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TWO SECTIONS PLUS SUPPLEMENTS | \$2

Buchanan County restricts tracked equipment on county roads

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Heavy equipment with tracks will no longer be permitted on Buchanan County roads except during a state of emergency following action by the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors.

The board approved the change following a public hearing during its Aug. 3 meeting at the Buchanan County Government Center on Slate Creek.

The proposed ordinance involved Chapter 90, Vehicles and Traffic of the Buchanan County Code and initially addressed the use of heavy construction equipment on

SEE **BUCHANAN COUNTY RESTRICTS** | 2A



Members of the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors are pictured during the board's Monday, Aug. 3, 2026 meeting at the Buchanan County Government Center on Slate Creek. From left are Prater District Supervisor David Rose; board Chairman and Hurricane District Supervisor Tim Hess; Garden District Supervisor Jeff Cooper; Rock Lick District Supervisor Craig Stiltner; South Grundy District Supervisor Roger Rife; North Grundy District Supervisor Lee Dotson; and Knox District Supervisor Trey Adkins.



Community members speak with representatives from participating agencies and organizations during Grundy's National Night Out celebration. The event provided residents with an opportunity to learn about local services and meet those who serve the community (photo by Chad Cooper).

National Night Out brings community together in Grundy

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Blue skies, warm weather and a shared sense of community helped make National Night Out a successful evening in downtown Grundy.

Families and residents gathered Tuesday, Aug. 4, at the Grundy Town Center, where they had an opportunity to meet local law enforcement officers, firefighters and community service providers outside of their usual working environments.

The event was held from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and centered on a simple goal: bringing the people

who serve the community closer to those who call it home.

Representatives from the Grundy Police Department, Virginia State Police, Grundy Fire Department, District 43 Probation, Buchanan County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and People Inc. were among those taking part.

The pleasant weather provided a welcoming setting as residents visited with representatives from the participating agencies and learned more about the services they provide. Children and adults alike had an opportunity to speak with officers and first responders, ask questions and become more familiar with the

SEE **NATIONAL NIGHT OUT** | 6A

Supervisors approve \$17,500 for Family Ag Day

By **CHAD COOPER**
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The Buchanan County Board of Supervisors has awarded the Big Sandy Soil and Water Conservation District \$17,500 to help make this year's Family Ag Day free for local families.

The board voted unanimously during its Aug. 3 meeting to provide \$2,500 from each of Buchanan County's seven magisterial districts.

Big Sandy board member Bobby Looney and District Manager and Education Specialist Jeanne Presley appeared before supervisors at the Buchanan County Government Center on Slate Creek to request \$20,000 for the event.

Although the district did not receive the full amount requested, the board's contribution came within \$2,500 of that goal.

During the discussion, supervisors considered how they could support an event that is entering its fourth year but was not included in the county's current fiscal year budget. Board members ultimately agreed to divide the contribution evenly among the county's seven districts.

Garden District Supervisor Jeff Cooper made the motion to provide \$2,500 from each district, and Knox District Supervisor Trey Adkins seconded it.

The motion passed unanimously. Presley later told The Virginia Mountaineer that the contribution will allow organizers to expand the event while continuing to offer it at no cost to families.

"We are so excited that the board of supervisors agreed to help sponsor the 2026 Family Ag Day," Presley said. "We have some new events planned for this year and are also working with some past presenters. This year will be bigger and better thanks to the generous donation. The funding allows us to once again offer everything totally free to those attending

SEE **SUPERVISORS APPROVE** | 2A

Supervisors raise traffic safety concerns ahead of SGHS opening

By **CHAD COOPER**
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With Southern Gap High School preparing to welcome students from across Buchanan County, county officials are considering traffic safety measures, including a study of a roundabout near the school and pursuing an emergency closure of Little Prater Road.

Both issues were discussed during the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors' Aug. 3 meeting as officials considered how traffic patterns could change with students, parents, school employees and buses traveling to Southern Gap.

Rocklick supervisor Craig Stiltner raised concerns about traffic entering and leaving the Southern Gap area and asked VDOT representative Erica Miller about the possibility of constructing a roundabout atop Lovers Gap Road.

"I think we need to really, really consid-

er doing a roundabout," Stiltner said.

Stiltner asked officials to assess the project's potential cost and feasibility, saying he believes a roundabout could provide a safer way to move vehicles through the area and address difficulties motorists face when merging and turning.

"I'm a firm believer in roundabouts," Stiltner said.

Miller said the idea could be considered but noted there would likely be challenges and details to work through.

Buchanan County Sheriff Allen Boyd told Miller he had submitted a letter requesting that the speed limit in the area be reduced from 45 mph to 35 mph, a move discussed as a possible short-term safety measure while longer-term improvements are explored.

Stiltner then moved to send a formal request to VDOT for a study of the area. North Grundy supervisor Lee Dotson

SEE **TRAFFIC SAFETY CONCERNS** | 2A



VDOT representatives Erica Miller and Jeff Buchanan speak with the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors during the board's Aug. 3 meeting. Miller and Buchanan discussed road conditions and traffic safety concerns with supervisors, including issues surrounding travel to Southern Gap.



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SUPERVISORS APPROVE

FROM PAGE 1A



CHAD COOPER | Virginia Mountaineer
Big Sandy Soil and Water Conservation District board member Bobby Looney and District Manager and Education Specialist Jeanne Presley address the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors during its Aug. 3 meeting to request funding for the fourth annual Family Ag Day.

the event. We look forward to seeing everyone on October 3rd.”

The fourth annual Family Ag Day will be held Saturday, Oct. 3, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the movie theater parking lot at the Grundy Community Center, located at 22734 Cinema Drive in Grundy.

Admission is free.

The family-oriented event will include carnival games, prizes, educational demonstrations, popcorn, snow cones, cotton candy and other hands-on activities. Organizers hope the combination of learning and fun will allow children and adults to experience agriculture together.

For additional information, contact Presley at Jeanne.Presley@outlook.com or 276-935-7750. Jonathan Fuller and Jake Hess may also be reached at the same telephone number.

Looney and Presley also updated supervisors on the development of an outdoor classroom at the Poplar Gap athletic fields at Southern Gap.

The project remains under construction, but work has been delayed because a heavy equipment class at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center has not been meeting. The center is part of Southwest Virginia Community College.

Students in the class, led by instructor Zach Mon-

drige, had been using heavy equipment to excavate a pond for the outdoor classroom at no cost while gaining hands-on experience. Looney and Presley said they hope the class will resume soon so work can continue.

The pond project is supported by a \$30,000 grant through the Cumberland Forest Community Fund. The funding also includes an observation unit, a solar picnic table, a fish feeder, a weather station, a pond liner and aerators.

Although the district has the grant money, it faces an Aug. 31 deadline to use the funding.

“We have the money, but our deadline is actually August 31,” Presley said. “I have asked for an extension until the end of October. I can’t buy the liner and the aerators until the pond is finished being dug. We have to measure the pond to make sure the liner fits.”

Presley told supervisors that showing additional progress could help the district secure the requested extension, but she was still awaiting confirmation. Board members discussed ways to move the work forward if the heavy equipment class cannot resume in time.

Once completed, the outdoor classroom will provide students and other visitors with a hands-on place to learn about ponds, fish, weather and the conservation of Buchanan County’s natural resources.

BUCHANAN COUNTY RESTRICTS

FROM PAGE 1A

county roads.

During discussion, board members narrowed the restriction to equipment with tracks, rather than heavy trucks and other equipment operating on rubber tires.

During the public hearing, Knox supervisor Trey Adkins said heavy construction equipment could also be an asphalt truck or gravel truck.

Board attorney Lee Moise asked Adkins for his recommendation.

“Metal tracks is the main thing,” Moise said.

Adkins discussed the importance of an exception during emergencies, when tracked equipment, such as bulldozers, may be needed to clear roads or assist with recovery efforts following flooding or other disasters.

“I think we can change it to tracks only and put an exception in there that whoever needs to can during a state of emergency,” Adkins added.

Rocklick supervisor Craig Stiltner said he doesn’t think rubber tires on end-loaders and trucks are hurting anything.

Under the change approved by the board, heavy equipment operating on rubber tires may continue to use county roads. Equipment with tracks is prohibited from operating on the roads unless it is being used during a declared state of emergency.

Adkins moved to close the public hearing, which was seconded by Stiltner and unanimously approved by the board.

Following the public hearing, Adkins moved to approve the ordinance, with the restriction applying to tracked equipment and an exception for a state of emergency. The motion was seconded by North Grundy supervisor Lee Dotson and approved unanimously.

The tracked-equipment ordinance was one of sever-

al matters considered by supervisors following public hearings during the meeting.

The board also held a public hearing concerning the proposed adoption of an ordinance involving the county’s land-use permit regulations. The change updates the county code to include land-use permits and renames the applicable chapter from “Gas Line Pipelines” to “Land Use Permits.”

No members of the public spoke during that hearing.

After the hearing closed, Adkins moved to approve the ordinance, with Garden supervisor Jeff Cooper seconding. The board approved the measure unanimously.

Supervisors also considered conveying an easement for ingress and egress near Dog Pound Road and the Buchanan County Animal Shelter to Billy Owens.

During the public hearing, county officials explained that Dog Pound Road and another access road in the area have been used to reach the landfill and that the access road also serves property owned by Owens.

Officials said the request was essentially to provide Owens with a permanent right-of-way to access the remainder of the property.

Following the hearing, the board approved the conveyance of the easement to Owens for a fee of \$100.

The action also authorized board Chairman Tim Hess, the Hurricane District supervisor, and County Administrator Craig Horn to execute the conveyance on behalf of Buchanan County, subject to County Attorney Moise’s approval of the form.

Stiltner moved to approve the easement, which received a second before the board approved it unanimously.

TRAFFIC SAFETY CONCERNS

FROM PAGE 1A

seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved it.

The conversation then shifted to Little Prater Road, a narrow route supervisors fear could see additional traffic from motorists traveling to and from Southern Gap.

Knox supervisor Trey Adkins asked whether the county could temporarily close the road on an emergency basis before school begins.

Adkins said South Grundy supervisor Roger Rife has pushed for improvements to Little Prater Road for years. Still, issues, including obtaining the property needed for widening, have prevented the work from moving forward.

“It’s not for the lack of Mr. Rife trying to fix the road,” Adkins said. “But the fact of the matter is, we have a consolidated school.”

Adkins said portions of Little Prater Road essentially narrow to one lane, making it difficult for vehicles traveling in opposite directions to pass safely.

He said the possibility of inexperienced teenage drivers using the route makes the situation particularly concerning.

“Sixteen-year-old kids are not the best drivers, obviously,” Adkins said, adding that some adults aren’t either.

“The question is, can we close that road on an emer-

gency basis until Mr. Rife and this board can figure out how to fix the road, make it safe for those kids or teachers or whoever wants to use it in the future?” Adkins said.

Rife, who has lived on Little Prater for around 60 years and has previously raised concerns about the road, agreed that something needs to be done.

He told the board he has personally seen vehicles leave the roadway and enter the creek, and said there are locations where two vehicles cannot safely pass.

Rife said development on the mountain has already brought additional vehicles onto the road, and the opening of Southern Gap High School could add another concern.

“I really do worry about these young kids,” Rife said.

Rife, who has experience teaching young drivers as a driver’s education teacher in the Buchanan County Public School system, said he has seen firsthand the potentially devastating consequences of crashes involving inexperienced motorists.

Following the discussion, Adkins made a motion authorizing board attorney Lee Moise to begin working toward an emergency closure of Little Prater Road, to schedule a public hearing if needed, and to report back to the board on the actions taken.

Dotson seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved it.



Courthouse News

By CHAD COOPER
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Marriage licenses
Sage Jonathan Bradley Keen, 23, of Grundy and Heileigh Elizabeth Vencill, 22, of Vansant, August 1, 2026.

Deeds recorded
July 1 - Michael Hillman, to Randall N. Hillman, 46 acres, Buchanan County, deed of gift.

July 1 - Steven Douglas Bails, to Dustin White, ETAL, two tracts, Three- and Twenty-Mile Branch, Levisa River, North Grundy District, \$250,000.00.

July 2 - Stella Elkins, to Amanda Grace Elkins, two tracts, Poplar Creek, Levisa River, deed of gift.

July 2 - Elsia Marie Mounts, ETAL, to Elisa Marie Mounts, ETAL, tract Oldhouse Branch, Paw Paw Fork, Knox Creek, deed of gift.

July 6 - Timothy Dennis Gearhart, ETAL, to Anthony Viers, ETAL, 10.5 acres Right Hand Fork Big Prater Creek, Grundy District, \$60,000.00.

July 6 - Donnie Deel, ETAL, to Reds Used Parts and Recycling LL, tract Russells Fork River, Prater District, \$120,000.00.

July 6 - Edith Louise Steward, to Michael Shane Wade Jr., 750 acres Poplar Creek, Levisa River, Rock Lick District, \$120,000.00.

July 6 - William Ratliff, ETAL, to Rebecca R. Street, ETAL, Lot No. 1, Garden Creek, Levisa River, \$100,000.00.

July 7 - Mary Elizabeth Kann, to Travis Jacob Rosendaul, two tracts Grundy, \$95,500.00.

July 7 - Terry Lee Looney, ETAL, to Trenton Chase Hicks, tract Deel, South Grundy District, \$141,000.00.

July 7 - Buchanan Mining Company, to Elham Saleh, 0.22 acre Garden District, \$50,000.00.

July 7 - Modie Lee Ford Jr., to CNX Gas Company, LLC, 10.339 acres Dismal River, Garden District, \$7,000.00.

July 7 - Johnny Lee Dye, ETAL, to Wilda Smith Looney, ETAL, 2.124 acres, Cove Branch, Bull Creek, deed of gift.

July 7 - Johnny Lee Dye, ETAL, to Ashley Elizabeth Sanders, Lots 1 & 2 Block 8, Subdivision of Rosa, Elswick Addition Maxie, deed of gift.

July 9 - Donald L. Hill, to Nicholas Lee Roy White, 0.25 acre, Buchanan County, deed of gift.

July 9 - Fannie Jane Baker, ETAL, to Fannie Jane Baker, ETAL, two tracts Greenbrier Creek, Russell Prater Creek, \$1.00, deed of gift.

July 10 - Joan B. Boyd, to Heather Lynn Boyd, ETAL, Trace Fork, Leemaster Fork, Big Prater Creek, Levisa River, Life Estate, deed of gift.

July 10 - Joan B. Boyd, to Lonnie Keith Boyd, four tracts Little Fox Creek, Big Fox Creek, deed of gift, deed of gift.

July 10 - Freddie O’Quinn, ETAL, to Benny Karl Ball, ETAL, 9.5 acres Little Fox Creek, Russell Fork River, Life Estate, \$20,000.00.

July 10 - Nina Michelle Sykes, to Wood Hollow Hill, LLC., 0.5 acre Greenbrier Fork, Russell Prater Creek, Prater District, \$30,000.00.

July 13 - Donald W. Hess, ETAL, to Brady Harris, 11.36 acres Indian Ridge, Russell Fork, Big Sandy River, \$100,000.00.

July 15 - Vanderbilt Mortgage and Finance to Peggy Smith, ETAL, tract Laurel Branch, Prater District, \$14,000.00.

July 16 - Audrey Diana Viers, to Eric Airron Viers, Life Estate, two tracts and mobile home, Russell Prater Creek, 8 AC and 1 AC, deed of gift.

July 17 - Bobby Stanley Justus, ETAL, to Parker Taylor, 1.7 acres Horse Branch, Slate Creek, Levisa River, \$30,000.00.

July 17 - Walter Kernie Miller II, to Kayla Renee Miller, 25 acres Russell Prater Creek, deed of gift.

July 17 - Tamera Beth Ball, to Trung Hoang Ly, ETAL, two tracts Slate Creek, \$48,000.00.

July 20 - Peggy Darlene Rife, to Robert Lee Rife, ETAL, 40 acres Spruce Pine Branch, Dismal River, \$20,000.00.

July 20 - Clinton Hale Sutherland, ETAL, to Joshua Jay Justus, tract Watkins Branch, Levisa River, \$220,000.00.

July 21 - Casey Nicole Edwards, to Roger Dale Edwards Jr., Big Fork, Wolf Pen, Bull Creek, deed of gift.

July 21 - RBL Enterprises INC, to Clevinger Enterprises LLC, tracts Slate Creek, \$30,000.00.

July 21 - Jessica Carol Sullivan, to Linda McCoy, two acres Right Hand Fork, Guesses Fork, Knox Creek, Life Estate, \$1.00, deed of gift.

July 23 - Black Diamond Company, to Appalachian Power Company, tracts Buchanan County, \$185,000.00.

July 23 - Buchanan Mining Company, to Danny Leon Hylton, Wolf Pen Ridge, Dismal River, Garden District, \$0.00.

July 23 - Udell Breeding, to Michele Lynn Compton, 1/7th undivided interest, tracts Hurricane Creek, Russell Fork River, Hurricane District, deed of gift.

July 23 - Jerry Douglas Owens, to Jerry Douglas Owens, ETAL, 0.47 acre, Russell Prater Creek, Russell Fork, Levisa River, Prater District, deed of gift.

July 24 - Betty Viers, to Michael Lee Viers, three tracts, Spruce Pine Creek, Dismal River, deed of gift.

July 27 - Ray Elmer Bostic, ETAL, to Christopher Thomas, ETAL, two acres, Buchanan County, \$180,500.00.

July 27 - Joyce Annelle Tiller Collins, to Michael C. Tiller, tract Hurricane Creek, Hurricane District, deed of gift.



LOOKING BACK

From our files

By **CHAD COOPER**
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65 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 10, 1961

Kiwanian John Hash, director of Civil Defense for Buchanan County was the speaker at this week's meeting of the Kiwanis Club and gave an interesting talk on the need for preparedness for an atomic war in this area. He discussed the various hazards to the civilian population as a result of an atomic explosion, stressing the danger of radioactive fallout.

Randy Venable, who recently won second place in a state-wide 4-H contest in public speaking, delivered her prize-winning address to the Grundy Rotary Club at its meeting Monday. Rotarian T. M. Arrington was in charge of the program.

45 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 13, 1981

Contrary to reports circulated in some areas, Hurley High School will field a football team for the 1981 season. School superintendent Ernest R. Raines announced early Wednesday morning that Tommy Blankenship had been rehired to coach the Rebels again this year and continue the job of rebuilding the football program.

Fifty-Year Membership Certificates were presented to two local Masons at a special ceremony on July 4 at Sandy Valley Lodge. Earnest L. Smith and Lawrence R. Lindsay were recognized by the Grand Lodge of Virginia signifying their service and continuous membership in Masonry. Both were also presented with gold veterans lapel emblems.

30 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 8, 1996

Kermit Rife was given the Democratic nod for Knox District supervisor Saturday during a Democratic convention at Hurley Middle School. Rife emerged victorious from a field of three candidates vying for the post with a fourth candidate Hufford Rife, having withdrawn his name from consideration prior to the start of Saturday's 10 a.m. meeting.

A handful of Buchanan County Republicans turned out Saturday afternoon to give Republican Party Chairman Robert M. "Bobby" Hall the GOP nomination for Knox District supervisor. Hall was uncontested in his bid for the Republican nomination during a mass meeting of Knox District Republicans held at Hurley High School.

25 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 2, 2001

Brandon Hankins led a team of young Grundy wrestlers competing for the Grundy Wrestling Club at the annual Commonwealth Games earlier this month at the Christiansburg Recreation Center. Hankins, who will be a seventh grader at Riverview Middle School when it opens this coming school year, won the 75-80-pound weight class championship in the Schoolboy folkstyle division.

David Byrd killed his first deer Nov. 13, 2000. It was an 11-point, 210-pound buck killed on the Big Buchanan Hunting Club property. He used a Knight .50-caliber muzzleloader. He is the son of the Rev. Kenneth and Teresa Byrd of Clifton Fork.

Nicholas Harmon caught a nice 14 1/4 inch trout while fishing in Dismal River. He is the son of Carl and Debbie Harmon, of Mavisdale.



From left, retired Buchanan County educator and former School Board member Scotty Owens, Johnny Mack Kelly and Prater District Supervisor David Rose stand beside the new Sergeant Godfred Blankenship Memorial Bridge sign following the Aug. 7 dedication ceremony (photo by Anita Willis).

Memorial bridge dedicated to local Marine killed in Vietnam

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

More than five decades after Marine Sgt. Godfred Blankenship gave his life for his country, his name has returned home to the Greenbrier community where his story began.

Family members, community leaders and local residents gathered Friday, Aug. 7, for the dedication of the Sergeant Godfred Blankenship Memorial Bridge. The bridge is located near the left- and right-hand forks of Greenbrier in Buchanan County.

Due to some early evening rain showers, the ceremony was held at the Russell Prater Old Regular Baptist Church and drew a large crowd honoring Blankenship, a Greenbrier native who died from wounds suffered while serving in the Vietnam War.

Retired Buchanan County educator and former School Board member Scotty Owens spearheaded the effort to have the bridge named in Blankenship's memory.

Owens thanked the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors for approving the resolution allowing the bridge to be named, and the Virginia Department of Transportation for providing and installing the memorial signs. He also recognized Erica Miller, a VDOT district transportation official in the Bristol area, for helping move the project forward.

Blankenship was born April 28, 1938, in Greenbrier to Stella Blankenship Kelly. He joined the U.S. Marine Corps around 1959

or 1960 and rose to the rank of sergeant during approximately seven years of military service.

He served with the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division and 3rd Marine Amphibious Force. His military occupational specialty was rifleman.

According to information Owens shared during the ceremony, Blankenship received six medals, including the Purple Heart and a Gold Star, as well as seven ribbons.

Owens said Blankenship and his reconnaissance team had recently returned to their base after spending several days on patrol when another team prepared to head out. One member of that team had become ill, and its patrol leader asked Blankenship to take the Marine's place and serve as assistant patrol leader.

Blankenship agreed.

During the patrol, an enemy mine exploded—the patrol leader, Capt. Barnes, died at the scene, while Blankenship and two other Marines were evacuated. Blankenship died March 26, 1967, four days after being wounded.

Owens read a message posted to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial website in March 2007 by Robert Rocky Schmidt, the Marine whose place Blankenship took on the mission.

"Greater love no man has than to give his life for his friend," the message read. "It has been 40 years this month. Sergeant Blankenship took my place on that recon mission. We remember, and we are eternally

grateful."

Blankenship was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal for heroic achievement during combat operations in Vietnam.

The citation recognized his service as a reconnaissance platoon sergeant and patrol leader from Jan. 4 through March 25, 1967. It credited Blankenship's skill, judgment and courage with helping his unit gather valuable intelligence while operating deep inside enemy territory.

The citation also described a January 1967 patrol during which Blankenship's unit came under Viet Cong fire. The team returned fire, killing three of the opposing force before Blankenship led part of the patrol farther into the area, where weapons, documents, medical supplies and rations were recovered. He then helped secure the safe helicopter evacuation of his team.

During another patrol near Da Nang on Jan. 11, 1967, Blankenship and four members of his team were wounded by a booby trap. Despite his injuries, he helped maintain control of the team and assisted with the medical evacuation of those who were more seriously wounded.

Blankenship was mortally wounded by an enemy mine while on patrol south of Da Nang on March 25, 1967.

"Sergeant Blankenship's outstanding courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States military service," the citation stated. "He gal-

SEE **MEMORIAL BRIDGE** | 3B

GOOD OL DAYS



THE BUCHANAN COUNTY FAIR officially opened Tuesday, Aug. 5, 1986, at noon with welcoming remarks and a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Taking part in the opening ceremony were (from left) Cheria Lester, Miss Grundy Senior High School; Roger Combs, behind the podium, co-chairman of the fair committee and president of the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce; Paul Hatfield, superintendent of Buchanan County Schools; Jerry Raines, vice chairman of the Buchanan County School Board; and Shenna Skeens, Miss Buchanan County Fair Festival Queen of 1985. (Staff photo by Cathy St. Clair.)

Congressman Griffith: What is an ombudsman?

The end of our schools’ summer break means children return to school in Virginia’s Ninth District.

A new school year represents new opportunity for students to develop friendships, connect with fellow classmates, recount family summer vacations and more. For some, it means changing to a new school.

Connections in school are important for a child’s development. As the son of a schoolteacher, I like to stimulate classroom conversations by visiting schools and talking with students.

For my school visits this year, I went to Council High School in Buchanan County, Cornerstone Christian Academy in Washington County, Floyd County High School and Patrick County High School.

This May, I had the privilege to address the graduates of Thomas Walker High School in Lee County.

These settings are opportunities for me to engage our student populations and educate them on the duties of lawmakers.

As a Congressman, I share my experiences as a policymaker and as an ombudsman.

I clarify that my role as a policymaker focuses on matters of drafting legislation, committee debate discussing proposals, amendment recommendations and the final votes on bills.

But what is an ombudsman?

An ombudsman is one who interfaces with the federal government on behalf of others.

I act as an ombudsman for you on many occasions.

Thus, my office communicates with scores of federal agencies to address agency issues that constituents ask us about.

These issues vary by agency. But among the matters that demand our attention include passport requests and renewals, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) disputes and Social Security assistance.

In 2025, my office opened more than 1,175 constituent cases. Through this casework, we worked with more than 40 federal agencies.

There are multiple ways for us to open a case for you. An easy route is for you to give one of my district offices a phone call and speak with a representative in my office.



WEEKLY REPORT
FROM THE CAPITOL

Please refer to the end of this e-newsletter to access those phone numbers.

However, I recognize that you may prefer an in-person alternative.

Every month, my staff travels to all corners of Virginia’s Ninth District, which happens to span more than 10,000 square miles.

You can view when my staff next visits your locality by checking on my website at <https://morgangriffith.house.gov/> or my Facebook page at Congressman Morgan Griffith.

These pages help people stay engaged on issues impacting my work in Congress and on behalf of the Ninth District.

My leadership on issues includes federal funding for Ninth District communities.

One program that I champion at the federal level is the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) program. As the leading Virginia advocate, AMLER projects identify idle mine land property and explore potential improvements and site redevelopment.

In late 2025, I attended an AMLER check presentation to support a nearly \$2 million project in Buchanan County. This project will create the Southern Gap Office Park Building, a commercial office space within Buchan-

an County’s Regional Office Park. I left DC at 8:30 pm to make it to Grundy the next day because I considered the announcement so important.

AMLER delivers millions of federal dollars to our regions every year. With new projects set to be announced later this year, I will continue to fight for additional AMLER opportunities that benefit Virginia’s Ninth District.

A second federal program targets brownfields, which are properties or sites whose redevelopment is complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Program delivers various federal grants to clean up these polluted sites.

When I served as Environment Subcommittee Chairman earlier in the 119th Congress, I held a hearing to spotlight the EPA Brownfields Program. As part of this, I invited Duane Miller of Scott County, who serves as Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, to testify.

Since then, the EPA Brownfields Program continues to deliver funds for local projects in our communities.

This June, the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, Giles County and the City of Martinsville received EPA Brownfields grants.

I believe in serving the constituents of Virginia’s Ninth District. Accordingly, my office remains ready to help you access the support, resources and opportunities you need from federal agencies.

Whether I am in the classroom or in a DC committee room, I will continue to remind people that you can always count on my voice and my office as a resource.

Further, if your local high school wants me to speak to students, please have them contact our office.

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/>.

Rocklick News

By DEBBIE FOSTER

Hello Readers

I won’t go into details, but Ray and I have had a very rough night. Please pray for us.

Brother Eddie Wilson brought the message “When Jesus Enters.” He read Matthew 8:9-10. Invite Jesus into your life, your house, your church! Ask God for healing!

I went to the store Tuesday; we were out of dog and cat food. In this house, that’s serious. Walmart’s buggy escalator and elevator were both down, but the workers carried everything down for me and put it in a buggy. One of the young men went with me and put the heavy bags of dog and cat food in the truck. Good job, everyone and thank you.

I stopped at Food City on the way home and got some chicken for supper; we love their deli chicken. I saw some friends I hadn’t seen in a while and got to visit for a few minutes.

I just found out I’ve lost a dear friend, Debbie Ashby—prayers and condolences to her family and friends. The first things that come to mind when I think of her are her smile and her laugh; she was a precious lady.

Happy 18th birthday to one of my great-grands, Madison Desirae. I hope you have a wonderful day.

We’ve lost another brother in our church; Brother Jim Baker passed away. What a dear man of God he was. Pray for his family and friends.

I gave the third kitten away today; the orangey one I called Butterscotch. I know he’ll have a good home with kids and other cats, but I still almost cried. I’ve still got the little calico.

Reminder: the mobile food truck, Feeding Southwest Virginia, an equal opportunity provider, will be at the Council Park on Thursday, August 13th. The truck arrives about 9 a.m., and the giveaway starts about 10 a.m. This is a drive-thru event; stay in your car, and we will come to you.

Reminder: Feeding my Sheep will be doing their giveaway Saturday, August 15th.

The giveaway starts about 9:00 am and goes until 1:00 pm. Because of construction at the old Russell Prater School location, cars will be lining up near the old Sykes (current EOC) building on Southern Gap. Someone will be there to assist you.

My prayer list is long: Shannon and Christine (needs 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, my uncle Tommy, Charles, Eugene,



Melinda, Stanley and Crystal, Steve, Scotty, Brother Kenny (back surgery), 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, Maryann, Brian, Miss Gertrude (keep praying for answers for this sweet lady), Patty, Bill, Charles and Von, Ann, Jack and Annette, Curtis, Susie, Carol (needs urgent prayers), 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, 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, 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 935-8296 or email me at dfoster_59@yahoo.com

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Hebrews 13:8 KJV

Until next week...

Don’t worry about tomorrow; Jesus is already there.

Adult Education Connection

By BEVERLY PRATER ASHBY

Leadership is not just reserved for managers, executives, or business owners. It is a skill that anyone can develop, regardless of age, career, or educational background. Adult education provides an excellent opportunity for learners to strengthen leadership abilities while gaining valuable knowledge and confidence that can positively impact both their personal and professional lives.



Many adults return to school with goals such as earning a diploma, learning new job skills, changing careers, or continuing their education. Along the way, they often discover that leadership skills naturally develop through the learning process. Every assignment completed, discussion participated in, and challenge overcome helps build qualities that strong leaders possess.

One of the first leadership skills developed in adult education is effective communication. Classroom discussions, presentations, and group activities encourage learners to express their ideas clearly while listening respectfully to others. These communication skills are essential in the workplace, where leaders must provide direction, solve problems, and collaborate with diverse teams.

Adult education also promotes critical thinking and decision-making. Learners are encouraged to analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, and make informed decisions. Another important leadership quality fostered through adult education is confidence. Returning to school can be intimidating, especially for adults who have been away from the classroom for many years. Successfully completing courses, mastering new concepts, and achieving educational milestones demonstrate that growth is possible at any stage of life.

Leadership also requires adaptability. Adult learners frequently balance work, family responsibilities, and education, learning how to manage changing schedules and unexpected challenges. These experiences teach flexibility and resilience, which are qualities that help leaders remain calm and effective during times of change.

If you are interested in building your leadership skills through adult education, there are many opportunities available in our area. Please call Southwest Regional Adult Education at 276-889-5424 for more information.

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LOCAL NEWS



SPORTS



OBITUARIES



COMMUNITY EVENTS

www.VirginiaMountaineer.com

THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER

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Savvy Senior: Smartphones Made Simple for Seniors

By JIM MILLER

Dear Savvy Senior,
My 79-year-old mom just upgraded from a flip phone to a smartphone, but she's having trouble figuring it out. Is there a way to make it easier for her to use?
--Only Daughter

Dear Only,
Switching from a flip phone to a smartphone can be a big adjustment. What seems second nature to younger users can feel overwhelming to someone who's never used a touchscreen. Even though the screen is bigger, the text can still be tiny, the buttons hard to tap, and one accidental touch can open an app or change a setting. Even simple tasks like texting or taking a picture can suddenly feel frustrating.
The good news is that smartphones can be surprisingly senior-friendly. Both iPhones and Android phones have built-in accessibility features that make them easier to see, hear, and navigate. The exact steps vary depending on the phone, but here are some of the most helpful settings to look for.

Apple iPhone

If your mom has an Apple iPhone, start by opening the Settings app, then tap Display and Brightness. From there, she can make the text larger, turn on bold text, and use Display Zoom to make icons, buttons, and menus bigger. Even these small changes can make the phone much easier to use.
Accessibility offers several helpful tools. VoiceOver reads whatever is on the screen aloud, Zoom enlarges small text or photos, and Voice Control lets her open apps



JIM MILLER

SAVVY SENIOR

or dictate messages simply by speaking.
For a simpler home screen, try Assistive Access. It creates a clean layout with large buttons and fewer apps, and you can lock it with a passcode so it won't accidentally switch back. For someone moving from a flip phone, this can make using the phone much less intimidating.
Google Pixel
If your mom uses a Google Pixel, open Settings, then Display, and select Display size and text. She can make words, buttons, and icons larger and increase color contrast to make everything easier to see.
Swipe gestures can be confusing for first-time smartphone users. Switching to the traditional three-button layout brings back simple on-screen buttons for Home, Back, and Recent Apps, making navigation much easier.
In Accessibility, TalkBack can read text aloud, Magnification zooms in on parts of the screen, Live Caption

adds subtitles automatically, Sound Amplifier makes soft sounds louder, and Voice Access lets her control the phone by speaking.
Samsung Galaxy
If she has a Samsung Galaxy phone, start by turning on Easy Mode. Open Settings, tap Display, and turn it on. This enlarges text and icons, simplifies the home screen, and adds a slight delay to reduce accidental taps.
She can also adjust font size, screen zoom, and switch navigation from gestures to buttons. Accessibility settings improve contrast, offer captions or hearing aid connections, and let her operate the phone with voice commands.
Extra tips
Clean up your mom's home screen by removing apps she doesn't use and placing her most used apps – such as Phone, Messages, and Photos – on the first screen. Choose a simple wallpaper, turn up the ringtone and alert volume, add favorite contacts for one-touch calling, and increase the screen timeout so the display stays on longer.
Remember, the goal isn't to master every feature. Start with the basics – answering calls, sending texts, and taking photos – and give her plenty of time to practice. A little patience goes a long way. With a few simple adjustments, her smartphone can become a tool she actually enjoys using.
Send your questions or comments to questions@savvysenior.org, or to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.



JERRY WARD

THE WATCHMAN Earth Belongs to the Lord

Psalms 24:1 tells us that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. Joel 3:5 tells us that the silver and gold belong to God.
We hear a lot today about investing in gold and silver for your future and protection. I am not against investing; having money is not wrong. The question is what we are doing with what God has given us. If we do not use it for his glory, James 5:1-6 warns us that riches can consume us. It warns us not to hoard what God blessed us with and to watch how we acquire our wealth.

God's word warns us in 1 Timothy 6:9 that those who will be rich fall into temptation, a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which draw men into destruction and perdition. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 19:23-25, "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." In verse 25, his disciples were amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

I know I have said a lot here about wealth and riches, but what matters is how we use them. Remember, they belong to God, and when all is said and done, they return to God. We cannot take them with us. Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 12:48: Everyone who has been given much will be demanded much, and for the one who has been entrusted with much, more will be asked.

Now, getting back to the Earth belongs to the Lord. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, chapters 1 and 2 describe the creation of the universe and the world. They also tell us about man and woman, who are created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). He gave them dominion over all the earth. Much was given to humanity, and much is required, yet humanity is failing miserably.

Shortly after God gave them this dominion, in chapter three of Genesis (3:1-15), his creation failed God, fell into sin, and separated Adam and Eve from their former relationship with God. Not only them, but also the human race (Romans 5:19): For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. Through their disobedience, there was a shift on earth when they listened to the serpent's voice (Genesis 3:4). They chose to listen to the serpent, and now the domain was given unto the devil. He was given the keys to death and hell because of Adam and Eve's choice.

Romans 5:17 says that if by one man's offense death reigned by one. That's why Satan, in Ephesians 2:2, is called the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children through disobedience. But God gave a prophecy to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, saying, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." From that day to the present, there has been a battle between the seed of the woman and the serpent and those who follow him.

In Romans 5:19 and 5:17, I only gave half of the scripture; now I will give the rest. For a time, the devil had the keys to death and hell until Jesus, God's son, died on the cross and on the third day rose from the dead. Colossians 2:14-15 says he's blotting out the handwriting of ordinance that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (verse 15). Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it, the cross. The blood of God's Son defeated him.

To those who believe, Jesus tells John in Revelation 1:18, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of earth." Now, the rest of the word, Romans 5:17, "much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ." Verse 19, "so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." At the cross, Jesus crushed his head; he's still bruising our heels, but shortly, Romans 16:20, "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet." The final victory is coming for the believers of Jesus Christ.

Stay Tuned: The Watchman



Thomas Taylor performs during a recent appearance. The Honaker native and traditional country artist will take the stage at The CAM on Thursday, Aug. 20, as part of the Third Thursday Summer Concert Series.

Spotlight on the CAM

By JODI REYNOLDS

Our Summer Concert continues with another evening of music on The Courtyard at The CAM. Join us on Thursday, August 20, as our Third Thursday Summer Concert Series continues with one of Southwest Virginia's own, Thomas Taylor.
If you've spent much time in our region, chances are you've heard Thomas long before you've seen him on stage. Whether he's greeting listeners during the morning show on 107.3 WXLZ or entertaining crowds throughout the area, Thomas has become a familiar and trusted voice, proudly carrying the torch for traditional country music. A native of Honaker, he represents everything that makes our area special.
Thomas's acoustic performances strip country music down to its roots. Armed with nothing more than a guitar and an unmistakable voice, he transforms every show into an evening of storytelling and shared memories. Fans can expect to hear timeless favorites from country legends such as Conway Twitty and Travis Tritt, along with classic Elvis Presley hits delivered with remarkable authenticity. It's the kind of music that invites audiences to sing along, tap their feet, and remember why these songs have stood the test of time.
There's something especially fitting about welcoming Thomas to The CAM. Our Third Thursday Summer Concert Series was created to celebrate local talent while bringing our community together in a relaxed,

family-friendly atmosphere. Thomas embodies that vision perfectly.
Of course, no Third Thursday would be complete without great food. We're excited to welcome Dave's Dawgs Food Trailer, which will be serving delicious favorites throughout the day and during the concert. Bring your appetite, grab dinner in the courtyard, and settle in for an evening of outstanding entertainment. Beer, wine, and other beverages will also be available for purchase in the concession.
One of the things we've loved most about this inaugural Summer Concert Series is seeing The Courtyard come alive month after month. Families spread out in lawn chairs, friends catch up over dinner, children dance in front of the stage, and neighbors discover new artists while supporting local businesses and performers. It's exactly the kind of community experience that we envisioned.
If you haven't joined us yet this summer, this is the perfect opportunity. And if you've been with us throughout the series, we'd love to see you back for another memorable night under the stars.
We hope you'll make plans to join us on Thursday, August 20, for an evening of real country music, great food, and hometown hospitality. Sometimes all you need is a guitar, a familiar song, and a community gathered together to make an ordinary Thursday feel extraordinary. We can't wait to see you at The CAM.

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Corn Cheese: Halfway Around the World, Right at Home

One of the many things I find fascinating about food is the throughlines of different cultures. Korean Corn Cheese sounds exotic, but it's just corn casserole's Asian cousin, and it shares a lineage with Mexican elote and other similar dishes across the world. Turns out corn, some sort of fat, and cheese work the same magic whether you're in Seoul, Oaxaca, or Summersville.

Corn Cheese is a staple of Korean bar food, the kind of dish you'd order alongside a cold beer at a pojangmacha, or food cart, in Seoul. I'll never forget reading the recipe the first time I stumbled across it, and thinking this sounds like something memaw would have set out on the Sunday supper table, right next to the deviled eggs.

Just like half & half, the recipe is in the name. Sweet corn, mayonnaise, butter, and a whole lot of melted cheese, cooked in a skillet until the edges catch a little color and the top turns bubbly and golden. It's usually served straight from the pan, just make sure to put a pot holder or towel on the table first.

I love how this is a dish served over 6,000 miles away and is still about as Appalachian as it gets. We've been making some version of that combination for potlucks and holidays for generations. Mexico's version is elote, corn slicked with mayo, cotija cheese, and a squeeze of lime. Peru's version, choclo con queso, pairs big Andean corn kernels with slices of fresh queso fresco. Turns out good food logic doesn't care much about borders.

This one comes together fast, and it travels well from stove to table, so don't dress it up too much. Let the corn do the talking.

Of course, fresh corn is going to be best, and 'tis the season. But frozen and canned works well, too. Here's how we build it.

KOREAN CORN CHEESE

Yield: 4 to 6 servings, as a side or shared appetizer
Time: 20 minutes

- 4 C Corn Kernels (fresh, frozen, or canned and drained)
- 3 T Unsalted Butter
- ½ C Mayonnaise
- 1 T Sugar
- ½ t Salt
- 1½ C Mozzarella Cheese, shredded
- ½ C Sharp Cheddar Cheese, shredded
- 2 ea Scallions, sliced thin

MIX CORN: In a bowl, stir together the corn, mayonnaise, sugar, and salt until the corn is evenly coated.

COOK CORN: Melt the butter in a small cast iron or other oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Add the corn mixture and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 to 7 minutes, until warmed through and starting to caramelize slightly at the edges.

TOP AND MELT: Heat your broiler. Sprinkle the mozzarella and cheddar evenly over the corn. Slide the skillet under the broiler for 2 to 3 minutes, watching it closely, until the cheese is melted, bubbly, and beginning to brown in spots.

FINISH: Remove from the broiler, top with the scallions, and serve immediately, straight from the skillet, with crackers, bread, or just a spoon.

Enjoy, friends. Proof that good food speaks the same language everywhere, whether it's cooked in Seoul or in a cast iron skillet right here in West Virginia.



Trails & Tunes set to bring music, outdoor adventure to Southern Gap

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

Southern Gap will come alive with music, ATVs, vendors and outdoor activities later this month as the Southern Gap Trails & Tunes Festival returns for three days of entertainment.

The festival is scheduled for Friday, Aug. 21, through Sunday, Aug. 23, at Breaks Interstate Park's Southern Gap location, bringing together live music and some of the outdoor recreation that has become a big part of the Southern Gap area.

From trail riding and an ATV Poker Run to live performances, food vendors and family activities, organizers have packed the weekend with something for visitors of all ages.

The fun will actually begin a day early for off-road enthusiasts. Southern Gap Dirt Drags will hold three days of competitions and off-road events beginning Thursday, Aug. 20, alongside the Trails & Tunes weekend.

Trails & Tunes officially gets underway Friday, Aug. 21, with the vendor marketplace open from noon to 6 p.m. Families can also take part in "Become an Animal Detective" at 4 p.m. at the pergola behind the Southern Gap Visitor Center.

Music will take center stage Friday evening with Whitney Lusk performing at 6 p.m., followed by Alex Key at 7 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 22, will be a busy day at Southern Gap. The vendor marketplace will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., while registration for the ATV Poker Run will be held from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Southern Gap Visitor Center. The Poker Run is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 6

p.m.

Families can learn more about area wildlife during an Animal Pelts Program at 4 p.m. at the pergola behind the visitor center.

Saturday evening's music lineup will feature Sandy Shortridge and Danny Joines at 6 p.m., followed by Rhonda Vincent & The Rage at 7 p.m.

Activities continue Sunday, Aug. 23, beginning early with the Mountain Melody 5K. Registration starts at 7:30 a.m., followed by the race at 8 a.m.

The 5K includes age divisions for runners 15 and younger, ages 16-39 and ages 40 and older. The \$35 registration fee includes entry in the race and an official event T-shirt. Proceeds will benefit the Alice Lloyd Cross Country program.

The vendor marketplace will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Live music returns Sunday afternoon with a local artist scheduled to perform at 1 p.m. Josh & Seth McGlothlin will follow at 2 p.m., and The Kody Norris Show will close out the scheduled music at 3 p.m.

Visitors will also find plenty to do between the scheduled events. Food vendors, trail riding and a trail scavenger hunt are among the activities planned throughout the weekend.

The combination of Trails & Tunes and the Southern Gap Dirt Drags gives visitors an opportunity to make a full weekend out of a trip to Southern Gap, whether they come for the trails, the competition, the music or simply a day out with family and friends.

A complete schedule, along with information about vendors, lodging offers, VIP tickets and other festival updates, is available on the Breaks Interstate Park website.

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

FROM PAGE 6A



Residents visit informational tents during National Night Out, held Aug. 4 at the Grundy Town Center. Local law enforcement agencies, first responders and community organizations participated in the event (photo by Chad Cooper).

people working throughout the community.

For many children, the evening offered a chance to meet police officers and firefighters in a friendly and relaxed setting. For adults, it provided an opportunity to connect with local agencies and learn more about the resources available in Buchanan County.

National Night Out is observed in communities across the country to strengthen relationships between residents, law enforcement agencies and first responders. The annual event also encourages neighbors to get to know one another and work together to create safer communities.

Those goals came to life in Grundy as residents and public servants spent the evening talking, sharing information and building connections.

The event also gave officers and first responders an opportunity to step away from the difficult situations residents often encounter and spend time with the community they serve.

Family is Everything

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

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WHAT IS THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM?

About 2.5 million children are being raised by relatives or close family friends. In Virginia, more than 74,000 children are in Kinship Care.

The Kinship Navigator Program helps kinship caregivers connect with resources, services, and support to meet the needs of both the children they are raising and themselves.

Since launching in Virginia in 2018, the program has expanded across the Commonwealth to serve more families in need.

**There is NO COST
for this program.**

HERE TO HELP YOU

The Kinship Navigator Program has 4 major areas of focus:

INFORMATION: Connects families with local, state, and federal services, community programs, and activities.

EDUCATION: Provides workshops and resources on parenting, child development, trauma, internet safety, discipline, and caregiver self-care.

CONNECTION TO RESOURCES: financial, legal, medical, educational, and community support services. ADVOCACY Offers personalized support through phone consultations and in-person visits.

"Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach greater 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)

Mountain Melody 5K to hit the trails at Southern Gap

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Runners will have a chance to hit the trails while supporting a good cause when the Mountain Melody 5K takes place later this month at Southern Gap. The race is scheduled for Sunday, Aug. 23, as part of the Southern Gap Trails & Tunes Festival at Breaks Interstate Park's Southern Gap location. Unlike a traditional road race, the Mountain Melody 5K will take runners across the trails at Southern Gap, combining competition with the mountain scenery of the area. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m., with the race scheduled to start at 8 a.m.

The event will feature three age divisions — 15 and younger, ages 16-39 and ages 40 and older. Awards will be presented to the top three runners in each age group, with overall medals also going to the top male and female finishers. Pre-registration is \$35 and includes race entry and an event T-shirt. All proceeds from the race will benefit the Alice Lloyd Cross Country program, led by former Grundy High School cross country standout Kaitlyn Ratliff Morris. The 5K is part of the Southern Gap Trails & Tunes Festival, which runs Aug. 21-23 and features a weekend of live music and outdoor activities. All music performances are free and open to the public. Registration and additional information for the Mountain Melody 5K are available through the Southern Gap Trails & Tunes event website.



Members of the Southern Gap High School varsity golf team celebrate after earning the first varsity victory in school history Aug. 3 at Willowbrook Golf Course at The Breaks. The Eagles won the five-team match with a score of 170. Pictured from left are Ethan Deel, Jaxon Hardin, Braden Hopkins, Ben Mayhew, Gavin Hartford, Ayden Whited, Jackson Deel and medalist Mason Boyd (Photo courtesy of Southern Gap Athletics).

Southern Gap golf team makes history with first-ever victory

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Southern Gap High School's first varsity athletic contest ended with a victory. The Eagles' varsity golf team made history Aug. 3 by winning the first competition in school history, capturing a five-team golf match at Willowbrook Golf Course at The Breaks with a team score of 170. Southern Gap finished ahead of Honaker (185), East Ridge, Kentucky (201), Southern Gap's junior varsity team (205) and River View, West Virginia (223). The victory came less than three weeks before Southern Gap officially opens its doors to students on Aug. 21. The new high school combines students from the former Grundy, Hurley, Council and Twin Valley high schools, making the win a memorable first for the Eagles' athletic program. Leading the way was senior Mason Boyd, a three-time Black Diamond District Player of the Year who earned medalist honors with an even-par 38. Boyd paced the Eagles with his medalist round of 38, while Ethan Deel followed with a 41 and Brayden Hopkins and Jaxon Hardin each shot 43. Jackson Deel finished with a 48, Ben Mayhew carded a 50, Gavin Hartford shot a 51 and Ayden Whited recorded a 52.

Southern Gap also dominated the individual standings. Boyd claimed medalist honors, while Ethan Deel tied Honaker's Silas Harris for second after each fired a 41. East Ridge's Jayce Cantrell finished fourth with a 42, followed by Southern Gap's Hopkins and Hardin, who tied for fifth with rounds of 43. Honaker's Parker Musick placed seventh with a 44, Southern Gap junior varsity golfer Wyatt Street finished eighth with a 46, East Ridge's Ryan Shepherd was ninth with a 47, and Jackson Deel rounded out the top 10 with a 48. Head coach Preston Hibbitts said he was encouraged by what he saw in the team's season-opening performance. "I am very pleased with our first match performance," Hibbitts said. "We had a lot of players record new personal bests and posted a great number for this point in the season." The significance of the victory was not lost on the veteran coach. "I'm really proud of my guys claiming the first win in school history," Hibbitts said. "I hope it points to great things for all Southern Gap athletics." Complete individual scores were: Southern Gap: Mason Boyd 38, Ethan Deel 41, Brayden Hopkins 43, Jaxon Hardin 43, Jackson Deel 48, Ben Mayhew 50, Gavin Hartford 51, Ayden Whited 52.

SEE TEAM MAKES HISTORY | 4B

In the Locker Room

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

There are some days in sports you know you are going to remember. Last Thursday was one of those days for me. I had the great privilege of attending the first fall sports media day in Southern Gap High School history, and from the moment I stepped onto that brand-new turf field, I knew this wasn't going to feel like any media day I had covered before.

My first thought was simple: Wow.

The design of the stadium reminds you of something you would see on a college campus. The field sits below ground level in a bowl, with terraces on both the home and visitor sides. Instead of climbing a set of bleachers to find their seats, fans will walk down toward the field.

Then you look beyond the stadium. That's when it really hits you. Sitting on top of that mountain, with the sky overhead and the mountains stretching across the horizon, the backdrop is breathtaking. Then you turn and see that beautiful new school overlooking everything, the "Southern Gap Eagles" lettering across the press box and the large intertwined "SG" at the school's main entrance.

It feels like a place where memories are waiting to be made. And Thursday, we started making them.

For the first time, I had the opportunity to see head football coach Greg Tester and his decorated staff together.

What a collection of football knowledge. That staff is a who's who of Buchanan County football history. These are men who have spent years coaching in different communities, on different sidelines and sometimes against one another. Now they are together, coaching Buchanan County's high school football team. That is pretty special.

You could see the Eagle pride shining Thursday. Players who once represented different schools and different communities walked onto the same field wearing the same all-black Southern Gap uniform. And those uniforms looked sharp.

More importantly, there is plenty of talent wearing them. It appears Ayden Whited will enter the season as the frontrunner to be QB1. Whited has plenty of experience, but Tester has another big arm in Kanan Justice, whose size and athleticism could allow him to make the transition to tight end.

If Whited gets the nod and Justice moves to tight

SEE IN THE LOCKER ROOM | 5B



IN THE LOCKER ROOM

Buchanan County YMCA golf tournament set for Friday

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Golfers still have time to sign up for one of Buchanan County's longest-running charitable sporting events. The Buchanan County YMCA will host its 35th annual golf tournament Friday, Aug. 14, at Willowbrook Golf Course at The Breaks, with proceeds benefiting the YMCA's youth programs, wellness initiatives and community outreach efforts. Registration will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., followed by a 10:30 a.m. shotgun start. The annual tournament has become a tradition for area golfers, bringing together participants from across Southwest Virginia for a day of friendly competition

while supporting the YMCA's mission of strengthening the community through programs that benefit children, families and adults. This year's tournament will be played in a two-person Captain's Choice format, with teams divided into four flights based on their average handicap, allowing golfers of all skill levels to compete. Participants will also have the chance to compete for hole-in-one prizes throughout the day. Following the tournament, trophies and special awards will be presented, and golfers will enjoy a buffet meal. Tournament organizers encourage anyone interested in playing to register before Friday. For more information or to register, contact the Buchanan County YMCA at (276) 935-8871.

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 on Aug. 19, from 5-8 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 student-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.

SWVA Sportsmen banquet set for Aug. 22

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

One of Southwest Virginia's biggest nights for outdoor enthusiasts is a little more than a week away. The SWVA Sportsmen Annual Banquet is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 22, at Noah Horn Well Drilling, located at 1070 Sandy Valley Lane in Oakwood. Doors will open at 3 p.m. The banquet will bring together hunters, anglers, conservation supporters and families for an evening of food, fellowship, games and outdoor-themed prizes. The event will feature premium firearm raffles and drawings for a variety of outdoor prizes. Guests will also

have opportunities throughout the evening to support wildlife habitat, conservation and outdoor education efforts across Southwest Virginia. Organizers say the banquet is about more than prizes. Money raised through the event will help preserve the region's outdoor heritage, protect wildlife and provide educational opportunities for future generations. Tickets are \$30 for adults and \$15 for children ages 12 and younger. Tickets may be purchased online at www.swvasportsmen.com or through the event's direct ticket page. Those seeking additional information may call 276-935-5903.

WELLNESS

WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

BALANCED
BREATHE
CARE
CLEANSE
ENERGY
FITNESS
GRATITUDE
HARMONY
HEALING
HOLISTIC
HYDRATION
MEDITATION
MINDFULNESS
NUTRITION
RECOVERY
RELAXATION
RESILIENCE
ROUTINE
SERENITY
SLUMBER
STAMINA
STRENGTH
VITALITY
WELL-BEING

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
65 66 67
68 69 70

CLUES ACROSS

1. Midway between south and southeast
4. Fathers
9. Wine grape
14. Al Bundy's wife
15. Derived from ammonia
16. Venezuelan state
17. Interest rate
18. Experts
20. Vascular tissues
22. Smooth and glossy
23. Administrative region in S. Korea
24. One from Damascus
28. Special interest group
29. It cools your home
30. Oh, God!
31. Intestinal pouches
33. Men
37. Twelfth star in a constellation
38. Former CIA
39. Arrange in grades of size

41. A baglike structure in a plant or animal
42. "The Great Lakes State"
43. Having earlike appendages
44. Momentarily stop
46. Ancient kingdom
49. Of I
50. White clerical vestment
51. Songs to one's beloved
55. Charges
58. Computer application originator
59. A place to dock a boat
60. One guided by reason
64. Slang for cigarette
65. Sailboats
66. "Jerry Maguire" actor Zellweger
67. Screen type
68. Country legend Haggard
69. Puts together in time
70. When you anticipate arriving

CLUES DOWN

1. Involuntary muscular contraction
2. Eastern US transit agency
3. Leaves a place
4. Cease to participate
5. Current units
6. Cease to exist
7. General's assistant (abbr.)
8. Earth vibration
9. Very strong winds
10. For each one
11. A bog
12. The creation of beautiful or significant things
13. Affirmative
19. Pie ____ mode
21. Nonclerical
24. Indonesian island
25. Educational environment
26. Namibian peoples
27. Bring out or develop

31. Moves into a place of thought
32. Out of the way
34. Loads a ship
35. Beloved Hollywood alien
36. Distinguishes
40. The ancient Egyptian sun god
41. Secondary or explanatory title
45. Relating to a wing
47. One who gives a speech
48. In the middle
52. Loop with a running knot
53. Airborne (abbr.)
54. Sweet persons
56. Put into play
57. Small cattle breed
59. Millisecond
60. Revolutions per minute
61. They ____
62. Moon crater
63. A place to stay the night

PUZZLE SOLUTION

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

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

SUDOKU SOLUTION

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

Horoscopes

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

You have been burning the candle at both ends, Aries. You can't run on caffeine and grit all of the time. Find a day to rest before your body makes that decision for you.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

Someone is testing your patience this week, Taurus. Before you stick to your guns, ask yourself if this is a battle worth fighting and then proceed.

GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21

It's time to mute as much internal noise as possible, Gemini. Focus on one project and make a concerted effort to finish it before jumping to the next thing on your to-do list.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, the stars are washing over your emotional sector, making you confront what you have been sweeping under the rug for some time. Trust your feelings.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23

Leo, the universe is asking you to give others a shot to shine and for you to step into the background. Use this week to refine your talents out of the spotlight.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, keep your eyes open for a chance encounter mid-week that could spark a great new idea. Let go of the need to control the outcome and just go with the flow.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Collaboration is your superpower this week, Libra. If you've been stuck on a professional problem, run it by a colleague. The answer may lie in a perspective you haven't considered yet.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Your financial intuition is incredibly sharp, Scorpio. Trust your instincts right now. It's a great week to pitch a big idea, ask for a raise or reevaluate your budget.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, you are feeling an itch to break free from your routine but don't know where to begin. Don't drop everything just yet. Explore little adventures first.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

There are a lot of ideas floating around in your head, Capricorn, but none have solidified into action just yet. Seek the opinions of others to identify a path forward.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18

Aquarius, every time you think you have a plan in place, the variables change. That's alright because you always have a backup idea should different scenarios present themselves.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

You can't predict where a relationship will go, Pisces. This week it is best to simply maintain the status quo. Things will be revealed soon enough.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

AUGUST 9

Bill Skarsgard, Actor (36)

AUGUST 10

Kylie Jenner, Reality Star (29)

AUGUST 11

Chris Hemsworth, Actor (43)

AUGUST 12

Sir Mix-a-Lot, Rapper (63)

AUGUST 13

Sebastian Stan, Actor (44)

AUGUST 14

Steve Martin, Actor (81)

AUGUST 15

Jennifer Lawrence, Actress (36)

County, VDOT look at partnership to tackle roadside brush

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

With school buses preparing to return to Buchanan County roads, county officials and the Virginia Department of Transportation are exploring ways to address overgrown roadside vegetation, including a possible partnership that would allow county crews to help cut brush along some state-maintained roads.

The issue was discussed during the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors' Aug. 3 meeting, where Rocklick supervisor Craig Stiltner told VDOT representative Erica Miller that his biggest concerns were pretty simple.

"Trees, weeds and asphalt," Stiltner said.

Stiltner, who said he requested Miller attend the meeting, told her he has been receiving calls from residents concerned about road conditions, particularly as the beginning of the school year approaches.

He said vegetation has become a problem along some roads traveled by school buses and other large vehicles, with brush extending far enough into the roadway to strike mirrors, antennas and other parts of vehicles.

Miller said VDOT recognizes the problem and has been working to catch up on vegetation management while dealing with limited resources, funding constraints, mowing season, road work and disaster recovery.

She said VDOT committed earlier this year to concentrate resources on mowing and vegetation work along higher-volume secondary roads and other priority routes.

Part of that effort has involved using outside contractors. Miller said contracting allowed VDOT to make progress but comes at a higher cost and isn't a sustainable long-term solution within the department's budget.

VDOT is now considering changes to its operations to dedicate more resources to the problem.

Miller said the department is close to assembling a crew that could work on vegetation management for at least 10 months of the year, which she believes could make a noticeable difference in roadside cutting and mowing.

"We have already put workforce and money towards trying to make a difference, and we are continuing to do

that," Miller told supervisors.

Miller said the department's goal is to begin catching up on accumulated work while balancing the many demands placed on its available employees and funding.

"I think that we are heading in a direction that we're going to be able to make some leeway and that our citizens will be able to see a difference," Miller said.

Supervisors, however, said Buchanan County may be able to help.

The county maintains its own road system and already has employees and equipment performing brush cutting and other maintenance. Garden supervisor Jeff Cooper questioned whether an agreement could be developed that would allow county crews to cut vegetation along certain state-maintained roads while traveling between county projects.

Cooper said the idea wouldn't involve sending county crews onto major primary highways. Instead, they envision county workers helping along smaller secondary roads, particularly when crews and equipment are already working in the same area.

The arrangement could allow the county and VDOT to cover more ground without unnecessarily duplicating resources.

Miller said discussions about such a partnership have already taken place and that she is open to pursuing the idea.

Safety requirements and operating standards would have to be addressed before county employees could perform vegetation work along state-maintained roads, she said.

"I think it sounds like a good idea," Miller said. "I think that there may be challenges in it, and I'm willing to work through those."

Supervisors expressed interest in moving quickly rather than waiting another month to continue the conversation, particularly as school buses soon return to the roads throughout Buchanan County.

Board members said county crews could make significant progress over the coming months if an agreement is reached.

Miller agreed to continue working with county officials to determine what would be required for such a partnership, including safety standards and other details that would need to be addressed before county crews could begin working on state-maintained roads.

Buchanan County man dies in ATV crash on Bearwallow Road

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

A Buchanan County man died last Monday evening after an all-terrain vehicle overturned on Bearwallow Road, according to Virginia State Police.

The crash occurred at approximately 6:25 p.m. on Aug. 3.

State police said Paul S. Perkins, 64, of Jewell Ridge, was operating a 2020 Axis 500 ATV westbound on Bearwallow Road when the vehicle stalled and began rolling downhill.

According to investigators, the ATV traveled off the right side of the roadway, overturned and came to rest against a tree.

Perkins died at the scene as a result of injuries sustained in the crash.

Virginia State Police is continuing to investigate the circumstances surrounding the fatal crash.



Ken Smith addresses the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors during its Monday, Aug. 3, 2026 meeting, proposing that the existing veterans markers near the county courthouse be relocated to a more visible memorial site in Grundy.

Smith proposes relocating courthouse veteran markers in Grundy

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

A Buchanan County resident is asking county and town leaders to consider moving the existing veterans markers near the Buchanan County Courthouse to a more visible location in Grundy.

Ken Smith presented the idea to the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors during its Aug. 3 meeting at the Buchanan County Government Center on Slate Creek.

Smith, a member of Lt. Col. Vincent A. Witcher Camp No. 1863 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, proposed relocating the markers to property near the traffic light at the intersection of Riverside Drive and Slate Creek, close to the Grundy Community Center.

He suggested using the markers to create an improved memorial setting that could also include three flagpoles. The proposed location would make the memorial more visible to residents and motorists traveling through town.

Smith remembered when the markers were first installed near the courthouse many decades ago. Although they still honor local service members, he mentioned that their placement along the courthouse sidewalk fails to give them the prominence or visibility they deserve. He also noted that because of their proximity to the courthouse, people entering often leave their cups and trash on the monuments, which disrespects the veterans.

"Those people did what they did so that we got what we've got," Smith told supervisors.

Smith emphasized that he was not asking the county for money. Instead, he wanted to introduce the idea and encourage the Board of Supervisors and Grundy Town Council to work together.

"I'm just planting the seed with the idea," Smith said.

Because the markers honor Buchanan County residents but would potentially be placed on town property, Smith said cooperation between the two local governments would be necessary. He told supervisors he planned to present the proposal to Grundy Town Council during its Aug. 11 meeting.

"If you don't mention it somewhere, the idea doesn't go anywhere," Smith said.

Supervisors took no action on the proposal.

In other business, the board unanimously approved two grants totaling \$15,000 for fiscal year 2027.

The approvals included a \$5,000 Public Safety Answering Point Educational Program Grant and a \$10,000 Geographic Information System and Data Program Grant.

The programs support public safety communications, mapping and data services used by the county.

MEMORIAL BRIDGE

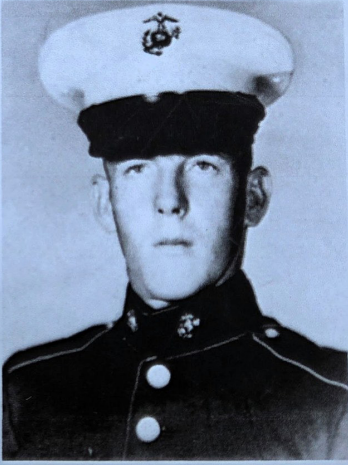
FROM PAGE 3B



Those attending the Sergeant Godfred Blankenship Memorial Bridge dedication ceremony gather for a photo in front of the new memorial sign in the Greenbrier section of Buchanan County (photo by Anita Willis).

Godfred Blankenship

Sergeant
1ST FORCE RECON CO, 1ST RECON BN, 1ST MARDIV, III MAF
United States Marine Corps
Vicey, Virginia
April 28, 1938 to March 26, 1967
GODFRED BLANKENSHIP is on the Wall at Panel 17E, Line 48
See the [full profile](#) or [name rubbing](#) for Godfred Blankenship



Marine Sgt. Godfred Blankenship, a Greenbrier native, died March 26, 1967, from wounds suffered while serving in the Vietnam War (photo submitted by Scotty Owens).

lantly gave his life for his country."

Owens said two experiences inspired him to seek the bridge dedication. The first came in 2021 when The Wall That Heals, a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, visited Southern Gap. Owens volunteered to help visitors locate the names of friends and loved ones, and Blankenship's name stayed on his mind.

His second inspiration came after seeing memorial highway signs honoring another area service member. Owens began wondering whether something similar could be done for Blankenship in Greenbrier.

Owens contacted one of Blankenship's only living family members, Johnny Mack Kelly of Grundy, who supported the idea, and later brought the proposal before the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Owens presented family members with miniature replicas of the Sergeant Godfred Blankenship Memorial Bridge sign provided by VDOT.

"I hope what I've said and what we've done today has been OK with everybody," Owens concluded. "And I hope that we all keep remembering the good things about Godfred."

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWS IS JUST A CLICK AWAY



 LOCAL NEWS

 SPORTS

 OBITUARIES

 COMMUNITY EVENTS

www.VirginiaMountaineer.com



Local ministers Larry Thornsby, Donnie Breeding, Roger Null, Nathaniel Deel, Jerry Ward, Tim Owens and Olivia Wilson in prayer in the foyer of Southern Gap High School on Friday, Aug. 7, 2026. The group gathered to pray throughout the newly constructed school ahead of its first day of classes on Aug. 21, 2026.

Local ministers gather to pray over new Southern Gap High School

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Before the first students walk through the doors of Southern Gap High School, a group of local ministers spent last Friday morning walking its halls for a different reason — to pray.

Seven area ministers gathered at the newly constructed school Aug. 7 to pray for the students, teachers, administrators and staff who will soon fill the building.

The group included Larry Thornsby, Donnie Breeding, Roger Null, Nathaniel Deel, Jerry Ward, Tim Owens and Olivia Willson.

They began together in the school's foyer, where they offered an

opening prayer before making their way through the building. Along the way, they stopped in different areas of the school to pray for those who will learn, work and spend their days there.

The gathering came less than two weeks before Southern Gap is scheduled to welcome students for the first time Aug. 21.

Opening day will mark a new chapter for public education in Buchanan County as students from Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley come together under one roof.

For generations, those schools built their own traditions and identities in communities across the county. This fall, students who once wore different school colors and competed against one another will walk the same hallways as Southern Gap Eagles.

Last Friday's gathering was an opportunity for the ministers to come together before that transition and pray throughout the new school.

Their prayers focused on the people who will make Southern Gap more than a new building — the students who will enter its classrooms, the teachers preparing lessons, the administrators leading the school and the staff members who will help keep it running each day.

As opening day draws closer, preparations continue throughout Southern Gap High School for the beginning of its first school year and a historic first day.

ASL to host business fair, welcome back luncheon

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Appalachian School of Law will welcome students back to campus later this month while giving area businesses and organizations an opportunity to introduce themselves to the law school community.

ASL's Business Fair and Welcome Back Luncheon will be held Tuesday, Aug. 25, from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the courtyard and Lions Lounge of the school's main building in Grundy.

The event will offer local businesses and organizations a chance to reserve a table, meet students and share information about the services and opportunities available throughout the area.

For students beginning a new academic year, the luncheon will also provide a relaxed setting to connect with community members beyond the law school campus.

Businesses and organizations interested in participating must RSVP by Thursday, Aug. 20.

To reserve a table or obtain additional information, contact Patty Street at 276-244-1215 or plester@asl.edu.

TEAM MAKES HISTORY

FROM PAGE 1B

ford 51, Ayden Whited 52.

Honaker: Silas Harris 41, Parker Musick 44, Kade Shortt 50, Landon Schneider 50, Lincoln Combs 53, Halle Hats 55.

East Ridge: Jayce Cantrell 42, Ryan Shepherd 47, Jackson Damron 53, Kourtlee Keene 59, Hunter Adkins 60, Kaylen Adkins 61 and Carrigan Ratliff 62.

Southern Gap JV: Wyatt Street 46, Jase Hurley 49, Carter Deel 53, Levi Tackett 57, Parker Hughes 59 and Jansen Davis 61.

River View: Jacob Stacy 50, Jarrett Auville 56, Donavon Bradley 57 and Colton Hale 60.

For a program just beginning its journey, the Eagles could not have asked for a better start.

CLASSIFIEDS

LEGAL NOTICES

TRUSTEE'S SALE OF PROPERTY
1103 Knox Creek Drive, Hurley, VA 24620
Tax Map No. 2HH086065A, Acct. No. 19013

In execution of a Deed of Trust dated June 6, 2012, in the principal amount of \$118,134.11, recorded in the Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Buchanan County, Virginia, of record as Instrument Number 120001140, Woods Rogers PLC, Trustee will offer for sale at public auction outside the main entrance of the Buchanan County Circuit Court, 1012 Walnut Street, Grundy, VA 24614, on September 3, 2026 at 12:00 noon , the property described in said Deed of Trust lying in the County of Buchanan, Virginia, and more fully described as follows:

Being certain tract or parcel of land, located on Knox Creek in Buchanan County, Commonwealth of Virginia, commonly known as follows:

Tract No One containing one and half (1 ½) acre more or less, and being the same property conveyed by Noah H Blankenship from Henry Osborne and Wortha Osborne, his wife, and recorded in the Circuit Court Clerk's Office of Buchanan County, Commonwealth of Virginia, in Deed Book 74, page 551.

Pursuant to Section 8.9A-604 of the Virginia Code, a 2012 Norris Manufactured Home, Serial No. NO2022028TNAB will be sold with the real property.

TERMS: Cash - Bidder's deposit of ten percent (10%) of the sales price by cashier's or certified check may be required. Balance of purchase price shall be due and payable not later than ten (10) days after sale.

WOODS ROGERS PLC,

LEGAL NOTICES

Trustee
For Information Contact:
Woods Rogers Vandeventer
Black PLC, P.O. Box 14125,
Roanoke, VA 24038-4125,
Telephone:
540-983-7729
VM-8-13,20,27;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Reduction Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2
Code of Virginia' PUBLICATION NUMBER: APPLICATION NUMBER:1011886

Jewell Valley Mining LLC is applying for bond reduction on Permit No.1202301 located in Buchanan County 4.2 MILES SW OF VANSANT ON PAWPAW CREEK. This permit consists of 14.82 acres bonded under Cost Estimate. 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 \$414,100.00 in the form of insurance surety posted for this permit be reduced by \$248,600.00.

This bond reduction request is based on the following Phase I reclamation: All backfill and re-grading completed per approved settlement agreement.

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 27, 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/dmlrinquiry/frmMain.aspx?ctl=4>.

Written comments and a request for informal conference may be e-mailed to repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.

VAM-08-6,13,20,27;2026

LEGAL NOTICES

at <https://www.energy.virginia.gov/dmlrinquiry/frmMain.aspx?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 repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.

VAM-08-6,13,20,27;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Reduction Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2
Code of Virginia' PUBLICATION NUMBER: APPLICATION NUMBER:1011887

Jewell Valley Mining LLC is applying for bond reduction on Permit No.1202304 located in Buchanan County 1.3 MILES NW OF WHITEWOOD ON MILL BRANCH. This permit consists of 20.38 acres bonded under Cost Estimate. 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 \$325,000.00 in the form of insurance surety posted for this permit be reduced by \$ 195,000.00.

This bond reduction request is based on the following Phase I reclamation: All backfill and re-grading completed per approved settlement agreement.

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 27, 2026, submit written comments or objections concerning this bond reduction, and

LEGAL NOTICES

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/dmlrinquiry/frmMain.aspx?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 repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.

VAM-08-6,13,20,27;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Reduction Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2
Code of Virginia' PUBLICATION NUMBER: APPLICATION NUMBER:1011888

Jewell Valley Mining LLC is applying for bond reduction on Permit No.1702302 located in Buchanan County JONES FK OF JEWELL VALLEY OFF ST RT 613. This permit consists of 196.03 acres bonded under Cost Estimate. 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 \$1,828,900.00 in the form of insurance surety posted for this permit be reduced by \$ 1,097,340.00.

This bond reduction request is based on the following Phase I reclamation: All backfill and re-grading completed per approved settlement agreement.

Any person with a valid legal interest which might be adversely affected by this proposal, or an officer or head of any federal, state

LEGAL NOTICES

or local government agency or authority, may within 30 days of August 27, 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/dmlrinquiry/frmMain.aspx?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 repurposingpublicnotice@energy.virginia.gov.

VAM-08-6,13,20,27;2026

Public Notice Application for Bond Release Under Chapter 19, Title 45.2
Code of Virginia' PUBLICATION NUMBER: 26TLD02 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 areas and Phase III release of

LEGAL NOTICES

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/dmlrinquiry/frmMain.aspx?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

PHI Air Medical marks 35 years of service to Virginia, Buchanan County

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

For 35 years, PHI Air Medical has been providing emergency air ambulance service to communities across Virginia, including Buchanan County, where rapid access to advanced medical care can make a life-saving difference.

The company recently celebrated the milestone, highlighting more than three decades of transporting critically ill and injured patients while expanding its reach to serve much of the commonwealth.

What began in 1991 as the Inova Medical AirCare Program with a single Bell 412 helicopter based at Fairfax Hospital has grown into a statewide network of six air medical bases. PHI Air Medical has operated the program for the past 23 years and now has aircraft stationed in Manassas, Fredericksburg, Leesburg, Front Royal, Harrisonburg and Culpeper.

The service responds to emergency requests from hospitals, emergency medical services and first responders, providing rapid transport for patients requiring specialized care. PHI Air Medical also serves Buchanan County and other communities across Southwest Virginia.

“For the last 35 years, our team of highly trained nurses, clinical members, mechanics, and pilots across Virginia has played a vital role in providing the highest level of specialized medical care to residents in their most vulnerable moments,” said Christopher Shaffer, program director at PHI Air Medical.

Shaffer said the company remains committed to

working alongside hospitals, EMS agencies and first responders to provide critical care when every minute counts.

“We are immensely grateful for the trust placed in us by healthcare partners, first responders, and the community at large,” Shaffer said.

According to PHI Air Medical, the program has continued to expand its capabilities through advances in medical technology and specialized training. Flight crews are equipped to care for critically ill patients using advanced equipment, including intra-aortic balloon pumps, fetal heart tone monitors, high-flow oxygen systems, Impella heart pumps and vete tri infusion therapy. Every aircraft also carries whole blood, allowing crews to begin lifesaving treatment before reaching a hospital.

The company said its clinical teams are trained to deliver evidence-based care during transport while working closely with hospitals and emergency agencies to improve patient outcomes.

Today, PHI Air Medical operates more than 80 air medical bases nationwide and transports more than 22,500 patients each year. Each base is staffed by experienced pilots, flight nurses and paramedics who are prepared to respond to emergency medical transport requests around the clock.

As PHI Air Medical celebrates its 35th anniversary in Virginia, company officials say they remain focused on providing timely, specialized care for patients across the commonwealth, including those living in rural communities such as Buchanan County, where air medical transport can play a critical role in connecting patients with advanced trauma and specialty care.

BCPS schedules meet-and-greets, back-to-school bashes

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

School hallways across Buchanan County will soon be busy again, but students and families will have several opportunities to stop by before classes official ly begin.

Buchanan County Public Schools has scheduled meet-and-greet events and back-to-school bashes to help students become familiar with their schools, meet teachers and reconnect with classmates before the 2026-27 school year begins Friday, Aug. 21.

All of the county’s elementary schools will hold meet-and-greet events Tuesday, Aug. 18, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. The schedule includes Council Elementary/Middle School, Tommy P. Justus Elementary/Middle School (former Hurley Elementary/Middle School), Riverview Elementary/Middle School and Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School.

Southern Gap High School will hold its meet-and-greet Wednesday, Aug. 19, from 3 to 7 p.m. The event will offer students from across Buchanan County an opportunity to explore the new school and meet teachers and staff before the start of Southern Gap’s first academic year.

In addition to the meet-and-greets, several schools are holding back-to-school bashes to give families another opportunity to come together before classes begin.

Council Elementary/Middle School will hold its back-to-school bash Tuesday, Aug. 18, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the school.

Tommy P. Justus Elementary/Middle School will also hold its bash Tuesday, Aug. 18, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the school.

Southern Gap High School will conclude the series of back-to-school celebrations Thursday, Aug. 20, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the school.

Two of the county’s back-to-school bashes have already taken place. Riverview Elementary/Middle School held its event July 30 at the school, while Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School held its celebration Aug. 1 at the Whitewood Fire Department.

IN THE LOCKER ROOM

FROM PAGE 1B

end, imagine Justice lining up at one tight end with sophomore standout Luke Stiltner lining up opposite in a double-tight formation.

Both can block. Both can catch. Both can create problems for a defense.

Then there is Brayden White, a capable passer who has started at quarterback for the Panthers for the past three seasons.

Think about this: Between Whited, Justice and White, Southern Gap has three quarterbacks with more than 20 games of starting experience.

How many first-year programs can say that?

White may ultimately become one of Southern Gap’s best pass catchers, as I expect we’ll see him get plenty of opportunities at wide receiver.

The Eagles are deep in the backfield, too.

There may not be a proven Trey Taylor or Logan Lester-type workhorse entering the season, but Southern Gap has something just as intriguing — options.

Aidan Baker, Reid Stiltner and Gavin Mays have already received plenty of varsity touches during their careers. Two talented freshmen, Carson Blankenship and Gunner Baker, will also be fighting for playing time.

Remember those two names.

By the end of the season, don’t be surprised if Blankenship and Baker are names people across Buchanan County are talking about.

Ethan Smith and Harvey Cooper add speed to the backfield, while R.J. Rowe and Caden Justice give the Eagles a pair of strong fullbacks.

Then we get to my favorite nickname on this football team.

The War Pigs.

Coach Anthony Church and the other line coaches have given that name to Southern Gap’s offensive and defensive linemen, and I absolutely love it.

Chase Baker, Henry Brown, Blake Childress, Eli Dye, Matthew Thompson, Trevor Blankenship, Marshall Justus and Colin Wolfrum are just a few of the big guys Southern Gap can throw into the trenches.

The War Pigs are not going to get their names called every time Southern Gap scores a touchdown. They aren’t going to fill up a stat sheet like a quarterback, running back or receiver.

But they can become the heartbeat of this football team.

They’ll be down in the dirt doing the work nobody notices until it isn’t getting done — opening holes, protecting quarterbacks, taking on double teams and making life miserable for opposing offenses.

There is something old-school about calling a group of big, physical Buchanan County linemen the War Pigs.

It just fits.

But Thursday wasn’t only about football.

Southern Gap varsity volleyball coach Hannah Lester brought a team to media day that should have Eagle fans excited.

Claire Griffey is one of the county’s most decorated volleyball players, and she’s joined by Leah Rasnake, Megan Hess, Madison Lester, Bella Hurley and Addy Boyd, to name a few.

There is plenty of talent on that roster, and I expect the Eagles to put a lot of wins on the board during their first season.

Southern Gap’s cross country program will look a little different after losing some outstanding runners to graduation, including All-American Keyston Hartford, Ella Rasnake and Destany Armendariz.

But I’m going to give you a name to remember.

Kaitlyn Wolford.

The freshman is a star in the making, and I expect her to make an immediate impact during her first high school season.

Aliyah Armendariz is another runner to watch after

enjoying a breakout season last year. She should be a key part of coach Christina Bane’s first Southern Gap cross-country team.

I also had the opportunity to photograph our Southern Gap band.

Standing in front of that band was senior drum major Rachel Tackett, who now owns a distinction nobody can ever take away from her.

Rachel Tackett is the first drum major in Southern Gap High School history.

But this certainly isn’t her first rodeo.

Tackett has led the Buchanan County band as drum major for the past three years, and now she’ll be the one leading the band as it provides the soundtrack for Southern Gap’s first year.

Our cheerleaders were there, too, led by Staci Griffey.

Seeing their smiles and excitement was another reminder that this wasn’t simply a collection of students from several former schools trying to figure out how to coexist.

They already looked like Eagles.

Southern Gap varsity golf coach Preston Hibbitts and his golfers came to media day with something nobody else could claim.

They were already 1-0.

Mason Boyd has already written his name into the Southern Gap record book with the lowest competitive round in school history after firing a 38 last Monday at Willowbrook.

Boyd is no stranger to winning. The three-time Black Diamond District golf champion gives Hibbitts a proven player at the top of his lineup.

Ethan Deel is another athlete Eagle fans will get to know quickly. He’s not only a promising young football player, but also one of the leaders of the golf team.

Braden Hopkins, Jaxon Hardin, Wyatt Street and Jackson Deel add even more talent to a deep roster.

Hibbitts has several other golfers capable of breaking into his top four on any given day, and that competition should only make the Eagles better as the season progresses.

But after taking all the pictures, talking football and looking at all the talent Southern Gap will put on the fields, courts and courses this fall, I kept coming back to one thing.

It was almost impossible to tell where anybody came from.

And maybe that’s the most important thing I saw all day.

I couldn’t look across that football field and immediately pick out Council.

I couldn’t pick out Grundy.

I couldn’t pick out Hurley.

I couldn’t pick out Twin Valley.

All I saw was black and Vegas gold.

All I saw were Eagles.

I’ll admit that this season feels different for me.

For years, fall meant traveling to Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley. It meant seeing those familiar colors and photographing kids wearing jerseys that their brothers, fathers, uncles and sometimes grandfathers had worn before them.

Those schools mattered.

Those rivalries mattered.

And those memories aren’t disappearing just because the jerseys have changed.

They are part of who we are.

But maybe Thursday showed us that we can honor where we’ve been while still being excited about where we’re going.

Buchanan County has been through a lot.

Our communities have endured devastating floods and watched neighbors lose homes, possessions and pieces of their lives. We’ve watched roads, schools and

communities take hits that would test anywhere.

And yet, Buchanan County keeps getting back up.

That’s why I believe Southern Gap can become about something much bigger than sports.

For decades, Friday nights divided us — not in a bad way, but in the way high school sports are supposed to.

Council pulled for Council.

Grundy pulled for Grundy.

Hurley pulled for Hurley.

Twin Valley pulled for Twin Valley.

You defended your colors. You cheered for your kids.

You wanted bragging rights until the next game.

Now imagine this fall.

Imagine that first big Friday night with the lights shining down into that new stadium.

Imagine the band playing.

Imagine the cheerleaders lined up.

Imagine the War Pigs coming out ready for battle.

Imagine that mountain backdrop behind the stadium and a packed house surrounding that black and Vegas gold field.

And then look into the stands.

Maybe you’ll see people from Council sitting beside people from Grundy.

People from Hurley cheering beside people from Twin Valley.

People who spent decades rooting against one another suddenly yelling for the same touchdown.

That’s what excites me about Southern Gap.

This school can’t erase the hardships our county has endured, and it shouldn’t erase the proud histories of the schools that came before it.

But it can help write the next chapter.

Maybe, in its own way, this new school can help mend some wounds.

Maybe sports can do what sports have always done at their best — give people a reason to come together.

There are going to be disagreements. There will be growing pains. There will be people who miss the old schools and the old rivalries, and I understand that.

But when those Eagles take the field, step onto the volleyball court, tee off on the golf course or run their first cross country meet, they won’t be representing one end of Buchanan County.

They’ll be representing all of it.

That is what I felt Thursday.

Words really can’t express the atmosphere surrounding that first media day. The morale was high. The smiles were everywhere. Coaches were excited. Athletes were excited. Cheerleaders were excited. The band was ready.

Nobody looked like a former Council Cobra, Grundy Golden Wave, Hurley Rebel or Twin Valley Panther.

They looked like Southern Gap Eagles.

One school.

One set of colors.

One county.

And for a place that has been through as much as Buchanan County has been through, maybe coming together underneath those Friday night lights is exactly what we need.

I can’t wait for that first football game.

I can’t wait for that first home volleyball match.

And I hope when those moments arrive, Buchanan County shows up.

Not one district.

Not one community.

All of Buchanan County.

Because those kids wearing black and Vegas gold aren’t somebody else’s team anymore.

They’re ours.

“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.”

CEDA Seed Capital Grant Approved for K&A Customz, LLC



Kristanne Mullins and Aaron Jacobs opened K&A Customz, LLC to provide property rehabilitation and renovation through site clean-outs, debris haul-off and job site prep all aimed at getting vacant housing back on the market. The new business is a recent recipient of a \$10,000 VCEDA Seed Capital Matching Grant.

Virginia Mountaineer

DANTE, VA – AUGUST 5, 2026 – Property rehabilitation, renovation through site clean-outs, debris haul-off and job site prep aimed at getting vacant housing back on the market are at the core of K&A Customz, LLC’s activities according to Kristanne Mullins, who co-operates the business with her spouse, Aaron Jacobs.

K&A Customz, LLC is a recent recipient of a \$10,000 Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) Seed Capital Matching Grant. Seed capital grants are funded from regional funds received by VCEDA which are paid by the natural gas industry.

“K&A Customz, LLC operates as a construction-related trade business through a set of unique services designed to rehab property to help it to sell while at the same time salvaging, refurbishing and reintroducing usable materials recovered during property clean-outs,” said Jonathan Belcher, VCEDA executive director/general counsel. “The business projects four full-time employees and four part-time employees within five years.”

In addition to the clean-out side of the business, Mullins said they also take some items from the clean-outs to refurbish and then to re-sell at their 16610 Russell Street, Suite 4 location in St. Paul, VA (the former Piggly Wiggly building). Materials recovered during cleanouts and refurbished reduce construction debris and support property rehabilitation and use. The storefront is open Tuesday-Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

“One of the benefits of our business to the community is opening up more housing availability, getting items out of the landfill and repurposing items,” Mullins said. “We specialize in estate properties and homes that require clearing prior to listing on the real estate market.”

Mullins said she and Jacobs came up with the idea for the business after assisting family members with a large estate cleanout where the previous owners had accumulated a significant number of belongings over many years, creating what she said was an overwhelming situation for the family responsible for preparing the home for sale.

“During this experience, we recognized two key challenges many families face – the emotional difficulty of sorting through personal belongings and the time constraints faced by family members who often live outside the area,” Mullins said. “These barriers frequently delay homes from entering the real estate market for sale or lease.”

She added, “K&A Customz provides a compassionate and efficient solution by contracting with estates and property owners to clear homes, transport items and

prepare properties for listing. Items removed from homes, are sorted and those which can be refurbished or repurposed are transported to our thrift store for resale.”

To date, K&A Customz, based in Dante, VA has provided services as far as Bluefield, VA. As the business grows, Mullins said plans are to add more cleanout crews to increase service coverage though the region and surrounding regions.

Mullins said the VCEDA grant is being used to develop a website to enable service bookings online, toward the purchase of a road tractor to be able to transport larger quantities of materials and debris in support of renovation and construction workflows and for operating expenses.

“The VCEDA grant is blessing,” Mullins said. “It will allow us to provide good quality service to the community.”

Mullins and Jacobs worked with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) in developing their application to VCEDA. They received a letter of support from the Wise County Industrial Development Authority.

“K & A Customz is addressing multiple needs within our region through services that benefit both the community and the local economy,” said Becki O’Quinn-Purdie, SBDC executive director at MECC. “Their clean-out services help families, heirs, landlords, and property owners prepare homes for sale, renovation, or reuse -- an important contribution in an area where housing availability remains a challenge. At the same time, their thrift store gives new life to quality items that might otherwise be discarded, offering affordable merchandise to residents while promoting reuse and reducing waste.

“MECC SBDC enjoyed working alongside K & A Customz throughout the grant process and this VCEDA Seed Capital award will help them continue making a meaningful difference in our communities,” she added.

“The services provided by K&A Customz provide a much-needed addition to St. Paul and the surrounding communities,” said Wise County IDA Executive Director Brian Falin. “By supporting property rehabilitation and renovation, K&A is well positioned to make a positive impact on both housing turnover and availability as well as contributing to the overall appearance and viability of the community through site cleanouts and debris haul-off. The Wise County IDA is proud to have supported this application and looks forward to seeing the company’s positive community impacts.”

For more information about K&A Customz, interested persons may visit or message their Facebook page or call 276-298-6899 or 276-344-8639.



Adopt a Pet

Virginia Mountaineer

Professional treat-taster

This sweet treat is a one-year-old male American Pit Bull Terrier. His sleek coat is colored grey/blue with white markings. He has bright eyes, an inquisitive expression and a muscular, stocky body. His personality is loyal, loving and eager to please. He appears intelligent and highly trainable.

This candy-coated canine will be available for adoption at the Buchanan County Animal Shelter until Monday, August 17, 2026.

Also available for adoption is this one-year-old male mixed breed. His short coat is colored honey gold with white markings and a black muzzle. He has dark eyes and high-set ears. His temperament is friendly and playful. 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.



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