



PLAZA ECONOMY DRUG

1123 Plaza Drive • Grundy, VA
Located in the Grundy Plaza

Mon-Fri: 9a.m.-6p.m. | Sat-Sun: Closed

276-935-9406

HD-539224

THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER

The Voice of Buchanan County Since 1922

www.virginiamountaineer.com

VOL. 104 NO. 23

GRUNDY, VA. | THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2026

TWO SECTIONS PLUS SUPPLEMENTS | \$2

Cooper named executive director of Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce

Virginia Mountaineer

A new chapter is underway for the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce after the organization's board of directors selected Chad Cooper to serve as its next executive director.

The chamber's board of directors voted during its July meeting to name Cooper as the organization's new executive director. Cooper officially began his duties July 21 and will succeed Amanda Shafer, whose final day with the chamber is July 30.

Shafer is leaving the chamber after accepting a teaching position with Buchanan County Public Schools, where she will serve as a special education teacher at the newly constructed Southern Gap High School.

A 2000 graduate of Hurley High School, Cooper earned a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from Virginia Intermont College in 2006. In addition to his new role with the chamber, he serves as editor of The Virginia Mountaineer newspaper.

Cooper said he is excited to begin working with the

chamber, its members and the board of directors to continue supporting local businesses and strengthening Buchanan County's economy.

"I'm incredibly excited to step into the role of executive director of the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce," Cooper said. "This is a community full of pride, potential and hardworking people, and I am ready to hit the ground running. My focus is on energizing our local business community, building strong connections and creating new opportunities that help move Buchanan County forward."

"I also look forward to working alongside such an outstanding board of directors," Cooper added. "Buchanan County is fortunate to have a board made up of strong business leaders who are deeply invested in the success of our community. I'm excited to help bring their ideas to fruition and continue building on the vision they have for the future."

"It is truly an honor to continue the work of Mary

SEE **COOPER NAMED** | 2A



Joseph Moore, disaster preparedness manager for United Way of Southwest Virginia, discusses emergency preparedness strategies during a community workshop July 23 at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center. Moore encouraged residents to develop family emergency plans and prepare for disasters before they happen.

Disaster preparedness workshop helps Buchanan residents prepare before the next emergency

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

KWith memories of catastrophic flooding still fresh in the minds of many Buchanan County residents, over 20 community members gathered on July 23 at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center to learn how to better protect their families before the next emergency strikes.

The free disaster preparedness workshop, presented by Joseph Moore, disaster prepared-

ness manager for United Way of Southwest Virginia, focused on practical steps residents can take now to prepare for floods, winter storms, extended power outages and other disasters that regularly affect the mountains of Southwest Virginia. While emergency preparedness can seem overwhelming, Moore's message throughout the evening remained consistent: people don't have to do everything at once. They simply need to start.

The workshop was hosted through a region-

SEE **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS** | 6A

Adkins questions County IDA actions during July meeting

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

Knox District Supervisor Trey Adkins spoke at length before members of the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority during its July 20 meeting, raising a series of questions about the authority's handling of legal matters, its relationship with the Appalachia School of Law and actions taken by the former IDA chairman.

Speaking during the public comment portion of the meeting, Adkins told board members his concerns centered on transparency, accountability and the proper protection of taxpayer dollars. His remarks touched on multiple issues, including an unidentified economic development project, the IDA's previous support for the Appalachia School of Law, a legal services contract approved earlier this year and reimbursements made to former Executive Director Matt Fields.

One of Adkins' first questions involved a project listed on a December 2025 IDA agenda under the code name "Project Vital Path."

Adkins asked whether the project could now be publicly identified and whether it was connected to the Appalachia School of Law because it appeared on the same agenda as a planned presentation by the school's dean.

Several current board members said they were unfamiliar with the project. Board attorney Vern Presley explained that "Vital Path" remains a confidential project name because it has not been publicly disclosed.

"I understand projects are given names until they're able to be disclosed," Adkins said. "I've been doing this 16 years. We give projects names that we don't want the public to know or another county to know, and I don't have a problem with that part."

SEE **ADKINS QUESTIONS** | 6A

FBI investigates cyber scam targeting BCPS school funds

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

KBuchanan County Public Schools is working with federal, state and local authorities after a cyber scam targeted a payment intended for construction of the new Southern Gap High School.

According to a statement released by the school division, a payment being transferred from Buchanan County to the contractor constructing the new high school was the target of a fraudulent payment diversion scheme.

School officials said they acted immediately after discovering the incident, contacting local law enforcement, which then notified federal authorities. The division also worked with the financial institutions involved to help stop the fraudulent transaction and recover the funds.

In addition, the school division retained outside legal counsel with experience in cybersecurity incidents and hired cybersecurity experts to assist with the investigation and response. Officials also

notified the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has been involved with the construction of the new high school.

Multiple investigations are now underway, including one being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

According to the school division, the quick response significantly limited the impact of the scheme.

"Through this swift response, the scheme was largely thwarted, and most of the targeted funds are being returned," the statement said.

School officials did not disclose the amount of money involved or explain how the payment was redirected. They also did not indicate whether any money remains unrecovered, citing the ongoing investigation.

The division said it will continue working with law enforcement agencies as investigators determine how the attempted fraud occurred.

Officials noted that payment diversion

SEE **FBI INVESTIGATES** | 2A



Construction continues on Southern Gap High School despite an ongoing investigation into a cyber scam that targeted a payment associated with the project. Buchanan County Public Schools said a swift response by local, state and federal authorities helped prevent the loss of most of the funds, and the school remains on schedule to open as planned.



Find us on
Facebook



8 0 4 8 7 9 3 5 8 9 5 4

Mary “Susie” Ratliff Rife

MARY “SUSIE” RATLIFF RIFE, age 84, of Grundy, Virginia, went to her Heavenly Home on Wednesday, July 15, 2026, at the Johnston Memorial Hospital, Abingdon, Virginia, surrounded by her loving family.

Susie was born on November 26, 1941, in Buchanan County, Grundy, Virginia. She was the daughter of the late Joe Clell Ratliff and Anna Mae Snead Ratliff.

Susie was a member of the Little Prater Church of Christ and a life-long member of Buchanan County. She was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She was a retired teacher’s aide and substitute teacher for the Buchanan County Public School System. She attended college at Lees-McRae College, Banner Elk, North Carolina. Susie also enjoyed working and spending time at the Poplar Gap Park, where she helped develop and acquire equipment, and serve her community.

In addition to her parents, Susie was preceded in death by her daughter, Katrina Rife, and broth-

ers, Randall Ratliff and Donald Ratliff.

Those left to cherish her loving memory include her husband, Roger Rife of Grundy, Virginia; son, Greg Rife (Debbie) of Grundy, Virginia; granddaughter, Christy Jones (John) of Knoxville, Tennessee; great-granddaughter, Joee Jones of Knoxville, Tennessee; and special friends, Ruby Perkins of Grundy, Virginia, and Joe Gary and Lanette Street of Vansant, Virginia.

There will be a service for Mary “Susie” Ratliff Rife on Saturday, July 18, 2026, 7:00 P.M. at the Virginia Funeral Home Chapel, Grundy, Virginia, with Ken Runyon, Mike Rife, and Dennis Wimmer, and officiating. The family will receive friends at 6:00 P.M.

A funeral service was conducted on Sunday, July 19, 2026, 1:00 P.M. at the Virginia Funeral Home Chapel, Grundy, Virginia.

Burial followed at the Greenhills Memory Gardens, Claypool Hill, Virginia.

Serving as active pallbearers



were Mark Cooper, Robert Sauer, Trey Adkins, Buddy Fuller, John Jones, David Rowe, Cap Smith, Benjie Looney, and Donald Rife.

Honorary pallbearers were the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, Kermit Rowe, Craig Horn, Marcus Creekmore, Louis Jackson, and Kenny Ratliff.

The Virginia Funeral Home of Grundy, Virginia, is honored to serve the family of Mary “Susie” Ratliff Rife.

Heritage Hall collecting school supplies for Back-to-School Bash

By CHAD COOPER
cookam@gmail.com

Heritage Hall Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center is asking the community to help local students get ready for the new school year by donating school supplies during its Back-to-School Bash supply drive.

The community-wide effort is aimed at providing students with the basic classroom essentials they need to begin the 2026-27 school year with confidence. Heritage Hall officials are encouraging individuals, businesses and organizations to contribute new school supplies that will be distributed to local children.

Among the items being collected are backpacks, notebook paper, spiral notebooks, composition books, pencils, pens, crayons, colored pencils, markers, highlighters, glue sticks, scissors, pencil boxes or pouches, folders, dry-erase markers, tissues, hand sanitizer and index cards.

Organizers said even a single donated item can make a meaningful difference for a student and help ease the financial burden many families face as they prepare for the upcoming school year.

Community members may drop off donations at Heritage Hall at 2966 Slate Creek Road, Grundy.

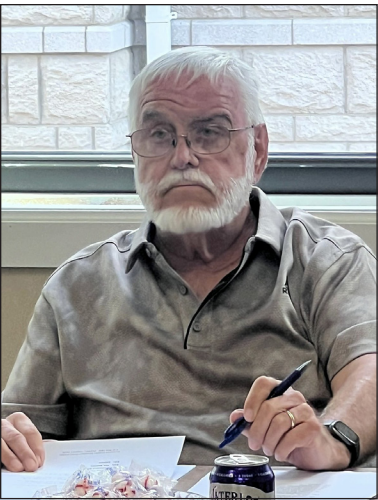
For more information about the Back-to-School Bash or the school supply drive, call Heritage Hall at (276) 935-8144.

County IDA elects new leadership following board changes

By CHAD COOPER
cookam@gmail.com

The Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority has selected new leadership following recent changes to its board, electing Pete Stiltner as chairman and Wade McGeorge as vice chairman during its July 20 meeting inside the IDA’s office in the Richardson Building.

The elections come less than a month after the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors voted to remove former IDA Chairman Tim O’Quinn from the authority’s board.



Pete Stiltner (or format as a proper numbered caption) was unanimously elected chairman of the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority during the board’s July 20 organizational meeting at the IDA offices in the Richardson Building. Stiltner succeeds former Chairman Tim O’Quinn following recent changes to the board.

The meeting began with nominations for chairman. McGeorge was initially nominated for the position but declined, citing concerns that scheduling conflicts with other board commitments could occasionally prevent him from attending meetings.

“I really would like to decline being chairman,” McGeorge told fellow board members. “My concern is ... I would hate to be chair and then have other conflicts with other meetings.”

Board member Brenda Ward encouraged McGeorge to reconsider, noting the authority could adjust meeting dates if necessary.

“We can change the date, Wade,” Ward said.

McGeorge, however, continued to decline the nomination.

Ward also declined to be considered for the position, saying she did not feel she had enough experience with some of the authority’s land-related matters to serve as chair.

“I don’t always understand ... when we’re doing land things and stuff like that,” Ward said. “I feel like the chair needs to be more knowledgeable than I am.”

Attention then turned to Stiltner, who accepted the nomination after acknowledging he would likely need assistance in the role.

“I’ll probably need a lot of help,” Stiltner said.

“We’ll help,” several members responded before voting unanimously to elect him chairman.

Following the election, Stiltner immediately presided over the remainder of the meeting.



Wade McGeorge (or format as a proper numbered caption) was unanimously elected vice chairman of the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority during the board’s July 20 organizational meeting at the IDA offices in the Richardson Building. McGeorge initially declined a nomination for chairman before accepting the nomination for vice chairman.

mainder of the meeting.

The board then unanimously elected McGeorge to serve as vice chairman after he was nominated by board member Alicia O’Quinn and the nomination received a second from Danny Bailey.

In other business, the authority unanimously approved adding the chairman and vice chairman as authorized signers on the IDA’s Legacy Bank accounts, joining the secretary as authorized signers.

Board members also approved the minutes from the previous meeting. McGeorge abstained from that vote because he was absent from the June meeting while attending a conference.

Scarberry still missing; Kentucky State Police continue investigation

By CHAD COOPER
cookam@gmail.com

Nearly two weeks after authorities began searching for a man who gained national attention for surviving Hurricane Helene on Georgia’s Tybee Island, officials say the investigation into his disappearance remains active.

Scotty Scarberry, known to many as “Huck Finn,” has still not been located, and the Kentucky State Police continue to investigate his disappearance.

Scarberry was reported missing after family members said he planned to travel into Southwest Virginia to explore abandoned mines. Earlier this month, the Buchanan County Sheriff’s Office confirmed deputies requested assistance from the Virginia Department of Energy’s Mines Rescue Team after receiving information that Scarberry may have entered an abandoned mine in the Paw Paw section of Buchanan County.

The mine entrance was excavated by the rescue team, but authorities reported finding no sign of Scarberry.

Kentucky State Police are now asking anyone with information about Scarberry’s whereabouts to come forward.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Kentucky State Police Post 9 at 606-433-7711.

Scarberry gained national attention in September 2024 after he and his dog, Creedy, survived Hurricane Helene while living aboard a sailboat near Tybee Island, Georgia. The pair washed ashore near U.S. Highway 80 during the storm, and national news outlets across the country shared their remarkable survival story.

According to previous reports, Scarberry later left Tybee Island and traveled to Kentucky, where he had been staying on his uncle’s property. Family members said he told relatives he planned to explore abandoned



Scotty Scarberry, known to many as “Huck Finn” after surviving Hurricane Helene on Georgia’s Tybee Island in 2024, remains missing as the Kentucky State Police continue their investigation. Anyone with information about his whereabouts is asked to contact Kentucky State Police Post 9 at 606-433-7711. (Photo courtesy of the Scarberry family)

mines in Virginia before he disappeared.

His family has expressed growing concern, noting that Scarberry left behind his dog, Creedy, something they said would be out of character if he intended to be away for an extended period.

Authorities have not released any additional information about the investigation. Anyone who may have seen Scarberry or has information that could assist investigators is encouraged to contact Kentucky State Police Post 9.

FBI INVESTIGATES

FROM PAGE 1A

scams have become increasingly common in recent years, particularly on large construction projects and business transactions. According to the FBI, these types of cybercrimes account for more than \$3 billion in losses annually and affect roughly 25,000 victims each year.

Although the incident remains under investigation, school officials said they are grateful the majority of the money was recovered before it could be permanently lost.

“While the prevalence of these cyber incidents on a global scale is concerning, Buchanan County is fortunate to have avoided a more damaging outcome through a quick, deliberate response to the incident,” the school division said. “We look forward to continued progress on the new high school.”

Construction of Southern Gap High School continues as scheduled and is on pace to open on time. Officials said they remain committed to completing the project while supporting the ongoing investigation.

COOPER NAMED

FROM PAGE 1A

Belcher, who faithfully served as chamber director for more than 30 years, and Amanda Shafer, who successfully carried that legacy forward over the past three years,” Cooper shared. “Amanda (Shafer) leaves the chamber in a great place, and I look forward to continuing the progress she helped build during her tenure. The best is ahead, and I am proud to be part of it.”

Shafer said leaving the chamber is bittersweet but expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve Buchanan County’s business community.

“My time with the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce has been incredibly rewarding,” Shafer said. “I’ve truly enjoyed being involved in our community and working alongside so many wonderful people. While it’s a bittersweet moment to move on, I’m grateful for the experiences, friendships and memories I’ll always carry with me.”

NEWS is just a click away!

LOCAL NEWS

SPORTS

OBITUARIES

COMMUNITY EVENTS

The VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER

Local Coverage. Real Stories. Real People.

LATEST NEWS

The VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER

Your Community. Your Stories. Your Newspaper.

Find us online at WWW.VIRGINIAMOUNTAINEER.COM

Appalachian Inn

Special \$69⁹⁵ per night + tax All utilities included Single Occupancy

ALL ROOMS INCLUDE:

- FREE Cable
- FREE Internet
- FREE WIFI
- FREE Local/Long Distance Calling
- Microwave Oven
- Refrigerator

Extended Stay (Weekly/Monthly) Discounts Available

\$535⁰⁰ Monthly Single Occupancy

Located 6/10 Mile up Hoot Owl Road (On Right) Grundy, VA

276-935-5355



Looking Back From our files

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

55 YEARS AGO

JULY 29, 1971

Mountain Mission School is happy to announce the appointment of its Director of Education Mr. James M. Swiney, as field supervisor for the Divinity School, Vanderbilt University. This appointment while allowing Mr. Swiney to continue his duties with the Mountain Mission staff, also bestows upon him the title and duties of Adjunct Member of the Faculty of Vanderbilt.

U.S. Army, Vietnam (AHTNC) July 8 – Army Specialist Four Leon H. Woods, 20, son of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Woods, Route 1, Vansant, recently received the Combat Infantryman Badge and was promoted to his present rank in Vietnam. The badge is a unique and cherished award that is highly coveted by its recipients.

45 YEARS AGO

JULY 30, 1981

Miss Veronica Belcher, a rising senior at Grundy Senior High School has been named to “Who’s Who among American high school students, 1980-81. Miss Belcher has been singing for audiences since childhood and has performed at numerous local and area events. She has also appeared on TV and has recorded several albums. Veronica is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rondal Belcher of Big Rock. Her maternal grandparents, Rev. and Mrs. Arville Collins, also live at Big Rock.

Two Grundy Senior High School seniors were among the 70 to receive certificates of completion of the King Fellow program held at King College in Bristol. Tammy Denise Deel and Elliot Stewert both earned certificates for the satisfactory completion of the summer five-week honors program for outstanding rising high school seniors. In addition to earning academic credit for their college level courses, King Fellows also participate in a variety of workshops and social and cultural events.

35 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 1, 1991

Ruby Kirby was named the new principal at White-wood High School during a continued meeting of the Buchanan County School Board last Thursday. Kirby, who has been assistant principal at Garden High School, was selected for the post after being recommended by Superintendent Paul Hatfield following a lengthy two-hour closed-door session.

The Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce was the winner of the Clean Business Award for July. Chamber of Commerce Secretary Mary McClanahan said the chamber appreciated the town of Grundy’s efforts in maintaining the chamber’s lawn and garden. Those on hand for the presentation included Chamber of Commerce president Oliver L. Upchurch; McClanahan; Town of Grundy Mayor Miller Richardson; Buchanan County Litter Control Coordinator Marie Sexton; Flo Stewert; and Chamber of Commerce First Vice President Raymond L. Board.

25 YEARS AGO

JULY 26, 2001

Rebecca L. Shortridge has been elected as Assistant Vice President of First Virginia Bank Southwest. Announcement of the promotion was made by Charles W. Robbins III, chairman and CEO. Shortridge joined First Virginia Bank Southwest in November of 1991, bringing with her over 13 years of previous financial experience. She began her career as a ‘clerk and quickly worked her way through the credit system, reaching her current position as Commercial Account Officer, located in the Richlands Downtown Office.

Amanda O’Quinn and Jonathan Hess, who will be juniors at Council High School this fall, have been selected to attend the High School Leadership Academy to be held July 29-Aug. 3 at Bridgewater College. O’Quinn is the daughter of Jeff Hess, the son of Gregory Allen and Wanda F. Hess of Honaker. Both students were nominated by Edna Sue Breeding, counselor at Council High School.



Contributed Photos

Southern Gap High School rising sophomore Sophie Whited takes part in a painting activity during the University of Mary Washington Summer Enrichment Program in Fredericksburg. The weeklong residential program combined creative, hands-on learning with college and career exploration for students from across Virginia.

SGHS student attends Mary Washington Summer Enrichment Program

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

For many high school students, summer break is a time to relax. For Southern Gap High School student Sophie Whited, it was an opportunity to take a step toward her future career.

Whited, a 15-year-old rising sophomore at Southern Gap High School, recently participated in the 2026 Summer Enrichment Program at University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. The seven-day residential program, held July 12-18, brought together about 70 rising sophomores, juniors and seniors from across Virginia who are interested in exploring future college majors and career paths.

During the program, students lived in campus residence halls, took part in hands-on academic courses and extracurricular activities designed to introduce them to college life while helping them explore potential careers.

Whited, who spent her freshman year at

Twin Valley and will be attending Southern Gap High, enrolled in the workshop, “The Places You Will Go,” led by Assistant Director of Career Education Mary Becelia. The interactive session encouraged students to think about their futures by creating vision boards using magazine clippings, stickers and other materials to illustrate their educational and career goals.

Whited said the experience reinforced her plans for the future.

“I know what I want to do, but I want to make sure what I’m doing is going to get me there,” she said.

Whited plans to major in psychology in college and pursue a career as an art therapist, combining mental health counseling with creative expression to help others.

The Summer Enrichment Program offered students opportunities to explore a wide range of career fields, including medicine, engineering, the arts and other professions through interactive learning experiences and campus activities.

Whited is the daughter of Matt Whited and Ashley Keene and Robbie Minton.



Contributed Photos

Southern Gap High School rising sophomore Sophie Whited displays a University of Mary Washington Summer Enrichment Program tote bag presented to participants during the weeklong program in Fredericksburg. The experience allowed students to live on campus, explore academic interests and begin planning for their college and career goals.



Contributed Photos

Southern Gap High School rising sophomore Sophie Whited (seated, center) joins fellow students during a hands-on activity at the University of Mary Washington Summer Enrichment Program in Fredericksburg. The weeklong program gave high school students an early opportunity to experience college life while exploring potential career paths.

GOOD OL DAYS

Virginia Mountaineer

County Fair Chairman Jack Reasor and Sharon Ward, Executive Secretary for the Chamber of Commerce, take a first look at the newly printed 1981 County Fair Catalogs in the Mountaineer production room on July 24, 1981. The catalogs feature, for the first time, photographs along with information about the various exhibits, judging, prizes to be awarded, and a helpful schedule of events for the fair. The County Fair opens to the public on Tuesday, August 4, 1981, at 3 p.m. at Grundy Junior High School. Fair catalogs are available at local stores and at the Chamber of Commerce office.



Congressman Griffith: Legislative Momentum on Health Care

Lawmakers take actions on various issues to make a difference.

In the health care space, it often seems I work around the clock to assess federal policy, hear perspectives from the medical community as well as patients, and explore ways to help lower health care costs.

One way I do this is by looking at the health care landscape in our region.

Accordingly, I am a leader of H.R. 2191, the Physician Led and Rural Access to Quality Care Act. This bill is one way for us to empower independent physicians and help address medical deserts in rural communities.

To begin 2026, I attended the ribbon cutting for the Stuart Community Hospital in Patrick County.

Thanks to the efforts of a company, led by physician Dr. Beau Braden, and with careful monitoring, Dr. Braden's team has been able to get around the so-called Affordable Care Act prohibitions against physician-owned hospitals.

Patrick County's hospital is not physician-owned, but it is certainly physician-led.

Historically, many hospitals in Virginia's Ninth District actually started as physician-owned hospitals.

But in some areas that are not served or underserved, Dr. Braden's model has shown that it can work to bring competition to hospital care.

His company has hospitals in Tennessee and North Carolina.

For these reasons, his company launched the Stuart facility to facilitate local emergency and in-patient care.

This positive development shows physicians can create a path towards health care access and opportunity for rural communities.

As the Chairman of the Health Subcommittee, good ideas like physician-led hospitals come across my desk. In some cases, I can promote these ideas toward a finishing line: the President's desk.

Right now, some good health care bills are on this track after recently securing House passage. The following bills show a collective effort on both sides of the aisle to address illnesses with no known cure.

One bill is H.R. 3747 – the Accelerating Access to Dementia and Alzheimer's Provider Training (AADAPT) Act. The AADAPT Act reauthorizes a program that provides



WEEKLY REPORT
FROM THE CAPITOL

primary care providers with Alzheimer's and dementia training to help improve detection and promote early diagnosis in rural and underserved areas.

With millions of Alzheimer's disease cases and other forms of dementia in the United States, it is necessary that we continue to work to better identify these devastating diseases.

As our population grows older and more seniors occupy our health care system, so comes the rise in Alzheimer's and dementia cases.

In May of 2026, Virginia Tech received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for more than \$642,000. Virginia Tech will use this federal funding to develop more aging research on these types of dementia diseases.

I am hopeful that H.R. 3747 will create more opportunities for Virginia Tech and others to better understand dementia-related illnesses.

A second bill to secure House passage is H.R. 4348 – To reauthorize the Kay Hagan Tick Act.

This legislation helps bolster federal programs that provide research into tickborne illnesses such as Lyme

disease.

Lyme disease cases are rising in the U.S. This April, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that visits to the Emergency Room for tick bites are higher than normal in many parts of the country.

This issue is not alien to Virginia communities.

According to the CDC, Virginia is one of the five U.S. states most impacted by alpha-gal syndrome, a tickborne illness that makes the body allergic to red meat consumption.

As someone who lives with a mild form of alpha-gal, I understand the severity of tickborne illnesses.

With a renewed federal focus on prevention and treatment efforts, I participated in an HHS roundtable with HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Secretary Kennedy outlined his support for policies, including the Kay Hagan Tick Act, that tackle the challenges of tickborne diseases.

I am glad to be a leader for House action on the Kay Hagan Tick Act.

Research on the above diseases presents meaningful opportunities for finding better treatments.

Accordingly, these health care actions are capable of making a difference in the lives of our loved ones, our neighbors and our communities.

My Health Subcommittee believes in making a difference.

Whether I discuss potential health care solutions in DC or in our region, I will continue to work for policies that make a difference in the lives of Central, Southside and Southwest Virginia.

If you have questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact my office. You can call my Abingdon office at 276-525-1405 or my Christiansburg office at 540-381-5671. To reach my office via email, please visit my website at <https://morgangriffith.house.gov/>. Also on my website is the latest material from my office, including information on votes recently taken on the floor of the House of Representatives.

The Watchman: Beginnings

Here in the mountains of Buchanan County, in just a few weeks, we will be embarking on a new adventure for our residents and our youth. They will be moving to a different place.

Moving is not always easy; sometimes it's difficult, with many new challenges. In this article, we are going to look at a few people who received instructions from God to leave their old place and enter into their new beginnings.

You can read about them in the Bible in Joshua chapters 3 and 4. In these chapters, God told Joshua to have the priests of the Lord lead the way. They were to go first and lead the move of God with the ark, which contained the law God gave Moses, known as the Ten Commandments, on Mount Sinai in Exodus chapters 19 and 20. The ark itself represents the presence of God and His work.

So you see, God is calling on the ministers of the Lord to step forth and be leaders in this difficult transition for many. Leadership is needed to help guide the transition.

It's not easy. Trust me, I know. I lived in Garden Creek for more than 40 years. I graduated from Garden High School. I was a Green Dragon. My daughter was a Green Dragon.

Then, in 2001, Garden and Whitewood were consolidated to form Twin Valley High School. The Garden community lost its high school. It was really hard at first for the community and the students, but one thing about young people is that they are resilient. They recover quickly from difficult conditions. As the students adapted, it helped the community adapt as well.

The Garden community has now spent 25 years without a high school. As a minister, I encourage everyone in our community to unite in prayer so this transition will be as smooth as possible for all involved. If we unite and pray, it will make a difference. Prayer changes things.

In Luke 18:1, God teaches that people "ought always



THE WATCHMAN

to pray, and not to faint." In other words, do not allow the situation to overwhelm you. Remember what Joshua said in Joshua chapter 3: The Lord will be with you. The priests shall lead you, and you shall remove from your place and go after it.

This is a new beginning—a new chapter in our lives filled with new dreams, new visions and new aspirations. Now our county will be one. We will

be the Eagles.

Isaiah 40:31 says that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, and they shall walk and not faint. That is why we must all unite and pray.

That is also why I have scheduled our Generations United event for Aug. 6-8 at Southern Gap, home of Southern Gap High School, which brings together the students of Grundy, Hurley, Twin Valley and Council high schools. Soon we will all be one.

My prayer is that the Lord will make us one and make Buchanan County great again. As Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:22, "That they may be one, as we are one."

On Saturday, Aug. 8, at 3 p.m., all who are able are invited to meet at the Susie and Roger Rife Park stage, also known as Poplar Gap Park. From there, we will proceed to the new school and pray for God's guidance and wisdom for the leadership and teachers, and for a smooth and successful transition for the students as they begin the new school year.

Please also mark your calendars for the Generations United Revival: Come Alive Virginia, Aug. 6-8, at the stage at Poplar Gap Park. Speakers will include Joel Horn, J.T. Harman, Steven and Lori Ward, Jeremy and Amy Mickles, along with many other youth groups from across our area.

Services begin nightly at 7 p.m. Please bring a chair and join us.

Stay tuned

Adult education connection

Life often presents unexpected challenges, from career changes and financial hardships to personal setbacks and family responsibilities. For many adults, these obstacles can feel overwhelming. However, one of the most effective ways to build resilience (the ability to adapt, recover, and grow through adversity) is through adult education.

Returning to the classroom is about much more than earning a diploma, certification, or new job skills. It is a journey that strengthens confidence, perseverance, and problem-solving abilities.

Adult learners often discover that every assignment completed, every test passed, and every new skill mastered reinforces their belief that they are capable of overcoming difficult situations.

The practical skills gained through adult education also contribute to resilience. Improved literacy, digital skills, financial knowledge, and workplace competencies prepare adults to navigate an ever-changing world with greater confidence. These skills increase adaptability, making it easier to respond to new opportunities and unexpected changes in both personal and professional life.

Perhaps most importantly, every educational achievement, whether completing a single class, earning a GED, or obtaining a college credential, serves as proof that persistence pays off. These accomplishments build self-confidence that extends beyond the classroom, empowering adults to tackle future challenges with determination and optimism.

Resilience is not something people are simply born with; it is a skill that can be developed over time. Adult education provides the knowledge, support, and experiences that help individuals become stronger, more adaptable, and better prepared for whatever life brings. By investing in learning, adults are not only improving their education; they are building the resilience needed to thrive in every aspect of life.

For information about adult education classes in our local area, please contact Southwest Regional Adult Education at 276-889-5424.



Debbie Gibson – Waiting on the sun

It is dark. Dark-thirty, as I have been known to call it. The back door is open, and I can hear the cicadas. The sun is still tucked away, and here I am writing to you. I have no idea why my sleep patterns have changed to awaken me at this hour every single day. I get up, go to the bathroom, make coffee, and sit in silence. No TV. No radio. Nothing but quiet stillness. Even the birds are still sleeping. They'll start their calls soon. I'm up before the chickens. Chickens don't have anything on me. I am the lone up-riser in this house. I get to greet the sun every day.

Of course, I am going to need a nap later. So, let it also be known that I am a napper. I love a nap. Kindergarteners get them. So why can't I? Just because I am not four years old should not imply that I cannot appreciate the rejuvenating effects of a good nap. The way I look at it, it turns one day into two. You wake up twice, and begin again. If I don't like the way the first half of my day is going, there is always that second half. I am ever the optimist.

I tell my friends that I am Debbie of the Two Sleeps. Two sleeps used to be the reality in medieval times. People would go to bed, wake up to stoke the fire, stay up a while, and then go back to bed. I get it. The rest of my family does not.

My husband can sleep, and he is always incredulous that I have accomplished so much before he even enters the kitchen. Bills are paid. Laundry is done. I've swept, mopped, swiped, and shined it all before the sun comes up. I've read the latest news, wished all sorts of people happy birthday on Facebook, planned my day, and by the time he gets up, it is as though we are living in separate households. I get up. He sleeps. I go down. He stays up. Our circadian rhythms are not in sync, but our love is still intact.

I tell him what he's missed. The sky's color as the sun rose. I tell him what creatures have ventured through the yard as he slept: the piebald deer, the twin fawns all spotted with their little white polka dots, the fox that likes to walk the back of our fence line, and the huge groundhog that owns this corner of the world. Living next to the river gives me a wildlife advantage. Everything needs a drink.

I tell him what I thought about before he rolled over. It takes a while for it to register, for he is on his first cup of coffee and I have already had my fill and switched over to sweet tea. I've already solved the world's problems, while he is buttering his biscuit. I've already planned what is for supper, while he hasn't thought past the creamer in his coffee. It works for us.

I don't know if this pattern will continue now that I have retired. Maybe, maybe not. But I do know this. These early morning hours during dark-thirty have been my salvation. They have helped me navigate all that is required of me. They have given me solitude to write. They have enabled me to gently ease into my day.

They have slowed my heart rate down. They have allowed me to take deep breaths. These dark-thirty hours have brought me peace. Secretly, I hope they continue.

As daylight approaches and the birds begin to sing, I think about the ways God's different creatures greet the world. A song, a flight, a buzzing of wings, a sauntering toward the river, a nibble of grass, a hopping from tree limb to tree limb all signify a new day. My early rising should be counted as one of those greetings. Debbie of the Two Sleeps is up. Good Morning, Sunshine!

In whatever manner your sleep patterns manifest, my hope is that they do you good. I hope you locate the moments of peace and tranquility. I hope you revel in your quietude. I hope you wish upon a star. I hope you see something that no one else sees. I hope you commune with all that is good in life.

Until next week! I have to go and sit on the back porch with my coffee. If you're up, you can join me. We'll wait on the deer and the groundhog.

THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER

The Virginia Mountaineer (USPS NO. 660-760) is published every Thursday by Virginia Media, LLC., 1633 W Main St, Salem, VA 24153. Entering in the Grundy Post Office as periodicals May 11, 1922, under Act of March 2, 1879. Periodicals postage paid at Grundy, VA 24614. Postmaster Send address changes to The Virginia Mountaineer.

OPINIONS

The views expressed in our opinion section represent the views of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Virginia Mountaineer or Virginia Media, LLC. Anyone wishing to respond to a column or editorial may contact us at (540) 389-9355.

STAFF

MICHAEL SHOWELL: President, Virginia Media, LLC
AILA BOYD: Executive Editor, Virginia Media, LLC
WENDI CRAIG: Advertising
CHAD COOPER: Editor
ANOTHY STEVENS: Sports Reporter

CONTACT

THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER
Telephone: (540) 389-9355
Member
Virginia Press Association
National Newspaper Association
Advertising rates on request

Savvy Senior: Robotic Pets Can Provide Comfort to Seniors

BY JIM MILLER
Dear Savvy Senior,
My mother, who has dementia, recently moved into an assisted living facility that doesn't allow pets. I'm thinking about getting her a robotic pet to cheer her up. Are they worth it, and if so, which one do you recommend?

--Inquiring Daughter
Dear Inquiring,
It's completely natural to want to bring a little furry joy into your mom's life. Moving into a new home without her pets can be tough, and sometimes even a small companion can make a big difference. Robotic pets – life-like, interactive companions – can brighten the days of seniors with dementia in ways you might not expect. They're more than just cute gadgets; they offer comfort, companionship, and a sense of purpose, along with plenty of

smiles and fun. Before you pick one, here's what you should know.
Why pets matter
Pets aren't just cute – they're family. They bring happiness, companionship, and even a gentle sense of routine. Studies have shown that pets can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, encourage light activity, and improve overall well-being. They can also provide a sense of connection, which can be especially grounding for seniors living with cognitive changes.
Unfortunately, many seniors, like your mom, have to give up pets when they move into care facilities or can no longer care for them on their own. That's where robotic pets can step in. Many studies have shown that robotic companion animals can improve quality of life by offering comfort, interaction, and a sense of companionship.



JIM MILLER
SAVVY SENIOR
Still, it's important to remember that not all seniors connect with robotic pets. Some may ignore them completely, while others enjoy holding them or respond positively to a lifelike companion that reacts and even "talks back."
Best options
If you're looking for a high-tech option, Jennie, a new Labrador puppy from Tombot (tombot.com), is the most impressive option available. Soft, cuddly, and very lifelike, she reacts to touch and voice, moves naturally, and even barks on command. A smartphone app lets you name

her, customize her behavior, and track interactions. She runs on a rechargeable battery and is expected to cost around \$1,500, with financing available. Jennie is currently on back order, with new units expected this summer or fall, so interested buyers may need to join a waitlist.
If that's more than you want to spend, Joy for All Companion Pets (joyforall.com) are a wonderful alternative. These cats and dogs cost \$160 or \$180 and respond to touch with purring or barking. They can move their heads, lift their paws, and open and close their eyes. With soft, brushable fur and a gentle "heartbeat," they feel surprisingly real. They also give seniors a comforting routine, like stroking or "feeding" their pet, which can be both calming and engaging.
For seniors who use a walker, the Walker Squawker bird (\$65), also available from Joy for All, attaches to the device and chirps

when the walker stops moving. It responds to touch and sound, offering a playful companion and gentle encouragement to stay active. Small touches like this can make a big difference in lifting spirits and keeping seniors engaged.
Robotic pets aren't a replacement for real animals, but they can bring companionship, comfort, and joy to seniors who can no longer have a furry friend. They are especially well-suited for seniors with dementia, providing interaction, routine, and a sense of connection. Whether you choose a sophisticated option like Jennie or a more affordable Joy for All pet, these interactive companions can turn moments of loneliness into smiles, connection, and a little extra joy every day.
Send your questions or comments to questions@savvysenior.org, or to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.

Rocklick News

By DEBBIE FOSTER
Hello Readers,

The Buchanan County Humane Society had its pet food giveaway yesterday. Stephanie shared the following update:
The Buchanan County Humane Society served 94 households yesterday and No change needed.. That's an average of 7.6 animals per household. Only 35% of them are spayed or neutered. That means there are 466 animals reproducing.
At this rate, there is a possibility of 1,500-3,000 offspring (puppies and kittens) by this time next year. A conservative estimate: "If 466 unspayed or unneutered cats and dogs continue reproducing, they could produce well over 2,000 puppies and kittens in just one year."
Please spay and neuter your pets, both male and female.



DEBBIE FOSTER
ROCKLICK
AREA NEWS
276-935-8296

Brother Scotty Coleman brought the message this morning, "We're Not Finished Yet." He read Mark 15:29-31, John 19:9-11, John 10:18, Mark 14:35, Psalm 68:18-20, and Isaiah 53:4-5, 12. The devil's after you. He doesn't want you to succeed. Hold on to God.
I'm finishing my article Saturday afternoon and will send it in tonight by 9 p.m. Vacation Bible School begins at our church tomorrow (Sunday) evening and goes through Wednesday. I'll try to get updates each night, as I won't be able to help this year. I'm a full-time caregiver now, and priorities have changed. This will be the first year since we joined the church that I haven't been able to help with VBS, and I miss participating in church events. I'm feeling a little down today. Too much is happening.
Pastor Mike Rife came by and visited with us. It was so good to spend time with him.
Happy 95th birthday to Charles Osborne. This man will not slow down. He still drives, mows and weed-eats his own yard. I hope your visit went well and you had a good day.

The mobile food truck, Feeding Southwest Virginia, an equal opportunity provider, had its food giveaway yesterday in Grundy. It served 142 households.
Happy 44th birthday to Snoda Compton, our special daughter of our heart. I hope you had a great day.
I delivered two of the kittens to their new mommy today. She sent pictures of them with her daughter, and I think it was love at first sight all the way around.
Reminder: The Buchanan County Humane Society will have a Back-to-School Yard Sale at its office behind the old Grundy High School on Thursday, Aug. 6, from 8 a.m. until noon. All clothing is \$1 per item.
My prayer list is long: Shannon and Christine (need urgent prayers), Sarah, Shawne, Brad, Joann, Michelle, Linda, Alvin, Mac, Gary, Jerry and Vicky, Betty and Arlene, Leroy, Linda and James, Craig, Scott, Martha, Teresa, Jacob, Shawn, Charles, Eugene, Melinda, Stanley and Crystal, Steve, Scotty, Brother Kenny, Tommy, Jon, Freddie and Sheila, Darrell and Vicki, Trish, Hudson, Amber, Dennis (urgent prayers needed) and Kathy, Courtland, Amy, Anthony, Henry, Jerry, Pastor Gene and Joyce Miller, Lilly, Clarence and Reba, Matt, Jerry and Lona, Brenda, Justin, Glenda, Shirley, JJ, Mike, Jack, Pastor Ronnie and Alma Sliger, Timmy, Riley, Darrell, Debbie, Maryann, Brian, Miss Gertrude (keep praying for answers for this sweet lady), Patty, Bill, Charles and Von, Ann, Jack and Annette, Curtis, Susie, Carol, Ronnie and Carol, Mike, Thelma, Kim, Judy, Malva, Gary and Linda, Randy, Tyler, Miss Jean, Jerry, D.C., June, Rachel, Jason, Lonie, Dean, Ralph, Ashleigh, Jim, Brenda, Barbara, Rodney, Chris and family, Lillian, Geraldine, Colin, Snoda, Judy, Mike and Dee, Bryan and Tina PPTA, Pam, Phillip, Peggy and family, Renee, Melissa, Charlie, Linda, Gordon, Miss Irene, Elmo, Teresa, Chris and Anthony, Miss Pauline, Margie, Melinda, Archie and Cathy, Martha, Colton, Ira, Jennifer, Daniel, Tracy, Anderson, Nicole, Dave, Hope, Liz, Barbara, Danny, Brenda, Nancy, Joe and Sherry, Gail, Bobby, Christie, Kenny, Baby Weston (encouraging updates, keep praying), Baby Leon, Sandy, Buck and Harriet, Tommy (motorcycle accident), Raymond, Mary, Wanda, Lois, Darrell, Sue, Jeff, Shirley, little Zach (keep praying), Bobby, Mary Lou, Dreama, and Ray and I. God knows every need.
If any of my Rocklick neighbors have anything they want me to share, please call me at 276-935-8296 or email me at dfoster_59@yahoo.com.
"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." Psalm 145:8 (KJV)
Until next week...
If you can be anything, be kind.



Participants Tina Clevinger, Pete Savage and Judd Reynolds work on their paintings during a Painting With Joy class held June 23 at The CAM. The class was one of several arts programs offered by the Theatre Guild of Buchanan County to encourage creativity and community involvement.

Spotlight on the CAM: A Look Back at an Incredible First Half of 2026

By JODI REYNOLDS
Theatre Guild of Buchanan County

As we reach the halfway point of 2026, it's remarkable to look back at everything that has happened at The CAM. What has already been an exciting year is really the result of countless volunteer hours, generous community support and a shared vision to make The CAM more than just a theater. It has become a place where creativity thrives in many different forms.
The year began with one of our favorite traditions, the CAMMIES Awards, celebrating the volunteers, performers, directors and supporters who make our organization possible. It was the perfect way to recognize the people whose passion keeps the arts alive in our community.
Our performance season quickly took center stage with Stephen King's Misery, a production that challenged both cast and crew and drew audiences from across the region. Running alongside the production were two exciting firsts for The CAM: our inaugural Community Art Show and our first-ever Misery-themed Escape Room. Throughout the run of Misery, visitors had the opportunity to enjoy an impressive collection of artwork by talented local artists, expanding the arts experience beyond the stage and showcasing the incredible creativity throughout our region. Additionally, the Misery-themed Escape Room offered participants an exciting new challenge unlike anything else in

the area.
Spring continued with Matilda Jr., followed by Disney's The Jungle Book KIDS in June, where dozens of young performers demonstrated that the future of community theater is brighter than ever.
The CAM also continued to grow beyond theatrical productions. Our Third Thursday Summer Concert Series debuted in The Courtyard, bringing live music, local food trucks and neighbors together on summer evenings. We were also thrilled to welcome local artist Debbie Jackson, who introduced Painting With Joy. This inspiring art class encouraged participants of all experience levels to set aside perfection, embrace creativity and enjoy the process of making art. The enthusiastic response confirmed what we've long believed: our community is eager for opportunities to create as well as to watch.
July brought another highlight with our annual Acting Camp. Almost 70 young performers spent four days building confidence, making friends, learning theater skills and discovering the joy of performing before taking the stage in their end-of-camp showcase.
While the performances and events have filled our calendar, some of the year's greatest accomplishments have happened quietly behind the scenes. This summer we completed major facility improvements, including new electrical service, dedicated food truck hookups, upgraded backstage and outdoor lighting, a beautifully refinished stage floor and the third and

final phase of our 18-month spray foam insulation project. These investments improve safety, increase energy efficiency and ensure that The CAM continues to serve our community for years to come.
Another exciting milestone was welcoming Wade Vance as The CAM property manager. With Wade's impressive skill set, he helps keep The CAM looking great and operating smoothly.
Third Thursday concerts continue throughout the summer; preparations are underway for The Beverly Hillbillies this October; our massive stage curtains will soon receive a professional cleaning; and It's a Wonderful Life will close the year with another season of community and celebration.
Looking back, one word captures the first half of 2026: growth.
Growth in performances. Growth in programming. Growth in facilities. Growth in partnerships. Most importantly, growth in the number of people who call The CAM their creative home.
To everyone who has attended a performance, visited an art show, taken a class, volunteered, donated, sponsored an event or shared our story with a friend, thank you. Together, you've helped make the first half of 2026 one of the most successful chapters in The CAM's history, and we can't wait to see what the rest of the year will bring.
Please follow us on our social media channels and visit our new, user-friendly website at www.seeyouatthecam.com. We can't wait to see you at The CAM.



An up to \$95,000 grant to expand river access at the Breaks Interstate Park was closed recently. Breaks Park Superintendent Austin Bradley, left, inked the agreement earlier this month. He is pictured here with VCEDA Executive Director/General Counsel Jonathan Belcher, right.

VCEDA grant approved to expand Breaks Park River access

Virginia Mountaineer

An up to \$95,000 grant to the Breaks Interstate Park from the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) will help to expand river access within the park.

The grant, closed recently, will be used to develop infrastructure and improvements at the park's Ratliff Hole River Access area. Improvements planned include renovation of restroom facilities, repaving of the entrance road and parking lot and bank stabilization.

The funds come from the VCEDA Civil Penalties Fund and are being used as match funding for an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant received by the park.

"The Breaks Interstate Park is a big tourism destination in our region and VCEDA is pleased to award this grant which will further expand tourism opportunities

at the park," said VCEDA Executive Director/General Counsel Jonathan Belcher. "Increased tourism is expected from the expanded river access and increased tourism translates into additional revenues for our counties through the additional lodging, food and gas taxes collected from those visiting in the region."

The park currently has 22 full-time and 85 part-time employees.

"Ratliff Hole is a river access area treasured by our guests for providing easy access to the Russell Fork for activities such as swimming, kayaking and fishing," said Breaks Interstate Park Superintendent Austin Bradley. "The VCEDA grant will serve as match funding for more than \$300,000 in federal grants and will allow us to renovate restrooms, improve parking and repair road access to the area. We hope that this will be Phase I in a broader effort to create a riverside camping area.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

FROM PAGE 1A

al preparedness initiative funded by the Center for Disaster Philanthropy following Hurricane Helene. The grant has enabled United Way of Southwest Virginia to conduct preparedness training sessions throughout the region and provide free family emergency preparedness buckets to participating households.

"Our goal is to do 25 trainings and distribute 250 preparedness buckets," Moore said, adding that the program has already exceeded its original goal thanks to strong participation throughout Southwest Virginia.

For Moore, disaster preparedness isn't just part of his job—it's something he has experienced firsthand.

Before joining United Way, he worked in emergency management, conducting damage assessments after major flooding events throughout Southwest Virginia. Those experiences placed him face-to-face with families who had lost homes, vehicles and personal belongings, reinforcing the importance of preparing before disaster strikes instead of scrambling afterward.

Throughout the presentation, Moore reminded attendees that preparedness isn't about fear.

Instead, he described it as peace of mind.

"There's really no perfect way to prepare, but being ready is better than nothing," he told the audience. "If you feel unprepared, you're not alone."

Rather than asking people to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on emergency equipment, Moore encouraged families to build their plans one step at a time.

He compared emergency preparedness to building a snowman. Just as a snowman begins with one snowball, family preparedness begins with one small decision. Whether it's purchasing bottled water during a grocery trip, making copies of important documents or discussing an evacuation plan with family members, every small action contributes to a safer household.

Moore explained that federal emergency officials generally recommend families prepare enough food and water to survive for at least 72 hours without outside assistance. In Buchanan County, however, he believes residents should plan for even longer.

Mountain roads, washed-out bridges and flash flooding can quickly isolate entire communities, making it difficult for emergency crews to reach affected areas. In those situations, families may need enough supplies to remain self-sufficient for as long as a week.

The discussion focused heavily on hazards familiar to local residents.

Flooding remains one of the region's greatest threats, but Moore also discussed severe winter storms, prolonged power outages and even the growing wildfire risk during dry conditions. He noted that Virginia has experienced numerous federally declared disasters in recent years, several of which have affected



Buchanan County resident Nathan Wolford displays the emergency preparedness bucket he received following a disaster preparedness workshop July 23 at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center. The free workshop, presented by United Way of Southwest Virginia Disaster Preparedness Manager Joseph Moore, provided practical tips and emergency supplies to help families prepare for floods, severe weather and other disasters.

Southwest Virginia, demonstrating that no community is immune from emergencies.

Moore encouraged attendees to think about their own circumstances when creating an emergency plan.

Families with infants may need diapers and formula. Pet owners should include food, leashes and medications for their animals. Residents who rely on oxygen concentrators or other electrically powered medical equipment should develop backup plans for extended outages, including generators or battery backups whenever possible. People living in mobile homes should be prepared to relocate quickly when dangerous weather approaches.

He also shared personal stories from his own household, explaining how he and his wife discussed escape routes after purchasing their first two-story home. Even their family dog has become part of their preparedness routine through evacuation practice.

Those lighthearted stories served as reminders that emergency planning doesn't have to be intimidating. Instead, it should become a normal part of family life.

Another important topic involved receiving accurate information during emergencies.

Moore urged residents to sign up for local emergency notification systems, keep weather radios readily available and verify information through trusted sources instead of relying solely on social media rumors.

False reports, he explained, often spread quickly during disasters and can create unnecessary confusion when residents are already dealing with stressful situations.

Emergency preparedness buckets distributed during the workshop included weather radios, flashlights,

whistles, emergency blankets, water purification tablets, first-aid supplies and waterproof pouches for storing important documents. Moore encouraged participants to customize those kits by adding foods their families regularly eat, extra prescription medications, batteries, phone chargers and other personal necessities.

Moore also stressed the importance of organizing important paperwork before disaster strikes.

Insurance policies, driver's licenses, medical records and photographs documenting the condition of homes and personal property can make filing insurance claims and applying for disaster assistance significantly easier following an emergency. He also encouraged renters to consider renters insurance, noting that many people mistakenly believe their landlord's insurance covers their personal belongings when it often does not.

While emergency supplies are important, Moore said one of the most valuable resources during any disaster is a strong community.

He encouraged neighbors to know one another before emergencies happen, check on elderly residents following storms and develop relationships that can make recovery easier when emergency responders are overwhelmed with calls for assistance. Families should also establish meeting locations and discuss evacuation plans with children so everyone knows where to go if they become separated.

Financial preparedness was another topic discussed during the workshop.

Moore acknowledged that not every family can immediately set aside a large emergency fund, but he encouraged participants to save what they can over time. Even a modest amount of emergency cash can help cover unexpected expenses, such as fuel, lodging or emergency supplies, when disasters disrupt everyday life.

During a question-and-answer session, Moore explained how federal disaster declarations work and discussed how United Way partners with local organizations and government agencies to assist families recovering from federally declared disasters. He described programs that have helped residents repair homes, replace damaged property and navigate recovery resources after major disasters across Southwest Virginia.

As the evening concluded, each household received a preparedness bucket to take home.

Moore encouraged participants not to place the buckets in a closet and forget about them, but instead use them as the starting point for a more comprehensive family emergency plan.

His final message was simple: disaster preparedness isn't about expecting the worst every day. It's about taking practical steps today that can reduce fear, lessen stress and help families recover more quickly when the unexpected happens.

ADKINS QUESTIONS

FROM PAGE 1A



Buchanan County Supervisor Trey Adkins addresses members of the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority during the board's July 20 meeting at the IDA offices in the Richardson Building in Grundy. During his remarks, Adkins raised questions about transparency, the Appalachia School of Law, legal contracts and other matters involving the authority's operations.

Adkins then turned his attention to former IDA board member and chairman Tim O'Quinn, who was unanimously removed from the board by the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors earlier this month.

Adkins disputed statements O'Quinn made on social media alleging the IDA board was not allowed to fully investigate the proposed financial assistance package for the Appalachia School of Law before approving it.

According to Adkins, IDA meeting minutes show O'Quinn and former board member Alicia O'Quinn were appointed to work directly with representatives of the law school on behalf of the IDA.

He also pointed to January 2026 discussions in which he offered IDA members access to confidential information concerning the law school if they signed nondisclosure agreements.

Adkins said the committee was later dissolved at the request of then-Chairman Tim O'Quinn after members declined to sign the agreements.

"I came here and said we're going to give you everything," Adkins told the board. "We're going to let you see everything that I see."

Adkins argued those events contradict later claims that board members were prevented from conducting due diligence before the county ultimately approved financial assistance for the law school.

He also questioned how a \$10,000 payment connected to former Tazewell County attorney Flux Neo was presented to the board earlier this year.

Although Adkins acknowledged the payment appeared within an accounts payable packet approved by the board, he argued it should have been listed separately because of its significance.

"This was not petty," Adkins said. "This should have been on an item of its own and made it clear to the board what you were voting on."

Adkins also questioned a contract signed by O'Quinn with Neo.

According to Adkins, board members were never specifically asked to approve hiring Neo, the contract terms or the initial \$10,000 payment before the agreement was executed.

He asked the current board not to ratify the contract until further legal review could be conducted.

"My request here tonight is for that to be tabled," Adkins said. "I don't think legally you can ratify it if you weren't asked."

During his remarks, Adkins also questioned communications surrounding the hiring of outside legal counsel.

Presley confirmed he had previously advised the IDA he could continue serving as legal counsel if board members formally voted to waive any potential conflict of interest.

Board members acknowledged the subject had been discussed, although no formal waiver was ever approved.

Adkins also raised questions about former Executive Director Matt Fields, including the circumstances surrounding a county-owned Chevrolet Tahoe that was involved in a crash in Roanoke and reimbursement requests submitted during Fields' employment.

He asked whether any current board members knew why Fields had been in Roanoke on county business when the accident occurred. No board member responded that they knew the purpose of the trip.

IDA board member Brenda Ward told Adkins that Fields conducted a lot of business for the IDA and had to travel a lot.

Adkins further questioned meal reimbursements Fields received while dining locally in Grundy, saying he believes taxpayer-funded meals should generally be limited to out-of-town travel conducted on official business.

As part of his presentation, Adkins submitted a Freedom of Information Act request seeking reimbursement records, invoices and documentation related to Fields' expenses, along with records identifying the purpose of the Roanoke trip.

Throughout his remarks, Adkins emphasized that he was not accusing current board members of wrongdoing but wanted them to carefully review past actions before taking additional votes.

"I don't have any hard feelings toward anybody here," Adkins said. "I'm making you all aware of the situation."

After Adkins concluded his remarks, the board entered executive session to discuss legal matters.

Following the closed session, the IDA reconvened in open session but took no action on any matters discussed.

Southern Gap Trails & Tunes Festival planned for Aug. 20-22

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

A new off-road motorsports event is coming to Buchanan County this summer as organizers prepare for the inaugural Southern Gap Trails & Tunes Festival, scheduled for Aug. 20-22 at Southern Gap Dirt Drags.

The three-day festival will feature a variety of competitions and activities for off-road enthusiasts, including side-by-sides, four-wheelers and dirt bikes. Organizers are promoting the event as a weekend of motorsports, entertainment and outdoor recreation.

Activities begin on Aug. 20, with gates opening at 5 p.m. and events starting at 7 p.m. The evening lineup includes a wheelie competition and a panty race.

On Aug. 21, gates will open at 11 a.m. with events beginning at 12:30 p.m. Scheduled competitions include a tire toss, Dizzy Daze challenge, blindfold breakout, Crazy 8s barrel racing and tug-of-war.

The festival concludes on Aug. 22, with gates opening at 10 a.m. and events starting at 11:30 a.m. Featured events include a donut competition, mud bog, hill climb, and drag racing. An awards ceremony will follow the day's competitions.

Admission is \$25 for a three-day wristband or \$20 for a single-day pass. Wristbands are currently available for purchase at Extreme Motorsports.

The festival is expected to attract riders, racers and spectators from throughout Southwest Virginia and neighboring states while showcasing Buchanan County's growing reputation as an outdoor recreation destination.

The Southern Gap area has become a focal point for recreation and tourism development in recent years, and organizers believe the new festival will provide another opportunity to bring visitors to the county while supporting local businesses.



Breese Bostic (left) and Easton Stevens (right) will represent Virginia at the 2026 TBF Junior World Championship, scheduled for July 29-31 on Lake Dardanelle in Russellville, Ark. The Buchanan County anglers earned the opportunity to compete against top youth bass fishermen from across the United States and around the world after qualifying through Virginia TBF Youth competition.

Buchanan County anglers headed to Junior World Championship

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Two of Buchanan County's young anglers will soon have the opportunity to compete against some of the best youth bass fishermen in the world.

Breese Bostic and Easton Stevens have qualified to represent Virginia at the 2026 TBF Junior World Championship, scheduled for July 29-31 on Lake Dardanelle in no change needed

The prestigious tournament, hosted by The Bass Federation (TBF), brings together top youth anglers from across the United States and several international teams to compete for a world championship title. Qualifying for the event is considered one of the highest achievements in youth bass fishing.

Bostic and Stevens earned their spots after advancing through Virginia TBF Youth competition, where they represented Buchanan County and demonstrated the skills needed to

compete at the national level.

The three-day championship will take place on Lake Dardanelle, one of Arkansas' premier bass fisheries. Daily takeoff is scheduled for 6 a.m., with weigh-ins beginning at 2 p.m. Central Time at Lake Dardanelle State Park.

The tournament provides young anglers with an opportunity to compete on a national stage while learning from experienced volunteers and professional anglers. In addition to testing their fishing abilities, participants gain valuable experience in sportsmanship, conservation and competitive fishing.

As Virginia's state qualifiers, Bostic and Stevens will carry not only the Commonwealth's colors but also the pride of Buchanan County as they compete against elite youth anglers from around the world.

Their appearance at the Junior World Championship highlights the growing success of young anglers from Buchanan County and showcases the area's strong outdoor and fishing tradition.

In the Locker Room

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Just a few weeks ago, in my column, I wrote that Boston Celtics general manager Brad Stevens had broken my heart.

As a lifelong Boston Celtics fan, watching All-Star forward Jaylen Brown leave Boston for an aging Paul George felt wrong. Brown was in his prime, coming off another outstanding season in which he received a few votes for league MVP.

George has had a tremendous career, but he's no longer the player he once was. He has had multiple injuries, and from my perspective, the trade didn't make basketball sense.



I still don't believe Boston received equal value. Who cares if he thought he was the smartest person in the room; he probably is.

But something happened that no one — including me — saw coming.

That trade didn't just give the Philadelphia 76ers another All-Star. It changed the balance of power in the NBA.

When Brown arrived in Philadelphia, the 76ers already had former NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid and rising star Tyrese Maxey. Brown's championship pedigree, elite defense and ability to score from anywhere on the floor instantly made the Sixers one of the favorites in the Eastern Conference.

Then came the move that sent shockwaves throughout the league.

LeBron James agreed to leave the Lakers to join the Philadelphia 76ers on a team-friendly two-year, \$8 million contract with a player option, in pursuit of another NBA championship. Suddenly, the 76ers weren't simply contenders. They had assembled a roster loaded with championship experience, star power and talent that rivals some of the greatest teams the league has ever seen.

LeBron's résumé speaks for itself. The 41-year-old is a four-time NBA champion, four-time NBA Finals MVP, four-time league MVP, a 22-time All-Star and the NBA's all-time leading scorer. He has won championships with Miami, Cleveland and the Lakers and continues to redefine what longevity looks like in professional sports.

Embiid is one of the league's most dominant centers when he is on the floor. The 2023 MVP is a two-time scoring champion, a seven-time All-Star and one of the NBA's premier defenders. When healthy, there are few players capable of controlling a game the way Embiid can.

Brown was the 2024 NBA Finals MVP after helping lead Boston to an NBA championship. He is a five-time All-Star, a two-time All-NBA selection and one of basketball's elite perimeter defenders.

Maxey has rapidly developed into one of the NBA's

SEE IN THE LOCKER ROOM | 3B

Meet the Eagles event rescheduled for Aug. 19

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Southern Gap High School has rescheduled its inaugural "Meet the Eagles" community event, giving students, families and supporters a new opportunity to kick off the school's first year together.

The event will now be held Wednesday, Aug. 19, from 5 to 8 p.m. at Southern Gap High School.

Although the date has changed, school officials said the event will continue to offer an evening of community fellowship, school spirit and family-friendly activities as the Eagles prepare for their inaugural athletic season.

Residents will have the opportunity to meet Southern Gap's stu-



dent-athletes, coaches and athletic programs while enjoying a vendor fair, music, inflatable attractions and other activities. The event is open to the public.

The celebration comes just days before Southern Gap opens its doors for its first school year following the consolidation of Buchanan County's

four high schools. School officials hope the event will bring together students, parents, alumni and community members to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in Buchanan County athletics.

The Eagles will begin their inaugural football season Aug. 21 when they host Holston in the program's first regular-season game after opening preseason play with an Aug. 15 home scrimmage against Patrick Henry.

School officials encourage the community to update their calendars and attend the rescheduled event to meet the athletes who will represent Southern Gap during its historic first year.

Additional information about the event will be released as it becomes available.

YMCA basketball camp tips off this week

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

As summer vacation begins to wind down, young basketball players across Buchanan County will have one more chance to hit the court, learn new skills and prepare for the upcoming season during the Buchanan County YMCA's annual Co-Ed Youth Summer Basketball Camp.

The three-day camp kicks off this Wednesday and will conclude on Friday. The camp was designed for boys and girls entering the second through eighth grades.

Leading the camp will be Southern Gap High School varsity boys basketball head coach Jory Rife, who will help campers strengthen the fundamentals of the game while emphasizing teamwork, sportsmanship

SEE BASKETBALL CAMP | 3B

YMCA golf tournament set for Aug. 14

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Golfers from across the region will have the opportunity to enjoy a day on the course while supporting the Buchanan County YMCA during the organization's annual Golf Tournament on Friday, Aug. 14.

The tournament will feature a two-player captain's choice format with four flights and will begin with a

shotgun start at 10:30 a.m.

The annual event serves as one of the YMCA's fundraising efforts, helping support programs and services offered throughout the year to children, families and the community.

In addition to friendly competition on the course, participants will enjoy a buffet dinner following play. Trophies and special awards will be presented to top finishers, and golfers will also have the chance to compete for several hole-in-one prizes.

Tournament organizers encourage golfers of all skill levels to participate, noting the event is designed to provide an enjoyable day of competition while supporting the YMCA's mission.

Teams interested in participating are encouraged to register as soon as possible.

For additional information or to register, contact the Buchanan County YMCA at 276-935-8871 or visit www.buchanancountyyymca.org.

ON THE FARM

WORD SEARCH

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

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

AGRICULTURE
AUTOMATIC
CANAL
CHANNELS
CONSERVATION
CROPS
DISTRIBUTION
DRIP
EFFICIENCY
FARMING
FLOW
HYDRATION
MOISTURE
PIPELINE
PRESSURE
PUMP
RESERVOIR
SATURATION
SOIL
SPRAY
SPRINKLER
SYSTEM
VALVES
WATER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

CLUES ACROSS

1. Egyptian bull god
5. Romanian monetary unit
8. Santa's helper
11. Fictional Pink Floyd corporal
13. Sea eagle genus
14. Broad volcanic crater
15. Minneapolis suburb
16. Actual commercial worth (abbr.)
17. Exchange rate
18. Ethnic peoples in Guinea
20. Men's fashion accessory
21. Craft material
22. Offerings
25. Early
30. Large room
31. Soviet Socialist Republic
32. One who hauls
33. Shorthand for accepting
38. Promotional materials
41. Loss of memory
43. One who beheads
45. Photographers
48. Small, rich sponge cake
49. White clerical vestment
50. Partner to "ooched"
55. Abba __, Israeli politician
56. Zero
57. Owl monkey genus
59. Lace bug genus
60. Mild expression of surprise
61. Storage devices
62. Keyboard key
63. Make a mistake
64. One-time Korean president

CLUES DOWN

1. Bridge building degree
2. Expression of sorrow or pity
3. Large, stocky, lizard
4. Rumanian river
5. Missive
6. Stout-bodied moths
7. Brings out
8. Bird of prey
9. King of Thebes
10. Cleaving tool
12. African antelope
14. Three are particularly famous
19. Satisfy
23. C. European river
24. Dictator
25. Portion of (abbr.)
26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
27. Consume food
28. Woman (French)
29. Scrape or wear away by friction
34. Popular vegetable
35. Pacific Standard Time
36. Brazilian state capital
37. Paddle
39. Cause to become insane
40. Drier and flakier
41. Mimic
42. ESPN host Kimes
44. One who moseys
45. Secret political clique
46. Behind the stern of a ship
47. Supernatural force
48. Sanctuary in Orthodox churches
51. Swiss river
52. Grayish white
53. Engrave
54. UNC's chief rival
58. Midway between south and southeast

PUZZLE SOLUTION

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

SUDOKU

	9			6				
					4			
				5		8		
	3						8	
6	5							7
7				6	4	1	5	
				7	2			
		8				9	1	2
	4		9					3

Level: Intermediate

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to irrigation.

E H S O

Answer: Hose

GUESS WHO ?

I am an actor and former athlete born in Michigan on July 30, 1968. I attended Western Michigan University, where I played football. I played a handful of seasons in the NFL. I segued into acting and starred on a TV series as the lead character's father. I also have been in many movies.

Answer: Terry Crews

CRYPTO FUN

Solve the code to discover words related to irrigation. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 12 = R)

A. 14 7 22 11 12
Clue: H2O

B. 10 12 9 8 20
Clue: Plants grow as food

C. 22 1 12 4 17 11
Clue: Flourish

D. 24 12 4 8
Clue: Slowly leak

Answers: A. water B. crops C. thrive D. drip

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

SUDOKU SOLUTION

8	9	5	4	3	6	2	7	1
3	2	6	7	1	8	4	9	5
4	1	7	2	5	9	8	3	6
1	3	9	5	2	7	6	8	4
6	5	4	8	9	1	3	2	7
7	8	2	3	6	4	1	5	9
9	6	3	1	7	2	5	4	8
5	7	8	6	4	3	9	1	2
2	4	1	9	8	5	7	6	3

Horoscopes

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20
Aries, your bold approach is magnetic right now. If you have a big idea that you've been waiting to share, present it now. Everyone is ready to listen.
TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21
Think about how you can treat someone else to something nice, whether it is a gift, time spent with you or whatever it is that they desire. Build the foundation for a stronger friendship.
GEMINI – May 22/June 21
This week is all about clearing out the old to make room for the new, Gemini. Begin decluttering your physical space and then move on to clearing out your mind.
CANCER – June 22/July 22
Cancer, your social circle is a great asset this week. Reach out to a friend you haven't spoken to in a while. You might find the conversation sparks a great new collaborative idea.
LEO – July 23/Aug 23
Leo, your hard work is finally getting the recognition it deserves. Don't be afraid to accept any praise that comes your way. You will inspire others with your natural leadership and confidence.
VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, whether it is picking up a new hobby or diving into a book you have been meaning to read, you are craving knowledge this week. Your mind is hungry for growth, so feed it.
LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23
Right now you are able to resolve lingering tensions with ease, Libra. Lean into your diplomatic nature; you have the power to turn a complicated situation into a win-win for everyone.
SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22
The connections you nurture this week will prove incredibly lucky for you, Scorpio. You will come across as deeply authentic, which can draw people to you like a magnet.
SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21
Getting details handled early on will clear the path for a much more open week as the weekend approaches, Sagittarius. Take to the task at hand now and reap the rewards later.
CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20
Your creativity is off the charts right now, Capricorn. You might find that you are better positioned to problem-solve when you're doing things unrelated to the task at hand.
AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
It is a wonderful time to redecorate the garden or spend quality time with family, Aquarius. Nurturing yourself will give you the stamina to tackle the world outside of your home.
PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
Pisces, people are generally interested in what you have to say this week, so be sure to speak up. Your message may inspire others.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

JULY 26
Roger Taylor, Drummer (77)
JULY 27
Winnie Harlow, Model (32)
JULY 28
Lori Loughlin, Actress (62)
JULY 29
Josh Radnor, Actor (52)
JULY 30
Seth Avett, Musician (46)
JULY 31
Joey King, Actress (27)
AUGUST 1
Jason Momoa, Actor (47)

IN THE LOCKER ROOM

FROM PAGE 1B

brightest young guards. After winning the league’s Most Improved Player Award in 2024, he earned All-NBA honors and became an All-Star starter in 2026. His speed, scoring ability and relentless energy make him one of the most exciting players in basketball.

Rounding out the starting lineup is rookie VJ Edgecombe, the third overall pick in the 2025 NBA Draft. After earning NBA All-Rookie First Team honors and winning the 2026 Rising Stars Challenge MVP, Edgecombe appears ready to become the next young star in Philadelphia. His athleticism and ability to impact the game on both ends of the floor give the Sixers another dangerous weapon.

Championships are never won on paper. Every so-called super team still has to build chemistry, stay healthy and prove itself over an 82-game season and through the playoffs.

Still, it’s difficult to remember many starting fives that can match Philadelphia’s collection of accomplishments.

Together, LeBron James, Joel Embiid, Jaylen Brown, Tyrese Maxey and VJ Edgecombe have combined for five NBA Most Valuable Player awards, five NBA championships, five NBA Finals MVP trophies, nearly 40 All-Star selections, multiple scoring titles and countless All-NBA honors. They feature a mix of championship experience, veteran leadership, players in their prime and one of the league’s brightest young talents.

Ironically, none of it may have happened without the trade that broke this Celtics fan’s heart.

Do I still wish Jaylen Brown was wearing Celtics green? Absolutely.

But as painful as that trade was for Boston fans, it may have helped create one of the most accomplished starting lineups the NBA has ever seen.

Only time will tell if this group delivers another championship. On paper, though, the rest of the NBA has every reason to be concerned.

Football season is almost here, and that means it’s time for one of my favorite traditions of the year — media days. Over the next couple of weeks, I’ll be traveling throughout Southwest Virginia to meet with coaches and student-athletes and hear about their expectations for the upcoming season.

This year’s annual football tab will have a different look than in years past. For the first time in decades, I won’t be covering three separate Buchanan County high school football programs. With Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley now united under one roof at Southern Gap High School, our coverage enters a new era alongside Buchanan County athletics.

That doesn’t mean readers will get any less football coverage. If anything, they’ll get more.

The 2026 football tab will spotlight our hometown Southern Gap Eagles as they prepare for their inaugural season, while continuing our longtime coverage of neighboring Honaker and Ridgeview. I’ll also be making trips to Richlands, Graham and Tazewell. Those Tazewell County schools will become familiar opponents for Southern Gap as the Eagles begin competing in the Southwest District alongside Virginia High and Marion. Lebanon is also a member of the Southwest District.

Still, the VHSL has announced that, following the 2026-2027 academic year, Lebanon will return to single A and will likely return to the Hogoheegee District.

One media day I’m especially looking forward to is Southern Gap High School’s inaugural media day on Aug. 6. The day will begin with cross country at noon, followed by golf at 12:45 p.m., volleyball at 1:30 p.m., band at 2:15 p.m., football and cheer at 3 p.m., and competition cheer at 3:45 p.m.

My media day tour begins Aug. 1 when Ridgeview High School hosts its football media day at noon in Rose Ridge.

On Aug. 6, Honaker will introduce the 2026 Tigers football team while also showcasing the school’s new artificial turf field beginning at 3 p.m. Richlands, under first-year head coach Bubba Edwards, will hold its media day on Aug. 7 at 2 p.m.

Graham head coach Tony Palmer has scheduled the G-Men’s media day for Aug. 10 at 9 a.m., followed by Tazewell’s media day at 10:30 a.m. later that morning. On Aug. 6, Honaker will introduce the 2026 Tigers football team while also showcasing the school’s new artificial turf field beginning at 3 p.m. Richlands, under first-year head coach Bubba Edwards, will hold its media day on Aug. 7 at 2 p.m. Graham head coach Tony Palmer has scheduled the G-Men’s media day for Aug. 10 at 9 a.m., followed by Tazewell’s media day at 10:30 a.m. later that morning.

“Thanks for joining me In the Locker Room. Until next week, let’s keep celebrating the victories, learning from the defeats, and always standing behind Buchanan County’s athletes.”

BASKETBALL CAMP

FROM PAGE 1B

and having fun.

Each morning will begin with a devotional before players move into skill instruction covering ball handling, shooting, defensive techniques, layups, agility drills and game situations. Campers will also have opportunities to put those lessons into action through scrimmages and friendly competitions.

Whether a child is picking up a basketball for the first time or looking to fine-tune their game before school starts, the camp is designed to help players of all skill levels improve while building confidence on and off the court.

Camp sessions will run from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. each day at the Buchanan County YMCA.

In addition to basketball instruction, every camper will receive a camp T-shirt, a pool pass and a snow cone pass. Daily awards will be presented throughout the week, and one participant will be recognized as Camper of the Week and will earn a complimentary one-year YMCA membership.

The cost for the three-day camp is \$75 for YMCA members, with each additional sibling costing \$60. For non-members, the fee is \$95, with additional siblings costing \$80 each.



Photo courtesy of Leigh Ann Hackney Facebook

YMCA to host cheerleading, tumbling camp with veteran coach

By CHAD COOPER
cookam@gmail.com

Young athletes looking to improve their cheerleading and tumbling skills will have the opportunity to learn from one of the region’s most experienced coaches when the Buchanan County YMCA hosts a one-day Cheerleading and Tumbling Camp on Saturday, Aug. 1.

The camp will be led by Elle Hackney, a coach with GymTyme Allstars who brings nearly two decades of experience in tumbling and cheerleading to the program.

The camp will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Buchanan County YMCA, located at 1059 Golden Wave Drive in Grundy. A lunch break will be included during the day.

Hackney has 17 years of tumbling experience, 10 years of cheerleading experience and seven years of coaching experience.

Throughout the camp, participants will receive instruction in tumbling fundamentals, drills, jumps,

stunts, dance routines and other cheerleading techniques designed to help athletes improve their skills while building confidence.

The camp is open to athletes looking to develop their abilities, whether they are new to cheerleading or preparing for school and competitive seasons.

In addition to on-the-mat instruction, each participant will receive a pool pass and a snow cone pass, both valid during the 2026 pool season.

Registration costs \$50 for Buchanan County YMCA members and \$60 for nonmembers.

Organizers say space is limited and encourage families to register early to secure a spot.

The camp is designed to provide athletes with quality instruction in a fun, encouraging environment while giving participants an opportunity to learn from an experienced coach with years of competitive and instructional experience.

For young cheerleaders hoping to sharpen their skills before the fall season, the camp offers a full day of hands-on training with one of the sport’s accomplished coaches.

Grill up a popular game day staple

Food features prominently when gathering for a game watch or tailgating outside the stadium of your favorite team. Perhaps no food is more synonymous with game day than chicken wings. When firing up the grill for the game this season, fans can look to this tasty recipe for “Grilled Honey and Sesame Seed Chicken Wings” from Lines+Angles.

GRILLED HONEY AND SESAME SEED CHICKEN WINGS
Makes 4 servings

- 1/2 cup dark soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger root, peeled and minced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chili paste
- 2 pounds chicken wings, tips removed, wings separated into drumettes and flats
- 1/2 cup honey
- 2 teaspoons hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds, lightly toasted
- 1 scallion, sliced



1. Preheat a gas or charcoal grill to a moderate heat, about 375 F.
2. Stir together the soy sauce, ginger, garlic, and chili paste in a large mixing bowl. Add the chicken, turning to coat, and let marinate for 15 minutes.
3. Spray the grill with cooking spray and then arrange the chicken on it in a single layer. Cover the grill with a lid and cook, turning often, until golden brown, about 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Whisk together the honey and hoisin in a small bowl and baste the chicken wings with the sauce. Cover with a lid and cook until caramelized, about 3 minutes.
5. Turn the wings and baste with more honey sauce. Cook uncovered for a further 2 to 3 minutes, taking care not to scorch them.
6. Transfer the wings to a platter and garnish with a sprinkle of sesame seeds and some sliced scallion. Serve with any remaining honey sauce on the side.

Your Community. Your News. Every Day.

Local Stories • Local People • Local Impact
Trusted Journalism Since 1869

Stay Connected

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

LOCAL NEWS. REAL IMPACT.

Support trusted journalism in your community.

VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER ONLY		
PRINT ONLY SUB	PRINT & ONLINE SUB	ONLINE ONLY SUB
 PRINT ONLY ONE YEAR	 PRINT & ON-LINE SUB MONTHLY BUNDLE	 ON-LINE ONLY SUB MONTHLY-BILLED QRTL
\$44.00 (In County Price)	\$6.50	\$3.50

The Virginia Mountaineer

Community Comes Together for Annual Festival

Honoring Our Veterans: A Day of Gratitude

Local Students Make an Impact in Science Fair

High School Sports Highlights

Your Community. Your News. Every Day.

Local Stories • Local People • Local Impact
Trusted Journalism Since 1869

READ ANYWHERE. ANYTIME. STAY CONNECTED.

YOUR SUBSCRIPTION. YOUR COMMUNITY. YOUR IMPACT.

TRUSTED LOCAL NEWS
Reliable reporting on what matters most to you.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION
Stories that bring us together and keep you informed.

FLEXIBLE OPTIONS
Choose the plan that fits your lifestyle and budget.

SECURE & CONVENIENT
Easy online subscription management.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

CALL US: (540) 389-9355
VISIT: virginiamountaineer.com

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING LOCAL JOURNALISM!

Free dinosaur show, ‘Alice in Wonderland’ Aug. 1

Virginia Mountaineer

“Dino Academy: A Dinosaur Discovery Show” and “Alice in Wonderland” are coming to the Buchanan County Public Library Saturday, Aug. 1, beginning at 11 a.m.

“We are so pleased to offer these great programs free to the people of Buchanan County,” said Children’s Librarian Teresa L. Matney. “Children and adults are sure to be delighted by these shows.”

Matney invites the community to step into the prehistoric world with Dino Academy. Led by the quirky and curious Dr. Sarah Tops, this action-packed adventure uncovers fascinating dino facts that will wow even the biggest dino fans. Featuring life-like, colorful dinosaur puppets that stomp, roar and charm their way into every heart, this show blends science, storytelling and imagination in the style of your favorite nature programs. It’s an unforgettable field trip through time—without ever

leaving your seat.

Following the Dino Academy, a free lunch will be provided for those in attendance prior to the performance of “Alice in Wonderland.”

The Lewis Carroll literary classic is magically brought to life in this 45-minute adventure. Join Alice on her journey into the rabbit hole, packed with some eccentric and fantastical characters who take the audience on an imaginative ride. Since 1865, this literary classic has been a favorite among young readers. Join the Queen of Hearts, the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter and Alice on this adventure in Wonderland.

Both programs are being presented by Bright Star Touring Theatre, a national touring company based in North Carolina.

The performances are made possible thanks in part to a grant from MALiA, the Mid-Atlantic Library Alliance.

For more information, please call the library at 276-935-5721.



Dr. Sarah Tops, along with her dinosaur friends, is excited to visit the Buchanan County Public Library on Saturday, Aug. 1, 2026.

CLASSIFIEDS

AUCTIONS

PUBLIC AUCTION! Lotscapes No Reserve Auction. Land Clearing, Earth Moving Equipment, Trucks, and More. Aug 4, 10am. Online Only. Hanover, Va. Bid at motleysindustrial.com. VAAL#16/NCAL#5914

HOME IMPROVEMENT

No more cleaning out gutters. Guaranteed! LeafFilter is backed by a no-clog guarantee and lifetime transferable warranty. Call today 1-877-614-6667 to schedule a FREE inspection and no obligation estimate. Get 15% off your entire order. Plus, Military & Seniors get an additional 10% off. Limited time only. Restrictions apply, see representative for warranty and offer details.

Safe Step. North Americas #1 Walk-In Tub. Comprehensive lifetime warranty. Top-of-the-line installation and service. Now featuring our FREE shower package and \$1600 Off for a limited time! Call today! Financing available. Call Safe Step 1-877-591-9950

Prepare for power outages today with a Generac Home Standby Generator. Act now to receive a FREE 5-Year warranty with qualifying purchase. Call 1-844-947-1479 today to schedule a free quote. It's not just a generator. It's a power move.

Replace your roof with the best looking and longest lasting material steel from Erie Metal Roofs! Three styles and multiple colors available. Guaranteed to last a lifetime! Limited Time Offer up to 50% off installation + Additional 10% off install (for military, health workers & 1st responders.) Call Erie Metal Roofs: 1-844-902-4611

LEGAL NOTICES

TRUSTEE SALE
7118 Deskins Road,
Vansant, VA 24656
Buchanan County

In execution of a Deed of Trust in the original principal amount of \$45,000.00, dated April 16, 2010 recorded in the Clerk’s Office of the Circuit Court of the Buchanan County, Virginia, in Document No. 100001013 and modified in Document No. 220000547, at the request of the holder of the Note, the undersigned Substitute Trustee and will offer for sale at public auction at the entrance to the Circuit Court of Buchanan County, 1012 Walnut Street, Grundy, on August 27, 2026at 12:30 PM the property described in said deed, located at the above address and briefly described as:

PARCEL 1:
Beginning at a stake which bears S 27 00 W 1.3 feet from Appalachian Power Company pole # 322-191, and also bears S 16 00 E 4 feet from a 6 inch apple tree, and approximately 6 feet East of the right to way of State Route 620; thence N 2 00 W 52 feet, and following the right of way line of State Route 620 for a part of said distance, to a stake in said Highway Right of

Way line; thence continuing with said right of way line, N 20 00 W 101 feet to a stake in the center of Prater Creek, said stake bearing N 10 00 W 15.5 feet from U.S. Geographical Survey B. Marker No. 22 WSM, and S 35 30 E 15.5 feet from a lead plug in the bridge pier connecting State Route 83 and State Route 620, and N 23 30 W 29 feet from an 11 inch locust; thence with the appropriate center of Prater Creek, descending, N 72 30 E 100 feet to a station in the center of said creek, said station bearing N 11 00 W 20 feet from a 15 inch hemlock and N 50 15 W 23 feet from a 12 inch buckeye; thence S 20 00 E 134 feet to a stake located approximately 3 feet above the toe of the hill; thence S 63 55 W 117 feet to the beginning, containing approximately 1/3 acre, more or less, with improvements thereon.

Less and Except the remainder of the property of which the property conveyed is a part, a right of way 20 feet in width, across the back of this property and being more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at a stake which bears S 27 00 W 1.3 feet from Appalachian Power Company pole no. 322-191, and also bears S 16 00 E 4 feet from a six inch apple tree, and approximately six feet of the right of way of State Route 620; thence N 2 00 W approximately 20 feet to a stake; thence N 63 55 E approximately 115 feet to a stake in the lower line of the lot above conveyed; thence S 20 00

E approximately 20 feet to a stake, located approximately three feet above the toe of the hill; thence S 63 55 W 117 feet to the beginning.

Less and Except from this conveyance, all the coal underlying the Tiller seam or the horizon thereof, which was previously conveyed to Island Creek Coal Company by Deed in Deed Book 186, page 95.

PARCEL 2:
Beginning at a stake 3 feet above the toe of the bank, corner to a lot purchased by parties of the second part from party of the first part; thence with the line of the parties of the second part S 20 E 134 feet to a stake in the center line of Prater Creek; thence leaving the line of the parties of the second part down Prater Creek to the eastern boundary of the 7.34 acre tract; thence leaving the creek up the hill with said eastern boundary of the

7.34 acre tract to a marked sycamore; thence S 20 30 E 386.4 feet to a point on the cliff, 2.5 feet below a 6 inch sugar tree; thence S 10 30 E 160 feet to a stake on a spur, witnessed by a small pine; thence N 68 30 W approximately 645 feet to a point in the edge of State Highway Right of Way to Route 620; thence with the Highway Right of Way approximately 315 feet to a stake in the highway right of way line and a corner of the property heretofore conveyed by the party of the first part to the parties of the second part; thence with the line of the parties of the second part S 2 E 52 feet to a stake; thence N 63 55 E 117 feet to the beginning, containing approximately 4 acres, more or less, and being all the property owned by par-

ty of the first part bounded on the north by State Route 620 and Big Prater River Creek, with improvements thereon. Less and Except and reserved from this property, that portion conveyed by Deed recorded in Deed Book 162, Page 99. Subject to any and all covenants, conditions, restrictions, easements, and all other matters of record taking priority over the Deed of Trust, if any, affecting the aforesaid property.

TERMS OF SALE: CASH:
A deposit of \$20,000.00 or 10% of the sales price, whichever is lower, cash or certified check will be required at the time of sale, but no more than \$9,000.00 of cash will be accepted, with settlement within fifteen (15) days from the date of sale. Sale is subject to post sale confirmation that the borrower did not file for protection under the U.S. Bankruptcy Code prior to the sale which affects the validity of the sale, as well as to post-sale confirmation of the status of the loan with the loan servicer including,

but not limited to, determination of whether the borrower entered into any repayment agreement, reinstated or paid off the loan prior to the sale. Sale is also subject to buyer providing Trustee with information needed for reporting requirements required by Federal law including FinCen requirements (31 CFR Chapter X) within 15 days from date of sale. In any such event, the sale shall be null and void, and the Purchaser’s sole remedy, in law or equity, shall be the return of his deposit without interest. Additional terms may be announced at the time of sale. Pursuant to the Federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, we advise you that this firm is a debt collector attempting to collect the indebtedness referred to herein and any information we obtain will be used for that purpose.

SAMUEL I. WHITE, P.C.,
Substitute Trustee
This is a communication from a debt collector.
FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:
SAMUEL I. WHITE,
P.C.(60472)
448 Viking Drive Suite 350
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
757-457-1460
Call Between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
or visit our website at www.siwpc.net
VAM-07-23,30;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Release Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2 Code of Virginia PUBLICATION NUMBER: 26TLDD02 APPLICATION NUMBER: 1011857

Dominion Coal Corporation is applying for bond release on Permit No. 1202036 located in Buchanan County 2.4 miles west of Oakwood on Webb Branch. This permit consists of 19.30 acres bonded under Cost Estimate Bond. As provided by 4VAC25-130-800.40 of the Virginia Coal Surface Mining Reclamation Regulations, the Applicant is requesting that the current total bond amount of \$320,600 in the form of insurance surety posted for this permit be released. The Applicant is also requesting in this application the deletion of the unmined ar-

eas and Phase III release of the Division of Oil and Gas (DGO) permitted road located within this MLR permit area, for a total of 19.30 acres to be deleted/released.

This bond release request is based on the following Phase III reclamation:

1. This applicant has never mined any coal on this permit; the unmined areas are being deleted.
2. The remaining areas totaling 4.91 acres, are DGO permitted gas well/line roads which are in use by the gas company and have met their Phase III requirements.
3. The Post-Mining Land Use is Industrial Oil and Gas usage for the 4.91 acres being proposed for Phase III release.

Any person with a valid legal interest which might be adversely affected by this proposal, or an officer or head of any federal, state or local government agency or authority, may within 30 days of (August 13, 2026) submit written comments or objections concerning this bond release, and may also request, in writing, that the Mined Land Repurposing Program hold an Informal Conference concerning this application. A copy of the application materials is available electronically for public inspection at <https://www.energy.virginia.gov/dm/inquiry/frm-Main.a.spx?ctl=4>

All correspondence concerning this application should be submitted to the Mined Land Repurposing Program (Attention: Permit Section), 3405 Mountain Empire Road, Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219. Telephone (276) 523-8160. Written comments and a request for informal conference may be e-mailed to the Division at repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.
VAM 07,23,30;08,6,13;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Reduction Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2 Code of Virginia PUBLICATION NUMBER: 26TLDD01 APPLICATION NUMBER: 1011841

The Black Diamond Company of 1073
Riverview Street, Grundy, Virginia 24614 is applying for bond reduction on Permit No.1102305 located in Buchanan County at the former Grundy Regional Airport, on Big Rock Branch, Turkeypen Branch, Cripple Creek, Little Prater Creek, and Big Lick Branch, north of Big Lick Branch, south of Little Prater Creek, east of Lovers Gap, and west of US Route 460, off Routes 737 and 718, approximately 1.4 miles west of Vansant, Virginia on the USGS Vansant and Prater quadrangle maps, latitude 370 13’ 57”, longitude 820 07’ 29”. This permit consists of 390.29 acres which are bonded under the Virginia Coal Surface Mining Reclamation Fund (Pool Bond) for \$471,600.00 in the form of insurance surety. As provided by 4VAC25-130-800.40 of the Virginia Coal Surface Mining Reclamation Regulations, the Applicant is requesting a bond reduction of \$461,600.00 on increment number 1, consisting of 389.97 acres.

This bond reduction request is based on completion of Phase III requirements and the following reclamation:

1. Types of Reclamation Work Performed: the areas proposed for bond reduction have been reclaimed, revegetated, and the post-mining land use has been achieved.
2. Appropriate Date(s) of Reclamation Work Performed: the majority of the reclamation work was performed between April 2021 and December 2024; part of the reclamation work was performed between February 2024 and October 2024, January 2025, and March 2025.
3. Description of Reclamation Results Achieved: the area proposed for a post-mining land use of Public Use – Buildings and Facilities and Fish and Wildlife Habitat - Wetlands has been reclaimed and revegetated to meet the requirements of the mining permit.
4. Description of the Post-Mining Land Use: Public Use – Buildings and Facilities and Fish and Wildlife Habitat - Wetlands.

Any person with a valid legal interest which might be adversely affected by this proposal, or an officer or head of any federal, state or local government agency or authority, may within 30 days of July 30, 2026 submit written comments or objections concerning this bond reduction, and may also request, in writing, that the Mined Land Repurposing Program hold an Informal Conference concerning this application. A copy of the application materials is available electronically for public inspection at

<https://www.energy.virginia.gov/dm/inquiry/frm-Main.a.spx?ctl=4>.

All correspondence concerning this application should be submitted to the Mined Land Repurposing Program (Attention: Permit Section), 3405 Mountain Empire Road, Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219. Telephone (276) 523-8160.

Written comments and a request for informal conference may be e-mailed to the Division at repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.
VM-07-30;2026

SERVICES

DIVORCE·Uncontested, \$525.00 + \$89.00 court cost. **WILLS**·\$295.00. No court appearance. Estimated completion time twenty-one days. Hilton Oliver, Attorney (Facebook). 757-490-0126. Se Habla Espanol. BBB Member.

<https://hiltonoliverattorneyva.com>

Consumer Cellular - the same reliable, nationwide coverage as the largest carriers. No long-term contract, no hidden fees and activation is free. All plans feature unlimited talk and text, starting at just \$20/month. For more information, call 1-855-262-5564

We Buy Houses for Cash AS IS!

No repairs. No fuss. Any condition. Easy three step process: Call, get cash offer and get paid. Get your fair cash offer today by calling Liz Buys Houses: 1-844-216-5028

WHAT BROKE

WHAT THEY CLAIMED

Their lies come out of your wallet. Insurance fraud costs everyone in Virginia \$1,000 per year. Learn how to spot it and report it at TheCostOfFraud.com.

Virginia Treasury Announces a New Record for Unclaimed Property Funds Reunited to Rightful Owners!

Over \$150 million successfully reunited to citizens in FY2026!

Have you lost track of any dormant accounts or checks? To locate and claim your unclaimed funds, visit our free search site today at:

vaMoneySearch.gov
Click and Claim

www.VirginiaMountaineer.com



An aerial view captures the latest construction progress at the Southern Gap Amphitheater, a project expected to bring concerts, festivals and community events to Buchanan County beginning in 2027. Local officials join Sunset Holler Inc. for the groundbreaking of the Sunset Holler Amphitheater on Monday, Oct. 27, 2025, at Southern Gap.

Southern Gap Amphitheater moves closer to 2027 debut

By **CHAD COOPER**
cookam@gmail.com

Construction continues to move forward on the Southern Gap Amphitheater, with crews making steady progress on what local officials hope will become a major destination for live entertainment, tourism and economic development in Buchanan County.

Work at the site has recently focused on development and infrastructure improvements, according to Sunset Holler Inc. Officials said the next major phase of construction will include erecting structural steel for the amphitheater's stage roof.

The project officially broke ground Oct. 27 during a ceremony at the Southern Gap Visitors Center that brought together local and state officials, community supporters and members of the Sunset Holler Inc. team to celebrate the start of construction.

When completed, the outdoor venue will seat more than 2,500 people and is expected to host concerts, festivals, community celebrations and other entertainment events, drawing visitors from throughout Southwest

Virginia and neighboring states.

Plans for the amphitheater include an 84-foot-by-57-foot performance stage with a 55-foot-by-42-foot clear area in the center that can accommodate a wrestling mat, allowing the venue to host athletic competitions in addition to concerts and other entertainment events.

The amphitheater is being designed by VMDO Architects and Terra Tech Engineering, with J.A. Street & Associates serving as the project's general contractor.

The venue is being constructed on the former Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure property, which became part of the Breaks Interstate Park system after documents finalizing the sale were signed Dec. 1, 2025. Under the agreement, Breaks Interstate Park acquired all Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure operations and associated assets, including the campground and approximately 35 acres of property. As part of the sale, an agreement was reached that allowed Sunset Holler Inc. to move forward with Asher McGlothlin's amphitheater project, ensuring construction would continue under new ownership.

"We are excited to see the continued progress at Southern Gap Amphitheater and grateful for the com-

mitment and hard work from everyone involved in the project," said Asher McGlothlin, president and director of Sunset Holler Inc. "This venue represents an opportunity to create a lasting asset for Buchanan County — a place where residents can gather, visitors can experience Southwest Virginia, and the region's rich musical heritage can be celebrated, preserved, and carried forward. Our goal is to create a space that pays homage to the traditions that have shaped this region while also providing a platform for new artists, new sounds, and the continued evolution of Appalachian music for generations to come."

Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, with the amphitheater scheduled to welcome its first performers and audiences during its inaugural season in 2027.

Once it opens, the Southern Gap Amphitheater is expected to become one of the largest outdoor entertainment venues in Southwest Virginia, giving residents and visitors a new place to enjoy concerts, festivals and community events while supporting Buchanan County's growing tourism and recreation economy.



An aerial view shows construction progress on the Southern Gap Amphitheater, where crews continue work on what is expected to become one of Southwest Virginia's largest outdoor entertainment venues. The project is scheduled to open in 2027. Construction continues on the Southern Gap Amphitheater at the former Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure property, now part of Breaks Interstate Park. The venue will seat more than 2,500 people and is expected to host concerts, festivals, community events and other entertainment beginning in 2027.

VDOT releases traffic alerts for Buchanan and nearby counties

By **CHAD COOPER**
coopkam@gmail.com

The Virginia Department of Transportation released traffic alerts for Buchanan and the surrounding counties. To keep motorists informed, VDOT provides weekly updates on highway construction and maintenance projects throughout Southwest Virginia.

The following are current VDOT projects in Buchanan, Dickenson and Tazewell counties that may cause traffic delays from July 27 through Aug. 2, 2026:

Buchanan County

Route 460/121 Poplar Creek Phase B: Be alert to a new traffic pattern on Route 460 at Grundy due to the construction of Route 460/121 Poplar Creek Phase B. The switch is approximately 1.1 miles west of the Route 460/Route 83 (Riverside Drive/Edgewater Drive) intersection in Grundy. Motorists should be alert to flaggers in the area. (Completion: Late 2027)

Dickenson County

Route 83 roundabout at Route 637: Construction continues for a roundabout and a new park-and-ride lot at the intersection of Route 83 and Route 637 in Dickenson County. Be alert to lane shifts and closures. Pay attention to flaggers, signs, and message boards in the area. (Completion: October 2026)

Russell County

Route 19 safety improvements: Safety improvements are underway on Route 19 northbound in the Rosedale area of Russell County. Lane closures will be in place starting 0.8 miles west of Route 80. The right lane is restricted to a width of 11 feet. Watch for signs and message boards. (Completion: November 2026)

Tazewell County

Second Street/Front Street Intersection Improvement – Richlands: Work is underway on a realignment project on 2nd Street and Front Street in the town of Richlands, modifying the raised median/island at the intersection of 2nd Street and Front Street and adding a raised median along Front Street to allow right turn movements from Kents Ridge Road.

A detour is anticipated in mid-to-late September. When the detour is in place, motorists traveling on Kents Ridge Road and Front Street will use 2nd Street and Floyd Avenue to access Front Street. Pay attention to

signs, message boards and construction crews in the area. (Completion: November 2026): Work is underway on a realignment project on 2nd Street and Front Street in the town of Richlands, modifying the raised median/island at the intersection of 2nd Street and Front Street and adding a raised median along Front Street to allow right turn movements from Kents Ridge Road. A detour is anticipated in mid-to-late September. When the detour is in place, motorists traveling on Kents Ridge Road and Front Street will use 2nd Street and Floyd Avenue to access Front Street. Pay attention to signs, message boards and construction crews in the area. (Completion: November 2026)

Route 19/460 drainage structure repairs at Corsica Drive: Due to drainage structure repairs on Route 19/460 at Corsica Drive in Tazewell County, a lane closure will be in place through July 31. Be alert to signs and message boards in the area.

Route 19/460 and Route 610 intersection improvements: An intersection improvement project is underway on Route 19/460, from the intersection of Route 19 with Route 460 at Adair Drive, to the intersection of Route 19/460 with Route 610 in the Claypool Hill area of Tazewell County. Anticipate shoulder and lane closures in the area. (Completion: December 2026)

Several interstate projects are also going on during this time on Interstate 81 and Interstate 77, including the following:

Interstate projects

Interstate 81/77

Interstate 81 – Exit 50 and mile marker 52 bridge rehabilitations (Smyth County): A project that includes bridge rehabilitation work on six bridges north and southbound at exit 50 and mile marker 52 in Smyth County is underway. Be alert to construction crews in the area. Nighttime lane closures will be in place for the duration of the project. Also, be alert to flaggers and/or lane closures on Kiawana Road and Nick's Creek Road. Pay attention to signs and message boards. (Completion: November 2027)

Interstate 81 – Exit 45 deceleration lane extension (Smyth County): A project to extend the deceleration lane at exit 45 northbound in the Marion area of Smyth County is underway. The project includes replacing the northbound I-81 bridge over Matson Drive. Be alert to periodic nighttime lane closures and shifted traffic over Matson Drive. (Completion: December 2027)

Interstate 81 – Bridge rehabilitation at mile marker 68 (Wythe County): Due to a bridge rehabilitation project on I-81 north and southbound over Reed Creek at mile marker 68 in Wythe County, be alert to periodic extended lane closures and a width restriction of 14 feet. Pay attention to signs and message boards. (Completion: September 2027)

Interstate 81 – Roadway improvements (Wythe County): A project is underway to construct an auxiliary lane southbound between exits 73 and 72. Be alert to periodic lane closures in this area. (Completion: Fall 2026)

Interstate 81/77 interchange at Wytheville: Due to improvements on I-81 and I-77 at the interchange at Wytheville, pay close attention to signs and message boards. Be alert to possible lane restrictions and traffic shifts. (Completion: Summer 2027)

Be alert to the following lane closures due to interstate maintenance activities:

Interstate 81

Daytime bridge repairs southbound near Exit 35 in Washington County, July 27 – 29.

Daytime brush removal north and southbound between mile marker 27 and Exit 54 in Washington and Smyth counties.

Daytime mowing operations north and southbound between the Tennessee state line and Exit 10 in Bristol.

Nighttime bridge deck repairs northbound near Exits 29, 35, 47, and mile marker 52 in Washington and Smyth counties.

Nighttime bridge inspections north and southbound between the Tennessee state line and Exit 13 in Bristol and Washington County.

Nighttime paving operations southbound between mile marker 56 and Exit 54 in Smyth County.

A superload is traveling northbound from Bristol to the West Virginia state line the week of July 27.

Interstate 77

Nighttime pothole patching north and southbound between Exit 41 and mile marker 67 in Wythe and Bland counties.

Nighttime tunnel maintenance northbound at Big Walker Mountain Tunnel in Bland County. All wide loads over 12 feet must stop before entering the tunnel.

A superload is traveling southbound from the West Virginia state line to the North Carolina state line the week of July 27.



J.T. and Mariah Harman will participate in the Generations United Revival, Aug. 6-8 at Roger and Susie Rife Park in Southern Gap. Harman, pastor of Oakwood Full Gospel Church, is one of the featured speakers during the free community revival.

Generations United Revival set for Aug. 6-8 in Southern Gap

By CHAD COOPER
cookam@gmail.com

Residents from across Buchanan County and the surrounding region are invited to gather for three evenings of worship, preaching and fellowship at the Generations United Revival, scheduled for Aug. 6-8 at Roger and Susie Rife Park at Southern Gap.

The free outdoor revival will begin each evening at 7 p.m. and feature messages from Joel Horn, pastor of The Anchor at Souls Harbor; J.T. Harman, pastor of Oakwood Full Gospel Church; and Whitewood native Stephen Ward, with worship led by Ward and his wife, Lori.

Organizers encourage attendees to bring a lawn chair for the outdoor event.

For Ward, the revival is more than another stop on his ministry schedule — it marks a return to the community where his faith first took root.

Ward, originally from Whitewood, grew up in Buchanan County before pursuing his calling to ministry. After working on staff at Redemption Church in Greenville, South Carolina, he and his

wife started The Living Room Movement, a full-time ministry dedicated to leading worship, preaching and inspiring others to grow closer to Jesus, in 2016. dedicated to leading worship, preaching and inspiring others to grow closer to Jesus. They currently travel across the United States, holding revival services and church events.

Ward said returning home to minister in Buchanan County is especially meaningful.

“It is truly an honor,” Ward said. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to come back and pour into a community that invested so much in my life and spiritual journey.”

Ward credits his upbringing in Southwest Virginia, along with the influence of his family and church, for shaping his faith and ministry.

“Growing up in Southwest Virginia taught me the importance of keeping God at the center of every area of my life,” he said. “That foundation has shaped both my ministry and my career.”

He hopes those attending the upcoming revival will experience more than just a worship service.

“I believe people can



Joel and Tina Horn will take part in the Generations United Revival, Aug. 6-8 at Roger and Susie Rife Park in Southern Gap. Joel Horn, pastor of The Anchor at Souls Harbor, is among the featured speakers for the three-night event.

expect more than just a concert,” Ward said. “They can expect an authentic encounter with God. My heart is that people experience His presence, healing, hope and the reality of miracles, signs and wonders.”

Organizers say the revival is open to everyone, regardless of church affiliation, and is intended to unite generations of believers while offering hope and encouragement to the community. Admission is free. For more information, contact Jerry Ward at 276-935-5672.



Stephen and Lori Ward will lead worship during the Generations United Revival, scheduled for Aug. 6-8 at Roger and Susie Rife Park in Southern Gap. Stephen Ward, a Whitewood native, returns to Buchanan County as part of the three-night community revival.



Adopt-A-Pet

Cuteness unleashed! This so puppin’ cute pup is a three-month-old female mixed breed. Her short coat is colored copper with phenomenal and symmetrical black-and-white markings. She has dark, round eyes and super cute ears. Her personality is friendly, happy and totally sweet. She’s absolutely a lapdog. This definition of cuteness will be available for adoption at the Buchanan County Animal Shelter until Monday, August 3, 2026.

Also available for adoption is this two-year-old female cat. Her calico coat is soft and fluffy. She has gorgeous green/gold eyes and long white whiskers.

Her temperament is gentle and calm. She loves attention and affection. The Buchanan County Animal Shelter is located at 1191 Dogpound Road. For more information about these animals, please call the shelter at 276-935-4067.



Family is Everything

ARE YOU A KINSHIP CAREGIVER?

The Kinship Navigator Program can help kinship families locate available community resources and help provide individual support to kinship families via telephone, on-line, support group or newsletters that can be emailed or mailed directly to their homes.

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR SUPPORT GROUPS

Join us for a beverage and snack as we support each other in parenting a new generation of children. There are informal monthly gatherings for kinship caregivers to meet and connect.

- DICKENSON COUNTY**
Every third Wednesday of each month from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Higher Education Building, Room 210, upstairs at 818 Happy Valley Drive, Clintwood, VA 24228.
- BUCHANAN COUNTY**
Every second Wednesday of each month from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Buchanan County Library, 1185 Poe Town St., Grundy, VA 24614.
- CITY OF NORTON, LEE, SCOTT AND WISE COUNTY**
Every third Thursday of each month starting at 11 a.m. at MEOC, 1501 3rd Ave. East, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219.

Dates are subject to change: Contact a Kinship Navigator or check our Facebook page for updated information.

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

Serving 8 Great Localities in Southwest Virginia

- Buchanan County
- City of Norton
- Dickenson County
- Lee County
- Russell County
- Scott County
- Tazewell County
- Wise County

CONTACT US
1280 Browning Hollow
Clintwood, VA 24228

Facebook
"Kinship Navigator Program"
<https://www.kinship-navigator.com>

Scan our QR code to learn more!

WHAT IS THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM?

- About 2.5 million children are being raised by a relative or close family friend and do not have a parent living in the household. In Virginia, 74,000 children are in Kinship Care. (State Data: Children in Kinship Care, grandfamilies.org)
- The Kinship Navigator Program is a primary prevention program that assists kinship caregivers on a voluntary basis in finding, learning about and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising as well as themselves.
- In 2018, Virginia piloted 6 Kinship Navigator programs in Bedford County, Dickenson County, Smyth County, Arlington, James City and Virginia Beach. Since then, Virginia Beach is no longer participating. In October of 2025, Virginia added an additional 5 Navigator sites including Henrico County, Carroll County, Petersburg, Lynchburg, and Fairfax.
- If you are currently raising your grandchild, niece, nephew, sibling, or unrelated kin, sometimes called "fictive kin," you may be interested in what this program has to offer.

THERE IS NO COST FOR THIS PROGRAM.

HERE TO HELP YOU

The Kinship Navigator Program has 4 major areas of focus:

- INFORMATION...** services available—local, federal and state; community activities (libraries, school events, camps, after school programs, and parks).
- EDUCATION...** topic sessions such as discipline, internet use, parenting a second time around, dealing with children that have experienced trauma and importance of self-care for the caregiver.
- CONNECTION TO RESOURCES...** financial, legal, educational, medical, community agencies, case management, and kinship support groups.
- ADVOCACY...** supportive telephone counseling and face to face visits.

“Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter.”
— Brad Henry

THERE ARE MANY FACTORS THAT LEAD INTO KINSHIP CARE, INCLUDING:

- Parental Substance Use
- Illness and Death
- Extended Military Deployment
- Financial Hardship
- Incarceration
- Mental Health Issues of Parents

HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM CAN HELP DIRECT YOU TO:

- ✓ Physical/Dental Health Services
- ✓ Benefits (SNAP, Medicaid, Child Care, TANF, WIC)
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ School Information
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Urgent Funds (if eligible)

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWS IS JUST A CLICK AWAY

LOCAL NEWS

SPORTS

OBITUARIES

COMMUNITY EVENTS

www.VirginiaMountaineer.com