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TWO SECTIONS PLUS SUPPLEMENTS | \$2

More than \$4 million recovered after Southern Gap payment scam

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

More than \$4 million of a \$4.6 million construction payment targeted in a cyber scam has been recovered by Buchanan County, school officials announced Aug. 18.

The county is still working to recover \$546,020, according to the latest statement from Buchanan County Public Schools.

The money was intended for the contractor building the new Southern Gap High School when it became the target of a misdirected payment scheme in July. The fraudulent transaction attempted to divert the entire \$4.6 million payment.

School officials said cooperation among the school division, Buchanan County Treasurer's Office, law enforcement agencies and multiple financial institutions helped reverse the payments and recover most of the money.

"Through tireless work, diligence, and cooperation with law enforcement, the School System, the Treasurer's Office, and multiple financial institutions, the misdirected payment scheme was largely thwarted," the school division said. "While the entire \$4.6 million payment was initially targeted, over \$4 million in payments were reversed and have been recovered by the County."

The Aug. 18 statement provided the first specific figures publicly released about the attempted theft and the county's recovery efforts.

In an earlier statement, the school division said it acted immediately after discovering the incident. Local law enforcement was contacted, and federal authorities were notified. The division also began working with the financial institutions involved to stop the transfers and recover the money.

Buchanan County Public Schools retained outside legal counsel experienced in cybersecurity incidents and hired cybersecurity experts to assist with the investigation and response. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, involved in the new high school project, was also notified.

The FBI continues to investigate the attempted fraud with assistance from Buchanan County and school division representatives.

Officials have not publicly explained how the payment was redirected or where the remaining \$546,020 went, citing the active investigation.

Misdirected payment schemes typically involve criminals sending fraudulent payment instructions or accessing legitimate communications and changing banking information. Large construction projects can become attractive targets because they involve payments worth millions of dollars.

Although more than half a million dollars remains unrecovered, the county's response prevented the loss of most of the targeted payment.

The incident did not stop work on Southern Gap High School or delay the new school's opening.



Three Southern Gap High School students work together during the first day of classes at Buchanan County's new high school. (Photo by Megan Wolford)

Southern Gap High School opens as Buchanan County begins new school year

By **CHAD COOPER**
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BUCHANAN COUNTY — Buchanan County Public Schools opened the 2026-27 academic year Friday, Aug. 21, marking the beginning of a new chapter for students, educators and families across the county.

The first day was especially historic at Southern Gap High School, where students from across Buchanan County entered the doors for the first time. The new school brings together the former Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley high school communities un-

der one roof.

Southern Gap, home of the Eagles, now serves as Buchanan County's only high school and houses students in grades eight through 12.

"Today was a really exciting and memorable first day at Southern Gap High School," Principal Mark Cooper said. "There was a lot of excitement among the students, teachers, staff, and families as we opened the doors to our new school. It was wonderful to see everyone coming together, getting familiar with the new building, and starting this new chapter as a

SEE **SOUTHERN GAP HIGH SCHOOL** | 2A

SGHS opens doors after receiving occupancy certificate early

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Southern Gap High School welcomed students into its halls Friday after the massive construction project received its certificate of occupancy three days ahead of schedule.

Construction Superintendent Tim Burge delivered the news during the Buchanan County School Board's Aug. 18 meeting, calling the completion of the nearly 200,000-square-foot school a team effort involving Branch Builds, its trade partners, school officials and others throughout the county.

"We got our CO last Tuesday, three days early on the contract," Burge said. "Thanks to Branch Builds, their trade partners, everyone else, the school system, working with everyone. It has been a team effort."

The certificate of occupancy cleared the way for Southern Gap to open Friday as Buchanan County's only high school. The school serves nearly 800 students in grades eight through 12 from the former Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley attendance areas.

Although students are now inside the building, work remains underway on several areas of the campus. Crews will continue addressing punch-list items, door hardware and other finishing work while completing the school's outdoor athletic facilities.

Burge said the remaining work inside the school will be scheduled around classes.

"We'll be working at night if we have to," Burge said. "We won't interrupt the school. Whatever's going on in school, we'll be working nights and weekends for punch-list items and those type of things."

SEE **SGHS OPENS DOORS** | 6A

Trial begins for man accused in 2022 killing of pregnant Buchanan County woman

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Nearly four years after Amber Dawn Compton was found shot to death inside her Buchanan County home, the trial of the man accused of killing her began this week in Russell County.

Jury selection in the case against Dustin Barrett Owens began at 9 a.m. Monday. The trial was moved from Buchanan County after a judge granted a defense request for a change of venue.

Owens is charged with first-degree murder in connection with Compton's death. The charge is an allegation, and Owens is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.

Compton, 35, was found dead inside her Vansant home Oct. 22, 2022. She had suffered multiple gunshot wounds and was seven months pregnant at the time.

Compton was a registered nurse and a mother of three. She and Owens were both employed at Keen Mountain Correctional Center in Oakwood and were involved in a relationship.

The Buchanan County Sheriff's Office began investigating after receiving a report that Compton was missing. Her body was discovered inside her home as investigators worked to determine what happened during the hours leading up to her death.

Owens was arrested Oct. 24, 2022, and charged with first-degree murder. He was later denied bond and remained in custody as the case moved through the court system.

Compton's death left her family grieving both her loss and that of her unborn child. In the years since the killing, her relatives have continued advocating for justice while also encouraging others to recognize warning signs in potentially dangerous relationships.

The trial is expected to continue after a jury is selected.



Dustin Barret Owens is charged with first-degree murder in connection with the October 2022 shooting death of Amber Dawn Compton in Buchanan County. His trial began this week in Russell County after the case was moved from Buchanan County (Photo courtesy of SWVRJ).



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Norma Jean Blankenship Hibbitts

NORMA JEAN BLANKENSHIP HIBBITTS, age 83, of Grundy, Virginia passed away on Wednesday, August 19, 2026, at her daughter's home.

Jean was born on October 31, 1942, in McDowell County, West Virginia. She was the daughter of the late Coy Blankenship and Mary Arwood Blankenship.

Jean enjoyed cooking, working with her flowers, spending time with her family, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was a friend to everyone and was known to most as Mamaw Jean. Upon retirement, Jean had been employed as a cook for the Buchanan County School System.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Jerry K. Hibbitts; son, Jerry W. Hibbitts, sisters, Hester Blankenship, Jeanette Kennedy and Wanda Yates; and brother, Lester Blankenship.

Those left to cherish her loving memory include daughters, Mary Hibbitts of Grundy, Virginia, and Donna (Mike) Underwood of Grundy, Virginia; sons, Randall (Tammy) Hibbitts of Wolford, Virginia, and Shannon (Billie) Hibbitts of Wolford, Virginia; eight grandchildren; twenty-two great-grandchildren; special relation, Laken Hibbitts and Preston Hibbitts; brother-in-law, Wayne Yates and sister-in-law, Trula Blankenship. She is also survived by several nieces, nephews, cousins, and a host of friends.

There was a service for Norma Jean Blankenship Hibbitts on Saturday, August 22, 2026, 7:00 p.m. at the Virginia Funeral Home Chapel, Grundy, Virginia, with Tommy Jenks and Eugene Whited officiating. The family received friends at 6:00 P.M.

A funeral service was conducted on Sunday, August 23, 2026, 1:00 PM at the Virginia Funeral Home Chapel, Grundy, Virginia.

Burial followed in the Hibbitts Cemetery, Edgewater Drive, Grundy, Virginia.

Serving as Pallbearers were her grandsons, great-grandsons, Aaron Knopf, Scotty Hibbitts, Aaron Church, and Michael Ashby.

Serving as honorary pallbearers



were Timothy (Dale) and Susan Hibbitts, Ardale and Betty Hibbitts, Wayne Yates, Bill Sage, David Sage, and employees of Ultra Hospice.

The Virginia Funeral Home of Grundy, Virginia, is honored to serve the family

Of Norma Jean Blankenship Hibbitts.



Courthouse News

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Marriage licenses
Michael Andrew Compton, 23, and Addison Grace Mullins, 19, both of Pikeville, Ky., on August 8, 2026.
Tyler Jordan Smith, 20, and Megan Taylor George, 22, both of Grundy, on August 15, 2026.
Deeds recorded
Changes in the Buchanan County Circuit Court record-keeping system have made the weekly electronic deed report unavailable at present. Deed transfer information for the prior month will be provided monthly during the second week of every month.

Community invited to Southern Gap High School ribbon-cutting

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Buchanan County residents can celebrate a historic moment in local education as Southern Gap High School holds its ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house Saturday, Aug. 29.

The celebration will begin at 10:30 a.m. at the new school, located at 2021 Eagle Drive in Grundy.

The event will officially welcome Southern Gap High School to the community and give students, families and local residents an opportunity to see the new facility. The school brings students from the Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley communities together as the Southern Gap Eagles.

Community members planning to attend are asked to RSVP to Sherry Fletcher by calling 276-935-4551 or emailing Sherry.Fletcher@bcpsk12.com.

SOUTHERN GAP HIGH SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 1A



The Southern Gap High School student body gathers for an assembly on the first day of classes Friday, Aug. 21. (Photo by Megan Wolford)

school community. Overall, it was a great first day, and we're looking forward to everything the future holds at Southern Gap High School."

The transition represents a major change for students who previously attended one of the county's four high schools. Former rivals are now classmates and teammates as they begin building a shared identity as Southern Gap Eagles.

Elementary and middle school students will continue attending schools in their respective communities. Those schools are Riverview Elementary/Middle School, Council Elementary/Middle School, Tommy P. Justus Elementary/Middle School and Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School.

The former Hurley Elementary/Middle School has been renamed Tommy P. Justus Elementary/Middle School in honor of the late Tommy P. Justus, who served Buchanan County Public Schools for many years, including as superintendent.

The opening of Southern Gap also brought significant changes to the school division's transportation plan. Southern Gap operates from 8:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., while the county's elementary and middle schools operate from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A long line of vehicles formed along Eagle Drive leading into Southern Gap on the first morning as students, families, faculty and staff adjusted to the new traffic pattern from state Route 83.

The Buchanan County Sheriff's Office increased its presence along Lovers Gap Road and Southern Gap Road to help direct traffic and monitor the area as motorists became familiar with the new school entrance and traffic flow.

Some delays were expected during the opening days as families, bus drivers and school employees adjusted to new routes and procedures. School officials and law enforcement are asking motorists traveling through the area to remain patient, allow additional travel time and use caution around school buses and increased traffic.

Although the first day brought adjustments, it also represented a milestone years in the making. Students from communities throughout Buchanan County walked into a new building Friday and began creating the traditions that will shape Southern Gap High School for generations to come.



Students arrive by school bus at Southern Gap High School on Friday, Aug. 21, for the first day of the 2026-27 academic year. (Photo by Megan Wolford)

Clear bags now required at Buchanan County athletic events

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Fans attending athletic events on Buchanan County Public Schools property must leave traditional bags at home under a new safety policy taking effect this school year.

Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, all athletic events held on school division property will require clear bags.

The policy applies to more than middle and high school sporting events. Spectators attending Little League games and other community athletic events on school property must also follow the requirement.

School officials said the change is intended to improve safety and security for students, athletes, employees, families and other community members. It will also create one consistent bag policy for athletic venues throughout the division.

The new requirement means fans should check their belongings before leaving for a game and make sure any bag they carry into the venue is clear. The school division's notice did not provide specific size requirements or list exceptions to the policy.

The division is asking families and visitors to cooperate with school employees as everyone adjusts to the change during the season's opening weeks.

School officials said the goal is to keep athletic events safe while continuing to provide a welcoming environment for students and the community.

For additional information about the clear bag policy, contact Buchanan County Public Schools at 276-935-4551 or visit www.bcpsk12.com.

Twin Valley receives \$80,000 for after-school program

By **CHAD COOPER**
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Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School will continue offering its after-school program with the help of an \$80,000 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant.

The Buchanan County School Board unanimously approved the continuation grant during its Aug. 18 meeting.

The funding will support after-school learning and enrichment opportunities for Twin Valley students during the 2026-27 school year. Laurelee Jackson oversees the school division's 21st Century grants.

The funding will support after-school learning and enrichment opportunities for Twin Valley students during the 2026-27 school year. Laurelee Jackson oversees the school division's 21st Century grants.

The federal program supports community learning centers that provide academic enrichment during hours when school is not in session. The programs can offer students additional educational assistance and other activities in a safe, supervised setting after the regular school day ends.

In another action involving Twin Valley Elementary/Middle, the board approved Zach Wimmer as the school's new head custodian. Wimmer replaces Trula Perrigan, who retired from the position.

Board members also voted to increase the school division's employee mileage reimbursement rate from 72.5 cents to 76 cents per mile.

The board ratified votes involving additional education funding, an addition to the Virginia High School League handbook and the nutrition credit purchase agreement. Approval of the nutrition agreement remains subject to legal review.



LOOKING BACK

From our files

By **CHAD COOPER**
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60 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 25, 1966

With 15 lettermen returning, Coach Jack Brown said he hopes to improve on last year's dismal 1-7 season. Brown, along with assistants Kermit Rife and John Stewart Justus, said that the attitude among the youthful aspirants for starting berths is good, and that this factor alone should mean an improvement in play.

Army Private First Class Robert E. Clifton, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter L. Clifton, Pilgrims Knob, was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam on July 26. Clifton is a 21-year-old soldier who graduated from Whitewood High School in 1963.

50 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 26, 1976

Miss Lisa Lester was crowned Miss Local Union 1640 on Saturday night at the Local Union 1640 Coal Miner's Daughter Beauty Pageant held at Vansant Elementary School. Lisa is the 17-year-old daughter of William Lester of Council and was sponsored by Dennie Tiller. The first runner-up was Anna Hess, a 17-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Coy Hess, and the second runner-up was Tamara Rowe, a 17-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Rowe.

Mr. Neal Cox, son of Mr. and Mrs. William (Mack) Cox of Grundy, is a recipient of the Hugh Scott Taylor Award in Chemistry at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey. This award is presented to the four most qualified graduate students entering the Doctoral Program in the Department of Chemistry. Neal attended Grundy Senior High School, where he graduated salutatorian in the Class of 1970.

30 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 29, 1996

Grundy Senior High School graduates Brent Osborne and Shauna Hurley recently received U.S. Army Reserve Scholar Athlete awards for their high school accomplishments. Both Osborne and Hurley will continue their education at colleges this fall. Staff Sgt. Moreland presented the awards.

Members of the Garden Green Dragons girls' basketball team for the 1996 season are Kristi Bartley, Shelly Blankenship, Janice Coleman, Kristy Boyd, Gre-ta Whitt, Susie Garrick, Tina Stanley, Brandi Davis, Wendy Meadows, and Rhonda Vance. Head coach Danny Rasnake leads the team.

25 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 30, 2001

Tonya Davis Plaster graduated May 14, 2001, from the Campbell University School of Pharmacy with a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Plaster graduated as valedictorian of Garden High School in 1993 and received a Bachelor of Science degree from Clinch Valley College in 1997. A former Oakwood resident, she is the daughter of Jack and Sharon Davis of Oakwood. She and her husband, Scott, now live in Cedar Bluff.

Stoney Hale added to an already impressive resume by capturing his fourth "Tough Man" championship in the middleweight division of the Tri-Cities Tough Man Contest on August 18 at Viking Hall. Buchanan County's resident tough man – who has won three tough man titles in West Virginia – won four bouts in the event, which was sanctioned by the Tennessee Boxing Association.



Young Southern Gap cheerleaders make their way through a line of cheering fans during the Meet the Eagles celebration. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

Meet the Eagles Brings Buchanan County Community Together

By **ALEXIS BURKES**
SGHS Media Reporter

It was a night filled with Eagle pride, school spirit and community support as Southern Gap High School hosted its Meet the Eagles event on Wednesday, Aug. 19. The evening gave the Southern Gap community an opportunity to meet the student-athletes who will represent the Eagles this school year. Athletes participating in volleyball, golf, cross-country, competitive cheer, sideline cheer and football were introduced to the crowd.

The event was filled with excitement as students, families and community members enjoyed music from a DJ, inflatables,

local vendors and food. Student Ryder Ward also volunteered his time to help announce the teams, adding to the energy and excitement of the evening. "It was so exciting to see everyone come together and support our students," said Bill Crigger during a radio interview on WNBV. You could feel the Eagle pride throughout the entire evening. This is more than just a school event—it's the beginning of something special for our entire community." The success of Meet the Eagles was made possible through the tremendous support of local businesses, organizations and community partners. Southern Gap High School extends a heartfelt thank-you to Chillerz, Pig-N-Out, Pearl & Pine Boutique,

Steel Magnolias, Darlene's Kitchen, Dave's Dawgs, Sunrise Building Company, West River Conveyors, Sweet B's Lemonade Stand, Donuts & More, TruPoint Bank, JGreat Entertainment, Golden Oldies, Soirée, Kona Ice, Wren's, WNBV – The Eagle, Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce, BCYI, CV Customs, Transitions Medical Spa, Tom's Coffee, Ridgeline Healthcare, New Peoples Bank, M&M Boutique, Appalachian Glow & Grow, Southwest Virginia Community College and Allie Daniels Permanent Jewelry. The event also highlighted the strong support surrounding Southern Gap's students and student-athletes. Coaches,

SEE **MEET THE EAGLES** | 6A



Southern Gap High School Lady Eagles gather for a group photo during the Meet the Eagles celebration. (Photo by Chad Cooper)



Southern Gap football players receive a warm welcome as they make their way through two lines of fans during the Meet the Eagles event. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

GOOD OL DAYS



The local artist pictured in the August 26, 1976 edition of the Mountaineer is John A. Whited, with a painting depicting a continuous mining machine at work. Whited painted it for Bob-by Harold Ratliff, a local mine owner. Whited, a resident of the Harman area, has extensive experience in the art world and has done other work for residents in the area. Whited worked in the mines before pursuing a career in Art. Many of Whited's works are on display throughout the county in various offices and places of business. Whited is employed by the Mountaineer Publishing Company.

Congressman Griffith: Lab Safety

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, lawmakers have intensified scrutiny of laboratory biosafety and research facilities that receive federal funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

As the former Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman and current Health Subcommittee Chairman on Energy and Commerce, I continue to help lead investigative work of federal research labs and the NIH.

The NIH consists of 27 Institutes and Centers. The NIH maintains a vast and expansive network of labs inside and outside the United States.

One such lab is Rocky Mountain Laboratories in Hamilton, Montana.

Rocky Mountain Laboratories maintains a massive research portfolio. The lab studies various diseases, including but not limited to Salmonella, chronic wasting disease, relapsing fever and plague.

POLITICO reports that scientists there are credited with breakthroughs involving Lyme disease and Ebola, among others.

Rocky Mountain operates as a Biosafety Level 4 laboratory, which is the highest safety designation. Scientists at Level 4 labs tend to deal with diseases that are life-threatening and must follow the most stringent security requirements.

According to a webpage from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), only a handful of U.S. labs are qualified Biosafety Level 4 labs.

However, within the last year, the Montana lab was linked to two concerning events.

One incident occurred in November 2025, when a Rocky Mountain worker was bitten by an infected lab monkey.

The monkey was infected with a lethal tickborne illness known as Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognizes the severe illness as the most widespread viral hemorrhagic fever.

After news broke of the monkey bite incident, questions swirled about the Montana lab, its safety protocols and how such a lab incident could happen.

Controversy did not stop there.

In June 2026, two NIH researchers from Rocky



MORGAN GRIFFITH

WEEKLY REPORT FROM THE CAPITOL

Mountain were criminally charged by the Department of Justice.

Their crime?

Smuggling monkeypox into the United States.

According to the Department of Justice, the two scientists were traveling on a commercial plane back to the U.S. from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa. Editor review required: paragraph identifies monkeypox smuggling but this sentence references an Ebola outbreak — verify accuracy.

When the scientists arrived in Detroit, they lied to Customs and Border Protection officers about the contents of a black case. The scientists claimed their case contained diagnostics and testing equipment.

Federal law enforcement discovered and tested 113 vials, many of which contained deactivated monkeypox virus. Another vial contained chickenpox and a couple contained human DNA.

It is clear that both researchers have experience working with infectious pathogens. In fact, Dr. Vincent Munster led Rocky Mountain's virus ecology section at that time.

Upon hearing about these incidents, I wanted to get answers.

This August, I traveled to Montana, where I received a tour of the Level 4 lab and a briefing. NIH Director Jay

Bhattacharya, who was a vocal opponent of COVID-19 lockdown policies, joined me to hear from the lab's researchers.

Explaining the monkey bite incident, the researchers had put the lab monkey under anesthesia. As one worker held the monkey up to their chest, the worker accidentally tapped the back of the monkey's jaw.

On reflex, instinctively bit the worker.

The worker received immediate treatment for their minor wound, and after appropriate precautions, returned to Rocky Mountain to continue research.

In research settings, animal-handling incidents can occur despite established safety and handling protocols.

Researchers I met with at Rocky Mountain also said they were ashamed and felt betrayed by Munster's actions.

The Munster case seemed to be a case of arrogance.

Because he was a leading scientist, the theory goes that Munster felt like the normal rules should not apply to him. But more will become clear as the criminal charges proceed.

We have seen too often recently that some scientists share this philosophy, which is why we need to pass specific rules banning risky research, such as my legislation, the Risky Research Review Act.

Rogue activity in the "name of science" must always be confronted. Thanks in part to my efforts to confront these issues, the group responsible for funding dangerous coronavirus research in Wuhan, China, was debarred from getting contracts with the U.S. government.

As infectious disease research develops, Congress has a responsibility to protect the American people. I will continue my vigilance on improving safety compliance, my investigative work and my exploration of additional Congressional action that can be taken regarding biolaboratory safety.

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

Rocklick News

By DEBBIE FOSTER

Hello Readers,

We didn't get to church this morning, and I couldn't find the service online. I'm not sure what happened. I do know that Brother Scotty Coleman brought the message.

I found out Sunday morning that we lost another precious lady in our church. Sister Pauline Wilson passed away Saturday night after so much sickness. Her son is our pastor, Brother Eddie Wilson. Prayer warriors, help me pray for her family. They are heartbroken.

I have a praise report. The report on my mammogram came in the mail Monday, and thank you, God, everything is normal.

We both have a big praise report. No details, but after waiting six weeks for a ramp for Ray to be built, everything fell through. I was so disappointed and near tears, but some men from our church stepped up. They came Monday morning and measured, ordered everything they needed and showed up early Tuesday morning to start building. By 2 that afternoon, we were walking across it into the garage. They're coming back Saturday morning to finish up. This was God's plan all along. I don't know how anyone can get along without a church family.

Saturday morning, bright and early, the men from our church showed up and finished the bridge project for Ray. He can now get out of the house safely and get to the garage, driveway, truck, side-by-side, etc. This will make such a difference and is an absolute blessing. Thanks to Ted, Steve, Billy, Herman, Dave and Buck for giving up their Saturday. We love our church family.

A reminder that the mobile food truck, Feeding Southwest Virginia, an equal opportunity provider, will be at the Grundy Community Center on Wednesday, Aug. 26. 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.

My prayer list is long: Shannon and Christine (need urgent prayers), Sarah, Shawne, Brad, Joann, Michelle, Linda, Alvin, Mac, Gary, Jerry and Vicky, Betty and Arlene, Leroy, Linda and James, Craig, Scott, Martha, Teresa, Jacob, Shawn, my uncle Tommy, Charles, Eugene, Melinda, Stanley and Crystal, Steve, Scotty, Brother Kenny (back surgery), Jon, Freddie and Sheila, Darrell



DEBBIE FOSTER
ROCKLICK
AREA NEWS
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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, Debbie (brain tumor), Curtis, Susie, Carol (needs urgent prayers), Ronnie and Carol, Mike, Thelma, Kim, Judy, Malva, Linda, Randy, Tyler, Miss Jean, Jerry, D.C., June, Rachel, Jason, Lonie, Dean, Ralph, Ashleigh, Brenda, Barbara, 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, 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.

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience."

Romans 5:3 KJV

Until next week ...

Don't worry about tomorrow. Jesus is already there.

There Are Different Ways To Learn



DR. GLENN MOLLETTE

There is more than one way to learn.

The formal method is the classroom. Elementary, junior and senior high school. This is of course the minimum standard for our society today.

Many of us spent years in other classroom studies. Today many people are studying online or via correspondence. There was a day when such a concept seemed ridiculous and even unacceptable but now is common.

Education does not always involve disciplined classroom type studies. Another method of education is trial and error, or "doing." We learn by doing. You can read about farming all day but it's another thing to do farming. Planting, tending and harvesting are learned by actually attempting the process.

Anyone would be smart to work with an experienced farmer for a season. Often when we start doing anything different we will mess up a few times but that's how we grow and become better. We often fail and learn from the failure. This enables us to try again with a plan to do better next time.

We also learn by seeing. I saw the ocean on television but never saw the ocean personally until I was 23 years old. I had heard about flying but had never flown until I was 27 years old. I had heard about the Grand Canyon and the Eiffel Tower but never saw either until later in life.

Twenty plus years ago my wife and I experienced much of Israel and many of the religious sites that I had read, heard and talked about for years. If I could have seen these sites when I was much younger it would have enhanced my biblical understanding. You can read about a place but it's far different when you can see and experience it first-hand.

Another way to learn is by listening. Many today don't have the ability to listen because they are always talking. If you will listen to others you will soon know everything they know plus what you know. If you talk all the time then you won't learn anything from other people.

Another way to learn is experiencing what you don't like and then moving forward to something else. You may learn that you don't want to own your own business. I've known people who have lost everything owning their own businesses including all their retirement savings.

Or, you may have learned you simply cannot work for someone else and being your own boss is the only way you can survive. Either way is often learned through a few years of experience.

Regardless of your current status in life, keep in mind that we all have lots to learn. We never know everything. The older we are the more we realize how much we don't know. Keep reading, doing, listening, trying and keep learning.

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWS IS JUST A CLICK AWAY



LOCAL NEWS



SPORTS



OBITUARIES



COMMUNITY EVENTS

www.VirginiaMountaineer.com

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THE WATCHMAN: Who Is the Stranger?

Moses gave a prophecy in Deuteronomy 29:21-28 about the children of Israel, the land and the curses. These Scriptures explain why the children of Israel went into Babylonian exile. In A.D. 70, Titus, a Roman military commander who later became emperor, led a campaign that captured and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God.

Later, the Ottoman Empire, historically also known as the Turkish Empire, did more damage to the land. They cut trees and salted the soil to stop it from producing crops.

The land was desolate, setting the stage for the stranger mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:22-23. I will give my opinion. You may disagree, and that's OK, but I will support my opinion with some data.

Let's look at Moses' prophecy in verse 22: "So that the generation to come of your children shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land shall say, when they see the plagues of the land and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it."

Verse 23 continues: "And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath."

In ancient times, the land of Israel was described as flowing with milk and honey — a fertile and fruitful land. But when the Jewish people were driven into exile, the land withered away.

Its forests disappeared, and its former glory lay in ruins. The Promised Land was now a barren, lifeless, parched and desolate horror.

Do you know who first prophesied the land's desolation? Moses.

Moses prophesied that a stranger would come from a faraway land. He said that when the stranger saw the plagues and sicknesses the Lord had laid upon the land, he would describe it as brimstone, salt and burning. It would not be sown, bear crops or grow grass. When the stranger entered the land, he would bear witness to its barrenness, devastation and desolation.

Is the passage speaking of one specific person, or does it refer to everyone who would come at such a time? I believe it has more than one level. In a general sense, it speaks of all who would come and be stunned by the land's utter desolation.

The stranger would come to the land in the end times, before a specific end-time event took place. That event is foretold in the same passage of Scripture.

The Lord God would bring his people back from captivity, have compassion on them and gather them again from all the nations where they had been scattered. The prophecy of the stranger leads into the prophecy of the regathering of the Jewish people.

The stranger's arrival would be a sign that the exile of the Jewish people was about to end and that the scattered children of Israel would return from the ends of the earth.

Did the prophecy come true? I believe it did — just as the land's devastation was at its most extreme during the 19th century.

The stranger would come, as prophesied, from a faraway land. From where? He would come from America, from the ends of the earth. From there, he would begin his journey. Because the prophecy required someone to offer words of testimony, he would be a man of words — a writer.

You have probably heard of him.

In my opinion, the stranger was Mark Twain, whom many consider the father of American literature. Let's look at the data.

Twain was working as a journalist on the West Coast when he was given an opportunity to travel by steamship to Europe, the Middle East, the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. He kept a notebook throughout the journey to record his observations.

According to the prophecy in Deuteronomy, the stranger was to bear witness to the plagues of the land and all its sickness. Listen to the words Mark Twain wrote concerning the plagues of the land: "Rags, wretchedness, poverty, and dirt," along with lepers, cripples and the blind. He wrote of the "maimed, malformed, and diseased humanity" that crowded the holy places.

According to Moses' prophecy, the stranger would describe the land as desolate. Twain wrote that all was "desolate and unpeopled." He described "miles of desolate country," "far-reaching desolation," and "the waste of a limitless desolation."

"It is a scorching, roasting heat," Twain wrote. "Such dismal desolation cannot surely exist anywhere on earth."

He also wrote, "Nowhere in all the waste around was there a foot of shade, and we were scorching to death."

The land was unsown. Twain said one might ride 10 miles thereabout and not see 10 human beings. He said there was not a solitary village throughout the entire area, not for 30 miles in either direction.

According to Moses, the stranger would bear witness to the land's inability to produce life. Twain described the valleys as "unsightly deserts fringed with feeble vegetation" and wrote of "a desert paved with loose stones, void of vegetation."

In the fierce sun, no grass grew. Not even a sprig of grass was visible.

Read Deuteronomy 29:22-25 and compare what Moses said with what Mark Twain wrote. You may gain an understanding of why I believe Twain was the witness.

Because of Israel's unfaithfulness toward God, the anger of the Lord burned against the land, bringing upon it every curse written in the Book of Deuteronomy, as described in verses 25-28.

Twain wrote, "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse."

He also wrote, "Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land?"

At the time, the land was called Palestine. The curse had removed the Jewish people for a season — but only for a season.

The year of Twain's visit was 1867. That was a 50-year Jubilee cycle, which I believe is very important. We will look at the Jubilee cycle in the next article.

Twain sent his words back to his native land, where they appeared in articles across America and beyond. But the stranger's witness would go even further.

Shortly after returning from his journey, a publisher approached Twain about turning his travel reports into a book. The book was released in 1869 as "The Innocents Abroad."

I believe that book helped fulfill the ancient prophecy. It became a best seller.

I have more to say in the coming articles, if it is the Lord's will. If God did this to Israel, America is living on borrowed time.

Stay tuned.

Savvy Senior: Simple Ways to Soothe Bunion Pain

Dear Savvy Senior,

I'm a 62-year-old woman and have had a bunion on my big toe for years, but lately it's become more painful and is making it hard to find comfortable shoes. I'd like to avoid surgery if possible. What can I do to ease the discomfort and keep it from getting worse?

--Sore Toe Susan

Dear Susan,

You're not alone. Bunions are very common, especially among women, and they often become more painful with age as the joint shifts out of alignment and inflammation sets in. What may have started as a minor nuisance can turn into ongoing discomfort, making it difficult to find shoes that fit comfortably.

A bunion, known medically as hallux valgus, is a bony bump that forms at the base of the big toe when the joint moves out of place, causing the toe to angle inward. Over time, this pushes the joint outward, creating the noticeable bump.

Why it happens

While tight or narrow shoes can make bunions worse, they're usually not the root cause. Genetics plays a major role, which is why bunions often run in families. Other factors like flat feet, arthritis, and past foot injuries can also contribute. Women tend to be more prone to them, partly due to years of wearing high heels or shoes with narrow toe boxes.

The good news is that most bunions can be managed without surgery, especially if your goal is to ease symptoms and slow their progression.

Simple relief

The first place to start is with your shoes. Switching to footwear with a wide toe box, soft materials, and good arch support can make a big difference, while high heels and tight shoes that crowd your toes should be avoided. It can also help to shop later in the day, when your feet are slightly swollen, for a more realistic fit.

Beyond footwear, a few simple steps can help ease the pressure. Padding the area with over-the-counter bunion cushions can reduce friction, and if the joint becomes sore or swollen, icing it for 10 to 15 minutes a few times a day may bring relief. Anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen can also help if your doctor says they are appropriate for you.

To further reduce strain, orthotic inserts, either store-bought or custom, can improve how your foot



JIM
MILLER

SAVVY SENIOR

distributes weight. Toe spacers can also help by keeping the toes in a more natural position, while a night splint, such as Dr. Scholl's Bunion Relief & Toe Corrector (about \$20), can gently guide the big toe into better alignment while you sleep.

It may also help to rotate your shoes rather than wearing the same pair every day, reducing repeated pressure. In addition, gentle exercises, such as stretching your toes, picking up small objects, or rolling your foot over a tennis ball, can help maintain flexibility.

It is important to keep expectations realistic. These steps will not eliminate a bunion, but they can make it more manageable.

When to get help

If your bunion pain interferes with daily activities or if you are developing corns, calluses or ongoing inflammation, it is wise to see a podiatrist or orthopedic specialist. They can evaluate the severity and recommend additional treatments.

Also seek care if you notice redness, warmth or significant swelling, which could signal irritation or infection around the joint.

Surgery is typically advised only when conservative measures no longer provide relief. Today's procedures are more advanced than in the past and are often done on an outpatient basis, though recovery can take up to six months and bunions can sometimes recur.

In the meantime, taking steps to protect your feet can go a long way. With the right care, many people are able to manage bunions effectively and stay comfortable, active and on their feet.

Send your questions or comments to questions@savvysenior.org or to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.

Adult education connection

As an adult, going back to school takes courage, commitment, and determination. Adult learners often balance education with work, family responsibilities, and other demands. Because of these challenges, it is important to recognize and celebrate the small wins along the way.

A small win might be passing a test, completing an assignment, attending class when you are tired, improving your reading or math skills, or learning how to use new technology. Even asking a question or reaching out for help can be an important accomplishment. These moments may seem minor, but they are meaningful steps toward a larger goal.

Celebrating progress can help build confidence and motivation. When adult learners focus only on the final goal, the journey can sometimes feel overwhelming. Recognizing smaller accomplishments provides reminders that progress is happening.

Adult education journeys rarely go exactly as planned. There may be setbacks, difficult classes, busy schedules, or times when motivation is low. A setback does not erase the progress that has already been made.

It is important for adult learners to be patient with themselves. Learning takes time, and everyone progresses at a different pace. What matters is continuing to move forward, even if some steps are smaller than others.

There are many simple ways to celebrate small wins.



BEVERLY
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Write down your accomplishments, share your progress with someone who supports you, take a well-deserved break, or simply give yourself credit for your hard work. Keeping a record of achievements can also be encouraging when you face a difficult day.

Most importantly, remember that every accomplishment matters. Completing one assignment, passing one test, or learning one new skill can bring you closer to your larger educational goals. Adult education is a journey, not a race. Celebrate each step forward, because small wins today can lead to major achievements tomorrow.

If you are interested in starting or continuing your adult education journey, you can call Southwest Regional Adult Education at 276-889-5424.

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE CAM

Meet Our New Executive Director, Colin Dailey

By JESSICA SAVAGE
Theatre Guild of Buchanan County

If you have spent much time at The CAM, there's a good chance you've already met our new Executive Director - although you may remember him stranded on an island, running a chocolate factory, or trying to figure out what to do about a house full of murderous little old ladies! Meet Colin Dailey, the new Executive Director of The CAM.

Colin is certainly no stranger to The CAM stage. Audiences have seen him take on some memorable roles over the years, including Gilligan in Gilligan's Island: The Musical, Willy Wonka in Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, and Mortimer Brewster in Arsenic and Old Lace. Now, he's taking on a brand-new role, one that may be his biggest challenge yet — helping The CAM continue to grow as a place where our entire community can gather, learn, create, celebrate, and connect.

As Executive Director, Colin will oversee event programming, business administration, community engagement, facility rentals, and other day-to-day operations while working alongside The CAM's leadership, volunteers, performers, instructors, and community partners.

For Colin, the vision extends well beyond what happens on the stage. "I want to help build The CAM into a community-building platform in line with the revitalization of the area, with an array of regular cultural events and classes." His long-term goal is even bigger, which is to help establish The CAM as a recognized cultural destination throughout our region and across Virginia.

Colin is originally from Beaumont, Texas, and spent much of his life between the Houston suburbs and Smithville, Texas. He later attended George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, where he earned a bachelor's degree in History and became a first-generation college graduate. It was also at George Mason where he met his wife, Hannah.

In 2022, Colin and Hannah moved to Southwest Virginia to be closer to Hannah's family while expecting their third child. Today, they are raising their three children here and have been busy putting down



Colin Dailey has been named the new executive director of The CAM, where he will oversee programming, community engagement, facility rentals and day-to-day operations while helping expand the organization's role in the community (Contributed photo).

roots, quite literally, as the two have also taken on the adventure of DIY-renovating their home.

Interestingly, theatre wasn't always part of Colin's plan. Before becoming involved with The CAM, his theatre experience consisted mainly of a high school class taken for a fine arts credit. His background in communication instead came from a decade of competitive debate, first as a debater and later as a coach, achieving success at the national level in both roles. Professionally, Colin spent approximately eight years working in insurance claims, including boat and travel insurance, before making the leap into his new position at The CAM.

But anyone who has watched him command The CAM stage knows that somewhere along the way, theatre found him. Colin's involvement in the community extends beyond The CAM. He has coached tee ball, youth basketball, and baseball, and he enjoys finding ways to be involved with his family and community. He's also a runner and is currently planning to complete a marathon this fall, although, according to Colin, he "may never run again" afterward.

When he's not working, running, coaching, acting, or renovating a house, you'll likely find him cooking,

He claims to make a solid chili and gumbo and describes himself as an "alright" campfire guitarist.

Colin's arrival comes at an exciting time for The CAM. Since opening our doors, we've always believed The CAM could be more than a theatre. Yes, we love producing plays and musicals, but our larger vision has always been to create a place where people throughout our community can experience something, learn something, share something, and belong to something.

Colin will play an important role in expanding that vision. That means more opportunities for events, classes, workshops, rentals, partnerships, cultural programming, and creative ideas we may not have even thought of yet. And that's where you come in! Do you have an idea for an event you'd love to see at The CAM? Is there a skill you could teach through a class or workshop? Would your organization like to partner with us? Are you looking for a unique venue for an upcoming event? Or have you simply been looking for a way to get involved?

Come talk to Colin.

His office hours are Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and community members are encouraged to stop by and introduce themselves, share an idea, or learn more about opportunities at The CAM.

He can also be reached at 276-244-7121 or cdailey@seeyouatthecam.com.

The CAM has always been built on people — the people who perform on our stage, sit in our audience, volunteer behind the scenes, bring their children to programs, teach classes, attend events, donate, dream big ideas, and believe that places like this matter in small communities.

We're excited to have Colin helping lead us into this next chapter.

He's survived Gilligan's Island. He's made it through Wonka's chocolate factory. He even survived the Brewster family in Arsenic and Old Lace.

We think he's ready to tackle his biggest role yet at The CAM!

Please join us in welcoming Colin Dailey, Executive Director of The CAM.

Free medical clinic coming to East Ridge High School

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Residents who have delayed visiting a doctor, dentist or eye care provider because of cost will have an opportunity to receive free care when Remote Area Medical comes to Lick Creek later this month.

The nonprofit organization will hold a two-day pop-up clinic Saturday, Aug. 29, and Sunday, Aug. 30, at East Ridge High School, located at 19471 Lick Mountain Road.

Free dental, vision, general medical and denture services will be available. The clinic is open to everyone, regardless of where they live or their financial circumstances. Patients do not need insurance, identification or proof of income to receive care.

Licensed medical professionals and trained volunteers will provide services. The clinic will accept patients on a first-come, first-served basis until it reaches its daily capacity.

The parking lot will open no later than 11:59 p.m. the night before each clinic day, and the clinic doors will

open at 6 a.m. Staff will distribute numbers as patients enter the parking lot, and everyone seeking care must be present to receive a number. Patients who leave after receiving a number will lose their place in line.

Appointments will not be scheduled in advance. Remote Area Medical encourages patients to arrive early because the number of people RAM can treat depends on available volunteers, time and services.

Dental services may include cleanings, fillings and extractions. Vision services may include eye exams and on-site prescription glasses. Patients should be aware that RAM cannot provide both dental extractions and dentures to the same person during one event.

Remote Area Medical organizes volunteer-powered clinics to help individuals and families who may otherwise have difficulty accessing professional health care. Additional patient information is available through Remote Area Medical.

Medical professionals, students and community members interested in helping with the clinic may register through RAM's volunteer website.

MEET THE EAGLES

FROM PAGE 3A

staff members, families and community members all played an important role in creating an atmosphere of excitement as the Eagles prepare for the 2026–27 school year. As the Eagles look ahead, the excitement will continue with Friday Night Tailgates and homecoming festivities planned for October. Meet the Eagles was more than an introduction to Southern Gap's student-athletes. It was a celebration of a new school, a new chapter and a community coming together behind its Eagles. It was a great day to be an Eagle.



The Southern Gap High School marching band performs for the community during the Meet the Eagles event. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

SGHS OPENS DOORS

FROM PAGE 1A

Student safety, he said, remained the project team's top priority as opening day approached.

"The school kids can go to school safely, and that's our most important, is that they come to school and they're safe," Burge said.

The new school had already passed its first major public test before classes began. A large crowd filled the Red Robertson Athletic Complex on Aug. 15 for Southern Gap's preseason football scrimmage against Patrick Henry.

Burge said the stadium's sound system has been installed, weight-room equipment has been placed, and wrestling mats and wall padding have been added to the wrestling room. A new sound system for the gym is scheduled to be installed during the week of Aug. 24, while a date is still being determined for installation of a light-show system in the gym.

During the meeting, school board members viewed a drone video offering a tour of the campus. Former Buchanan County Career, Technology and Higher Learning Center student Teddy Smith, now in college, filmed the footage. Engineering teacher Kayla Cantrell helped assemble the presentation.

The video carried viewers down the home-side sidewalk at the football stadium, past the concession area and bleachers and onto the artificial turf. An 8-foot fence surrounds the football field, and crews were still installing additional fencing along the top of a retaining wall.

"Honestly, it looks great seeing the kids out there playing ball and the cheerleaders and looking forward to seeing the band on the field, hopefully real soon," Burge said.

Inside, the video highlighted the large gymnasium, which can accommodate three full-size courts. The main bleachers rise approximately a story and a half and extend to within about 26 feet of the basketball court's sidelines when opened. The floor will also accommodate four wrestling mats.

The cafeteria offers students several types of seating, including traditional round tables, high-top tables and booths. Additional seating overlooks the outdoors through the building's large windows.

The auditorium was still receiving finishing touches before opening day. Its sound and lighting systems must be completed, the curtains have not arrived, and employees will need training on the equipment.

Burge said he looks forward to seeing the auditorium eventually host plays and academic competitions.

Classrooms were largely in place by the time of the board meeting. Teachers had begun arranging the flexible desks in several configurations. At the same time, science instructors were brought into the building early because their rooms contained some of the most equipment and supplies.

The library includes book shelving, traditional seating and enclosed egg-shaped chairs that rock as students sit in them.

Curtis Elswick Sr., vice president with Skanska, said preparing Southern Gap for students involved much more than completing construction and handing over the keys.

"There's been a lot of training on all the HVAC equipment, other pieces of the buildings, scoreboards, stadium lighting; all those things have been happening so that the school system, Mark Cooper, principal of Southern Gap High School, and his team know how to actually operate the school," Elswick said.

Architects conducted an educational orientation to help teachers, staff members and students learn their way around the 57-acre campus. The training explained the school's floor plan, room-numbering system, emergency exits and the ideas that influenced its design.

The building was designed around a central spine running along the mountain's ridgeline. Its colors and materials reference Buchanan County's industrial and coal-mining heritage.

Teachers received a one-page, front-and-back guide containing floor and site plans and information about the gym, auditorium and other major areas. Students were scheduled to receive a similar orientation Friday morning.

Architects also led tours of the career and technical education areas, including welding and nursing labs, to help instructors understand how the specialized spaces and equipment were designed to function.

School Board Chairman and North Grundy District board member David Thornbury said the project was never expected to be finished by the time students arrived for their first day. The current construction schedule calls for several outdoor facilities to be ready in time for spring sports.

Baseball and softball fields, a track and a multipurpose field that can accommodate soccer and other activities are among the remaining projects. Elswick said crews will continue working on those facilities for approximately three more months. Grass is already growing in portions of the outdoor complex.

Some career and technical education equipment will also require several more weeks to install. Elswick said that will not significantly disrupt students because the programs will begin with classroom instruction.

Students will eventually leave their mark on the new school. Career and technical education classes are developing a perforated-metal design for an empty steel wall near the dining area.

Students are creating the design with computer-aided design software, and welding students will use a computer numerical control machine to cut it into metal. Branch Builds will install the finished piece, and lighting will be placed behind it.

"It's something that the kids actually did," Elswick said.

Thornbury thanked the construction team for keeping the project on schedule and delivering the certificate of occupancy early.

"Everything's looking good," Thornbury said. "Everybody's excited."

While construction will continue around portions of the campus during the coming months, Thornbury said the building will continue taking shape as students and teachers settle into their new home.

"It will take shape over the next few months and should be pretty exciting as we go," he said.

Southern Gap volleyball ready to set standard in historic first season

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Southern Gap High School’s first volleyball team will enter the gym carrying more than a new name across the front of its jerseys.

The Eagles will carry the responsibility of establishing the expectations, traditions and identity of a program that will represent Buchanan County for years to come.

Players who previously represented Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley have spent the summer putting old rivalries behind them and learning how to compete as one team. First-year head coach Hannah Lester said the players have made that transition easier than she

could have imagined.

“It feels great,” Lester said of becoming the first varsity volleyball head coach in Southern Gap history. “I am so thankful and honored to have the opportunity to coach this team, and I am grateful I was trusted to take on the role.”

Building a program from scratch brings pressure, but it also presents an opportunity that Lester and her players will experience only once.

“Building a program from the ground up comes with a lot of pressure and responsibility, but this team is making it easy,” Lester said. “I take a lot of pride in these girls and how they have come together as a brand new team. I am excited for this opportunity.”

The adjustment began during open gyms over the summer. Instead of returning to familiar teammates and systems, the players had to learn new personalities, tendencies and styles of play.

“Preseason was a little different for us this year,” Lester said. “We had girls coming together from four different schools, so we had big numbers at open gym all summer. It was a lot of getting to know each other and learning each other’s style of playing.”

Any concerns about former rivalries carrying over quickly disappeared.

“The girls have adjusted in the best possible way,”

SEE SOUTHERN GAP VOLLEYBALL | 2B



Southern Gap junior running back Aidan Baker breaks loose for a long run against Holston. Baker rushed for 80 yards and scored the first touchdown in school history during the Eagles’ 22-6 victory. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

Eagles soar into history with 22-6 win over Holston

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The packed stands, crowded concourse and fans lining the hillside made it clear Friday night was about more than football.

Buchanan County had come together to witness history.

Southern Gap High School played the first regular-season football game in program history Aug. 21 at the Red Robertson Athletic Complex on Smiley Ratliff Field, and the Eagles made the occasion even more memorable with a 22-6 victory over Holston.

“It’s awesome,” Southern Gap head coach

Greg Tester said. “It’s the first win for Southern Gap and the first win for Buchanan County. We have a great school, great facilities and had a great crowd. I thank the community for coming out and supporting these kids.”

Following an emotional pregame ceremony, the Eagles wasted little time giving the home crowd another reason to celebrate.

Southern Gap received the opening kickoff and marched 56 yards for the first touchdown in program history. Freshman running back Carson Blankenship helped ignite the drive by breaking loose for a run of more than 30 yards

SEE EAGLES SOAR | 3B



Freshman running back Carson Blankenship finds a big hole in the Holston defense for a long gain during the first quarter of Southern Gap’s historic 22-6 victory. Blankenship rushed for 168 yards and a touchdown in his varsity debut. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

In the Locker Room

By CHAD COOPER | COOPKAM@GMAIL.COM

A night Buchanan County will never forget

As I turned onto Eagle Drive last Friday night, I knew Buchanan County was about to experience something special.

Traffic was still pouring onto the campus at 2021 Eagle Drive as families, students, and football fans made their way to the first game in Southern Gap High School history.

Even before my wife and I walked into the stadium, I was blown away by how many people had come to witness the start of a new era.

Once we entered the Red Robertson Athletic Complex, we could feel the excitement in the air.

By kickoff, the home stands were packed. Fans lined the beautiful concourse that was horseshoe-shaped above the seating area, while others found places on the hillside overlooking the field. Everywhere you looked, people were wearing black and gold and celebrating the arrival of the Southern Gap Eagles.



CHAD COOPER
IN THE LOCKER ROOM

Standing there and taking it all in, I felt a little extra proud to be from Buchanan County.

This was more than a football game. It was the first time students from the Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley communities came together beneath the Friday night lights to represent one high school.

Before the Eagles reached the sideline, Southern Gap’s first game captains walked onto the field. The group showed how much history came together to form this new program.

Senior wide receiver and defensive back Brayden White played his previous three seasons at Twin Valley. Senior Kanan Justice came to Southern Gap after spending three years at Hurley. Senior linebacker and fullback R.J. Rowe previously wore the Grundy uniform, as did Ayden Whited, Southern Gap’s first starting quarterback.

They once represented different schools and communities. On this night, they stood together as Eagles.

The moment was especially emotional for me because Southern Gap head coach Greg Tester is a close friend. I had the privilege of playing one season with Greg in high school and another in college. We were also roommates for a couple of semesters.

Knowing the time, energy and emotion he has invested in this program made it special to watch him lead the Eagles onto the field for the first time.

The coin toss carried even more personal meaning.

My brother, Mark Cooper, the first principal in Southern Gap High School history, was chosen to flip the coin. A thoughtful message about him was read before the toss, recognizing his role in helping guide the school through its historic opening. Senator Todd Pillion was set to be with Cooper during the coin toss but arrived late. He did make an appearance during the second half of the game after a tour of the school by Cooper.

Holston called tails, and the coin landed on tails.

SEE IN THE LOCKER ROOM | 2B

So-Gap hosts Ridgeview in Black Diamond Bowl; Honaker battles Lebanon in Coal Bowl

THE GAME: Ridgeview (0-0) at Southern Gap (1-0)

THE SETTING: Friday, Aug. 28, 2026, at 7:30 p.m. at Smiley Ratliff Field at the Red Robertson Athletic Complex in Grundy.

RIDGEVIEW: The Wolfpack feature two of the state’s top juniors in Colin Hill and Alex Grant. Both are moving into the backfield this season and will be focal points in head coach Kent Grant’s offense. Junior Braxton Deel takes over at quarterback, giving Ridgeview another dangerous athlete. Deel’s mobility and ability to make plays outside the pocket will challenge the Southern Gap defense.

SOUTHERN GAP: Freshman running back Carson Blankenship led the Eagles in their historic 22-6 victory over Holston. Blankenship rushed for 168 yards on 15 carries, scored a touchdown and intercepted a pass in the end zone. Brothers Aidan and Gunner Baker give Southern Gap two more physical options in the backfield.

Senior defensive back Brayden White recovered three fumbles in the opener, while linebackers R.J. Rowe and Reid Stiltner helped anchor a defense that forced five turnovers.

FINAL WORD: Southern Gap opened its inaugural season with a victory in front of a packed home crowd, but the competition takes a major step up this week. Ridgeview returns most of the key skill players from a team that finished 11-2 and came within one touchdown of defeating Union in last season’s Class 2 Region 2D

championship game.

The Wolfpack have experience, speed and playmakers throughout their lineup. Southern Gap will need to control the football, limit big plays and create turnovers to remain within striking distance. The excitement surrounding the new program should produce another outstanding atmosphere, but Ridgeview’s experience and offensive firepower will be difficult for the young Eagles to overcome.

PREDICTION: Ridgeview 48, Southern Gap 6

THE GAME: Lebanon (0-0) at Honaker (0-0)

THE SETTING: Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026, at 7 p.m. at Fuller Field at EMATS Stadium in Honaker.

LEBANON: Junior running back and middle linebacker Layne Jessee is one of the top recruits in Southwest Virginia and can take over a game on either side of the football. The Pioneers also have an outstanding special-teams weapon in sophomore kicker Hagin Curry.

HONAKER: The Tiger Raid offense returns with sophomore quarterback Parker Lowe ready to build on one of the best freshman seasons in Virginia High School League history. Lowe pairs accuracy with a talented, imposing group of receivers. Kameron Keen, Levi Honaker, Jeremiah Rose and Kam Beavers all stand at least 6-foot-2, giving Lowe several big targets in the passing game.

SEE SO-GAP HOSTS RIDGEVIEW | 2B

New People’s Bank

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

BRAYDEN WHITE

Southern Gap High School senior Brayden White is the New People’s Bank Player of the Week. White had three key fumble recoveries and three total tackles during the Eagles’ 22-6 victory over Holston at home on Aug. 21, 2026.

www.NewPeoples.Bank

CONGRATULATIONS!



VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER PIGSKIN PROGNOSTICATORS



	CHAD COOPER	SAM BARTLEY	RYAN KEENE	TERESA MATNEY	MARK COOPER	BRIAN MOORE
THIS WEEK'S GAMES						
1 Ridgeview at Southern Gap	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Southern Gap	Ridgeview
2 Lebanon at Honaker	Honaker	Honaker	Honaker	Lebanon	Honaker	Honaker
3 Graham at Bluefield	Bluefield	Bluefield	Bluefield	Graham	Graham	Bluefield
4 Virginia High at Patrick Henry	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Patrick Henry	Patrick Henry
5 Chilhowie at Marion	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie
6 Abingdon at John Battle	Abingdon	Abingdon	Abingdon	Abingdon	Abingdon	Abingdon
7 Northwood at Twin Springs	Northwood	Northwood	Northwood	Northwood	Twin Springs	Twin Springs
8 Bland County at Castlewood	Bland County	Castlewood	Castlewood	Bland County	Holston	Bland County
9 Holston at Eastern Montgomery	Holston	Holston	Holston	Holston	Holston	Holston
10 Rural Retreat at Fort Chiswell	Rural Retreat	Rural Retreat	Rural Retreat	Rural Retreat	Rural Retreat	Rural Retreat
11 Richlands at Gate City	Gate City	Gate City	Gate City	Gate City	Gate City	Richlands
12 Eastside at Wise Central	Eastside	Eastside	Eastside	Wise Central	Eastside	Eastside

EAGLES SOAR

FROM PAGE 1B

to get into Holston territory. Freshman Gunner Baker followed by bulldozing his way inside the Cavalier 5-yard line.

Two plays later, junior running back Aidan Baker powered into the end zone on a 1-yard run with 10:21 remaining in the first quarter, etching his name in the record books as the first player to score a touchdown for Southern Gap.

Blankenship followed by running in the first 2-point conversion in school history, giving the Eagles an 8-0 lead just 1 minute, 39 seconds into the game.

Southern Gap's defense made an immediate impression behind a physical defensive front, linebackers R.J. Rowe and Reid Stiltner, and defensive back Ayden Whited. Holston struggled to establish anything on its opening possession and was forced to punt.

Blankenship provided another historic moment when Southern Gap got the football back.

The freshman found an opening, burst through the Holston defense and raced 51 yards for the second touchdown in program history. The conversion attempt failed, but the Eagles had built a 14-0 advantage midway through the opening quarter.

Blankenship finished his varsity debut with 168 rushing yards, a touchdown, a 2-point conversion and an interception.

"It was a great feeling getting our first win and making Southern Gap history," Blankenship said. "I'm thankful for my coaches for pushing us and believing in us, and I'm proud to be part of this team. I'm excited to see what we can accomplish this season."

Tester said Southern Gap plans to continue developing its passing game, but the Eagles will also lean on their physical rushing attack when the situation calls for it.

"It depends on the situation," Tester said when asked if they were a running team. "We're going to throw the football more, but with clock management and the way we were playing up front, running the ball helped our confidence and energy."

The Eagles attempted only one pass but rushed for 225 yards on 41 carries. Aidan Baker added 80 yards and the historic opening touchdown.

"We played physical football," Tester said. "Our offensive line played outstanding. Defensively, we bent a little, but we didn't break. They got inside on us a few times, but our kids kept battling and made plays when we needed them."

Holston did not go quietly after falling behind by two early touchdowns.

The Cavaliers began finding some success on their second offensive possession, but the first takeaway in Southern Gap history ended the drive. Mason Rife intercepted Holston quarterback Brodie Richardson inside the Eagles' 10-yard line early in the second quarter, stopping the Cavaliers before they could cut into the lead.

Holston later found a rhythm behind senior running backs Eli Tweed and Desmond Mickens and drove back into the red zone. Blankenship answered with another historic play, intercepting Richardson in the end zone to end the threat.

Tester credited Holston and head coach Chris Akers for continuing to challenge Southern Gap after the Eagles' fast start.

"First of all, I want to give that team a lot of credit," Tester said. "Chris Akers always does a great job. I told our guys last week that he always gets the best out of his kids and that we had to be ready to play. They have some tough kids and some pretty good athletes."

"We came out, grabbed the momentum and scored quickly, but Holston battled back. They had the momentum going into halftime. Our kids rallied on defense, got a stop on that first series of the second half and then we started taking control again."

Southern Gap's offense struggled to maintain its early pace during the second quarter. Holston recovered an Eagles fumble at the Southern Gap 17-yard line and took advantage of the short field.

Mickens scored on a 6-yard run with 3:16 remaining in the half. Southern Gap blocked the extra-point attempt, allowing the Eagles to carry a 14-6 lead into the locker room.

The Cavaliers had gained momentum, but Southern Gap's defense came out of halftime swarming and forced a quick three-and-out.

Southern Gap began moving the football on its next possession, and Blankenship appeared to break free for another long touchdown. A holding penalty erased the score and eventually helped end the drive.

Holston regained possession after a turnover on

downs and targeted Tweed and Mickens. The Cavaliers advanced inside the Southern Gap 1-yard line, positioning themselves to possibly tie the game with a two-point conversion.

Instead, the Eagles delivered one of the defining plays of the night.

Chase Baker and Southern Gap's defensive front met the Holston ball carrier near the goal line and knocked the football into the air. Senior Brayden White recovered it before the Cavaliers could cross the goal line.

"They had the momentum, and I told our kids that we had to get it back," Tester said. "We needed a big stop on defense, and they came through for us. That tells you a lot about the character of this team."

It was one of three crucial fumble recoveries by White during the game.

"It was awesome," White said. "We had a great atmosphere here. We made plays on defense and flew around. We had a rough first half, but we played better in the second half. I don't think we played our best ball, but we just have to take it week by week and get better."

Tester praised White's willingness to contribute wherever he is needed.

"Brayden White may be small, but no matter where we put him, he can play," Tester said. "He's like 'Where's Waldo?' We can play him at running back, receiver or quarterback. He is a true team player, and those three fumble recoveries were huge for us."

Holston committed five turnovers, including two fumbles inside the Southern Gap 5-yard line. The Eagles intercepted two passes and recovered three fumbles, repeatedly turning away the Cavaliers when they threatened to score.

Whited put the finishing touches on Southern Gap's historic victory with 5:37 remaining in the fourth quarter.

The senior quarterback initially ran toward the left side before reversing field. Whited outran Holston's defenders to the opposite side and beat them to the pylon for a 4-yard touchdown.

Gunner Baker powered into the end zone for the 2-point conversion, extending Southern Gap's lead to 22-6.

The Eagles' defense made sure the lead stood.

Rowe, Gunner Baker and Stiltner were active throughout the game, while White repeatedly found himself around the football in crucial moments.

Tweed led Holston with 86 yards on 17 carries, and Mickens and senior linebacker Levi Parks were among the Cavaliers' defensive leaders.

Holston finished with 156 yards of offense, including 120 rushing and 36 passing. The Cavaliers collected 12

first downs but could not overcome their five turnovers.

Southern Gap finished with 14 first downs and 225 yards, all on the ground. The Eagles were penalized eight times for 80 yards and lost two fumbles.

Tester congratulated his players on the victory but reminded them that the first win was only the beginning.

"He said we have to clean up some little things," White said. "He congratulated us on the win and told us to be ready for next week, come to practice Monday and get back to work."

For White, earning the first victory in school history in front of a packed home crowd made the moment even more meaningful.

"It feels awesome," White said. "We have a great facility and had a lot of fans here. I'm sure they loved seeing us win the first game. It was amazing"

When the final seconds disappeared from the scoreboard, Southern Gap's players and coaches celebrated with a large home crowd that had waited all summer to see the Eagles take the field.

More importantly, it gave Buchanan County its first look at what can happen when athletes, coaches and communities from across the county come together as one.

"We have the four corners here," Tester said, quoting local minister Mike Rife, who spoke to the team before the game. "We have Hurley, Grundy, Twin Valley and Council. Those are the four corners, and we have to bring them together. That is what I want to build this program on — being tough, being together, being accountable and being disciplined."

"Buchanan County is full of hardworking, blue-collar people. That is what we want to base our standards on."

Southern Gap will host Dickenson County rival Ridgeview Friday night at Southern Gap in the Black Diamond Miners Bowl, with kickoff scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Dr. Pepper Fanville will be hosting the pregame show beginning at 4 p.m.

Holston. 0 6 0 0 —6

Southern Gap 14 0 0 8 —22

Scoring Summary

SG — Aidan Baker 1 run (Carson Blankenship run)

SG — Carson Blankenship 51 run (run failed)

H — Desmond Mickens 6 run (kick blocked)

SG — Ayden Whited 4 run (Gunner Baker run)

Team statistics

First downs — H 12, SG 14. Rushing — H 120 yards, SG 225. Passing yards — H 36, SG 0. Passing — H 5 of 8 with two interceptions; SG 0 of 1. Fumbles-lost — H 3-3, SG 2-2. Penalties-yards — H 6-45, SG 8-80. Punts-average — H 2-31, SG 2-34.



Freshman Mason Rife intercepts a pass from Holston quarterback Brodie Richardson intended for Desmond Mickens. Rife's second-quarter takeaway was the first interception in Southern Gap football history. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

School Board approves principal, superintendent designees

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Buchanan County School Board approved a list of employees who will be authorized to oversee the county's schools when their principals are away during its Aug. 18 meeting.

The board also approved Pam Tester, the school division's elementary supervisor, to serve as Superintendent Sherry Fletcher's designee when needed.

Each principal recommended staff members who can assume leadership responsibilities in the principal's absence. The designees provide continuity at each school and ensure an administrator or authorized employee can handle decisions and daily operations.

At Tommy P. Justus Elementary School, Principal Angela Rife Wolford selected Scott Embry as her designee.

Riverview Elementary/Middle School Principal Melody O'Quinn selected assistant principals David Owens and Amelia Ward, along with Jill Lester and

Stephanie Yates.

Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School Principal Melisa Goodman selected Dot Owens, Alice Crigger and Stephanie Stiltner.

Council Elementary/Middle School Principal Joan Hart selected Samantha Ferguson and Marsha Presley to oversee the school when she is away.

Southern Gap High School Principal Mark Cooper selected Christina Bane, Bill Christian and Kim Hess as his designees.

Board members approved the list without opposition.

Fletcher also provided an early enrollment update as the school division prepared for the beginning of classes. She said preliminary figures placed the division near last year's enrollment.

"When I talked with schools today, we're about where we were last year, maybe 10 students less, but, you know, we've not gotten to school yet," Fletcher said.

Because the update came before students reported for the first day, the numbers were not considered final. Enrollment figures typically fluctuate during the

opening days as students register, transfer or withdraw.

In other business, the board approved a new locally awarded verified credit plan for history and social sciences.

Secondary and CTE Supervisor Karen Taylor developed the plan with Cooper and his staff. Instead of relying on a single test, the plan will allow students to earn a locally awarded verified credit through performance-based assessments completed throughout the school year.

"This would be based on performance-based assessment," Taylor told the board. "It is not just a test. This would be conducted all year long and would be scored by different teachers throughout the year to give our students a local verified credit."

The plan will take effect during the 2026-27 school year.

The board also approved a group of Virginia School Boards Association policies following their second reading. The policies had previously been presented to board members for review.



Fifty-four Buchanan County students earn academic honors at SWCC

Fifty-four students from Buchanan County earned academic recognition at Southwest Virginia Community College following the summer 2026 semester.

The local students were among those named to the college's Dean's List and Honors List, marking a semester of hard work and achievement both inside and outside the classroom.

Nineteen Buchanan County students earned a place on the Dean's List. To qualify, students must be enrolled full-time, complete at least 12 credit hours, and earn a grade-point average of 3.20 or higher.

Buchanan County students named to the Dean's List were Rylea Baker, Brittany Daugherty, Dianalid Ford, Eian Ford, Madison Hagy, McKenzie Hagy, Hunter Horn, Aiden Jackson, Daniel Jackson, Alexandria Love, Sabrina McCowan, Jaelyn Owens, Austin Potter, Pattie Proffitt, Samuel Pruitt, Candace Runyon, Connor Snead,

Brandon Stiltner and Zachary Stiltner.

Another 35 Buchanan County students were named to the Honors List. The recognition is reserved for part-time students who complete at least six credit hours and earn a grade-point average of 3.50 or higher.

Local students earning Honors List recognition were Keisha Adkins, Landon Adkins, Charlotte Anglin, Eric Ball, Joseph Basham, Hunter Blankenship, Jordan Boyd, Amanda Charles, Matthew Charles, Landon Dale, Kierra Dales, Lorena Davis, Mary Davis, Morgan Davis, Ashley Deel, Katelyn Dotson, Lukas Dotson, Makailah Estep, Morgan Hale, Kaydence Jackson, Tristan Jayyab, Andrea Keen, Richard Keen, Lily Lester, Luke Mackey, Amber Mays, Brittany Moore, Emily Mullins, Bryant Rasnake, Sarah Stacy, Tiffani Sullivan, Sarah Turner, Kaden Vanover, Jade Vencill and Christina Wolford.

School Board approves leadership chart, raises SRO overtime rate

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Buchanan County School Board approved an updated organizational chart for the 2026-27 school year and increased the overtime rate paid to school resource officers during its Aug. 18 meeting.

The organizational chart outlines the chain of responsibility across Buchanan County Public Schools, from the Virginia Board of Education and local School Board to the employees serving students in classrooms, cafeterias, school buses and other areas.

Superintendent Sherry Fletcher said the overall structure remains largely unchanged from the previous school year. Names were updated to reflect retirements and personnel changes.

Fletcher remains at the top of the division's day-to-day operations, while Elementary Supervisor Pam Tester is listed as the superintendent's designee. Tonya Cox serves as clerk of the School Board.

The chart identifies the supervisors responsible for the school division's major departments.

Bethany Crouse serves as school nurse supervisor, overseeing the division's team of school nurses.

Kevin Yates is the technology supervisor. The technology department also includes Networking Coordinator Brandon Thomas, central office technology employees and technology teachers.

Kaitlin Dotson is the director of finance and oversees the finance department staff and school book-

keepers.

Becky Harrison serves as director of human resources and Medicaid.

Kathy Witt is the school improvement coordinator and works with middle and secondary school teachers.

Laurelee Jackson is the federal programs supervisor, 21st Century program supervisor and grant writer. That department includes Title I and preschool teachers. Jackson also oversees the division's 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, including the \$80,000 continuation grant approved for Twin Valley Elementary/Middle School's after-school program.

Tabby Cline serves as the special education and Medicaid supervisor. Carolyn Mitchell and Kim Hess are special education coordinators. That department oversees special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

Karen Taylor is the division's director of technology, secondary education and career and technical education. Her area includes secondary and career and technical education teachers.

Dwayne Hurley serves as the bus garage supervisor and oversees bus garage employees.

Adam Cook is the maintenance supervisor. His department includes maintenance employees, building engineers, head custodians and custodians.

Jeremy Ward is the transportation and safety supervisor. His department includes office staff and the division's school bus drivers.

Rhonda Musick serves as the school nutrition supervisor. She oversees food service office staff, cafeteria managers and cafeteria workers.

Elementary, middle and high school principals and assistant principals are also included in the division's leadership structure. They oversee school-level teams composed of teachers, counselors, secretaries, bookkeepers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria employees, custodial workers, bus drivers, athletic directors, coaches, volunteers, nurses and substitute employees.

Board members approved the organizational chart without opposition.

In another school safety matter, the board unanimously approved Sheriff Allen Boyd's request to raise the overtime rate for school resource officers from \$35 to \$43 per hour.

Hurricane school board member Mike Thompson (a retired investigator of the Buchanan County Sheriff's Office) made the motion, seconded by Prater school board member Jack Compton and unanimously approved by the board. The increase is \$8 per hour, or about 23%.

School resource officers provide security during the regular school day and may work overtime to cover football and basketball games, ceremonies and other school activities held after normal hours.

The board approved the increase without discussion.

No committee reports were presented during the meeting. The board scheduled its next regular meeting for Tuesday, Sept. 15.

SWCC announces Southern Gap class schedule for 2026-27

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Students will not have to travel far from Buchanan County to receive training for careers in health care, nursing, diesel technology, aviation, construction and food service during the upcoming academic year.

Southwest Virginia Community College has announced its fall 2026 and spring 2027 class schedule for the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center in Grundy.

The schedule includes traditional college courses, workforce training and short-term certification programs. Classes will cover subjects ranging from nursing and phlebotomy to diesel engines, drones, solar installation and food safety.

The center's health care offerings begin with an Adult Education Program for certified nursing assistant students. The class meets from 5 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays from Aug. 18 through Oct. 13.

A Scrubs/TABE/REVIVE session for CNA and phlebotomy students will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 24. CPR training for those students will follow from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 1.

The fall Certified Phlebotomy Technician course meets from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesdays from Aug. 26 through Dec. 9. The course will be offered again during the spring semester, meeting from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesdays from Feb. 17 through May 26.

A Certified Nursing Assistant program is also planned for spring 2027. That class will meet from 5 to 9 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays.

Nursing students will have several courses available at the center during the fall semester.

Introduction to Nursing Concepts will meet from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Mondays from Aug. 24 through Dec. 18.

Two sections of Competencies for Nursing Practice will be offered. One will meet Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4 p.m., and the other will meet Thursdays at the same time. Both sections will run from Aug. 24 through Dec. 18.

Professional Nursing Concepts will be offered online.

Health Promotion and Assessment will be available from 8:30 to 9:20 a.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, with corresponding laboratory sessions meeting from 9:30 a.m. to noon each day.

Health Care Concepts I will meet from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Thursdays, while Health Care Concepts II will meet from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. The fall nursing courses are scheduled from Aug. 24 through Dec. 18.

The center will also offer hands-on training for students interested in transportation and diesel technology.

Basic Diesel Engine Systems will meet from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays from Aug. 24 through Oct. 19.

Medium/Heavy Duty Truck Brake Systems will meet from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays from Aug. 24 through Dec. 18.

Industrial Safety will be offered from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursdays from Aug. 24 through Oct. 19.

Diesel Power Trains, Chassis and Suspension is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 20.

Students interested in aviation and drone technology can enroll in Unmanned Aerial Systems. The course will meet from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays from Oct. 3 through Oct. 17.

Short-term construction and energy courses will also be available.

Flagger training will be held from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 20. Solar Installation Technician training will follow from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Oct. 21-22.

A Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation course is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, June 26, 2027.

Food service workers and others interested in hospitality training can participate in several ServSafe courses.

A ServSafe class will meet from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 15. Another session will be held from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 22.

Additional ServSafe training is planned for February 2027; the specific date and time will be announced. A final class is scheduled for Monday, May 11, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Southern Gap Center is located at 1102 Ovenbird Road in Grundy.

Students interested in the classes should contact the center at 276-964-7528 or southerngap@sw.edu. Additional information is available at sw.edu/southerngap.

Community members are also invited to help Southwest Virginia Community College improve its Southern Gap programs by completing a survey at go.sw.edu/southerngap-survey.

CLASSIFIEDS

AUCTIONS

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LEGAL NOTICES

VA ABC NOTICE
Full Name of owner:
Rudra Enterprise, LLC
Trading as:
Sonny's Quick Stop
1063 Contrary Creek Road, Rave, Buchanan County, VA 24639-8408

The above establishment is applying to the VIRGINIA ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL (ABC) AUTHORITY for a convenience grocery store, beer, wine, consumed off premises license to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages.
Bipin Chaudhary, Owner.
Note: Objections to the issuance of this license must be submitted to ABC no later than 30 days from the publishing date of the first of two required newspaper legal notices. Objections should be registered at www.abc.virginia.gov or 800-552-3200.
VAM-08-20,27;2026

PUBLIC NOTICE
APPLICATION FOR RE-NEWAL/REISSUANCE OF COAL SURFACE MINING/ NPDES PERMIT NO. 1601787/0081787
UNDER CHAPTER 19, TITLE 45.2 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA
Publication Number: 26NXA01
Application Number: 1011932

The Black Diamond Company of 1073 Riverview Street, Grundy, VA 24614 is applying to the Virginia Mined Land Repurposing Program for renewal of Permit No. 1601787, to continue the operations at the following location:
The operation is in Buchanan County on Caney Fork and Buckeye Branch, approximately 2.4 miles southwest of Big Rock off Route 610 and 460. The permit is situated on the Harman USGS 7.5 Minute Topographic Quadrangle Map. The acreage for this operation is 344.29 acres. Drainage will pass through sediment control structures and will be discharged into Caney Fork and Dry Hollow near the VA/KY state line. The existing discharge lo-

LEGAL NOTICES

cations may be viewed on the Renewal Map which is attached in Section 21.2 of the application. Additional discharge details are available in the NPDES Application attached in Section 5.15 of the application.

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 September 10, 2026, submit written comments or objections concerning this application 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/epinquiry/frmMain.aspx>
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 08-20,27, 09-3,10;2026

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, 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

LEGAL NOTICES

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>.

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 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

LEGAL NOTICES

Jewell Valley Mining LLC is applying for bond reduction on Permit No.1702302 located in BuchananCounty 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 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

SERVICES

LEGAL NOTICES

DIVORCE-Uncontested, \$525.00 + \$89.00 court cost. WILLS-\$295.00. No court appearance. Estimated completion time twenty-one days. Hilton Oliver, Attorney (Face-book). 757-490-0126. Se Habla Espanol. BBB Member. <https://hiltonoliverattorney-va.com>

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Notice of Public Hearing

Town of Grundy
September 8, 2026
7:00pm

Grundy Town Office Board Room
1185 Plaza Drive
Grundy, VA 24614

RE: Town of Grundy Proposed Ordinances

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Breaks Interstate Park Commission will hold a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, September 1 at Breaks Park Conference Center, 627 Commission Circle in Breaks, VA 24607.
The meeting will begin at 11:00 a.m.

Authorized by: Grondall Potter,
Commission Chairman

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Please take notice that the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing at 6:15 o'clock p.m. on the 14th day of September 2026, in the Board of Supervisors' Meeting Room on the third floor of the Buchanan County Government Center, 4447 Slate Creek Road, Grundy, Virginia. The purpose of this hearing will be to receive public comment on the proposed naming of a portion of Old Greenbrier Road, State Route 608 to State Route 744, Southern Gap Road. Said county road is located in the Prater Magisterial District of Buchanan County, Virginia.

Any interested person is invited to appear and make public comment concerning the naming of said county road. If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Stiltner, 276-935-6508 at the Buchanan County Administrator's Office.

PLEASE CONDUCT YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator of
Buchanan County, Virginia

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE is hereby given that the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors will conduct a Public Hearing on Monday the 14th day of September, 2026 at 6:30 o'clock p.m., in the Board of Supervisors meeting room, 3rd floor of the Buchanan County Government Center at 4447 Slate Creek Road, Grundy, Virginia, to hear public comments concerning a proposed Temporary Electric Mobile Unit License Agreement between Buchanan County, Virginia by its governing body the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors (Licensor) and Appalachian Power Company (Licensee).

The Licensor is the owner of certain real property located in Buchanan County, Virginia consisting of Buchanan County Tax Parcel Number 2HH087088, located in the Knox Magisterial District. The Licensee has requested permission to use a portion of the property for an initial three-month period, with the potential for an extension of an additional three months, for the temporary installation and operation of an electrical mobile unit to be used by Licensee to provide temporary power to Licensee's Hurley substation, along with continuous and unobstructed non-exclusive ingress and egress access rights along the access drive located on the property.

The proposed Temporary Electric Mobile Unit License Agreement will be available for review at the time of the public hearing, and earlier upon request to the Buchanan County Administrator's Office, 4447 Slate Creek Road, Grundy, Virginia. Please contact Sandy Stiltner, 276-935-6508 to make arrangements to obtain a copy of the proposed Temporary Electric Mobile Unit License Agreement prior to the public hearing.

PLEASE CONDUCT YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator of
Buchanan County, Virginia



Beth Maxfield, owner and chief of dairy operations for Redbud Creamery, LLC, front, is surrounded by Redbud Creamery employees (back) Stevey Howell, dairy operations lead; Breanna Maxfield, livestock and milk operations lead; Jensen Meade, operations manager; and Luna Dunne and Alex Dunne, facility and operations interns. Not pictured is Steve Maxfield, chief engineering and financial officer. Redbud Creamery, LLC is a recent recipient of a \$10,000 VCEDA Seed Capital Matching Grant.

Redbud Creamery, LLC Approved for VCEDA Seed Capital Grant

Virginia Mountaineer

Cheeses, Grade A goat yogurt and Grade A pasteurized goat milk are the primary products produced by Redbud Creamery, LLC, a small micro goat dairy, owned and operated by Beth Maxfield and her husband, Steve Maxfield, in Russell County, VA.

Redbud Creamery, 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.

“Redbud Creamery, LLC became Virginia’s first Grade A goat yogurt manufacturer when it began operations in June 2025,” said Jonathan Belcher, VCEDA executive director/general counsel. “The business projects four full-time employees and three part-time employees within five years.”

“We farm nearly 120 acres and obtained our Grade A Farm and Dairy Manufacturing permits in April 2025 and our Grade A Processing permit in June 2025,” Maxfield said. “We expect to process approximately 10,000 pounds of milk in 2026, expanding to up to 18,000 pounds between 2027 and 2028.”

Redbud milks both Nubian and Nigerian Dwarf goats, which Maxfield said were chosen because of the higher milk fat content they produce and for the ease of their care.

Maxfield noted initial pilot markets for Redbud Creamery’s products include farmers markets in South-

west Virginia and Northern Virginia, as well as face-to-face direct sales.

“We plan to expand marketing along Virginia’s I-81 corridor, targeting higher-end health-oriented food markets like Mom’s Organic Market, Trader Joe’s, specialty stores, restaurants and hotel/resort communities,” Maxfield said. “Since opening, we’ve focused on building our goat herd and working toward building customers.”

Through the summer, Maxfield said, the creamery hosted summer school students, which she said provided a great opportunity to educate kids about farming and dairy production.

Tastings are offered on Saturdays at the farmers’ markets, which Maxfield noted provides a great opportunity for feedback on Redbud Creamery’s products.

“We are so excited to receive this funding,” Maxfield said of the VCEDA grant. “It allows us to expand and will allow us to double our production volume. We really appreciate the recognition and the funding.”

She noted the funds primarily allowed Redbud Creamery to purchase a 15-gallon pasteurizer, a microscope needed for analysis purposes and portable transport coolers.

Maxfield worked with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC) in developing her application to VCEDA. She received a letter of support from the Russell County Industrial Development Authority (IDA).

“From the beginning, Beth’s passion for agriculture and her commitment to producing high-quality dairy

products were evident,” said SWCC SBDC Executive Director Denise Harmon. “As a hardworking farmer and entrepreneur, she has thoughtfully built Redbud Creamery with a vision for long-term growth while remaining dedicated to serving our region with locally produced products.”

“I had the opportunity to tour the farm and see firsthand the care, dedication and planning that have gone into creating this exceptional operation.

“It has been a privilege to work alongside Beth throughout the application process, and I am excited to see her business continue to grow,” Harmon added. “Redbud Creamery is a tremendous asset to Southwest Virginia’s agricultural economy, and I have no doubt Beth’s hard work and perseverance will lead to many years of success.”

“Redbud Creamery fills an important need in Russell County by bringing craft food production to our local economy,” said Russell County IDA Executive Director Laura Gilmer. “We believe craft food services like this can play a significant role in attracting new business to the county.”

Consider replacing with a specific month, e.g., ‘Earlier in August’, Redbud Creamery also learned it had been selected as one of 14 projects statewide to receive \$10,000 from the state in the form of an infrastructure grant.

For more information about Redbud Creamery, LLC, interested persons may call 276-979-5217 or visit their Facebook page found at Redbud Highway Farms.



Photo Credits: Finsley Creative

Everything Is Going to Be Brine

Nothing says summer quite like firing up the grill and putting some beautiful crosshatches on a chicken breast or a thick-cut pork chop. There’s something primal about cooking over fire. The smell of charcoal, the sizzle when meat hits the grate, the satisfaction of pulling off a perfectly marked piece of protein—it’s hard to beat.

But grilling comes with a common pitfall.

The same intense heat that creates those gorgeous grill marks can also turn a perfectly good piece of meat into something dry enough to rival an August creek bed. Most of us have done it. We get distracted talking to friends, grabbing another frosty beverage, or chasing kids around the yard, and suddenly that juicy chicken breast has transformed into a hockey puck.

Fortunately, your friendly neighborhood Vagabond Chef has a simple solution.

Actually, two solutions. But first we’re focusing on one of my favorite grilling techniques: brining.

At its most basic, a brine is simply water and salt. That’s it. The salt helps season the meat all the way through while also helping it retain moisture during cooking. The result is a more flavorful and forgiving piece of meat that stays juicy, even if you leave it on the grill a minute or two longer than intended.

Once you understand the basics, a brine becomes a blank canvas. Add a little sugar and you’ll encourage better browning and a beautiful crust. Toss in a few garlic cloves, some black peppercorns, a bay leaf, fresh herbs, and some citrus peel? Now you’re building flavor from the inside out.

Brining is especially useful for lean proteins like chicken breasts, pork chops, turkey, and tender-

loins. These cuts don’t have much fat to protect them from drying out, so they benefit tremendously from a little time in a flavorful saltwater bath.

Here’s my go-to all-purpose brine:

- 1 quart water
- 1/4 cup kosher salt
- 2 T brown sugar
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- A couple sprigs of fresh herbs is nice, too.

Bring about half the water to a simmer and dissolve the salt and sugar. Add the aromatics, then remove from heat and let stand for five minutes. Add the remaining cold water. Let the brine cool completely before adding your meat. You can cheat it with ice cubes if you’re in a rush.

Brine chicken breasts for anywhere from 2-4 hours, pork chops for 4-6 hours, and turkey for up to 24 hours. After brining, pat the meat dry, rub with oil, season lightly, and grill as usual.

The result? Better flavor, better texture, and a much smaller chance of serving something that resembles boot leather.

Oh, and that second trick I mentioned? Get a good meat thermometer and learn the correct internal temperatures to cook each protein to. We’ve got a bad habit in this state of overcooking everything. Once your protein hits the correct temp, get it off the heat. Even a medium-well steak can still be delicious.

This summer, before you fire up the grill, remember one simple rule: everything is going to be brine.



Photo Credits: Finsley Creative

Buchanan County Public Library Plans End-of-Summer Luau

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Buchanan County Public Library will help families say goodbye to summer and get ready for the new school year with an End of Summer Luau on Saturday, Aug. 29.

The tropical-themed celebration will be held from 2 to 3 p.m. at the library, located at 1185 Poe Town Road in Grundy.

The event will feature a fish tank game, limbo, library games, snacks and door prizes. Barbecue sliders and Hawaiian ice will also be served.

Visitors can update their library cards and learn about new resources available through the library as students and families prepare to return to school.

The program is open to the public. For additional information, call the Buchanan County Public Library at 276-935-5721 or visit www.bcplnet.org.



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