

Jason Miller named Virginia Tech Police Department's 2023 Officer of the Year

Officer Jason Miller has been named the Virginia Tech Police Department's Officer of the Year for 2023. Miller's many contributions in his eight years with the department have left a lasting mark on the Virginia Tech community.

A residence life resource officer (RLRO), Miller is highly engaged in the community, including work at Gobbler Nights and new student orientation, instructing Rape Aggression Defense classes, and contributing to events like the police department's annual hot dog luncheon and University Library's Cheesy Nights during finals week.

Additionally, he assists with Ringo the Patrol Pony, co-hosts the "RLRONation" radio show on WUVT, and serves as an instructor for the Virginia Tech Student Police Academy.

He is the team leader for the police department's

Emergency Response Team, where he contributes leadership and tactical skills. He also is a defensive tactics instructor, ensuring his colleagues are well-prepared for the challenges they may face, as well as a firearms instructor, use of force instructor, Gracie Survival Tactics instructor, active shooter instructor, Chief's Advisory Committee member, and Training Committee member.

As the liaison between the police department and the Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy, Miller supports the development of new law enforcement professionals in the region. And he coordinates training events with the University of Virginia, George Mason University, Roanoke College, and regional New River Valley law partners.

See Miller, page 3



PHOTO BY JOHN TARTER FOR VIRGINIA TECH

(From left) Chief Mac Babb presents Officer Jason Miller with the Officer of the Year award.



PHOTO BY LORI GRAHAM

Volunteer Montgomery volunteers gather on February 9th to make valentines for local veterans.

Volunteer Montgomery honors veterans with valentines

Lori Graham
Contributing writer

Volunteers from Montgomery County and the City of Radford gathered on Feb. 9 to make valentines for local veteran patients in a Volunteer Montgomery event.

"Every year, members of Volunteer Montgomery participate in the National Salute to Veteran Patients by crafting valentines for the VA Medical Center and Virginia Veterans Care Center in Salem," Mandy Hayes, Volunteer Montgomery Coordinator said. "This year, 19 volunteers of all ages gathered at our office on Friday, Feb. 9 and made 490 valentines for veterans."

The valentine-making volunteers joined together at the Montgomery County office at 210 South Pepper Street, Suite D, in Christiansburg from 10-12 p.m. According to the Director of Human Services, the event has been going on for over 10 years and welcomes

volunteers of all ages.

"This worked out great as schools were out for a teacher workday, so many of our younger volunteers were able to participate as well. If folks weren't able to make it out to craft day but wanted to participate, we welcomed them to make the valentines independently and drop them off at our office prior to the ninth," Strickler said.

After the almost 500 valentines were completed, volunteer Taska Bailey then delivered the cards to the two locations in Salem for staff to share with the veteran patients at the facilities.

"We would like to thank Volunteer Montgomery Volunteer Taska Bailey for delivering the cards this year," Hayes said.

See Veterans, page 2

NRCC presents Black History Month program



Wayne Scales, Ph.D.



Jubilee Christian Center Choir



Sharon Edwards

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NRCC

In celebration of Black History month, New River Community College (NRCC) and the college's Black History Committee will sponsor a guest speaker and music program on Sunday, Feb. 18 at 3 p.m.

The event will be held in 117 Edwards Hall at NRCC in Dublin.

Keynote speaker Wayne Scales, Ph.D. will present "A black man's challenges, struggles, rewards and triumphs pursuing a stem career."

Scales received bachelor's and master's degrees in Honors Electrical Engineering and Applied Mathematics from Virginia Tech and was a Sage Graduate Fellow while receiving his doctorate from Cornell University in electrical engineering and applied physics with focus in space plasma physics. He was the first African American rocket scientist trained at Cornell University and amongst the first at any Ivy League university. Afterward, he was awarded an American Society of Engineering Education (ASEE) Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Space Plasma Physics Branch of the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, Washington

D.C. He then joined the Bradley Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Virginia Tech and is currently the J. Byron Maupin Professor of Engineering and was founding Director of the Center for Space Science and Engineering Research (Space@VT) and founding Co-Director of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Education Program in Remote Sensing. Scales was the first African American faculty member in Electrical and Computer Engineering and also the first to hold an endowed professorship in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech. Scales is also an affiliate Professor in the Kevin T. Crofton Department of Aerospace and Ocean Engineering.

He currently serves as Associate Vice Provost for Research and Diversity where his responsibilities include supporting special initiatives involving faculty development as well as research and workforce development partnerships with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs),

particularly in the area of quantum engineering. In this capacity, he is also leading the construction of the first High Frequency (HF) space weather radar facility on the continent of Africa and also developing partnerships with African universities in the area of quantum engineering and space science. He serves in leadership capacities on a number of national and international professional organizations and has received a number of awards for excellence in research, teaching, and service in the Virginia Tech College of Engineering.

Musical performances will be presented by the Jubilee Christian Center Choir and Sharon Edwards, NRCC assistant professor of health information management and administrative support technology.

This free event is open to the public. Light refreshments will be served following the program.

For more information about the program, please contact Elaine Powell-Hawkins at (540) 674-3600, ext. 4478.

New River Community College

Bell collection tells local woman's life story spanning almost a century

Lori Graham
Contributing writer

MONTGOMERY COUNTY-In Mrs. Rubye Scott's dining room stands a cabinet full of almost 300 bells, each a gift to her as tokens of love and appreciation.

Each special trinket also represents a story of how Scott became such a meaningful part of their lives.

Anyone meeting Mrs. Rubye Scott would never guess her age of 95 years. She drives herself to town and does whatever she sets her mind to do. Her kind eyes and friendly smile invoke a sense of already knowing her, even though you've only met for the first time. It must be the natural teacher in her, as she lovingly speaks of the many students she taught at Blacksburg High School. Yet, there's something else unique about this lady that draws you into her gentle spirit and soft voice as she tells the story of her bell collection.

Born in Grundy, Va., as one of seven children, Scott said she was always too young or too small for everything from the very beginning. She was a premature baby and the oldest of her sisters. Grundy is a very rural, mountainous area in southwest Virginia, and her father worked at the nearby coal mine and was also a farmer. Life was hard and people had to eek out a living the best they could.

One of her prized bells, and one of the oldest, is a cowbell that once hung from the neck of her family's Jersey cow. In her Grundy community, Scott said, everyone had a cowbell on their milk cow when they would turn them out to graze together.

"When it was 5 o'clock, it was milking time, you'd go find your cow and bring it home and milk the cow," Scott said. "You found your cow by the ring; we knew the ring so we could find our cow."

Scott was fortunate to have parents who always wanted the best education they could get for their children.

See Bells, page 8



Rubye Scott stands alongside her cabinet containing her collection of almost 300 bells; special gifts collected since her childhood beginning in the late 1920s.



PHOTOS BY LORI GRAHAM

Scott's sister Lovis gifted her this bell after returning from a trip to England; Scott has bells from eight different countries.

OBITUARIES

Akers, Earlene Rose Dingus

Earlene Rose Dingus Akers, 68, of Riner, passed away Saturday, Feb. 10, 2024. She was preceded in death by her parents, Earl Lee and Mary Mullins Dingus; and a brother, Dennis Lee Dingus.



(Joel); Alex, Jonathan,

David, Briar and April; sisters, Sheila Ann Gallimore (Walter), Patricia Lynn Thomas, and Johnnie Belinda Lytton; and many other relatives and special friends.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.

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

Bayes, Bonnie Jean Mayle

Bonnie Jean Mayle Bayes, 86, of Hiwassee, passed away at home Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Derwood Howard Mayle and Jean, and Ilah Good Ebnit and Harvey; sisters, Shirley Roberts, Christine Barnes and Karen Browning; and her brothers, Rex and Bill Ebnit.

She was born in Saginaw, Michigan on Dec. 5, 1957. Bonnie married Tom Bayes in St. Louis, Michigan in 1955 and he has been a devoted husband throughout their 68 years together. She did many

things over the course of her lifetime including being a church secretary, gas station manager, telephone operator, welder, babysitter and certified nursing assistant. She enjoyed singing in the church choir and with the Sweet Adelines, being a girl scout leader, crocheting, gardening, canning and loving her dogs.

Survivors include her husband, Thomas Bayes; son, Tom Bayes; daughter and son-in-law, Kim Marcotte (Paul); six grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren; her loving dogs, Buddy and Mollie; sisters, Beverly Hopkins

(Chuck) and Linda Snyder; brothers, Roger Mayle (Joyce), Darrell Mayle (Brenda), Terry Ebnit (Joy), and Butch Alward; several nieces and nephews; and numerous other family members and friends.

The family would like to thank the staff of Medi Hospice for their excellent care. Special shoutout to Kimberly, Kayla, Robbie, Daniel and Bailly.

Per her request, no services will be held at this time.

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

Atkins, Donald Judd

Donald Judd Atkins, 81, of Dublin, passed away Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. He was preceded in death by his parents, Theodore Judd and Virginia Covey Atkins; and brothers, Dean, David and Dennis Atkins.



Survivors include his wife of 47 years, Peggy McCraw Atkins; daughters, Shirl Nolen, Beth Viperman (Billy), and Terri Grayson (Garin); special sons, Wes Nolen and Brian Wade; grandchildren, Reese, Jaxon, Chloe and Easton; siblings and their spouses, Bobby (Betsy) Atkins, Vickey (Darrell) Woodyard, Ricky (Donna) Atkins,

receive friends 1- 2 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16, 2024, at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services will begin at 2 p.m. with Tucker LaForce officiating. Burial will follow in Mountain View Cemetery in Pulaski County.

Flowers are appreciated, however if you choose to make a donation, the family requests that contributions be made to the Newbern Volunteer Fire Department, PO Box 328, Newbern, VA, 24126.

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

Warf, Betty Louise Agee

Betty Louise Agee Warf, 85, of Fairlawn, passed away Friday, Feb. 9, 2024. She was preceded in death by her parents, Glenwood, Sr. and Margaret Agee; her husband, Luis Warf; sisters, Lois Rash and Ruth Agee; and her brother, Glenwood, Jr.



Survivors include her son and daughter-in-law, Jeff Warf (Michele); granddaughter, Brittany Stassin (Kevin); sister, Jean Long; niece, Ann Phipps; and many other

relatives and special friends. The family received friends Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024, at the Mullins Funeral Home in Radford. Funeral services followed with Rev. Darlene Marshall officiating.

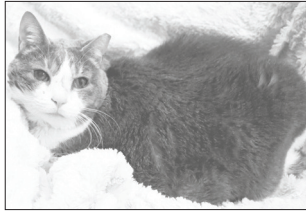
Burial followed in Highland Memory Gardens in Dublin. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to Morgan's Chapel UMC, 6540 New River Rd., Fairlawn, VA 24141.

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

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.

Say hello to Lola. This sweet, shy gal is ready to head home to enjoy the great indoors. Once comfortable, she enjoys affection and quiet time. Lola may have some leftover holiday weight and will need some help shedding a few pounds. In the meantime, there's a lot of cat to love!



Daphne is no mystery. She's a happy, energetic younger dog! She enjoys treats as rewards and occasionally likes to play with tennis balls. Her new human may need to refresh her on good doggie manners. Daphne lived with another dog in a previous home and got along well. Stop by the Animal Care and Adoption Center to meet her.

Miller from page 1

"Officer Miller's commitment to excellence and tireless efforts in enhancing our department's capabilities make him truly deserving of the 2023 Officer of the Year award. His dedication to both community engagement and professional development sets a standard for others to follow," said Chief of Police Mac Babb.

Miller previous earned a 2022 commendation letter from Babb for extraordinary service and rendering critical aid as well as the department's Lifesaving Award in 2016, both of which show his commitment to going above and beyond the call of duty.

"Officer Miller's impact on the department is immeasurable, and his dedication to community engagement sets a standard for excellence," police Sgt. Micah Pasquarell said.

"Officer Miller continually exceeds Virginia Tech

expectations, not just within the VTPD, but also in contributing to the safety and well-being of the entire Virginia Tech community," added Threat Assessment Team Coordinator Caroline Newell.

"I am deeply honored to receive this award," Miller said. "It is truly extraordinary to be acknowledged by both my colleagues and superiors for what I consider part of my daily responsibilities," Miller said. "I appreciate the support of a department that enables me to serve both the community and our organization. Recognizing that the success of the department is a collaborative endeavor, I am grateful to play a part in our shared mission of ensuring safety and security for the Virginia Tech community."

New River Valley HOME Consortium and Town of Blacksburg 2024 Annual Action Plan HOME and Community Development Block Grant Programs Notice of Public Comment

In accordance with guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the New River Valley HOME Consortium and the Town of Blacksburg seek public comment on the proposed draft of the 2024 Annual Action Plan for the New River Valley's HOME Program and the Town of Blacksburg's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program.

The Annual Action Plan provides a yearly accounting of HOME, CDBG, and other funds allocated towards the implementation of objectives outlined in the Consolidated Plan. The Consolidated Plan identifies community needs and proposed solutions in the areas of Housing, Special Needs, Economic Development and Non-Housing Community Development. The draft 2024 Annual Action Plan can be reviewed online on the Town's website at https://www.blacksburg.gov/HUDplan or in person by appointment at 303 Wilson Ave. HOME and CDBG activities benefit low and moderate- income persons by making improvements throughout the New River Valley taking into consideration the public input received.

Citizens are invited to participate in a Public Comment meeting at an in person meeting from 4-5 pm on March 6th at 303 Wilson Ave and a live ZOOM call on March 6th from 6-7 pm. Please call (540) 443-1615 to request a link to the call.

Comments are also welcome via e-mail to: housing@blacksburg.gov, by phone at (540) 443-1615, or by mail to Housing and Neighborhood Services, P.O. Box 90003, Blacksburg, VA 24062.

Comments must be received by 5:00 p.m. March 15.

Accommodations for persons with disabilities and non-English speaking residents will be provided upon request. For additional information, please call (540) 443-1615.

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For applications and additional information contact the Commissioner of the Revenue's Office

Brenda Winkle, Commissioner of the Revenue winklebh@montgomerycountyva.gov 540-394-2120 ext. 54042 755 Roanoke St. Suite 1A Christiansburg, VA 24073

Information is available online at MONTVA.COM

DEADLINES:

FOR REPEAT FILERS March 1, 2024 FOR FIRST TIME FILERS December 31, 2024

Send community news and photos to communitynews@ourvalley.org

OPINION

This time of year brings fond memories of basketball tournaments at the Coliseum

Evans "Buddy" King
Columnist

This is one of my favorite times of the year, from mid-February through mid-March, when the days get longer, when there is the occasional spring-like weather that promises more to come. In the Montgomery County of my youth, there were usually piles of dirty snow still in parking lots and along the sides of the roads this time of year, but you knew warmer days were ahead.

My most vivid memories of that time involved basketball, specifically tournament basketball. March Madness had not yet become the national mania that it has become. There were few televised college games. We got the C. D. Chesley Jefferson Pilot ACC game of the week ("Sail with the Pilot") on Saturday afternoons, and the Friday night and Saturday night semi-finals and finals of the ACC Tournament and the NCAA Finals. That was it. I do not even remember if the term "Final Four" had been coined, and I am pretty sure

no one referred to the "Elite Eight" or the "Sweet Sixteen".

Only 23 teams made the NCAA Tournament. The brackets were truly regional - we did not get the incongruous pairings of Florida versus Ohio State in the Western Regional or California versus New Mexico State in the East. The regionals were truly regional. In fact, there were so few teams and conferences in the West that the West Regional consisted of only four teams, with no first-round games. And the regionals were actually symmetrical, with a Mideast Region in those years instead of the one they now call the South Region.

One slight deviation from the symmetry of the tourney during this era was in 1967 when the Hokies were placed in the Mid-East bracket. I guess southwest Virginia was further west than we realized. The Techmen actually won their first-round game against Toledo, and the regional semifinal against the Indiana Hoosiers, advancing to the regional finals only to

lose to a Dayton team led by a super star of that era, Donnie May.

I still remember the starting lineup of that Tech team, Glen Combs (who went on to become an early star of the ABA), Ron Perry, Ken Talley, Ted Ware and my favorite, Chris Ellis, a tenacious defender, plus a phenomenal sixth man, Don Brown, who had perfected a fall away shot from around the foul line, an early version of the step back jumper of today. The high school coaches in the New River Valley had to spend considerable practice time discouraging their charges' efforts to replicate this move.

This "Haley's Comet" of an NCAA appearance by Tech (my beloved (later) Cavaliers were perennial first round losers in the ACC tournament and Tech didn't sniff the Big Dance again until the tournament expanded significantly in the 70's), was actually televised by one of the Roanoke channels. In my mind, this was a bigger TV event than Neil Armstrong's moon walk a couple of years later. I still

remember gathering nervously in my parents' den, watching on a black and white television set, marveling that the Fighting Gobblers, the local boys, were actually on television!

All of this is back drop though as to why the high school tournaments of this time were so significant. The NCAA had adopted a rule during this period that only UCLA could win the national title. ESPN was only a gleam in advertisers' eyes, 20 years away, CBS had not yet bought the NCAA tournament and made us all sick of hearing "We are the Champions", and these two forces had not yet combined to dampen local interest in high school and small college sports.

The Virginia Tech Coliseum (no Cassell then, simply THE Coliseum) had opened in January of 1960, when I was in the first grade, with my dad and me in attendance. Within a few years, this magnificent facility (the Hoos were still in Memorial Gymnasium, the

See Coliseum, page 8

A mixed bag of results for the fate of bills moving through the General Assembly

Del. Jason Ballard
Virginia General Assembly

This week, I welcomed visitors from the 42nd District to the Capitol, including local elected officials and Chamber of Commerce representatives from Pulaski County, representatives from Volvo/Mack Trucks, and a class of 60 students from Macy McClaugherty Elementary/Middle School in Giles County! I had a great time speaking with the class, taking them to the

floor of the House of Delegates, and introducing them to Speaker Don Scott, who was kind enough to share some remarks with the group before session convened. The group also saw Governor Glenn Youngkin in the halls of the General Assembly Building, and he stopped for a picture with them. I appreciate the hard work our teachers do to instill civic education in our children, and these field trips do wonders to get youth interested in how our laws are created. I received feedback - including from the Speaker himself - on how well-behaved the group was during their trip. Great job to all!

Additionally, two more of my bills unanimously passed through the House of Delegates and will now be considered by the Senate of Virginia. The first, HB 306, establishes additional procedures for how court appointed counsel - usually a public defender - can manage his or her caseload for indigent clients when the defender's active caseload creates a conflict of interest. The other bill, HB 1373, is workforce development legislation that allows the Roanoke Higher Education Center to offer specialized, non-credit workforce training in situations where local community colleges may be unable to. This encourages all entities to work collaboratively to ensure that regional workforce development needs are being met, and I was pleased to see it pass through the House on a 99-0 vote.

However, I was disappointed this week when my HB 300, which would have allowed 9-1-1 dispatchers to qualify for enhanced retirement benefits, was "continued to 2025" in the Democratic-controlled

House Appropriations Committee on a party-line vote. This means the bill is dead for the year. Our 911 dispatchers encounter untold amounts of stress on the job and deserve retirement benefits that acknowledge their invaluable contributions to our communities. Dispatchers often encounter individuals having the worst days of their lives, and this can weigh on them heavily. I'm hopeful that my Democratic colleagues will reconsider their opposition and pass this important bill next year.

Also puzzling was the defeat of Delegate Mark Earley Jr.'s HB 882, which would have created a model policy to prohibit K-12 students from using cell phones during instructional time. This is a serious issue, and most reading this article (myself included) never had these distractions in the classroom when we were young. Our teachers work hard to prepare our students for the future, and in the aftermath of COVID-19 induced learning loss, we should be ensuring that all barriers to learning are removed. Our children are counting on it! Again, I'm hopeful that my Democratic colleagues will reconsider their opposition to this legislation.

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 and your family, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at DelJasonBallard@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.

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AARP Virginia Fraud Alert: Cupid's Connection to Crypto

The past two years have seen an explosion of crypto currency scams which has led many people to ask the same question - how? After all, crypto currency is something most people don't understand, and those who do follow it know that it is very volatile, completely unregulated, and has no protection for investors. So, given all of that, how are people losing billions a year to crypto scams? If we had to pick someone to blame (besides the criminals), it might be Cupid.

Romance scams have become one of the top drivers of crypto currency fraud, because once the criminal creates a deep connection with their victim, they are able to get that person to do things they wouldn't normally do.

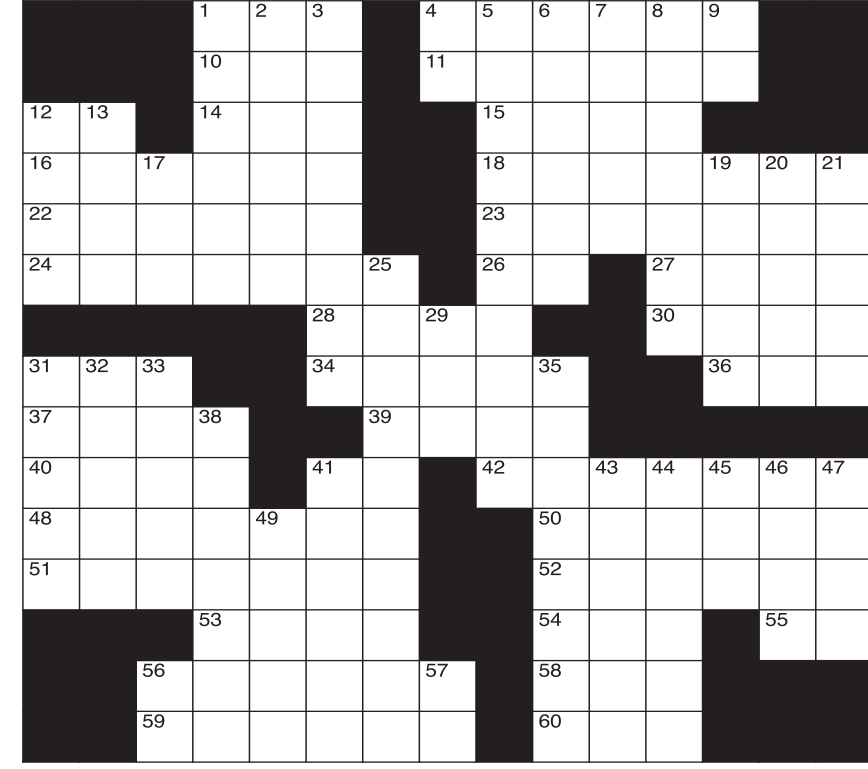
If someone you only know online tells you they are making money investing in crypto and offers to teach you how, it's a scam - full stop. It doesn't matter how well you think you know this person or how strong of a bond you feel you've created, asking for money to invest in crypto currency is one of the surest signs of a modern-day romance scam.

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

Report scams to local law enforcement. For help from AARP, call 1-877-908-3360 or visit the AARP Fraud Watch Network at www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork.

AARP Virginia

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| CLUES ACROSS | philosopher | CLUES DOWN | 31. Mollusks |
| 1. Revolutions per minute | 36. Sharp, shrill bark | 1. Flower cluster | 32. German municipality |
| 4. Hymns | 37. Albanian monetary units | 2. A form | 33. Body part |
| 10. Brew | 39. Launched Apollo | 3. Inner organ regions | 35. City of Angels |
| 11. Did not acknowledge | 40. One who graduated | 4. Local law enforcement | hoopsters |
| 12. Atomic #77 | 41. Exist | 5. A citizen of Senegal | 38. Suffocate |
| 14. Partly digested food | 42. Passed by | 6. Positively charged electrodes | 41. Pleasing to the eye |
| 15. Not one | 48. Very unpleasant smell | 7. Connects granules | 43. Poplar trees (Spanish) |
| 16. Lesotho capital | 50. Graduates | 8. Business practice | 44. Ship officer |
| 18. Copyreading | 51. Seedless raisin | 9. The Mount Rushmore State | 45. Individual investment account (abbr.) |
| 22. Living organism that feeds on organic matter | 52. Self-protection | 12. Leader | 46. Prefix meaning within |
| 23. One's biological father | 53. Clue | 13. Hindu queen | 47. Ceased to live |
| 24. An aggregate of molecules | 54. Life-savers | 17. Proofreading mark | 49. Day by day |
| 26. Equally | 55. Ingest too much | 19. European country | 56. Not color |
| 27. Khoikhoi people | 56. Misrepresented | 20. Greek mythological nymph | 57. Condition of withdrawal (abbr.) |
| 28. Jump in figure skating | 58. Small Eurasian deer | 21. Grandfather | |
| 30. Lantern | 59. Most mocking | 25. Clears | |
| 31. TV network | 60. Soviet Socialist Republic | 29. Amount of time | |
| 34. Georges __, French | | | |

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MONTGOMERY SPORTS

Big South evolving in changing landscape

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Editor's note: Today, we continue to examine the challenges college athletics are facing especially in this age of Name, Image and Likeness (NIL).

College athletics is changing and continues to this day. But the question is what does the future hold?

The recent movement has centered about the Power 5 conferences, leaving many to wonder what might happen to the smaller schools and conferences.

Big South Conference Commissioner Sherika A. Montgomery took a moment this past week to discuss how hers and other mid-major athletic conferences have been and will be affected in the new landscape.

"We have to continue to evolve," she said. "We've are reviewing our strategic plan and have formed a basketball task force working group."

Montgomery said the question is how the Big South can set its apart from other conferences.

"The NCAA is facing challenges we've never have before."

The Big South Conference was founded in 1983 with charter members including Radford, Armstrong State (later Armstrong Atlantic State University and Augusta University), Campbell University, Baptist College (now Charleston Southern University), Coastal Carolina University and Winthrop University.

The expansion of membership occurred during the '90s. Some of those members were the University of North Carolina at Asheville, Davidson College, Liberty University, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Towson University, Elon University, High Point University and Birmingham-Southern College.

The conference history does include football, which was started in 2002 as part of the Football Championship Subdivision. Fourteen years later, the Big South and the ASUN Conference (ASUN) announced a football partnership that effectively combined the two conferences in the sport.

Slowly teams and schools like Liberty, Campbell and Coastal Carolina have moved to new conferences. The latest being Hampton and North Carolina A&T, which left the Big South in 2022.

Currently, there are nine members in the Big South with another five being listed as associate members.

In April, Montgomery was named the fourth commissioner of the Big South Conference and is a former women's basketball player and staff member of the conference. She previously served as the Deputy Commissioner for the Missouri Valley Conference and served as the Assistant Director of Enforcement

(Investigations and Processing) at the NCAA.

Earlier as a staff member at the Big South, Montgomery served as a two-time chair (2016-2018) of the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics during her service from 2014-2018 and was also a member of the inaugural NCAA Board of Governors Ad Hoc Committee to Promote Cultural Diversity and Equity. Her familiarity of the Big South also dates to her time as a basketball player (2010) at Gardner-Webb.

Changes in collegiate athletics includes a big emphasis on Name, Image and Likeness (NIL), which is the means through which college athletes are allowed to receive financial compensation. NIL refers to the use of an athlete's name, image, and likeness through marketing and promotional endeavors.

In the past, collegiate athletics' governing body the NCAA has done everything to not compensate student-athletes.

Three years ago, a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court changed that with the introduction and approval of the NIL plan.

Many student-athletes are now receiving as much as a million dollars a year. Montgomery could not give specific examples, but many Big South athletes are receiving NIL compensation. The total might not be the millions but instead hundreds or thousands.

NCAA President Charlie Baker believes there must be more control over this process as we move forward. During last month's NCAA convention, he said to maximize these opportunities, it will be important for Congress to provide special status to student-athletes.

"That way, schools and conferences can engage in NIL and enhanced educational support without turning the student-athletes into something they are definitely not, which is employees," he said.

According to a recent ESPN survey of more than 200 coaches, players and administrators, nearly 80% of respondents believe schools will pay athletes directly within the next decade. Another 75 percent felt "college athletics will eventually follow some sort of professional model, perhaps with schools forming conferences based on their willingness to pay players."

Just two weeks ago, Montgomery joined a Radford University volleyball player who 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.

The proposal aims to protect student athletes' dealmaking rights and create clear rules to preserve amateur sports.

In opening remarks, the subcommittee said: "Federal legislation is needed to protect student athletes from



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BIG SOUTH

Big South Commissioner Sherika A. Montgomery

bad actors taking advantage of them financially, ensure transparency and protections in NIL contracts, and address the patchwork of laws affecting student athletes' dealmaking rights."

Montgomery said it was very important for her to be at the hearing.

"We had to make sure our voices are heard on this matter," she said.

In so many ways, the new definition of the collegiate student-athlete is ever-changing itself. The National Labor Relations Board even suggests athletes at private universities should be classified as employees.

Getting back to the future, Montgomery is optimistic for the Big South. Membership is something that is prevalent on a day-to-day basis.

"We (the Big South) are not immune to that." The commissioner would not say if there were plans to expand to more schools or does she expect others to leave the Big South.

One of the big discussions centers on creating better non-conference schedules, especially in basketball.

"I feel very optimistic about the Big South's future," Montgomery said as she praised the excellent leadership across the conference.

For now, the Big South and its commissioner are trying to stay above water and watch what happens in the near future in college athletics. The next move could lie with NCAA officials and how Congress might be involved somewhere down the road.

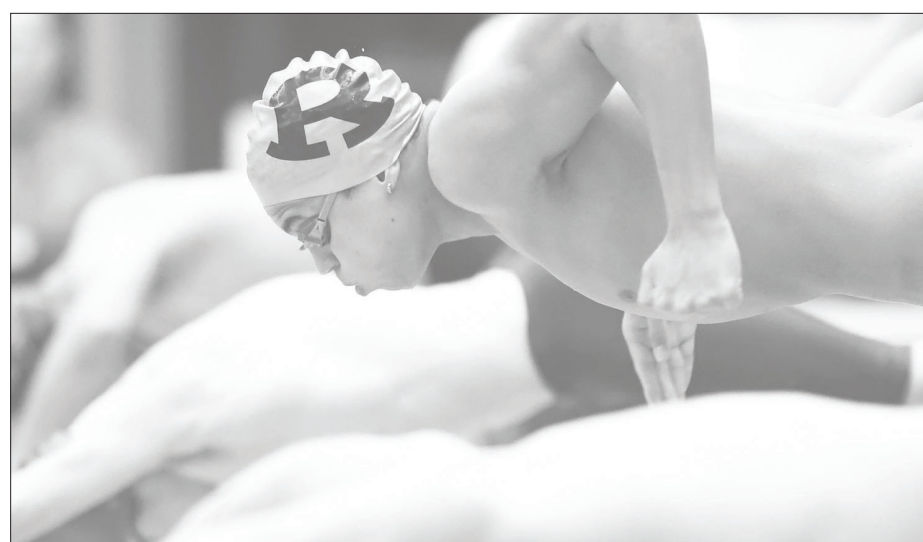


Auburn's Lily Phillips placed ninth in the Region 2C 100-yard backstroke at Thursday's regional meet at Christiansburg. Auburn would finish in eighth place in the boys' competition and 11th in the girls.

Radford girls take region swimming title



Auburn's Kade Hamilton was the 100-yard breaststroke Region2C champion with a time of 1:11.57



PHOTOS BY JON FLEMING

Radford's Trent Hollandsworth raced to a win in the Region 2C 50-yard freestyle on Thursday night during the Region 2C meet held at the Christiansburg Aquatics Center. Radford tallied 98 points in the boys' competition to finish second by Glenvar with 134 points. The Radford girls' squad would total 101 points to finish ahead of second place George Wythe with 87 points.

Battle of the Burgs

Christiansburg girls win, Blacksburg boys win



Christiansburg's Katy Hoover was an offensive force for the Blue Demons in a 50-45 win over Blacksburg on Wednesday night. Hoover scored five three-point goals on the way to a 27-point outing against the Bruins and tallied 1,000 points for her career as a junior.



Blacksburg post player Riley Price scored 18 points in the Lady Bruins loss to Christiansburg.



Christiansburg guard Izaiah Cotto lines up a jump shot against Blacksburg. Cotto would score 13 points in the Blue Demons' 62-51 loss.



PHOTOS BY JON FLEMING

Blacksburg's Wade Bland paced his team with 19 points and led all scorers in a 62-51 win over Christiansburg on Wednesday.

Swimming from page 7



Radford's Evie Grim dives in for the 200-yard freestyle relay anchor leg for the Region 2C race winning Bobcat team. The Radford girls would win the team Region 2C championship, with the boys in second place.



PHOTOS BY JON FLEMING

Radford's Peyton Mowry swam to a third-place finish in the Region 2C 50-yard freestyle with a time of 27.89.

Coliseum from page 4

Mountaineers were in the Field House, the Heels were in Woollen Gymnasium, twice removed from today's Dean Dome, and most colleges still played in similar gyms built soon after WW I) began hosting the district, regional and occasional state high school tournaments. These three weeks of back to back games are what I think of first when the days become longer and the sun looks different in late February.

Schools came from all over southwest Virginia to play life or death games in one of the best college arenas in the country. At that time, Virginia had four classes of schools - 1A, 1B (Christiansburg, Blacksburg and Radford were 1B schools), II and III. The Coliseum hosted the New River District Tournament (the Montgomery County schools and their rivals), the next weekend (or maybe the next two) there were regional rounds for 1B, II and III, and some years we were lucky enough to get the state finals. The "bigger schools", i.e., Roanoke east, Class 1A, did not venture west to play their games. We cared not about them. Teams came from Gate City and Grundy, from Fort Chiswell and Covington, from Pound and Pearisburg, to compete.

These were the real "one and done" days. One loss and your team went home, and we constantly witnessed the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Christiansburg, Blacksburg and Radford were members of the New River Valley District then, along with Dublin and Pulaski (in the 70s these schools were consolidated, ending one of the great rivalries of all time in my mind), Narrows, Giles County, Galax, Hillsville, and Wytheville and, for a few years, Fort Chiswell. During, this era, probably from my second or third grade year through high school, Blacksburg dominated the district and was a perennial participant in the regionals and states, guaranteeing that my mom and dad would be in attendance since my father was head of the schools in Montgomery County at the time.

Blacksburg won two state titles during this period, led by a wonderful player named Rick Aydlett, who amazingly was the star both his freshman and senior years when the Indians (it was okay to call them that at that time) won state titles. They were coached during this run by the great Allen Wiley, who, if memory serves me well, won a total of five state titles at BHS and went on to successfully coach at Pulaski County, much to the chagrin of all Blacksburgers. Aydlett went on to play for Frank McGuire's great teams at South Carolina, perplexing and breaking the hearts of all Hokie fans, me included.

Sadly, our own Blue Demons never won a tourney game during this time that I can recall, usually being bounced in the very first game of the NRV District tournament, not even making the field a few times when the district

got too big. This game was usually at noon on Thursday and relieved any stress for all Blue Demon fans for the rest of the month.

There were some epic games. One year Blacksburg and Pulaski met in the district finals, with each team sporting a 20 - 0 record, through a scheduling quirk they had not met during the regular season. They both advanced to the Regionals and met again, with Blacksburg winning both games. One of the games ended with Tot Martin hitting a jumper from the top of the key to win the game. It was one of the great clutch plays of my youth. This was Aydlett's freshman year and the Indians went on to win the state. His senior year BHS had another epic win against Harrisonburg in the state finals, from "up the valley".

While my family and I were died in the wool Blue Demons, we couldn't help but root for BHS during these years, partly because the team was so good and well-coached, partly because of my dad's fondness for Curtis "Ducky" Gray who was principal of BHS, and partly because it would have been poor form for the superintendent of schools not to pull for a county team.

There were legendary coaches as well, the aforementioned Allen Wiley, my cousin Sammy Joe Lucas who won several Class III championships at Auburn High and Sonny Smith who coached at Dublin. Sonny went on to be the head coach at VCU and eventually at the "other" Auburn, the university, not my mother's alma mater in Riner. Sonny was by far the most entertaining, in what had to be one of the first stops on his storied coaching path. I saw him once kick the scorer's table over before being asked to leave the floor of the Coliseum. My mom and dad were so intrigued by Sonny that we tried to sit behind his bench so we could hear him exhorting his troops. His catch phrase when his team transitioned to defense was "get your happy tails up the court". My mother laughed for weeks over that line and some of Sonny's other sideline shenanigans. A few years later these legendary coaches were replaced by other Montgomery County icons, family friend Bob Trear at BHS and Nelson Simpkins at Auburn High.

So, this time of year I remember the drive from Christiansburg to Blacksburg with the sun at a funny angle, walking through the parking lot beside the Coliseum with my parents dodging snow drifts, entering the doors of the grandest arena in the region. And I remember walking the halls during halftimes, looking for familiar faces, smelling the popcorn (served by my Aunt Ruth and her husband Ralph who had the concessions), marveling at a gym that could seat 10,000 people. And I remember the hollow feeling I got, sometime while I was in college I believe, when my dad told me "Tech's not going to let us use the Coliseum anymore."

Bells from page 1

"At that time, keep in mind this was 95 years ago, they had a schoolhouse in that community. It was a small community," Scott said. "They would only give you a teacher if you had 20 students. So, in that community it was hard to get 20 students. It was 1-7 grades. When they could have school, and had 20, the schoolhouse was used."

Everyone walked to school at that time, and the schoolhouse was close to Scott's house, so the teachers would board with her family. This also provided the added benefit for Scott to receive special attention from the teachers that resided in her home.

When Scott was about 4-5 years old, the school was struggling to have enough pupils to support a teacher, so she started her elementary education at an early age. After her first year of schooling, Scott would return the next year as a third grader.

"For that reason, I've always been too young, younger than the other students. Not because I was smarter," Scott said. "It was because they started me out young."

Scott would graduate from high school at the age of 15 years old and then go directly into higher education at Radford College. This was a grand adventure for someone that had rarely ventured outside of her home community.

She would have never imagined the beautiful life that awaited her.

At age 18, she graduated from Radford College, just at the close of World War II. Her first year of teaching was instructing military men who had returned from the war. Some men had been drafted or signed up before they had finished high school. She would then teach a couple of years in Floyd County schools and another year at a small schoolhouse in McCoy, Virginia, where her husband and she settled down and raised a family.

Her husband Leo, affectionately called "Scotty" by Rubye and all who knew him, gifted her bells as well through the years. Scotty and his brother owned a store in the McCoy community which sometimes required travel to parts of the United States to buy things to sell. One bell he purchased was from 1981 after his visit to the western United States.

Bells line her cabinet made of iron, brass, coal, wood, straw, and glass - all part of a collection that has been labeled with the year and name of the giver. As Scott picked each bell up and gave it a shake, she recalled the story of how each chime came to reside in her display cabinet.

There is one from her daughter Patricia Scott Williams, who lives close by, and another from her son Kim Scott, also of Blacksburg. A sheep bell from her neighbor and farmer and here's her smallest bell, barely the size of the end of your finger. Only two of her bells are alike, one from England and another from Scotland. Rubye Scott's sister, Lovis, visited England on a trip and brought back one of the bells decorated

with delicate lavender flowers. Her sister Lovis passed away recently after battling Alzheimer's, making the bell even more special to Rubye in her remembrance.

Pastor and Missionary Mike Flinchum also gifted Scott a bell from his time spent in Thailand. Altogether, Scott has bells from eight countries.

There are bells that were also gifted to her from her years of instruction too. Although Scott was primarily a business instructor for 33 years, that first teaching job instructing World War II veterans was remembered as some of the best learning years of her life. She thought she had to teach by the book. Later she would come to understand that teachers were a lot of things to students, especially that could not be learned from a book but had to be felt and experienced from the heart.

One year when Scott was teaching at Blacksburg High School, Principal Alfred Curtis Gray approached her about helping to cover for a teacher who was leaving for an opportunity to study abroad for a year. Scott was reluctant at first, as she enjoyed teaching business courses and was very happy to stay where she was. An agreement was made that she would take on a few additional tasks but remain in her business classes. One of those duties was to provide some guidance to students as needed during her non-instructional class periods.

This was when she met "Tommy", a young man in a transient home life, with no parents to look after him.

"He was in trouble all the time, in every class. That little boy was sent to my office, I know every day. Tommy was not his real name; I won't tell you his real name. Here would come Tommy though. He was wasting time, and I didn't think you should waste time. I would find little things for Tommy to do," Scott said. "We got to talking and that's the reason I knew Tommy's situation and Tommy and I got to be good buddies."

The time came when the principal told Scott that Tommy needed something different to help with his education. The principal set to work, finding a place for the student to go where he could learn something; a place where he could get a better start in his life. Special education was not part of the public-school curriculum at this time but both Scott and Gray knew that he needed specialized education.

"I hated to see Tommy go but I knew that is what he needed," Scott said. "Tommy knew that I collected bells, so the day that he was set to leave, he came in my office. He was all dressed up and looked so nice, and he said, 'Mrs. Scott, I've got something for you.', and he pulled it out and it was this bell. Lord, I knew it was stolen off some desk...I didn't want him to think I knew that."

Scott didn't know what to do at that moment, so she went and hugged him and thanked him.

Scott said to Tommy, "Tommy, I will always keep your bell."

Hole-in-one at Auburn Hills



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUBURN HILLS

Thon Keings recently had a hole-in-one at the Auburn Hills Golf Club on hole #17.



This bell, made from coal, was gifted to Rubye Scott by McCoy coal miner Dudley Scott and his wife, Faye.



A simple teacher's desk bell reminds Rubye of a particular student that touched her heart in a special way.

PHOTOS BY LORI GRAHAM

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