2013-2017, 79.5% of gun homicides were perpetrated by handguns, while only 4% were by rifles of any type. This is obviously misguided policy, and its why Republicans embrace proven gun-violence prevention programs, such as Operation Ceasefire.

As the Delegate representing the 42nd House District in the Virginia General Assembly, your concerns are my greatest priority. If ever I may be of assistance to you



COURTESY PHOTO

and your family, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at DelJBallard@House.Virginia.Gov. You can also follow me on Twitter @ JasonBallardVA or like my Facebook page, Jason Ballard for Delegate, to keep up to date with what I am doing in Richmond and in our community on your behalf.

You can save more for retirement in 2024

Josh Smith, CRPC
Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC

As an investor, one way you can enhance your long-term retirement security is to fully leverage the potential of tax-

advantaged retirement savings vehicles. Each year, the IRS releases new guidelines on the amount of money you can contribute to these accounts. New contribution limits in 2024 allow you to save even more this year through plans such as 401(k)s, 403(b)s and IRAs.

Changes to workplace savings limits

Contribution limits for workplace retirement accounts have been raised by \$500 for the year 2024. In 2024, the IRS allows pre-tax employee contributions to 401(k) or 403(b) plans of: \$23,000 for those under age 50 and \$30,500 for those age 50 and older (includes a \$7,500 "catch up" contribution).

When combined with employer contributions, a maximum of \$69,000 can be directed to your workplace retirement plans in 2024 (plus the \$7,500 catch-up contribution for those age 50 and older). Note that total contributions can't exceed your annual compensation at the company that houses your plan.

If offered by your employer, you may be able to make after-tax contributions to a Roth 401(k). Note that any after-tax contributions are counted toward the \$69,000 total maximum limit for employee and employer contributions to workplace plans. Save an amount that makes sense for you, but it can be beneficial to take full advantage of any matching contribution offered by your employer. For example, if an employer offers to match up to 5% of your income into a 401(k) if you make a similar contribution, it, in effect, means you're doubling your contribution for your retirement savings, before investment earnings are taken into account. This is a great way for your savings to make a big impact.

New IRA contribution limits

IRA contribution limits move up periodically to reflect cost-of-living changes. 2024 is one of those years. The new limits are: \$7,000 for those under age 50 and \$8,000 for those age 50 and older.

Note that contributions can't exceed 100% of your earned income if you earn less than the limits stated above. Also, these limits apply to total IRA contributions for the year. This is applicable even if you hold multiple IRAs or make contributions to both Roth IRAs (which feature the potential for tax-free earnings growth) and traditional IRAs.

To make fully tax-deductible (pre-tax) traditional IRA contributions in 2024, your modified adjusted gross income cannot exceed: \$77,000 for single or head-of-household tax filers or \$123,000 for married couples filing a joint return.

Not everyone can make maximum Roth IRA contributions. In 2024, full Roth IRA contributions can only occur if your modified adjusted gross income is less than: \$146,000 for single or head-of-household tax filers and \$230,000 for married couples filing a joint return.

Save diligently, plan wisely

Determining how much to set aside for retirement and in what types of savings vehicles is best determined through careful planning. The start of a new year is a great time to consider if you want to change or start contributions to these types of accounts. Discuss your retirement strategy with your financial advisor and consult with a tax professional on all tax-related matters.

Josh Smith, CRPC is a Financial Advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. in Radford (540-639-5153), 202 Third Ave., Radford. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for three years.

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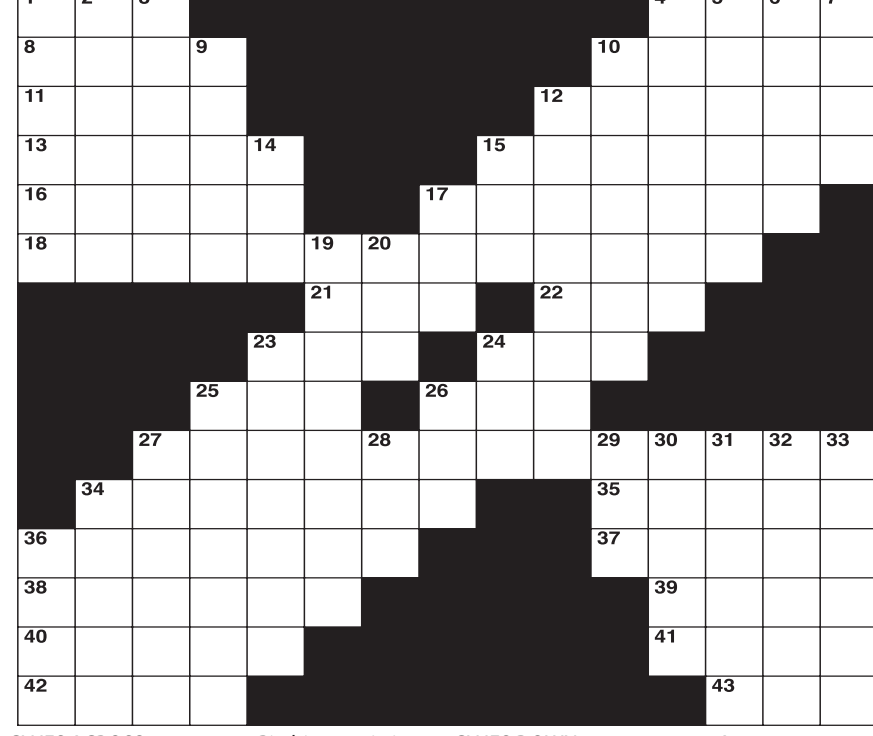
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE



CLUES ACROSS
1. One point south of due east
4. Coagulated blood
8. Fortifying ditch
10. Devotee of Hinduism
11. Trunk of a tree
12. Bank note
13. Capital of Guam
15. Study again
16. Covered with hoarfrost
17. Opening
18. Legendary Rolling Stone
21. Stray
22. Computer storing system
23. Signal

24. Pitching statistic
25. Human being
26. Malaysian isthmus
27. The "Blonde Bombshell"
34. A gland
35. Bluish greens
36. Endangered
37. Three-dimensional
38. In a way, precipitated
39. God associated with dissolution
40. Blemished
41. Flow or leak slowly
42. Disco legends The Bee
43. Midway between south and southeast

CLUES DOWN
1. A way to board
2. Get down
3. Highly seasoned sausage
4. First day of month
5. Eurasian shrubs
6. The organ that bears the ovules of a flower
7. Small lake
9. Belief
10. Sunrooms
12. Metric weight unit
14. Vasopressin
15. Bravo! Bravo!
17. One-time family room staple
19. Got back together

20. Anger
23. Sang merrily
24. Sea eagle
25. Military men
26. Kilo yard (abbr.)
27. Found in the sea
28. Protects from weather
29. Type of medicine
30. City along the Rhine
31. Animal disease
32. Martini ingredients
33. Get away
34. Lack of disunity
36. One-time European Commission officer

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MONTGOMERY SPORTS

RU volleyball player testifies on NIL



PHOTO COURTESY OF RU ATHLETICS

Radford University volleyball player Meredith Page speaks to members of Congress during the "NIL Playbook: Proposal to Protect Student-Athletes Dealmaking Rights" hearing Jan. 18, 2024 in Washington, D.C. Page was joined by Radford athletics leaders and Big South Conference commissioner Sherika Montgomery (right) during her testimony.

(Editor's note: Today, we begin a look at the changing landscape of college athletics and how it might affect the mid-major and smaller schools like Radford University.)

Meredith Page had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to represent herself and Radford University.

Page, a member of the women's volleyball team, testified before members of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., during the "NIL Playbook: Proposal to Protect Student Athletes' Dealmaking Rights" hearing of the House Innovation, Data and Commerce Subcommittee on Jan. 18, 2024.

The native of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and third-year member of the Highlanders joined two other student-athletes – UCLA football quarterback Chase Griffin and Michigan softball catcher Keke Tholl – as well as NCAA President Charlie Baker, Missouri Valley Conference Commissioner Jeff Jackson and Victoria Jackson of Arizona State University in testimony on Capitol Hill.

Amid a growing push to professionalize college sports, Page used her time before Congress to send a message – the opportunities afforded to athletes who participate at the mid-major level, and in Olympic or women's sports, must be protected.

"Becoming a student-athlete in 2021 truly changed my life," Page said in her testimony. "I have seen myself grow from an unsure girl to a confident woman with the empowerment of college athletics."

"Swimming, volleyball, tennis, soccer,

track and field, and the rest on the long list of non-revenue-generating sports cannot be forgotten. It is easy to lose touch with who is behind those titles. Future doctors, lawyers, scientists, CEOs, and most importantly, the next generation of leaders. They do not deserve to get lost in the narrative."

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) is the movement that allows student-athletes to receive payments or benefits related to their status as athletes, like the rights afforded to professionals. Schools may not pay the athletes directly for competing, but athletes can receive compensation from businesses or social media platforms or from collectives, which are organizations that pool together the NIL rights of athletes from the same school (or team) and make payments to those athletes based on obligations that they fulfill.

Radford's student-athletes can access NIL opportunities through the Highlander Exchange, a platform powered by third-party provider INFLCR.

There are no unified laws, rules or regulations that govern NIL. A patchwork of state laws and the NCAA offers broad guidance, but no uniform governance applies to all 362 Division I schools or the nearly 1,100 NCAA member institutions in all divisions. And following the recent announcement of Project DI, which includes a potential Division I subdivision that will allow for direct athlete compensation, athletes could soon become employees.

Some fear that proposed changes

may lead to lost opportunities for women or Olympic hopefuls. Page was there to provide perspective as a women's volleyball player and on behalf of an institution like Radford, which is considered "mid-major." The NIL conversation has been typically driven by athletes and institutions from "Autonomy 5" conferences (ACC, Big Ten, Big XII, SEC, Pac-12; the Pac-12 will dissolve following the 2023-24 season).

Page is the president of the Radford University Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and a member of the Big South Conference SAAC. Joined in Washington by Big South Commissioner Sherika Montgomery, Radford University Director of Athletics Robert Lineburg and Radford Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Support Services Allison McCoy, Page sought to bring more inclusion to the NIL discussion.

Page sat down for a question-and-answer session following the hearing.

When did you first find out that you would be giving testimony, and what was the preparation process like?

Meredith Page: I got my invitation from Congress on Sunday (Jan. 14), and the hearing was on Thursday (Jan. 18). I had to submit my written testimony and other forms by Tuesday (Jan. 16) at 10:30 a.m. It was incredibly stressful. The first thing I did was watch three past hearings, because this was the 11th different hearing on NIL, to get an idea of what I needed to do. I had two meetings a day (with NCAA staff) until it was time for me to submit my testimony on Tuesday. It was a short turnaround to submit my testimony - I had to work through the night each night to make sure I got exactly what message I wanted to put out there. I put 19 of 24 hours those days into prep. Lots of sleepless nights.

What happened when you arrived in Washington?

MP: I met with the subcommittee Republican staff (majority party of the House). They took me into the hearing room and let me have a preview. I met in their subcommittee office, where they gave me some pointers, told me about the (timer) on the microphone, let me know how long the hearing would be, and what to expect from different congressmen and congresswomen.

Did you meet the other student-athletes who testified?

MP: I did not get to spend any time with Chase, but Keke and I had a conversation for about an hour and

a half on the phone - we were going to meet in person, but then her flight got delayed. We talked about our opinions and gauged each other out – she wanted to have some reassurance from someone else in the room since she didn't know anyone who was testifying. I knew both Jeff Jackson and Charlie Baker.

How do you think your message was received?

MP: I think it was received really well. I think the consensus going into the hearing was that athletes should be employees. Stepping back now, I think my message and words put some thoughts into the heads (of the representatives) and shifted the narrative on employment status. So, I'm hopeful that it will gain momentum. I think one of the main reasons I said yes to going was that I wanted them to look at somebody that this [athlete employment status] would drastically affect. To see me and know all of my accomplishments and know that this, the changing of (student-athlete) employment status, could take opportunities away for thousands of athletes.

I received really good feedback from the representatives that were there, and their staff members gave me business cards and let me know that they wanted to talk about draft revisions and continue the conversation. But also, the media surrounding (the hearing) has absolutely exploded regarding my testimony. There's a feeling of, "How did I end up here?" My mom called me last night (Jan. 21) and said she saw me on cable news. I can't even count the number of articles I've been in - it's so amazing to see a Big South athlete, a mid-major athlete, at the forefront of this conversation. That's normally where we're not heard like those at Autonomy 5 schools are.

What's next for you, and what are the future outcomes for athletes like yourself?

MP: What's next for me is to use this momentum and put it directly into congressional engagement for the Big South Conference. I want to use all of the momentum and social media presence we have right now to continue to show that subcommittee that these are real people who you are affecting.

Page, a student in the Davis College of Business and Economics majoring in management, is on track to earn her bachelor's degree in spring 2025.

Radford University



Adouncia Hayes puts up a jumper in the lane against James River in a 68-39 loss on Thursday.



Radford's Quinn Burton nails a short jump shot against the visiting Knights.

James River girls down Radford



Senior Claire Fender races up the court on senior night. She led the Bobcats with 12 points.



Radford's Melody Burks shoots a free throw in the fourth quarter. Radford falls to 5-12 overall on the season with the loss.

PHOTOS BY BRYANT ALTIZER

Wake tops ACC baseball poll, Tech sixth in Coastal

Wake Forest has been selected as the 2024 Atlantic Coast Conference Baseball preseason favorites by the league's 14 head coaches.

The Demon Deacons collected 10 of the 14 possible first-place nods from head coaches. North Carolina tallied two votes, while Clemson and Virginia each received one vote.

Wake Forest was also the clear-cut winner of the Atlantic Division, receiving 12 of 14 first place votes. Clemson, who won the 2023 ACC Baseball Championship, picked up the two remaining first-place votes among the teams in the Atlantic Division.

With Wake Forest collecting 95 points to lead the Atlantic, Clemson finished with 79 total points to be slotted in second place. NC State picked up a third-place selection with 68 points, while Florida State (54), Louisville (48), Notre Dame (31), and Boston College (17) rounded out the grouping.

The Demon Deacons finished atop the Atlantic Division in 2023 before making a run to the Men's College World Series championship series. Clemson won the ACC Baseball Championship and finished the year with 44 wins – the most for the Tigers since 2018.

The Coastal Division was nearly deadlocked between Virginia and North Carolina. The Cavaliers garnered seven first-place nods and 88 total points to inch past the Tar Heels, who received six votes on the top line and a total of 86 points. Duke picked up the final first-place vote among Coastal teams.

The Blue Devils accumulated 71 points to take third in the preseason poll, while Miami finished fourth with 56 points, followed by Georgia Tech (40), Virginia Tech (34), and Pitt (17).

The Cavaliers are coming off of a 50-win season in 2023, including 19 wins in ACC play, which cultivated in a trip to the Men's College World Series. The Tar Heels won 36 games and made a trip to the Terre Haute Regional, while Duke capped its season one win away from Omaha in the Charlottesville Super Regional.

Wake Forest has been named the preseason No. 1 team in the country by D1Baseball, Baseball America, Perfect Game, and the NCBWA. The USA Today Coaches' Poll has not yet been released. Six ACC schools – Clemson, Duke, North Carolina, NC State, Virginia, and Wake Forest – have each appeared in all three preseason polls thus far.

The ACC has placed at least one team in each of the last 17 College World Series and at least six teams in each of the last 19 NCAA tournaments.

All 14 ACC teams will open their seasons on Friday, Feb. 16, with conference play set to begin on Friday, March 8. The 2024 ACC Baseball Championship will be held May 21-26 at Truist Field in Charlotte, North Carolina. ACC Network will be on hand for the first five days of the tournament with ESPN2 set to carry Sunday's championship game.

Full tournament ticket books are on sale now through the Charlotte Knights and the Truist Field box office.

2024 ACC Baseball Coaches Preseason Poll

- First-place votes in parenthesis
- Overall ACC Champion
- Wake Forest (10)
- North Carolina (2)
- Clemson (1)
- Virginia (1)
- Atlantic Division
- Wake Forest (10) - 95
- Clemson (1) - 79
- NC State - 68
- Florida State - 54
- Louisville - 48
- Notre Dame - 31
- Boston College - 17
- Coastal Division
- Virginia (1) - 88
- North Carolina (2) - 86
- Duke - 71
- Miami - 56
- Georgia Tech - 40
- Virginia Tech - 34
- Pitt - 17

Atlantic Coast Conference

