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THE NEW CASTLE RECORD



WE SELL KEROSENE

Craig County EMS receives valuable hands-on training

Pam Dudding
Contributing writer

It is true that when someone is allowed to physically do something, verses just read it in a manual, their educational and training value is skyrocketed.

The local EMS group agrees and recently received some very valuable training which indirectly could help to save the lives of citizens in Craig County in the future.

"We recently held a training in collaboration with EMS Medical Director Daniel Sapp which is a valuable asset to us all as providers. The recent session on airway management, shock medications, and cardiology not only expanded the knowledge but also boosted confidence among providers, contributing to a higher level of service to the

community," shared Amber Charette, EMS education coordinator. "Creating a robust EMS training program is essential for enhancing community service. By prioritizing comprehensive training, we ensure providers are well-prepared to handle diverse situations, ultimately improving the overall quality of emergency medical services."

The EMS mission is, "To provide pre-hospital emergency medical care. Committed to saving lives and protecting the wellbeing of all Craig County residents. Craig County Rescue - EMS dedicates itself to providing exceptional emergency medical services through skilled volunteers, innovative training and community engagement."

Charette added, "The ability to provide proper training after creating the program relies heavily on

having the proper training equipment which is something that we are in the process of applying for grants to obtain."

They were able to physically train with animal parts of pig tracheas and lungs that they used to practice surgical cricothyroidotomy. All parts were sourced responsibly.

"The continuing educational training that was hosted this past weekend was very educational for those who attended," said Chief Robert Wrzosek, "We had excellent lecture and hands on training, and I wish to thank everyone who came to teach and the ones who participated."

"Our recent training is just one more step of many in our efforts to overhaul our training program, and the volunteer rescue squad

See EMS, page 2



COURTESY PHOTO

The Craig County Volunteer EMS Rescue team received a hands-on course that is very valuable in understanding human needs in emergencies.

VFW awards Teachers of the Year honors for 2023



COURTESY PHOTO

VFW Craig Valley Post 4491 awarded Teachers of the Year honors to Pam Boyer - Craig County High School and Melissa Beaudoin - Kindling School.

Pam Dudding
Contributing writer

The gift of teaching not only impacts the lives of students but of families as well. Many teachers have an effect so strongly on their students that it trickles into the lives of their families as well.

VFW Post 4491 shared that it felt this way about many of the teachers in Craig County, especially recently elected Pam Boyer who received the High School Teacher Award, CJ Crowder the Middle School Teacher Award and Melissa Beaudoin Alternative Teacher Award.

Each year, people are welcome to nominate teachers who have shown exceptional teaching skills in their classes, explaining the reasons behind their nomination to the local VFW.

The VFW received letters for different teachers and an exceptional nomination for Boyer. It stated:

I am writing to enthusiastically nominate Pam Boyer for the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education High School Teacher Award. Over her remarkable two-decade career at Craig County High school, Pam has exhibited an unwavering commitment the fostering good citizenship, instilling knowledge, and inspiring a passion for learning within her students.

Pam has made an indelible impact on countless young lives through her dedicated teaching of high school biology and earth science. Her approach to education goes beyond the confines

of textbooks and conventional classroom methods. Pam is a true champion of hands-on, experimental learning, and she actively engages her students through innovative practices like dissections and interactive labs. These experiences not only deepen her students understanding of science but also instill a sense of curiosity and wonder, igniting A lifelong love for learning.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Pam's teaching career is her relentless commitment to providing her students with the best educational resources. She understands the importance of equipping her classroom with the tools necessary for effective learning. Pam tirelessly fundraises to procure essential classroom supplies, including microscopes, which enhance the learning experience for her students. Her dedication to ensuring that her students have access to these resources is a testament to her selflessness and her passion for education.

However, what truly sets Pam Boyer apart is her unwavering passion for her career and most importantly, her students. Her dedication extends far beyond the classroom as she continually seeks opportunities to inspire and mentor her students. Her guidance, encouragement, and genuine care for her students personal and academic growth create an environment where young minds flourish, not just academically,

See VFW, page 2

VFW gives out EMS worker awards for 2023



Craig Valley VFW Post 4491 awarded Dispatcher of the Year- Erin Dressler, Fireman of the Year- Robert Hale and Kirsten Gereaux - EMT of the Year. Post Commander Billy Lee is second from the right.




COURTESY PHOTOS

Christopher Swingle Jr was awarded Policeman of the Year 2023 by VFW Post 4491 Commander Billy Lee.


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Upcoming meetings are scheduled in Craig County

Jan. 16

Rep. Morgan Griffith will hold a citizen comment period from 9-10:30 a.m. in the courthouse breakroom.

The Craig County Planning Commission will meet at 7 p.m.

Jan. 17

A CPMT meeting at CPMT – Department of Social Services will be at 1 p.m.

Jan. 25

The Department of Social Services Board will meet at 6:30 p.m.

Ongoing

Feeding southwest Virginia will be offering food twice a month on the second and third Wednesday of the month from 3-5 p.m. and 4-5 p.m., respectively. All community members are welcome to purchase fresh produce and other canned

and boxed items. EBT recipients receive 50% off their fruits and vegetables.

Booster Club of Craig Schools meet on the third Monday of each month in the school cafeteria at 6 p.m. Community members are encouraged to attend and to join to support the kids of Craig County as they need the participation of more people.

-The New Castle Record

EMS page 1

as a whole. This last training covered much needed topics and skills that all of the counties EMS providers have either never had the chance to practice hands on, or it has been many years since the last time they were able to practice," said Trace Bellasai, first lieutenant. "The department has greatly increased its number of dedicated volunteers, and holding these trainings ensures we are all able to remain at the top of our game."

They reported that the Craig County Volunteer Rescue Squad has more than doubled its call volume in the last two years.

Therefore, having the volunteer squad has helped to "save the county money in the process and gives us all the opportunity to serve the community we love," they added.

However, these training

courses take funds and additional equipment.

"Most of our current training equipment is outdated and we are currently searching for grants or other ways to acquire new training equipment to continue to offer high quality training like this one," Bellasai said. "Any donations to help us in that effort are greatly appreciated."

Those who are interested may visit the website at www.craigrescue.com.

The Craig County Rescue - EMS is a 100% volunteer organization, funded from many sources, such as insurance, state, and federal grant programs, but most importantly, the generous donations from local residences and businesses.

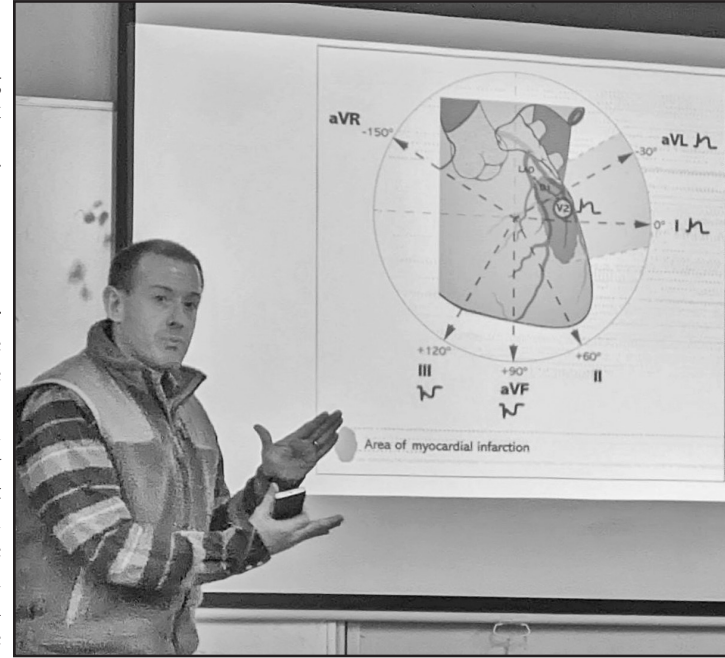
"Your donation will help us stock our emergency medical equipment, maintain our vehicles, provide training to our

membership, and much more," they shared.

The mailing address is Craig County Rescue - EMS, PO Box 81, New Castle, VA 24127, and the physical address for monetary or other donations is 258 Paint Bank Rd. New Castle, VA 24127, otherwise known as "the flats" in New Castle.

"We are a 100% volunteer force and rely on the desire to give back from people like you to serve Craig County," the group shared. "Interested in helping out but not sure how you can help? We need help not only from those interested in becoming EMT's, but also those who are willing to help with fundraising, grant writing, and all sorts of other things we have to do to remain in operation."

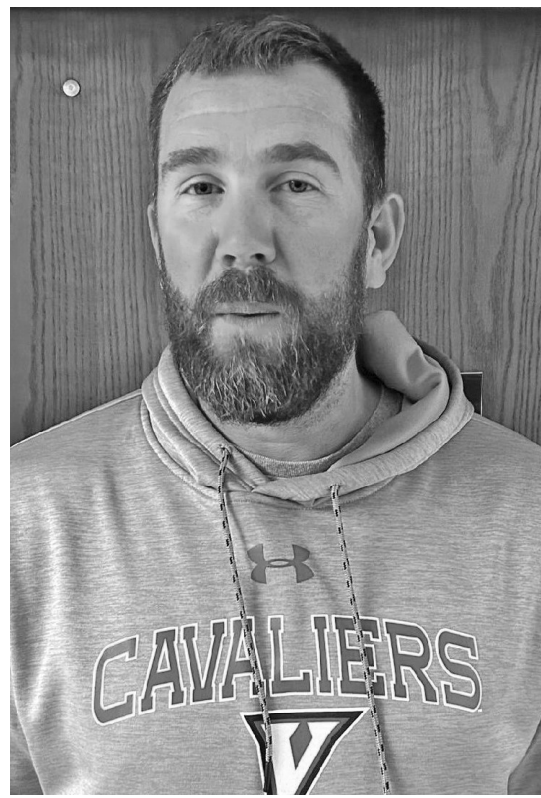
See the "Get Involved" tab for more information on their website or call 540-864-5115.



COURTESY PHOTO

The lecture included information that will enhance the knowledge of the volunteer EMS team who desires to serve the community with the best knowledge and learning.

VFW page 1



COURTESY PHOTO

An award for Craig County Middle School Teacher of the Year was also given to CJ Crowder.

but also as responsible, engaged, and caring citizens.

Pam Boyer is a role model of good citizenship herself, and her students benefit from her exemplary conduct and leadership. Her commitment to fostering a sense of community and social responsibility within her classroom is a reflection of her character as an educator and a citizen.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly nominate Pam Boyer for the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education High School Teacher Award. Her dedication to her students, innovative teaching methods, and tireless efforts to provide the best learning resources exemplify the values and principles upheld by this prestigious award. She is a true asset to Craig County High school and

an inspiration to her colleagues and students alike.

Thank you for considering Pam Boyer for this well-deserved honor. I am confident that she is more than deserving of this recognition for her exceptional contributions to education and her unwavering dedication to her students and community.

"I was very honored to receive this award! I have tremendous respect for all members of the armed forces and was very pleased that they would recognize me," shared Boyer. "I am teaching high school science courses (biology, ecology, and anatomy). I have been teaching at CCPS for 20 years and LOVE being a teacher. Being able to spend my days talking about science with really great students is wonderful. I am really

grateful for the award and the opportunity to be part of such a wonderful community."

Melissa Beaudoin was selected for the first Alternative Teacher Award.

"I have been teaching in some context for 14 years, the majority in early childhood education. For these last three years, I have had the true honor of serving as the director of the Kindling School, a faith-based, homeschooling cooperative located in town. In this capacity, I have moved from primarily serving students to serving our teachers and homeschooling parents," Beaudoin shared. "Together, we hope to kindle in our students both a love for learning and a faith in Jesus that far exceeds our own."

She was quick to add that the days she gets to spend in the classroom are

her absolute favorite days.

"It was truly a joy to be the first nominee for this award to come from an alternative schooling environment. As there are a remarkable variety of student learners, parents and educators alike are reminded that the ways in which we instruct them should also display variety!" she added. "I appreciate that the VFW has recognized that, like learners and instruction come in all shapes and sizes, so do instructors. I feel humbled to have been named among such a wonderful class of instructors who have received this award prior."

CJ Crowder was nominated for the Middle School Teacher of the Year Award and though very complimentary letters were submitted for him and Beaudoin; they were not available for print.

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- Orange-red chalcidony
- The shallowest Great
- Floating ice mountain
- Japanese cervids
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- Divertimentos
- Indian wet nurses
- Flatfishes
- Haitian currency (abbr.)
- Southeast
- One point N of due W
- 10 decibels
- Wild oxes of SE Asia
- Ancient Greek City of SW Italy
- A passing glancing blow
- Marriage announce-
- ment
- Tandoor bread
- Mag. ____: Time
- Portended
- Alicante's 7th city
- Gulf of, in the Aegean
- Strike
- Hill (Celtic)
- Stuart Little's author
- White
- Male sheep
- Indian dresses
- Pears
- Tardy arriver
- Smudge of ink
- Youngsters
- About aviation
- Small ornamental ladies' bag
- Unreturnable serves
- Fante and Twi peoples
- Round shape
- Of she
- Beard lichen genus
- Brings into being

CLUES DOWN

- Strikes lightly
- Fencing sword
- Hooked pericarp
- Entreats
- Edison's Corp.
- Cooks in an oven
- Amounts of time
- Tooth caregiver
- Spellbind
- Solo opera piece
- Audible exhalates
- Siddhartha author
- Coach's game area
- Gross revenue
- Toff
- 1896 Italian defeat (alt. sp.)
- Auto fuel
- A woven structure
- Reveal a secret
- Hawaiian geese
- Frigid Zone
- Newsman Rather
- Prefix for inside
- Short-billed rails
- Sensory receptor
- Egyptian temple - Ombo
- Challenges
- Photograph (slang)
- Declined gradually
- Tilapia nilotica
- One-edge sword
- Wets
- Small coins (French)
- Twine together
- The middle point
- Sea eagle
- Activist Parks
- Humbug
- Atomic #79

Be sure to 'Like' the New Castle Record on Facebook.

OPINION

News from the 9th: Deposition with Fauci



Morgan Griffith
Representative

On January 8th and 9th, I participated in a two-day Congressional transcribed interview (what normal people would call a deposition) with Dr. Anthony Fauci to learn more about his role in the COVID-19 outbreak and response.

These are my key takeaways from my preparation for the deposition and the deposition itself:

1. We need better protocols and oversight of biosafety laboratories. Fauci, who was the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), claims he did not know much about the grants awarded to EcoHealth Alliance and nothing about the subsequent subgrants to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. This is unacceptable. He was the head of the agency that awarded the grants,

and the buck should stop with him. At the very least, before his agency got the U.S. involved with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, he should have had a working knowledge of their operations. He disavowed all knowledge of the Institute, even saying if someone said Wuhan before COVID-19, he wouldn't know if they were referring to Wuhan University, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, or another entity in Wuhan.

And when EcoHealth Alliance did not forward required reports for more than a year, someone at NIAID should have been aware and raised Cain.

2. We need a generally accepted definition of gain-of-function (GoF) research for U.S. grant purposes. According to Fauci, NIAID was not funding any GoF research. Under the definition he was using, that may be so. But NIAID is a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and on the NIH website at the time the research was being done, they used a different definition of GoF. Under that definition, NIAID was funding GoF research. Both definitions are acceptable in various settings, but this type of research is too serious to not have a

generally accepted definition.

3. At a structural level, some scientists referenced in an email to Fauci found aspects of the virus perplexing. They queried how it could happen in nature. When looking at the makeup of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, researcher Mike Farzan took issue with how the furin cleavage site was in the virus. He believed it was difficult to explain how this could happen outside of a lab. While possible, it is highly unlikely to occur in nature. Additionally, Dr. Bob Garry observed the virus had a perfect 12-nucleotide insertion as part of the furin cleavage site and didn't know how this could happen in nature. The furin cleavage site is a large part of what made the virus so contagious. And, interestingly, prior coronaviruses did not contain a furin cleavage site.

4. Fauci said he had an open mind when it came to how the COVID-19 outbreak could have started, whether it was spread via animal transmission at a wet market or a lab leak, but he believes it was due to animal transmission. However, he gave no indication of his open-mindedness to the American people in public statements.

Those who believed COVID-19 started due to a lab leak were universally shunned and their opinions were taken down and/or barred from many social media sites.

Some conclusions:

Based on the evidence I have seen, I believe COVID-19 started due to an accidental lab leak. This is in part because no animal source has ever been found (in the past we've been able to find one). Further, the Chinese government did not look at a large sample of animals in their search, nor was the virus found in animals near the time of the outbreak. If the Chinese thought the virus started in animals, they would have scoured the region looking for the animal source. Their lack of strenuous effort indicates to me the Chinese know the source was a lab leak.

Fauci said we needed to continue to look for the animal source, but also admitted that without Chinese cooperation, we may never be able to determine with scientific certainty which theory is correct.

Dudding concludes her tenure as contributing writer

Life has a way of changing your focused directions and mine has taken a few turns in the last several years.

In December of 2014, our sweet Gwen, who was the contributing writer for The New Castle Record asked me to help her type out her articles, as she was having difficulties with the ends of her fingers.

Needless to say, one physical happening led to another until sadly she felt she could no longer work for The Record, and I agreed to help out until they found another writer.

I was not the greatest in writing and so I desperately sought to find someone else. My knack is in mathematics, as I was in engineering in college. I also went back to college in 1995 and obtained my Bachelor of Theology at Life Christian University, as ministry is my heart. I was going for my master's degree but had to lay that aside for family needs.

Though a few other writers have been hired, none stayed.

However, it is now my time to say goodbye, to care for my family and even myself a bit.

Writing for the Record has been a true learning experience and I have even written a book in the last couple of years and hope to have it published soon.

I wish to send a heartfelt thank you to all the citizens of Craig County who were so helpful in sending in information for us to share with our residents of Craig and persons in other counties and states that still enjoy the small community news.

Craig has always been a "home" where people tend to care for their own and I have always been blessed to be able to share in that mindset and extend it through writing.

The editor and manager at the office in Salem, Aila Boyd will be accepting article information until a new person is found. Anyone interested can contact her at aboyd@mainstreetnewspapers.com or call the office at (540) 389-9355.

Again, I thank you all for being so kind and I greatly appreciate your future prayers as I turn the corner of a new chapter in life, as my family is everything.

May our Daddy God bless you beyond your imagination and may you have dreams come true that only He could bring to pass. I pray health and prosperity to Craig County, believing that "the best is yet to come!"

-Pam Dudding

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The New Castle Record encourages letters from our readers on topics of general interest to the community and responses to our articles and columns. Letters must be signed and have a telephone number where you can be reached to be considered for publication. All letters will be verified before publication. The Record reserves the right to deny publication of any letter and edit letters for length content and style. News of public interest is solicited from all sections of the county.



COURTESY PHOTO

Pictured from left to right are Rick (CB) Dudding (brother), Laura Jannell (Rick's fiancé), Pam Dudding, Olivia Dudding Slusher (niece) and James and Betty Dudding (parents).

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Recipe of the Week



Shelly Koon
Contributing
Writer

Editor's note: The New Castle Record is excited to start sharing a weekly cooking column that is authored by Shelly Koon. In addition to being an adventurous cook, she serves as the receptionist for The New Castle Record.
-Aila Boyd

January is a cold and dark month with short days. The holidays are over, not much is going on, and time seems to have slowed down. The "January Blues" is the feelings of sadness and depression that make the month hard. The lack of excitement the holidays bring and the return to the daily routine can make the peppiest person feel unenthused about the coming year. January is said to be the least productive month. Some tips to overcome the blues is to know that it is normal to feel this way. Lack of sunlight plays a big part in the mood. Get as much daylight as possible, sit in a window or wrapped up on the porch. My dad would sit in the car on the driveway to get sunlight in the winter. Don't make New Year resolutions. This can lead to feelings of failure should you slow down or quit. Make plans for the summer or a goal you can look forward to and really want to accomplish. Stay as active as you can though. Take the stairs, walk around a store before shopping, or just going outside for a walk in the yard

can help your mood. Get enough sleep. Winter is the cold and flu season so getting enough sleep can keep you healthy. Try something new. A new hobby or start a new TV drama or puzzle; read for fun, not your job. Eat properly. Making meals is hard when your mood is poor. Make something easy and that you enjoy but still healthy. Extra sugar is tempting but it will just make you more tired and grumpy.

This week's recipe is one I make when I need a good dinner after a long day at work. I know it reheats well, so I am not tempted to get fast food when I know it's in the refrigerator at home. I got this recipe from a neighbor, (funny how most good recipes are found this way) when I was 13 years old. My mom was working part-time, my dad was always working, and it was my job to cook dinner. I did not mind, I felt important and got to boss my little brother around. This elderly neighbor, Martha Lou, kept an eye on us and was available when Mom was not home. I have made this so much I have memorized it. When I found the recipe in my box, it surprised me that the recipe card was so vague.

Martha Lou's chicken and rice bake

Ingredients:

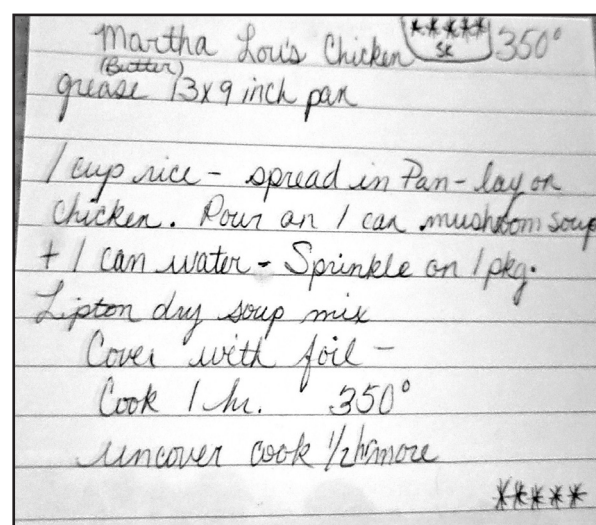
3-4 boneless and skinless chicken breasts
1 cup uncooked white rice
1 can condensed cream of mushroom soup
1 envelope of dry onion soup mix

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 pan with butter or nonstick spray. Spread dry rice evenly in pan. Lay on chicken. Mix can of soup and 1 can of water together and pour over chicken and rice. Sprinkle dry

soup mix over everything. Cover with foil and cook for 1 hour. Uncover and cook ½ more.

Tips:

I use boneless and skinless chicken breasts, tenders, or chicken thighs. I have left the breasts whole or cut them up in pieces. I used pork chops once and it turned out well. Basically, whatever you prefer. Make sure you get all the rice wet. Lift the chicken so the soup gets under it if needed. I have made this in my casserole crockpot, cooking on high for 3-4 hours, low 6-8 hours. Check the chicken for doneness. Try cream of chicken or cream of celery soup instead of mushroom soup. I have used Minute rice in a pinch, but it can get mushy if overcooked.



SHELLY KOON PHOTOS

VDOT Roadwatch

Interstate 81

SOIL TEST BORING ON I-81 IN ROANOKE COUNTY - SEQ Drilling will be performing soil test boring within the median of I-81 near mile marker 143.2 in Roanoke County on Tuesday, January 23 and Wednesday, January 24, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. There are no direct impacts to traffic for this project such as lane or shoulder closures, but traffic may be delayed due to location and onlookers.

INTERSTATE 81 LANE WIDENING CONSTRUCTION PROJECT EXIT 137 TO EXIT 141 - The \$179 million design-build project to widen both directions of I-81 between mile markers 136.6 and 141.8 from two to three lanes is underway. Work is being performed along a five-mile section of both northbound and southbound Interstate 81 in Roanoke County and the city of Salem. Barrier wall is in place along the shoulders. Two lanes of I-81 traffic in each direction are expected to remain open during the project with periodic lane closures scheduled during nighttime hours or outside of peak travel times as needed. Drivers can expect the following lane closures and upcoming traffic impacts in this area on northbound and southbound I-81:

ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC IMPACTS:

WORK ZONE SPEED: Drivers should adhere to posted 60 mph speed limits in the work zone and allow space when following a vehicle. Narrow spacing in lanes due to barrier walls, lack of shoulders and lane shifts in various locations, are present.

TRAFFIC SHIFTS ON WILDWOOD ROAD: Expect a work zone with traffic shifts and narrow width on Wildwood road after exiting I-81 southbound on exit 137 heading towards Salem. Southbound and northbound I-81 exit and entrance ramp narrows are possible at Route 311.

TRAFFIC SHIFT ON EXIT 140: Drivers may experience a periodic quick merge into traffic onto

Thompson Memorial Drive from the southbound exit ramp of exit 140. Work zone located at bottom of the ramp for work on the I-81 bridge at the underpass.

RAMP CLOSURES: Ramp closures are possible during nighttime hours, 12 a.m., to 5 a.m. Drivers should watch for message boards dates and times the ramp will be closed.

LANE CLOSURES: Alternating left and right lane and shoulder closures during nighttime hours between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., Sunday through Thursday, are possible. Lane widths will be reduced to 11 feet. Nightly lane closures may be in place along the right lane with possible nightly ramp narrows as needed for guardrail and shoulder strengthening.

The project also includes replacing six bridges, widening two bridges, installing approximately 2.6 miles of sound barrier walls along northbound I-81, improving the southbound exit 137 off-ramp intersection at Wildwood Road and adding interchange lighting at exits 137, 140 and 141. Expected completion in early 2026.

I-81 NB & SB BRIDGE REHAB OVER ROUTE 100 AT EXIT 98 - Beginning late March 2024, work will begin on I-81 rehabbing the northbound and southbound bridges over Route 100 at Exit 98. Lane and shoulder may be in place on Route 100 north and on I-81 northbound and southbound, 8 p.m. - 6 a.m. Flagging operations may also be in place on Route 100 north for up to eight-minute slow rolls. Both northbound and southbound on and off ramps at exit 98 for I-81 traffic will remain fully operational for the duration of this project. Estimated completion date is summer 2024.

I-81 NORTHBOUND AT EXIT 105 NEW RIVER BRIDGE REPLACEMENT IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY - Traffic on northbound I-81 has been switched onto the newly constructed bridge over the New River at the Montgomery/Pulaski County

lane. Lane and shoulder closures may be in place near exit 105. Lane closure may be in effect during the week from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. Shoulder closures may be in effect at any time during the week. Slow rolls may be performed on I-81 in the north and southbound lanes from mile marker 98 to 109. Speed limit is reduced to 60 miles per hour in the work zone. Shoulder closures will remain in place though the duration of the project. Project completion is estimated for Summer 2024.

LANE CLOSURES: Beginning December 10, nighttime alternating lane closures are possible on I-81 northbound between mile markers 104-106 from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. the following morning.

ROUTE 605: Alternating lane closures and flagging operations may be present on Route 605, located under the New River Bridge, for paving operations and work overhead on the bridge.

I-81 BRIDGE DECK REPAIRS - Weather permitting, crews will repair bridge decks on Interstate 81. Between mile markers 170 to 89, right and left lane closures will be in place northbound and southbound during nighttime hours, 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. the following morning. Drivers should watch for signs and expect possible delays.

e completed in summer 2024.

Craig County MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE - The Mountain Valley Pipeline construction project is underway. Temporary intermittent flagging operations will be in place in the county throughout the project to load/unload equipment at crossings and construction entrances. Scheduled completion is February 2024.

Tax page 3

totaling roughly \$20.2 billion, is again the largest in Virginia history.

"This has been a tremendous effort on all of our behalf to fund our schools at unprecedented levels. And I would caution us from drawing strong opinions from out-of-date facts that precede this great work that all of you facilitated," Youngkin said, an apparent reference to a recent state study that found Virginia's K-12 school funding trailed the national average by about 14%.

He also emphasized his efforts to shore up Virginia's struggling mental health system, a push that's drawn widespread bipartisan support.

Many of Youngkin's legislative priorities were familiar from last year's campaign season. He called for the repeal of a Democratic-backed law tying Virginia to California's vehicle emissions standards, even though the

federal Clean Air Act requires states to either follow federal standards or the California standards.

He also called for new rules to restrict tech companies from selling data gathered from minors, tougher criminal penalties for drug dealers whose products lead to overdoses and stiffer punishment for those who commit crimes with guns.

"We should also know that Virginia's gun laws are already among the toughest in the nation," Youngkin said, seemingly laying down a marker against a proposed assault weapon ban and numerous other gun-control bills Democrats are expected to pass this session. "Therefore, I'm asking you, allow us to hold accountable those criminals that commit crimes with guns by lengthening and making more severe the penalties in order to keep them off the streets."

There were a few new proposals in the

speech. After championing legislation last year to adopt a new definition of antisemitism, Youngkin called for new legislation seemingly tied to the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel and the ongoing debate about how American institutions should respond to the Israel-Hamas conflict.

"Pass a bill which says the commonwealth of Virginia won't do business with companies that boycott Israel," Youngkin said. "Pass a hate crime bill which ensures all forms of antisemitism, not just religious bigotry, are treated as hate crimes under the law."

Surovell, the Senate Democratic leader, said that for all Youngkin's talk of bipartisanship, it was light on policy specifics and issues the Democratic legislature might support.

"It's hard for us to know where he stands," Surovell said. "Because he never takes positions on a lot of important

issues."

One big question hanging over the 2024 session is whether Youngkin can be convinced to move forward with legalized sales of marijuana, a proposal that's drawn at least some bipartisan support as a way to restore order to Virginia's cannabis laws. Democrats decriminalized possession of small amounts of pot in 2021, and the state now allows home growers to cultivate up to four marijuana plants for their personal use. But there's still no way to legally purchase marijuana for recreational use.

Speaking to reporters after the speech, Youngkin said "I just don't have a lot of interest in pressing forward with marijuana legislation."

Mercury reporters Charlie Paullin and Nathaniel Cline contributed to this story.

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SPORTS

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Jaycob Wolfe shoots a floater against East Mont.



Craig County's Isaiah Wenthe battles for position under the hoop.



Craig's Matthew Lucas shoots a jumper between two Mustang defenders.



Seth Parsons of the Rockets puts a fake on an East Mont defender.

Craig County basketball teams will play in four-team Giles tournament

Craig County basketball teams will play in four-team Giles tournament

The Craig County girls and boys basketball teams will be competing in a four team tournament at Giles High School this week. The event will run from Thursday through Saturday.

The girls will open the action on Thursday with Craig County against Hidden Valley at 6 pm. The host Giles girls will play Hurley High in the second game of Thursday's doubleheader.

On Friday the boys will take the court. Again, Craig will meet Hidden Valley at 6 pm with the Giles boys against Hurley in the nightcap.

There will be four games on Saturday. The two Thursday losing girls' teams will open at noon, followed by the two losing boys' teams from Friday. The girls' winners will follow, and the boys' winners from Friday will wrap up a big day of action.

Craig was scheduled to play a girls-boys doubleheader at Highland County on Tuesday, but that was in jeopardy due to Monday's winter storm. Craig County athletic director Carrie Hutton was hoping the games could be rescheduled for Wednesday if they couldn't be played Tuesday, but nothing was decided at press time.

Last week the boys dropped two games to fall to 3-9 on the season. The Rockets lost at Eastern Montgomery on Monday, January 8, 67-40 then lost at home to Parry McCluer on Friday, 84-46.

The girls also dropped two games last week, losing to William Byrd and Parry McCluer. The Rockets lost 58 to 30 against Class 3 William Byrd in Vinton on Thursday, and on the second game of a back-to-back they lost at Parry McCluer Friday, 52-14. That put them at 4-6 for the season.

Next week the girls are scheduled to play at Narrows on Monday, with the Narrows boys coming to New Castle on Tuesday.



Craig's Daileigh Donithan handles the ball.



Kailyn Jones of the Rockets goes to the floor to grab a loose ball at Byrd.



Craig coach Brock Jones talks to the girls during a timeout in Vinton.



Morgan Underwood of Craig (#24) boxes out under the basket.