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Pauline (Shortridge) Wilson

PAULINE (SHORTRIDGE) WILSON, 87, of Vansant, Virginia passed away on Monday, August 17, following a brief illness at the Pikeville Medical Center in Pikeville, Kentucky. Born in Buchanan County, she was the daughter of the late Bertha and Willie Shortridge. At Harman Independent Freewill Baptist, she was one of the longest-standing, faithful members, where she sang with the congregation for many decades. She was a former employee of the Buchanan County School System serving in the cafeteria at Vansant Elementary School for 29 years.

She was recognized as the #1 fan of the CAM, supporting local theater. Her macaroni salad and pin-wheel candy were staples of any family gathering.

Her home was often filled with the sound of gospel music playing on her television. Pauline loved spending time with her family and babysat all of her grandchildren and great grandchildren until her recent health struggles.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband of 50 years, Guy Wilson, her sisters, Kester Ratliff, Gladys Street,

Hassie Street, and Lillian Stiltner, and brothers Ferrell, Clarence, C.W., Verlin, Billy, Guy, and Clyde Shortridge.

She is survived by her two children, Eddie (Shirley) Wilson and Angie (Mike) Cantrell, five grandchildren: Melody (Seth) O'Quinn, Brooke (Eric) Belcher, Cody (Emily) Cantrell, Isaac (Peyton) Cantrell, and Connor Cantrell, and four great-grandchildren: Will O'Quinn, Jake Belcher, Kaleb Belcher, and Ellie Cantrell.

She is also survived by three sisters: Wilma Vandyke, Vivian Gross, and Wanda Deel and many nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

Funeral services for Pauline Wilson were conducted on Thursday, August 20, 2026, at 11:00 A.M. at the Grundy Funeral Home Chapel with Rodney Stiltner & Gene Miller officiating. Burial followed in Mountain Valley Cemetery, Big Rock, Virginia.

Active Pallbearers were Seth O'Quinn, Eric Belcher, Cody Cantrell, Isaac Cantrell, Connor Cantrell, Will O'Quinn, Jake Belcher, and Kaleb Belcher.

Honorary Pallbearers were deacons of the Harman Freewill Baptist



Church.

Special thanks to Dr. Jessica Rasnick and the staff of Thompson Family Health Center, of Vansant, and Dr. McDonald and staff of the 9th floor ICU of Pikeville Medical Center. Also special thanks to Buchanan General Hospital ER staff and Rescue 33.

Grundy Funeral Home is honored to serve the family of PAULINE (SHORTRIDGE) WILSON.



Courthouse News

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Marriage licenses

Devin Wayne Hall, 25, of Haysi, to Mycah Shay Brown, 22, of the Breaks, August 22, 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.

C. RAY FOSTER

C. RAY FOSTER, 70, of the Poplar Creek section of Grundy, VA, went home to be with the Lord, on his birthday, Tuesday, August 25, 2026, in Abingdon, VA. Born in Grundy, VA, he was the son of the late Kenneth Ervin and Verna Lou (Collins) Foster. He was a lifelong resident of Buchanan County and a faithful member of Harman Freewill Baptist Church. Ray proudly served as Sheriff of Buchanan County for 16 years. He loved his job and he loved the people of Buchanan County that he served. His employees became his family. He never asked any of his deputies to do anything he wouldn't do himself. He was a people person and introduced himself saying "I'm just Ray."

He was hardworking, honest and straightforward, and you never had to wonder what he was thinking. He told you exactly what was on his mind. Before becoming Sheriff, he was an employee of United Coal Company and the Grundy Town Police. Ray enjoyed hunting, fishing, reading westerns, golfing and loved his family above all. He was the last surviving member of his immediate family.

In addition to his parents, he was

preceded in death by his father and mother-in-law: Caral Daugherty and Mary Madeline (Stiltner) Daugherty; Sister: Judy Carol (Foster) Ramey; brother-in-law: Tommy Caral Daugherty.

Those left to cherish his memory include his wife of 49 years, Debbie Jean (Daugherty) Foster; his daughter, Crystal Leann Foster (Stanley) McCoy; Grandchildren: Amelia Rae McCoy, Keisha (Justin) Blair, Brittany (Nick) Moore, Adam (Sarah) McCoy; Great-Grandchildren: Bennett "Little Man" Moore, Asher McCoy, Walker McCoy, Madison Blair, Bella Blair, Connor Blair, Willow Blair and Ellie Blair; Nephews: Wayne (Brandi) Winchester, Shane Asbury, Shannon Asbury; Great-Nephew: Noah Winchester; K-9 Companion: Minnie Foster.

Visitation was held at the Grundy High School Gymnasium Friday evening at 6:00 P.M. with Masonic Rites by members of Sandy Valley Lodge No. 17, AF&AM at 7:00 P.M.

Funeral Services for C. RAY FOSTER were conducted Saturday, August 29, 2026, at 1:00 P.M. at the Grundy High School Gymnasium with Pastors Eddie Wilson and Rodney Stiltner officiating. Burial



followed in the Stiltner Cemetery on Poplar Creek, Grundy, VA.

Active Pallbearers were Raymond Webb, Billy Owens, Chris Sparks, Wes McCoy, Eddie Stiltner and J.R. Stanley.

Honorary Pallbearers were Johnny Billiter, Brad Calhoun, Joe Stephens, Landon Hurley, Mike Lester, Doug Baker, Haley, Amber and Anna at Mountain Air Medical Clinic and the Employees of Special Care Hospice and Home Health.

Grundy Funeral Home is honored to serve the family of C. RAY FOSTER.

RAY FOSTER DIES

FROM PAGE 1A

its work in patrol, criminal investigations, drug enforcement and community protection.

Current Buchanan County Sheriff Allen Boyd said Foster played an important role in his life and law enforcement career.

"Sheriff Ray Foster was a big reason I am where I am today," Boyd said. "He was down to earth, honest, and never made you wonder what was on his mind. He had a unique ability to empathize with people and talk to them on their level. But beyond all of that, he was my friend. I'm grateful for his friendship, his influence, and everything he taught me. He will be deeply missed."

That ability to meet people where they were became a defining part of Foster's years in law enforcement. He was known for stopping to speak with residents, listening to their concerns and helping people whenever he could.

Grundy Police Chief Seth McGlothlin said Foster demonstrated what community policing should look like.

"While I did not have the opportunity to personally work with Ray for many years before his retirement, the time I did spend around him truly showed me the importance of community policing," McGlothlin said. "Ray was never too busy to stop and speak with people in the community, listen to their concerns, or lend a helping hand to someone in need. He was the embodiment of what community policing should be."

"His kindness, compassion, and willingness to help others are qualities that we should strive to carry forward every day. As law enforcement leaders, it is our responsibility to listen to and pay attention to the communities we serve and to do everything we can to make them better. Ray understood that responsibility and lived it every day."

"He left a lasting impression on everyone fortunate enough to cross his path, and his legacy of service to this community will not be forgotten. He will be dearly missed by all who had the opportunity to know him."

The Grundy Police Department also released a statement mourning the former sheriff, whose law enforcement career began with the town.

"It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the passing of retired Sheriff Ray Foster," the department said.

"Sheriff Foster began his law enforcement career with the Grundy Police Department before being elected Sheriff of Buchanan County. Throughout his career, he faithfully served the citizens of both the Town of Grundy and Buchanan County, leaving behind a legacy of dedicated service to the community. We ask that everyone keep Sheriff Foster's family, friends, former colleagues, and loved ones in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time and in the days ahead."

"Rest in peace, Sheriff Foster. Thank you for your many years of dedicated service to our community."

The Virginia Sheriffs' Association and Virginia Sheriffs' Institute joined the community in remembering Foster and the changes he helped bring to the sheriff's office.

"Sheriff Foster left a lasting legacy of service in Buchanan County, helping transform the Sheriff's Office

into a modern law enforcement agency focused on patrol, investigations, drug enforcement and protecting the community," the organizations said in a joint statement.

"We extend our deepest condolences to Sheriff Foster's family, friends, former colleagues, and the entire Buchanan County community."

U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith also offered his condolences, saying Foster represented the best of the region he served.

"I mourn the loss of Sheriff Ray Foster of Buchanan County," Griffith said. "Sheriff Foster dedicated his life to public service, beginning his career in law enforcement in Grundy before being elected Sheriff of Buchanan County. He represented the very best of Southwest Virginia, and the 9th Congressional District will miss him dearly. My deepest condolences go to his family, friends, and all those who had the privilege of knowing and working alongside him. May he rest in peace."

Foster remained connected with Buchanan County residents in ways that extended beyond his law enforcement duties. During his time in office, he wrote a weekly column for The Virginia Mountaineer, giving readers a closer look at the work of the sheriff's office.

His wife is also familiar to Mountaineer readers as the author of "Rocklick News," a community column appearing weekly in the newspaper.

A lifelong Buchanan County resident, Foster lived in the Poplar Creek section of Grundy and was a faithful member of Harman Freewill Baptist Church. Before entering law enforcement, he worked for United Coal Co.

Foster loved serving as sheriff and considered his employees part of his family. He was known for never asking a deputy to do something he was unwilling to do himself.

Those closest to Foster described him as hardworking, honest and straightforward. He often introduced himself simply by saying, "I'm just Ray."

Outside of work, Foster enjoyed hunting, fishing, golfing and reading Westerns. Above all, he loved his family.

Foster was the son of the late Kenneth Ervin and Verna Lou Collins Foster. He was also preceded in death by his sister, Judy Carol Foster Ramey, and was the last surviving member of his immediate family.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Debbie Jean Daugherty Foster; his daughter, Crystal Leann Foster McCoy and her husband, Stanley; grandchildren Amelia Rae McCoy, Keisha Blair and her husband, Justin, Brittany Moore and her husband, Nick, and Adam McCoy and his wife, Sarah; eight great-grandchildren; several nephews; and his canine companion, Minnie Foster.

Visitation will begin at 6 p.m. Friday, Aug. 28, at the Grundy High School gymnasium. Members of Sandy Valley Lodge No. 17, AF&AM, will conduct Masonic rites at 7 p.m.

Funeral services will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 29, at the Grundy High School gymnasium, with Pastors Eddie Wilson and Rodney Stiltner officiating. Burial will follow at Stiltner Cemetery on Poplar Creek in Grundy.

Grundy Funeral Home is serving the Foster family.

IDA accepts \$80,000 grant for wind turbine feasibility study

By CHAD COOPER | COOPKAM@GMAIL.COM

The Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority approved an \$80,000 grant agreement with the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority to study the potential of manufacturing small wind turbine systems in the county.

The agreement was approved during the IDA's Aug. 17 meeting. Wade McGeorge made the motion to approve the agreement, and Danny Bailey seconded it. The motion passed.

The funding will support a feasibility and economic impact study and a pilot test to manufacture small vertical wind turbine energy recovery systems in Buchanan County.

The study will give local economic development officials a closer look at whether the emerging energy technology could be manufactured successfully in the county and what economic benefits it might bring. The work could help determine whether the concept can create jobs, attract investment or become part of Buchanan County's efforts to diversify its economy.

Approval of the agreement does not mean a full manufacturing operation has been authorized or established. The grant supports the preliminary study and pilot testing needed to evaluate whether the idea is practical.

Under the agreement, grant proceeds must be used only for the wind turbine project. The IDA must provide written disbursement requests, invoices and other documentation verifying project expenses before funds are released.

Any money not disbursed within two years of the agreement date will return to VCEDA.

The wind turbine agreement was among several agreements with VCEDA that the IDA approved during the meeting.

IDA approves \$250,000 grant for Southern Gap water tank

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority approved a \$250,000 grant agreement with the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority to advance plans for an additional water tank at Southern Gap.

The agreement was approved during the IDA's Aug. 17 meeting. Wade McGeorge made the motion to approve the agreement, and Danny Bailey seconded it. The motion passed.

Under the grant agreement, the money will fund planning, design, engineering, permitting and related costs for a new water tank serving the Southern Gap development.

The project would strengthen the water infrastructure needed to support continued development at Southern Gap. Reliable water service is an important part of preparing the area for new businesses, public facilities and other future growth.

The grant money may not be used for purposes outside the water tank project. The IDA must submit written disbursement requests, invoices and other supporting documents before receiving the funds.

Any grant money that has not been disbursed within two years of the agreement date will return to VCEDA. Plans, specifications and construction contracts also must be reviewed and approved by VCEDA before construction begins, if construction is included as part of the project.

The water tank agreement was one of several VCEDA-related items approved together by the IDA at the August meeting.

ASL CLASS OF 2029

FROM PAGE 1A

diversity mentor, encouraging them to value the different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives their classmates bring to law school and eventually to the legal profession.

The Professionalism Oath emphasizes that a legal education extends beyond studying cases and learning the law. Students are also challenged to learn how to serve, listen and lead while understanding the responsibilities that come with becoming an attorney.



LOOKING BACK

From our files

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

50 YEARS AGO

SEPTEMBER 2, 1976

Miss Stella Ann McClanahan of Grundy has been accepted by Ferrum College for the 1976 fall semester, according to Ferrum's Director of Admissions Bill Bowen. Ferrum College is a coeducational United Methodist-related institution.

Regina Tickle recently completed the two-year Radiology Technology program at Clinch Valley Clinic Hospital in Richlands. Regina is a 1974 graduate of Garden High School. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Tickle of Keen Mountain.

45 YEARS AGO

SEPTEMBER 3, 1981

Coach Larry Bradley's Grundy High School Golden Wave kicks off the football season at Lebanon Friday night. And if the preseason games are any indication, it should be a dandy. The probable starters for the Wave will be Marty Stapleton and Greg Deel at the end positions; Mark Cook and Paul Elswick at tackle; Russell Owens and Sam Owens or Andrew Ward at guard; and Todd Farris at center. Junior Bill Wooldridge will get the call at quarterback.

Coach Bill Cecil's Golden Wave girls basketballers started the season right for Grundy High this week. They opened on Monday night with a convincing 57-46 win over the girls from Garden and then took their first win in the Southwest District, defeating Tazewell 45-34 on Tuesday.

A pair of seniors, Kelly Vandyke and Tracy Fletcher, led the way in the victory over Garden.

35 YEARS AGO

SEPTEMBER 5, 1991

Brenda Stiltner, who has served as a deputy treasurer in the Buchanan County treasurer's office for the past 23 years, was appointed treasurer of Buchanan County Friday to replace retiring treasurer Sue Yates. Circuit Court Judge Nick Persin appointed Stiltner. Debbie Bostic was appointed as deputy treasurer.

Town of Grundy Mayor Miller Richardson presented a gold plate to Joyce Matney, honoring her for her dedicated service as secretary of the town's sewage commission. Matney served as the commission's secretary for 20 years and resigned earlier this year.

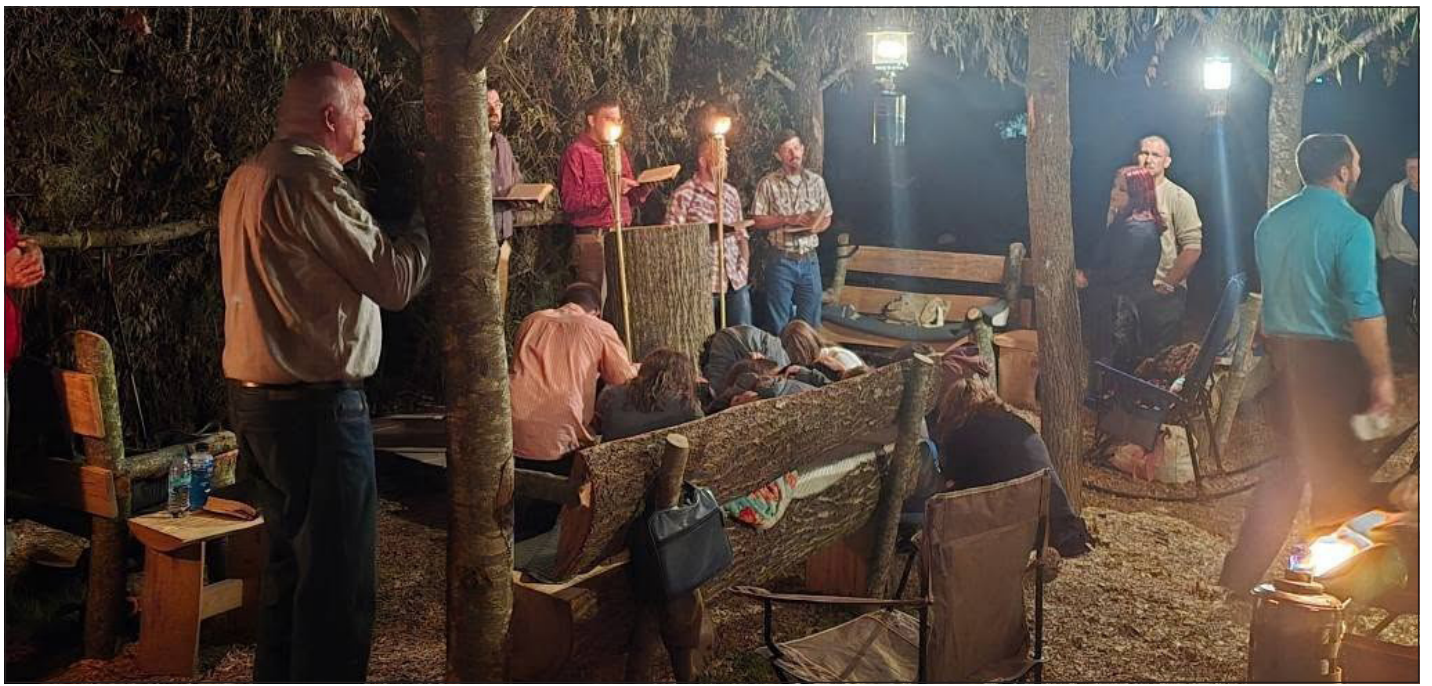
At a prior ceremony, Matney received gifts and applause for her work from fellow workers and commission members.

20 YEARS AGO

AUGUST 31, 2006

Ed Talbott II signs the official documents that make him the first recipient of the Ryan McGlothlin Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund was set up in honor of McGlothlin, who died last year in Iraq. The scholarship fund provides no-interest loans to military veterans accepted to attend the Appalachian College of Pharmacy program.

Members of the 2006 Lady Wave volleyball team are Chasity Matney, Kassie Bell, Courtney McClanahan, Amy Crouse, Julia Smith, Karen Cantrell, Kayla Viers, Kasey Bowman, Sara Looney, Brittany Lester, Jenna Stiltner, Hailey Stiltner, and Tiffany Bell. Russell Street steps in as the new head volleyball coach at Grundy High School this season.



Community members gather for an evening of worship during the Brush Arbor Revival near William P. Harris Park in Council (Contributed photo).

Brush Arbor Revival brings weeks of worship to Council

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



The Brush Arbor Revival brought people together in Council for nightly preaching, prayer and fellowship (Contributed photo).

A Brush Arbor Revival near William P. Harris Park brought the Council community together for three weeks of nightly prayer, preaching and fellowship.

The revival began on Aug. 10 near the park's east entrance along State Route 80, also known as Helen Henderson Highway. By Aug. 27, ministers reported 13 conversions, several rededications and countless people gathering at the altar to pray.

Ministers Wendell Harris, Dennis McGlothlin and Adam Farmer began planning the revival about a year ago after feeling called to hold the outdoor services in Council.

"Myself, Dennis McGlothlin, and Adam Farmer started getting the burden for this revival about a year ago," Harris said. "The Lord laid the field on my heart and the hole of water near the Council Community Center. It was like I could feel and imagine the worship services, the structure of the arbor, and the baptism services that could follow."

The three ministers hoped the revival would unite the community and offer spiritual encouragement to those who attended.

"Our hopes were that our communities would be blessed and uplifted," Harris said. "We knew that if everyone would bind together in one mind, that God could bless and revive us all."

People continued returning to the brush arbor night after night to worship, hear the preaching and pray together. The revival

SEE **BUSH ARBOR REVIVAL** | 5A

GOOD OL DAYS



Coach Larry Bradley talks strategy with captains Mark Cook, left, and Ralph Justus as they look toward the season opener. This photograph appeared in the Sept. 3, 1981, edition of The Virginia Mountaineer.

Congressman Griffith: Labor Day and Memories of Tragedy

On September 7, Americans will celebrate Labor Day. The American worker serves as a backbone for our economy. Thanks to the fruits of their labor, our communities reap the rewards of more opportunity, business growth and expanded access to goods and services.

Even in times of hardship where industries face new challenges, and when innovative technologies emerge, the American workforce shows resilience by adapting.

This resilience takes shape in the belief that hard work is central to our communities. We see numerous investments that drive this belief for our region's workforce.

In the last year, Henry County celebrated various company investments resulting in a cumulative total of more than \$100 million.

There is also Narro Trucks which recently launched in Pulaski County. The electric utility vehicle company will power new jobs for the New River Valley.

Further, thanks to a new industrial investment, Bland County's Virginia Steel and Fabrication is set to expand operational capabilities.

Earlier this year, I toured the Virginia Steel plant in Bastian to receive updates on its operations and leadership.

These industry decisions, among others, will support regional jobs, generate friendly climates for small businesses and deliver renewed hope for our communities.

Because these investments mean so much, I am an advocate for federal policies that help the American worker access opportunity for work.

From job programs, including ones that develop skills, to friendly tax environments, we can use policy to strengthen this access.

As we rest for Labor Day weekend, join me in celebrating the American worker.

Days after Labor Day, I will join our communities to recognize solemn occasions.

September 10 marks the one-year anniversary of the assassination of a conservative icon. In broad daylight on a college campus, Turning Point USA CEO Charlie Kirk was murdered by an individual seemingly indoctrinated



MORGAN GRIFFITH

WEEKLY REPORT FROM THE CAPITOL

by radical gender ideology.

My family shared the shock and grief with millions of Americans stunned by Kirk's murder. Following the slaying, I supported Kirk's legacy and memory, visiting Virginia Tech with Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears for a candlelight vigil.

Outside of my DC office along with countless other Congressional offices, I displayed a poster of Kirk. Additionally, I voted with 309 of my House colleagues to honor Kirk's life and legacy. It was disappointing to see more than 100 Democrats refrain from supporting the House resolution, but I remain committed to protecting the conservative values and freedoms that Kirk constantly worked to defend.

Perhaps nothing meant more to Kirk's movement than the freedom of speech, a cornerstone of our country's founding and the U.S. Constitution.

We must never forget that disagreements, discourse and debate are healthy for our government. Kirk provided a venue for our younger generations to recognize this fundamental truth.

Silencing Americans is never a solution. I will continue to support policies that protect the freedom of speech.

Please join me on September 10 to not only pray for Charlie, but to ask that God helps with healing for Charlie's widow, Erika, their two young children and the entire Kirk family.

Americans will also reflect on the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

To this day, the attacks are a painful memory for millions of Americans as well as many across the entire world.

I have the memory of working that morning in my law office when my bookkeeper, Terry Haynie, grabbed my attention. She informed me that a plane struck a tower of the World Trade Center.

After turning our eyes to the television to see the events live, we watched the second plane crash into the South Tower.

The Pentagon was also hit, while a thwarted attempt resulted in a plane crash in Pennsylvania.

When passengers of Flight 93 knew the end was coming, they would not allow that plane to be used to attack America. It is believed that plane was headed for the U.S. Capitol where I now work.

In total, more than 3,000 innocent lives were taken from us that day.

While the terrorists sought to strike fear, they failed to break the enduring spirit of the American people.

Following the tragedy, I drove to Salem's Kmart store to buy an American flag. I proudly displayed it outside my office.

I plan to attend a 9/11 wreath laying with former Governor Glenn Youngkin at the National D-Day Memorial.

With these events on the horizon, it will be an emotional time for many.

But over the Labor Day weekend, we will rejoice that the American worker is the most efficient, hardworking labor force in the world.

If you have questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact my office. You can call my Abingdon office at 276-525-1405 or my Christiansburg office at 540-381-5671. To reach my office via email, please visit my website at <https://morgangriffith.house.gov/>.

Rocklick News

By DEBBIE FOSTER

Happy 70th birthday to my Honey.

Tuesday morning, we got up early to go to Abingdon for Ray's eye doctor appointment. We went to lunch at Cracker Barrel for Ray's birthday. He wanted their gravy and biscuits, which he ate and loved. Within ten minutes of us finishing our meal, Ray was gone. There was a nurse right there, and she immediately started CPR; another person was doing mouth-to-mouth, and they kept it up until the paramedics arrived. They took over and worked on him all the way to the hospital. When I arrived minutes later, the doctor talked to me. I told him Ray's wishes. They continued for probably ten more minutes, and he was gone.

I'm still numb and in shock; it all happened so fast.

Pray for us; we've got some hard days ahead, and then I have to learn to live without my Ray.

There's more I want to say and need to say, but it'll have to be later.



DEBBIE FOSTER
ROCKLICK AREA NEWS
276-935-8296

Brother Eddie finished the service with this verse... I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.
2 Timothy 4:7-8 KJV

Adult education connection



BEVERLY PRATER ASHBY

Returning to school as an adult is a courageous step. Adult students often balance classes with work, family responsibilities, finances, and other commitments.

Because of these responsibilities, it can sometimes feel easier to struggle quietly than to admit that help is needed. However, asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is an important part of being a successful student.

Many adult students bring valuable life and work experience to the classroom, but they may also be returning to subjects or study habits they have not used in years. Adjusting to assignments, technology, testing, and academic expectations can take time.

Schools and colleges recognize these challenges and provide resources such as tutoring, advising, technology assistance, writing support, and career services. Knowing when and where to seek assistance can make the educational journey much more manageable.

Some adults hesitate to ask questions because they worry that others will think they are not capable. Others may believe they should be able to figure everything out on their own.

In reality, successful students understand that learning sometimes requires asking questions and seeking guidance. Academic support resources specifically encourage students to reach out rather than struggle alone. Asking for help demonstrates that you care about your education and are willing to take responsibility for your success.

It may seem that asking for help makes a person feel less confident, but the opposite can happen. Each time an adult student asks a question, receives guidance, and successfully applies what they have learned, they gain another reason to believe in themselves.

Adult students sometimes feel pressure to have all the answers because they have responsibilities and experience outside the classroom. Remember that being an adult does not mean knowing everything. Education is supposed to be a place where you learn, make mistakes, ask questions, and grow.

Asking for help is an important part of the adult education journey. It can reduce frustration, strengthen confidence, improve understanding, and help students stay on track toward their goals. Most importantly, it reminds adult learners that they are part of a community that wants to see them succeed. If you are interested in getting help with your educational journey, please contact Southwest Regional Adult Education at 276-889-5424.

Daily Life Strategies

We all need a few strategies for navigating the high-way of life.

Here is a simple rule. Don't fight with people at a buffet. When someone breaks in front of you to grab for the fried chicken or mashed potatoes then simply back off.

Let them reach for what they want. Keep in mind it's a buffet and more food will be coming. We've all seen people act like they have not eaten in years when they are going through a buffet. Take your time. You can always come back to the buffet for more. You won't go home hungry.

Let people pass you on the road. If you want to drive 45 mph, that's okay. Life doesn't have to be lived at 75 mph. There is a reason there are speed limits on roads.

Actually, some country roads need slower speed limits. Just because it's legal to drive 55 mph on a country road doesn't mean it's safe to drive that fast. Take your time, slow down and let Mario pass you so you can enjoy the rest of your ride.

Don't ignore the efforts of others. When it's obvious that someone is working and trying hard then give them some appreciation. Sometimes people work hard and still don't do a great job. You don't have to encourage them to continue in their failures.

If people are trying, they have a chance of progressing and doing better. You can find a way to constructively encourage them in their efforts. Let the school teacher know he or she is appreciated. He or she has a tough job. Let your local public servant know you are thankful for his or her community efforts.



DR. GLENN MOLLETTE

Public service is often a thankless job. Thank the people who take care of you at your local medical office, nursing home and so forth. Extend appreciation to those who help you along life's journey.

Don't let opportunities pass. Wish people happy birthday, anniversary or whatever the occasion may be. Grieve with those who are suffering loss. In some way we will all experience various life celebrations and difficult occasions. We need each other in the good times and the difficult times. Be a friend in the good times and the bad.

We rarely agree with each other all of the time or even most of the time. Approval of each other's politics, life achievements or failures should not be a reason to withhold kindness or even friendship. Becoming adversarial only demonstrates that we are small and incapable of working with others to solve problems.

Finally, treat others the way you want to be treated. Love is kind and covers a multitude of sins.

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWS IS JUST A CLICK AWAY



LOCAL NEWS



SPORTS



OBITUARIES



COMMUNITY EVENTS

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THE WATCHMAN: Understanding Israel's Purpose

Last week, I started a series of articles on the end times and how they relate to Israel and to us today. To see my viewpoint, you must believe the Bible is the infallible word of God, given to holy men as the Spirit of God led them to write.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." So, if you believe this, God is the author of the Bible.

Let's start with Isaiah 46:9-10. Verse 9 says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." Verse 10 says, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done."

That's why we have prophecy. If true prophecy comes from God, it will come to pass. If it does not come to pass, it's not from God.

The Bible says in Titus 1:2 that God cannot lie. In Romans 3:4, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

Did you know that when Jesus walked on the Earth, he said in Matthew 5:18 that not one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled? Jesus said the Old Testament was right. So I believe the New Testament is also right, and the Scripture I gave you tells us that God gives us insight from the beginning to the end concerning his plan for planet Earth and Israel, and his plans for the future.

To understand the future, we must go back to the very beginning. So, let's go back to Genesis chapter three.

In Genesis chapters one and two, God created the heavens and the Earth, man and woman. Genesis 1:27 says God created them male and female. Genesis 2:21-25 says God takes a rib from Adam and makes a woman.

Verse 24 says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh."

This is the beginning of marriage and its purpose, as God said in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion."

This brings us to chapter three, the fall of Adam and Eve and the introduction of sin. God drove them from the Garden of Eden and gave a prophecy.

In Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Who is the seed of the woman?

Remember, God sees everything from the beginning to the end, and I believe we are the end-time generation. We, too, can see through God's word and history.

Who is the seed of the woman who shall bruise the head of the serpent? First, a woman does not have seed; only the male does. So, what is this scripture referring to?

This is the first prophecy concerning Immanuel (Jesus). Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," meaning God with us.

God became man. John 1:14 says, "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Romans 5:12-19 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Verse 19 says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

But God had a plan from the beginning, in case his creation failed and sinned. In Revelation 13:8, Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

God had a plan to save the human race — those who would believe. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

In these verses, you see the words, "He, God the Father, gave his only begotten son" to fulfill Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman bruising the head of the serpent.

So, for God to carry out his plan for redemption, he needed a people to complete it, and that people was Israel.

Deuteronomy 7:6-7 tells us, "The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth."

Verse 7 says, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people."

In this scripture, we see God's attributes and characteristics: he is meek and lowly in heart, as Matthew 11:29 says.

James 2:5 says God has chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith. God hates pride and arrogance; read Proverbs 6:16-19.

God gave Israel their name. Genesis 32:28 says, "And he said to him, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed."

In Genesis 15:17-21, God made a covenant with Abraham. Verse 18 says the land runs from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the Euphrates. Genesis 17:7 records it as an everlasting covenant.

Psalms 89:28-36 records a covenant God made with his chosen servant David. Psalm 89:28 says, "My covenant shall stand fast with him." God said in verse 35, "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David."

Psalms 89:28-34 says: "My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

"If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments, if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

"Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the things that are gone out of my lips."

At this time, God is dealing with their transgression, but soon he will visit them with his loving kindness.

There is a scripture in 1 Peter 5:10 that says, "After that ye have suffered a while, I will make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle you."

We owe a lot to Israel and the Jewish people, from whom God sent his son, Jesus.

More to come.

Savvy Senior: Flu Shots for Seniors - What's New This Fall

Dear Savvy Senior,

I always get my annual flu shot, but I never know whether I'm getting the right one. Can you explain which flu vaccine is best for seniors this fall and whether there are any other recommended vaccines I should get?

--Trying to Stay Healthy

Dear Trying,

If you're 65 or older, getting your annual flu shot is one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself during flu season. But with new vaccines and changing recommendations, many older adults aren't sure which shots they need.

The good news is that this fall's advice for seniors is simple: Get an enhanced flu vaccine, and use the opportunity to make sure you are up to date on other important vaccines, including RSV, pneumonia, shingles and, depending on your health situation, COVID-19.

Best flu shot for seniors

Influenza can be especially dangerous for older adults. As we age, our immune systems don't respond as well to infection, which is why people 65 and older account for most flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults 65 and older receive one of three enhanced flu vaccines instead of a standard-dose shot: Fluzone High-Dose, Fludac or Flublok.

Each of these vaccines is designed differently, but all produce a stronger immune response in older adults. Studies have not shown that one works better than the others, so there's no need to wait for a specific brand. The important thing is to get one of these enhanced vaccines when it's available.

Also new for the 2026-27 flu season is Moderna's mFLUSIVA, the first mRNA flu vaccine authorized in the United States. It is fully approved for adults ages 50 to 64 and has received accelerated approval for those 65 and older, pending additional study results. While mRNA technology could eventually allow flu vaccines to be updated more quickly to match circulating strains, adults 65 and older should continue to follow CDC recommendations and choose one of the three enhanced flu vaccines whenever possible.

The best time to get your flu shot is September or October, but it's not too late if you miss that window. Even a flu shot in November or later can still provide valuable protection.

Medicare Part B covers one flu shot each flu season at no cost when it's given by a Medicare-participating doctor, clinic or pharmacy.



JIM
MILLER

SAVVY SENIOR

Other vaccines

While you're getting your flu shot, it's also a good time to review your other vaccinations with your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

The CDC recommends a one-time RSV vaccine for everyone age 75 and older, as well as adults ages 50 through 74 who are at increased risk for severe RSV illness. Medicare Part D covers RSV vaccines.

Adults age 50 and older who have not received a pneumococcal vaccine should also consider getting protected against serious forms of pneumonia. The preferred options are Prevnar 20 (PCV20) or Capvaxine (PCV21). Most people need only one dose, and Medicare Part B covers these vaccines.

If you have not received the Shingrix shingles vaccine, it is another important vaccine to consider. The two-dose vaccine is more than 90 percent effective at preventing shingles and the painful nerve problems that can follow. Medicare Part D covers both doses.

COVID-19 recommendations have become more individualized in recent years, but older adults remain at higher risk for serious illness. Talk with your healthcare provider about whether an updated COVID vaccine is appropriate for you. Medicare Part B covers COVID vaccines.

Vaccine timing

Flu, RSV, COVID-19 and other recommended vaccines can generally be given during the same visit. But if you're concerned about temporary side effects such as fatigue, muscle aches or a sore arm, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about spacing them out. To find pharmacies and other providers offering vaccines near you, visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

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

BUSH ARBOR REVIVAL

FROM PAGE 3A

also included baptism services at William P. Harris Park.

"We have witnessed countless individuals on the altar praying, thirteen conversions, and several rededications," Harris said.

A third baptism service was scheduled for Aug. 30 at the park, followed by the revival's 21st consecutive night of worship.



People listen during a nightly service at the Brush Arbor Revival near William P. Harris Park. Ministers reported 13 conversions, several rededications and multiple baptism services during the revival (Contributed photo).



Worshippers gather beneath the brush arbor near William P. Harris Park in Council during a revival that continued for three weeks of nightly prayer, preaching and fellowship (Contributed photo).

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE CAM

Theatre Guild of Buchanan County



A crowd gathers in The Courtyard at The CAM on July 16, 2026, for a performance by the Midnight Gypsies as part of the Third Thursday Summer Concert Series (Contributed photo).

By JODI REYNOLDS

From Stage Shows to an Arts Center: The CAM Is Growing Into Its Name

If you haven't visited The CAM lately, you might be surprised by what you'll find. On one evening, actors may be rehearsing for our next show on stage. A few days later, an artist may be guiding a room full of people as they put paintbrushes to canvas. By Thursday night, a band may be playing in The Courtyard while patrons gather for dinner from a local food truck. Somewhere in between, dozens of children may be singing, dancing, playing theatre games and discovering the stage for the very first time.

This is what we always hoped The CAM would become.

Theatre will always be at the heart of The CAM. The Theatre Guild of Buchanan County has spent over a decade bringing stories to life on stage, and that tradition remains the foundation of everything we do. Upon finding our home at The CAM, we began envisioning a permanent home for the arts, and the dream was bigger than producing plays.

We are truly starting to see that vision materialize and take root in 2026. The Community Arts Mainstage, The CAM, has started coming to life in ways we can actually see.

Earlier this year, our first multi-artist art show transformed portions of The CAM into gallery space while "Misery" occupied the stage, allowing two very different forms of art to share one building. Since then, local artist Debbie Jackson has brought painting and creativity into The CAM through her classes, giving community members another way to participate in the arts, no audition required.

This summer also brought the launch of our Third Thursday Summer Concert Series. The Courtyard has become a gathering place for live music, food trucks, cold drinks and summer evenings with friends. With outstanding entertainers playing their music, we've watched people experience The CAM in an entirely different way.

Then there was Theatre Camp. For four days in July, The CAM belonged to children. They acted, danced, played, created, made new friends and eventually took the stage for their families. For some, theatre is already familiar territory. For others, camp provided their very first experience under the stage lights. Both matter, because building an arts community also means creating a place where the next generation feels welcome to explore.

The backbone of TGBC remains

the plays and musicals. The rehearsals, sets, costumes and performances fill the building throughout the year. Currently, preparations are underway for "The Beverly Hillbillies" in October, followed by "It's a Wonderful Life" in December. Behind the scenes, we're already planning what audiences will see in 2027.

Perhaps that is the most exciting part of what is happening at The CAM. We aren't replacing one thing with another. We're adding layers. A theatre can be a place where you buy a ticket and watch a show. A community arts center can be a place where you perform in one, paint a picture, hear a band, take a class, volunteer backstage, bring your children to camp, meet your friends or simply discover something you didn't know you enjoyed.

Little by little, event by event, that is what The CAM is becoming. There is still plenty we want to add and plenty of room to grow. Today, when we look around at everything that has happened inside and outside these walls this year, one thing is clear: The CAM is growing into its name. And we're just getting started.

Follow us on social media and visit our new and improved website at www.seeyouatthecam.com for all our latest happenings and a schedule of events. See you at The CAM.

\$1.6 MILLION GRANT

FROM PAGE 1A

The project previously received \$7 million in fiscal 2027 state funding through the efforts of state Sen. Todd Pillion, who served as a state budget conferee; Del. Will Morefield, a member of the House Appropriations Committee; and state Sen. Travis Hackworth. The funding requests were originally submitted for General Assembly consideration by Morefield and Hackworth.

At the federal level, U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith and U.S. Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine have supported the project and helped secure congressionally directed spending. The most recent federal allocation included \$3 million in the fiscal 2026 budget.

Buchanan County also provided \$1.75 million in matching funds for the current project.

Belcher said the AMLER grant was made possible because county, state and federal leaders recognized the importance of completing the four-lane highway and worked together to provide the necessary funding.

"This will now allow the entire stretch of new highway from Grundy, Va. to Pikeville, Ky. to be finished up as a four-lane highway," Belcher said. "We are very grateful to Governor Spanberger and her Administration, as well as the Virginia Department of Energy, and all of our local, state, and federal officials who supported and went to bat for this very important project for the economic future of our region."

Kaine said the funding will support economic development and infrastructure improvements in Southwest Virginia.

"This newly announced AMLER funding in Southwest Virginia will be a crucial boost to the region – repurposing land and fostering economic growth in the process," Kaine said. "I will always advocate for policies and funding that support jobs and infrastructure improvements throughout the Commonwealth."

Warner said the funding will help generate jobs and economic opportunities in the region.

"This funding is great news for Southwest Virginia to create good-paying jobs and boost economic opportunities for years to come," Warner said. "I am grateful to see these impactful investments made in Virginia's mining communities who have given so much to power our nation."

Griffith said the grant will give the Buchanan County IDA the resources needed to widen the highway.

"This AMLER grant for \$1.6 million will provide the Buchanan County IDA with the necessary resources to widen the Route 460 Connector Phase II within Corridor Q to a four-lane highway," Griffith said. "Buchanan County is using AMLER funds to improve transportation infrastructure and highway access, support economic growth and create investment opportunities through increased accessibility. With new projects set to be announced later, I will continue to fight for additional AMLER opportunities that benefit Virginia's Ninth District."

Pillion said completing the Coalfields Expressway is important to keeping Buchanan County and the surrounding region positioned for future growth.

"Transportation infrastructure is critical to the future of Southwest Virginia and completing the Coalfields Expressway ensures that Buchanan County and the surrounding region remain positioned for future growth and development," Pillion said. "Projects like the Coalfields Expressway are about creating opportu-

nities for future generations, attracting new investment, supporting existing employers and connecting our communities to jobs and markets. The new AMLER funding demonstrates the ongoing commitment that exists for this project."

Morefield said each completed section of the highway strengthens the region's potential for growth.

"The AMLER funding announced will continue to advance the completion of the Coalfields Expressway project in Buchanan County," Morefield said. "The CFX is a critical component to the economic future of Buchanan County and Southwest Virginia and each section of the road that is completed positions the region for growth and expansion which will benefit its citizens now and in the years to come."

Buchanan County IDA Executive Director Craig Horn welcomed the announcement.

"We were very pleased to hear about the approval of the AMLER grant for \$1.6 million to the IDA for a section of the CFX in Buchanan County," Horn said. "The CFX is an important infrastructure project in Buchanan County and in our region and this particular project will now allow for the full section of the highway to be a four-lane from Grundy to Pikeville, Ky."

Design work is expected to begin soon, while construction is projected to begin in late 2029.

"The funding provided by the AMLER program is the final step in ensuring Corridor Q in Buchanan County is a true four-lane highway," said Marty Halloway, P.E., VDOT district project development engineer. "Design work is anticipated to begin soon and we plan to move toward construction in late 2029."

The expressway authority is already planning and seeking funding for additional sections of the Coalfields Expressway, including sections near Pound and Clintwood. Planning is also underway for the Route 744 connector between Route 83 and the expressway in the Southern Gap area.

Belcher said completing the overall expressway will continue to require cooperation among local governments, state agencies, economic development organizations, elected officials and contractors.

"The successful completion of the Coalfields Expressway project in Virginia requires a strong collaborative approach involving the CFX Authority, the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), state and federal legislators, the Governor's office, planning district commissions, localities and key contractors," Belcher said. "We are pleased to see the AMLER funding approval which continues to advance the overall expressway project."

The Virginia General Assembly created the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority in 2017 to improve transportation into, from and through Southwest Virginia, assist with regional economic development and improve highway safety.

The Coalfields Expressway is designated as U.S. Route 121 and is a congressional high-priority corridor. It is planned as a limited-access highway providing a modern transportation route through the coalfields of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia. The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority provides staff support to the Expressway Authority Board.

RIBBON CUTTING

FROM PAGE 1A

hanced high school experience and expanded educational opportunities.

"As they transition out into society, both in their lives and in their careers, they will soar on eagle's wings and only be limited by their own imagination," Thornbury said.

The ceremony included an opening prayer by Eugene Whited, pastor of Blackey Baptist Church in Hurley. The Southern Gap High School band performed the national anthem, and those attending recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Buchanan County Public Schools Superintendent Sherry Fletcher recognized the government officials, School Board members, county officials, project representatives and community leaders in attendance.

Among the speakers were U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith; Del. Will Morefield; Bob Peterson, project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Huntington District; Curtis Elswick, vice president of operations for Skanska; and Mike Howdyshell of Branch Builds.

Peterson said the new school represents more than a completed construction project. He discussed the county's long history of flooding, including the devastating 1977 flood and more recent flooding in 2021, 2022 and 2025.

The Disaster Relief Act of 2019 provided funding for flood-mitigation work involving structures in Buchanan County affected by the 1977 flood. Peterson said the Corps entered into a contract to relocate Hurley High School and floodproof the county's career and technical education center.

Through those agreements, the Corps reimbursed the School Board for a substantial portion of the cost of the new consolidated high school.

"What stands before us is more than a building," Peterson said. "It is a result of a successful collaboration to enhance community flood safety and resilience."

Peterson said the project demonstrated what can be accomplished when government agencies and local stakeholders work together toward a common goal.

"It is a testament to the strength of this community and a promise that by working together we can not only rebuild, but build back stronger and more resilient than before," Peterson said.

Griffith praised the local officials, builders, engineers and designers responsible for the school. He compared himself to a proud uncle arriving after the birth of a child and celebrating the accomplishment of the entire family.

"What a great facility this is," Griffith said. "I think this facility is just top shelf. Wow, you all have a lot to be proud of."

Griffith acknowledged that bringing four schools together was not easy, but said Southern Gap has an opportunity to create new traditions in academics, athletics, theater, forensics and other programs.

"The future for this high school is unlimited," Griffith said.

Morefield described the ribbon cutting as a historic moment of change for Buchanan County. He acknowledged that change can be difficult but said the county has always shown an ability to adapt during challenging times.

"This beautiful school is built on the history of many great traditions in education," Morefield said. "As we stand here and look at this modern, high-tech campus, we all know this is built on the foundations of the schools in this community."

Morefield said the traditions of the former schools are now coming together to create a new future on the mountain.

"The future looks bright on Southern Gap," he said.

Elswick said he had served as the school division's project manager for eight years and described completing the school as the fulfillment of a longtime dream.

He recognized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Virginia Department of Education, Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, current and former School Board members, school employees and the companies involved in designing and constructing the facility.

Elswick said approximately 200 people worked at the construction site during some stages of the project, often working six or seven days a week. He said the school was completed three days ahead of schedule.

"Today we turned that dream into a reality," Elswick said.

Howdyshell said the project was especially meaningful to Branch because the company has maintained a presence in Grundy and Buchanan County for generations.

He praised project superintendent Joe Keen and the construction team for completing the approximately 200,000-square-foot building in 18 months.

"This job is, in many ways, a part of the community, and it's not just another project," Howdyshell said. "It is another chapter in a very long relationship with this community."

Fletcher closed the auditorium program by reflecting on the years of work and difficult conversations that led to the school's completion.

"This ribbon represents far more than opening a building, because there were years of planning and difficult conversations, but it is a shared belief that our children deserve every opportunity to succeed," Fletcher said.

Fletcher acknowledged the strong histories, traditions and school pride associated with Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley. She said the opening of Southern Gap does not mean those legacies will be forgotten.

"Today we're not saying goodbye to those legacies and those memories," Fletcher said. "We're bringing them with us. We're bringing them together. We're taking the very best of each school, and we're going to build something even stronger."

Fletcher thanked the School Board, Board of Supervisors, legislators, architects, engineers, contractors, school employees, parents and community members who supported the project.

She then addressed Southern Gap's first group of students, telling them they will establish the school's traditions and define what it means to be an Eagle.

"You are the first generation to call Southern Gap home, and one day people will ask, 'What was it like to be the first students?'" Fletcher said. "And you'll tell the stories."

The school includes a three-court gymnasium, wrestling room, weight-training area and locker rooms. Its performing arts facilities include an auditorium, band room and performance-preparation spaces.

Review intended term; if visual arts: 'Media and visual arts facilities' on the second floor include studio space, computer laboratories and a pottery room. The three floors of the academic wing include career and technical education programs on the first floor, science and health classrooms on the second floor and core academic classrooms on the third floor.

Fletcher said the building itself will not be the school division's greatest accomplishment. That distinction, she said, will belong to the students who leave Southern Gap prepared to lead, serve and make Buchanan County proud.

"Today we honor the past, we will celebrate the present, and together we will open the door to an extraordinary future," Fletcher said.

Wolford places third at
Through the Pines Invitational

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

Southern Gap freshman Katelyn Wolford made an early statement against some of the area’s top cross country runners Wednesday, Aug. 26, placing third at the 17th annual Travis Hooker Through the Pines Invitational.

Wolford completed the 5,000-meter course at Lebanon Primary School in 23 minutes, 4.30 seconds. She led the Southern Gap girls in a field of 77 competitors representing schools and running clubs from across the region.

Only two runners finished ahead of Wolford. Abingdon junior Clara Bakker won the race in 21:53.50, while Abingdon sophomore Lily Morrow placed second in 22:18.70.

45.50 seconds, who placed fourth in 23:49.80. Lebanon sophomore Jalyn Osborne rounded out the top five in 24:05.90.

For Wolford, earning a medal against an experienced field was the result of the work she put into preparing for her first high school season.

“Placing third as a freshman meant a lot to me because I’ve worked really hard and stayed dedicated to my

SEE **WOLFORD PLACES** | 4B



Southern Gap freshman Katelyn Wolford wears her medal after placing third among 77 runners at the 17th annual Travis Hooker Through the Pines Invitational on Aug. 26 in Lebanon. Wolford finished the 5,000-meter race in 23:04.30. (Photo courtesy of Christina Bane)



Southern Gap junior Aidan Baker fights for additional yardage as three Ridgeview defenders bring him down during the inaugural Black Diamond Miners Bowl on Aug. 28.

Ridgeview defeats
Southern Gap 48-8
before massive crowd

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

Ridgeview defeated Southern Gap 48-8 before an estimated crowd of more than 5,000 fans in the inaugural Black Diamond Miners Bowl on Aug. 28 at Smiley Ratliff Field at the Red Robertson Sports Complex.

The Wolfpack entered the matchup as one of the top teams in Region 2D and showed why. Junior Alex Grant scored four touchdowns in three different ways, and his 62-yard punt return proved to be the turning point as Ridgeview pulled away.

Grant rushed for 91 yards and two touchdowns on six carries, caught a 76-yard touchdown pass and returned a punt for another score. The Ridgeview standout finished with 243 all-purpose yards on nine touches and four TDs in the win.

Southern Gap trailed only 6-0 following a competitive opening quarter in which the Eagles made several defensive stops. Early in the

second quarter, Grant fielded a punt, broke several arm tackles and raced 62 yards for a touchdown.

Junior Braxton Deel added the extra point, giving Ridgeview a 13-0 lead and changing the momentum inside the packed stadium.

“I think the punt return was momentum switcher for us, and, you know, special teams is part of it,” Southern Gap head coach Greg Tester said.

Grant also believed the return helped set the tone for Ridgeview.

“The atmosphere was amazing,” Grant said. “We had a lot of people there, a lot of people show up. It was a great atmosphere, and we really leaned on them and did a good job.”

The loss dropped Southern Gap to 1-1 during the first season in school history. Ridgeview improved to 1-0 with the season-opening victory.

While Ridgeview controlled the scoreboard, the night became one of the largest sporting

SEE **RIDGEVIEW DEFEATS** | 2B

In the Locker Room:
A night bigger than
the scoreboard

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

I am now a Southern Gap man, but the final score of last Friday night’s Black Diamond Miners Bowl did not bother me.

Ridgeview entered the game as a heavy favorite and one of the top teams in Region 2D this season. The Wolfpack showed why, defeating Southern Gap 48-8.

Sometimes you simply have to give credit to the opponent.

Ridgeview has speed, size and playmakers all over the field. Alex Grant, Colin Hill, Xander Wallace and Braxton Deel caused problems throughout the night. The Wolfpack took control early and never allowed Southern Gap to settle into the game.

Southern Gap head coach Greg Tester is building a football program from the ground up. Players and coaches from four former high schools are still learning how to work together. Ridgeview, meanwhile, arrived with an established program, experienced players and high expectations.

SEE **IN THE LOCKER ROOM** | 2B



IN THE LOCKER ROOM



Longtime WCYB meteorologist Dave Dierks, left, holds a plaque of appreciation presented by Southern Gap High School Principal Mark Cooper. Dierks was recognized for his support of Southwest Virginia athletes and his dedication to keeping teams, coaches, families and fans informed and safe (Contributed photo).

Southern Gap travels
to Rye Cove; Honaker
heads to Ridgeview

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

THE GAME: Southern Gap (1-1) at Rye Cove (1-0)

THE SETTING: Friday, Sept. 4, at 7 p.m. at War Eagle Field on Eagles Nest Lane in Clinchport.

SOUTHERN GAP: A 12-yard touchdown pass from Brayden White to Mason Rife accounted for the Eagles’ lone score in last week’s loss to Ridgeview. Harvey Cooper led Southern Gap on the ground with 54 yards on five carries.

RYE COVE: The War Eagles are led by one of the country’s top linemen, West Virginia University commit Ethan Lawson. Cole Barnett is the go-to player in the Rye Cove backfield after scoring both touchdowns in the War Eagles’ season-opening victory.

FINAL WORD: It will be a battle of the Eagles on Friday night in Clinchport. The game will mark the first road trip in Southern Gap history, and it will be a difficult test for head coach Greg Tester and his team.

Rye Cove finished one victory short of playing for a state championship last season after defeating Eastside on the road in frigid temperatures to win the Region 1D title. Southern Gap struggled to contain Ridgeview’s athleticism last week.

Although Rye Cove may not have as many offensive weapons as the Wolfpack, the War Eagles remain one of Southwest Virginia’s top teams.

PREDICTION: Rye Cove 42, Southern Gap 12
THE GAME: Honaker (1-0) at Ridgeview (1-0)
THE SETTING: Friday, Sept. 4, at 7 p.m. at Ridgeview High School Football Stadium in Rose Ridge.

HONAKER: Kameron Keen caught a 60-yard touchdown pass from backup quarterback Brayden Justus in the Tigers’ season-opening victory. Other key players for Honaker include Levi Honaker, Cole Morrison, Kam Beavers, Levi Johnson and Haiden Miller.

RIDGEVIEW: The Wolfpack’s dynamic duo of Alex Grant and Colin Hill combined for more than 200 rushing yards in last week’s blowout victory over Southern Gap. Hill led all rushers with 112 yards and two touchdowns on six carries. Grant added 91 yards and two scores on six carries.

Grant also returned a punt for a touchdown and caught a touchdown pass, showing how many different ways he can affect a game.

FINAL WORD: Honaker suffered a devastating loss when standout sophomore quarterback Parker Lowe broke his collarbone three plays into the season opener. The injury could keep Lowe sidelined for the remainder of the year.

Ridgeview looked as good as advertised in its opening victory over Southern Gap. Grant, Hill, Xander Wallace and Braxton Deel give the Wolfpack more than enough firepower to overwhelm the injury-plagued Tigers.

PREDICTION: Ridgeview 48, Honaker 14

New People’s Bank

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

KATELYN WOLFORD

Southern Gap High School freshman Katelyn Wolford is the New Peoples Bank Player of the Week.

Wolford placed third among 77 runners at the prestigious Through the Pines Invitational, completing the 5,000-meter course at Lebanon Primary School in 23 minutes, 4.30 seconds.

CONGRATULATIONS!

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IN THE LOCKER ROOM

FROM PAGE 1B



Southern Gap students Paris Sanabria, left, and Blake Childress compete in Dr Pepper's scholarship football-throwing contest during halftime of the Black Diamond Miners Bowl. Childress won a \$3,000 college scholarship, while Sanabria received a \$1,000 scholarship (Photo by Chad Cooper).

That does not mean Southern Gap should be satisfied with losing. Tester, his staff and the players were disappointed. They will study the film, identify their mistakes and return to work.

That is how a new program grows — and growing pains really hurt.

One difficult night against one of the region's best teams does not define the Eagles' season or determine what this program can become.

When I left the stadium Friday night, the score was not what stayed with me.

I kept thinking about the crowd, the moon hanging over the stadium and the pride surrounding Southern Gap High School's new football program.

Both sides of the stadium were packed. People lined the upper concourse, gathered around the top of the stadium and found places to sit or stand along the hillside. Everywhere I looked, there were people.

I estimate more than 5,000 fans attended. Whatever the exact number, it was an unbelievable sight and one of the largest crowds I have seen at a Buchanan County sporting event.

I have covered Buchanan County sports for almost a decade and spent most of my life involved in local athletics as a player, coach, spectator and reporter. I have attended many memorable games, but Friday night felt different.

The scene brought to mind my playing days at The Cliff in Hurley. I remember the stands being packed elbow to elbow, with longtime sports fans standing along the fence. Those crowds made every game feel more significant and created an atmosphere the players never forgot.

Friday night brought back some of that same excitement.

This time, people from Council, Grundy, Hurley and Twin Valley gathered to support one school. Four communities that spent decades competing against one another are beginning to come together under the Southern Gap name.

That process will not happen overnight. Old rivalries, school colors and traditions cannot be forgotten in a few weeks — and they should not be. Those schools and communities helped shape generations of Buchanan County residents.

But Friday night showed that new traditions can grow alongside memories of the old ones.

People began arriving not long after the final school bell rang. Dr Pepper's pregame activities started at 4 p.m., but it felt as though fans had been gathering at Southern Gap all day.

The parking lots filled, friends visited and excitement continued building as kickoff approached. It felt like more than another high school football game. It felt like a community event.

WCYB televised the game as part of its Friday Night Rivals coverage, giving the Southern Gap and Ridgeview players an opportunity to compete before a television audience. The TV timeouts made the game last a little longer, but the delays were a small price to pay for that kind of exposure.

Those young men will always be able to say they played in the first Black Diamond Miners Bowl at



Southern Gap High School senior student-athlete Megan Hess displays the plaque she received after being named the Mountain Area Ford Dealers Scholar Athlete of the Week by WCYB's Friday Night Rivals.

Southern Gap before a huge crowd and a television audience.

The broadcast also provided an opportunity to recognize one of Southern Gap's own.

Southern Gap senior student-athlete Megan Hess was named the Mountain Area Ford Dealers Scholar Athlete of the Week by WCYB's Friday Night Rivals. Hess was presented with a plaque recognizing her accomplishments as both a student and an athlete.

The honor was another reminder that Friday night was about more than the score on the football field. It was also about celebrating students who represent their school and community through their hard work in the classroom and in athletics.

Southern Gap also used the occasion to recognize longtime WCYB meteorologist Dave Dierks for his support of athletes across Southwest Virginia.

Southern Gap Principal Mark Cooper presented Dierks with a plaque of appreciation that thanked him for his dedication to keeping athletes, coaches, families and fans informed and safe.

The plaque read, "In appreciation of your unwavering support of Southwest Virginia athletes and your dedication to keep our athletes, coaches, families and fans informed and safe. From the fields to the courts, your forecasts help us make informed decisions and protect the teams we love. Thank you for being the MVP of our weather team."

The message concluded with thanks from the coaches, athletes and communities of Southwest Virginia.

It was a fitting honor. Weather plays a major role in high school athletics, and Dierks has spent years helping schools and families prepare for everything from extreme heat and thunderstorms to snow and dangerous travel conditions.

State Sen. Todd Pillion also attended the game, marking the second consecutive week he had watched Southern Gap play. When I spoke with him, he was blown away by the facility.

Pillion described the stadium as a gem of Southwest Virginia and possibly the entire state.

It is difficult to argue with him.

The turf, large video board, mountain backdrop and the way the field sits below the surrounding terrain give the stadium a special look. The facility was impressive while empty. Seeing it filled with thousands of people made it even more remarkable.

Pillion was there to present the new Black Diamond Miners Bowl trophy. The massive trophy includes space for the winning school's name to be engraved following each game in the series.

Ridgeview became the first school to claim it.

Pillion presented the trophy to Ridgeview head coach Kent Grant and the Wolfpack after the game. WCYB also awarded Ridgeview its Friday Night Rivals trophy, sending the Wolfpack back to Dickenson County with two pieces of hardware.

Southern Gap would have loved to keep those trophies in Buchanan County, but Ridgeview earned them. The Wolfpack played an outstanding game and deserved its moment.

Another memorable part of the night came during halftime.

Dr Pepper selected Southern Gap students Blake Childress, a football player, and Paris Sanabria, a band member, to compete for college scholarships by throwing footballs into two large inflatable bottles.

After 30 seconds, they were tied with one successful throw apiece, sending the competition into sudden death.

Childress made the winning throw and received a \$3,000 college scholarship. Sanabria was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

That is the kind of moment young people remember. The scoreboard did not favor Southern Gap, but the night was still a victory in many other ways.

It showed that Buchanan County residents will support their students. It showed that fans from four former high schools can gather in the same stadium and cheer for the same team.

On a much sadder note, Buchanan County unexpectedly lost former Sheriff Ray Foster this past week.

I extend my condolences to his wife, Debbie Foster, who writes the "Rocklick News" column for The Virginia Mountaineer, and to the rest of his family.

Ray and I shared a story that came up many times through the years. I believe it was in 1998 when I pulled out and struck another vehicle. Ray told me it was the first traffic accident he had ever worked.

Whenever I later spoke with him while covering the sheriff's office for the newspaper, that first meeting would usually find its way into our conversation.

Ray served Buchanan County for 16 years as sheriff. He was a good man who dedicated much of his life to serving the people of this county. His sudden passing leaves another hole in our community.

He will be missed.

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



Ridgeview's Alex Grant stretches toward the end zone for a 20-yard touchdown run in the first quarter of the inaugural Black Diamond Miners Bowl. The score gave the Wolfpack an early 6-0 lead over Southern Gap.

RIDGEVIEW DEFEATS

FROM PAGE 1B

events in recent Buchanan County history.

Both sides of the stadium were packed well before kickoff. Fans lined the upper concourse, gathered around the top of the stadium and found places to watch from the surrounding hillside.

People began arriving shortly after school dismissed. started at 4 p.m., and the parking lots continued filling as kickoff approached.

WCYB televised the game as part of its Friday Night Rivals series, giving the Southern Gap and Ridgeview players an opportunity to compete before a television audience.

Coach Grant praised the crowd, Southern Gap's new facility and the possibility of building a rivalry between neighboring Buchanan and Dickenson counties.

"My gosh. Just, I mean, these two weeks in a row, man, they've had two big old crowds," Grant said. "So this is great. I mean, this is great for them and, you know, makes a new rivalry for us, because this is probably the closest two schools to us now. It is. So this is, you know, this is just a great night."

Alex Grant opened the scoring on a 20-yard run with 5:07 remaining in the first quarter. The extra-point attempt failed, leaving Ridgeview with a 6-0 advantage.

Southern Gap remained within one score until Grant's punt return early in the second quarter.

After the return made it 13-0, Ridgeview's offense found its rhythm. Deel raced 27 yards for a touchdown and then connected with Xander Wallace for the two-point conversion.

Alex Grant broke free for a 54-yard touchdown run, and Deel added the extra point to make it 28-0.

Junior Colin Hill closed Ridgeview's 28-point second quarter with a 40-yard touchdown run during the final minute of the half. The conversion failed, sending the Wolfpack into halftime up 34-0.

Hill continued the scoring early in the third quarter with a 57-yard touchdown run. Deel's extra point pushed the lead to 41-0.

Deel later found Alex Grant for a 76-yard touchdown pass. Another extra point gave

Hill led all rushers with 112 yards and two touchdowns on six carries. Deel completed 3 of 4 passes for 113 yards and a score while also rushing for a touchdown.

Ridgeview finished with 359 yards of total offense, including 246 on the ground. The Wolfpack recorded 10 first downs and did not commit a turnover.

Southern Gap continued fighting and avoided the shutout in the fourth quarter.

Senior Brayden White connected with freshman Mason Rife on a 13-yard touchdown pass. White found Rife again in the back of the end zone for the 2-point conversion, producing the final 48-8 margin.

Sophomore Harvey Cooper led Southern Gap with 54 rushing yards on five carries. Ayden Whited added 29 yards on the ground, while Caden Justice rushed for 18 yards and caught an 18-yard pass.

Southern Gap finished with seven first downs and 117 rushing yards on 27 carries. Editor should verify: '6 net yards' for passing appears inconsistent with individual pass plays described (13-yd TD, 18-yd catch). Confirm stat with scorer. with one touchdown and one interception. They lost one fumble and were penalized four times for 30 yards.

Ridgeview was flagged seven times for 80 yards.

Tester said the Eagles were often in position defensively but struggled to finish tackles against Ridgeview's playmakers.

"I think defensively we had . I think we were in the right spots. You know, we just didn't wrap up," Tester said.

Despite the final margin, Tester praised his players for continuing to compete.

"But I was proud of my guys," Tester said. "I know we got some work to do. We're just going to get back to work."

Tester challenged the Eagles at halftime to continue battling against an established Ridgeview program that played for the Region 2D championship last season.

"I told them at halftime, you know, you need to come out and win your individual battle," Tester said. "Let's get a first down. Let's get a touchdown. Let's get on the board and just show some grit and show some fight about you. And I thought they did that in the second half."

state Sen. Todd Pillion presented the new Black Diamond Miners Bowl trophy to Kent Grant and the Wolfpack after the game. The trophy, which honors the coal-mining heritage shared by Buchanan and Dickenson counties, includes space for the winning school's name to be engraved following each meeting.

WCYB also presented Ridgeview with its Friday Night Rivals trophy.

"They really stepped up and made the Miners Bowl here for us," Kent Grant said. "And it really represents really our two counties, I think, what our two counties were built on. So it's great to honor that."

Tester encouraged his players to watch Ridgeview's celebration and use it as motivation.

"I want them to watch that trophy presentation there, because that's going to be them in a few years," Tester said.

Several Southern Gap students and community supporters were also recognized during the evening.

Senior student-athlete Megan Hess was honored as the Mountain Area Ford Dealers Scholar Athlete of the Week by WCYB's Friday Night Rivals. Southern Gap Principal Mark Cooper presented longtime WCYB meteorologist Dave Dierks with a plaque recognizing his support of Southwest Virginia athletes.

During halftime, Southern Gap students Blake Childress and Paris Sanabria competed in Dr Pepper's Fanville football-throwing contest. Childress received a \$3,000 college scholarship, while Sanabria earned a \$1,000 scholarship.

VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEER PIGSKIN PROGNOSTICATORS							
THIS WEEK'S GAMES		CHAD COOPER	SAM BARTLEY	RYAN KEENE	TERESA MATNEY	MARK COOPER	BRIAN MOORE
							
1	Southern Gap at Rye Cove	Rye Cove	Rye Cove	Rye Cove	Rye Cove	Southern Gap	Rye Cove
2	Honaker at Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview	Ridgeview
3	Patrick Henry at Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Patrick Henry	Lebanon
4	Marion at Wise Central	Wise Central	Wise Central	Wise Central	Wise Central	Wise Central	Wise Central
5	Union at Daniel Boone TN	Union	Daniel Boone TN	Union	Union	Union	Union
6	John Battle at Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High	Virginia High
7	Jl Burton at Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie	Chilhowie
8	Thomas Walker at Lee High	Lee High	Lee High	Lee High	Lee High	Lee High	Thomas Walker
9	Tazewell at Pulaski County	Pulaski County	Pulaski County	Pulaski County	Pulaski County	Pulaski County	Pulaski County
10	Heritage (Lynchburg) at Graham	Graham	Heritage	Graham	Heritage	Graham	Heritage
11	Castlewood at Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky	Phelps Ky
12	Holston at Narrows	Narrows	Narrows	Narrows	Narrows	Narrows	Narrows
LAST WEEK'S RECORD		10-2	9-3	9-3	11-1	7-5	7-5

Southern Gap golfers place third in Southwest District match

By CHAD COOPER
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Southern Gap continued to make its presence felt during its inaugural golf season, placing third in a Southwest District match Wednesday, Aug. 26, in Marion.

The Eagles posted a four-player team score of 169, finishing behind district champion Graham and runner-up Marion.

Graham won the match with a 149, while Marion finished seven strokes back with a 156. Southern Gap followed in third, with Richlands placing fourth at 190, Virginia High fifth at 193 and Lebanon sixth at 218. Tazewell did not have enough golfers to record a team score.

Mason Boyd led Southern Gap with a 37, tying for the third-lowest round of the match. Jaxon Hardin followed with a 40, giving the Eagles two golfers among the top 10 individuals.

Brayden Hopkins shot a 45, while Ben Mayhew finished with a 47. Gavin Hartford carded a 49, and Jackson Deel added a 50.

Graham's Brogan Gilpin earned medalist honors after firing a match-low 35. Teammate Bailey Goodson finished one stroke back with a 36.

Boyd tied Marion's Campbell Sayers and Brady White with rounds of 37. Tazewell's Jay Sawyers followed with a 38.

Graham's Noah Mulkey and Kendal Brodnik joined Marion's Hayes Hall at 39. Hardin rounded out the top 10 with his 40.

The third-place showing gave Southern Gap another strong performance in its first season as the Eagles continue competing against some of Southwest Virginia's established golf programs.

Team results: Graham 149, Marion 156, Southern Gap 169, Richlands 190, Virginia High 193, Lebanon 218. Tazewell did not record a team score.

Southern Gap: Mason Boyd 37, Jaxon Hardin 40, Brayden Hopkins 45, Ben Mayhew 47, Gavin Hartford 49, Jackson Deel 50.

Graham: Brogan Gilpin 35, Bailey Goodson 36, Noah Mulkey 39, Kendal Brodnik 39, Dawson Goins 41, Colton Graham 41.

Marion: Campbell Sayers 37, Brady White 37, Hayes Hall 39, Kingston Gates 43, Grant Cox 47, Emerson



Southern Gap's Mason Boyd led the Eagles with a 37, tying for the third-lowest round during a Southwest District match Wednesday, Aug. 26, in Marion. Boyd's performance helped Southern Gap place third in the team standings. (Photo by Chad Cooper)

Street 52, JJ. Cregger 53.

Richlands: Gunner Beaty 42, Wakely Boyd 45, Keegan McGhee 47, Elijah White 57, DJ Cline 56, Brayden Mitchell 58.

Virginia High: Gracie Belcher 42, Ryan Penley 43, Carter Gemmell 52, Kenden Lester 56.

Lebanon: Luke Lambert 52, Ethan Jones 53, Jaxon Fields 56, Cannon Barton 57, Maddox Barton 58, Collin Ball 63.

Tazewell: Jay Sawyers 38, Tanner Lester 42, Cason Howington 59.

Top 10 individuals - 1. Brogan Gilpin, Graham, 35; 2. Bailey Goodson, Graham, 36; tied for 3. Mason Boyd, Southern Gap, 37; Campbell Sayers, Marion, 37; Brady White, Marion, 37; 6. Jay Sawyers, Tazewell, 38; tied for 7. Noah Mulkey, Graham, 39; Kendal Brodnik, Graham, 39; Hayes Hall, Marion, 39; 10. Jaxon Hardin, Southern Gap, 40.

Kiwanis 5K returns to Breaks Interstate Park

By CHAD COOPER
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Runners and cross-country teams will take on the hills and trails of Breaks Interstate Park during the 26th annual Kiwanis/Breaks Park 5K Cross Country Run on Saturday, Sept. 26.

The race will begin at 10 a.m. in the swimming pool area inside Breaks Interstate Park. The course will cover approximately 3.1 miles through some of the park's central attractions, taking runners along portions of its trails toward the cottage area before returning to the swimming pool.

The event is open to runners of all ages and abilities. The individual entry fee is \$15 in advance or \$20 on race day. Registration for high school cross-country runners is \$2 per team member, but T-shirts are not included with the high school team rate.

Trophies will be presented to the overall male and female winners and the top male and female finishers in the masters division for runners age 40 and older. Awards will also be presented to the top three finishers in each age group.

The age divisions are 14 and younger, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60 and older.

High school teams will also compete for team trophies and cash prizes in separate boys and girls divisions. Winning teams will receive \$150, with \$100 for second place and \$75 for third place. Each school that brings a complete team will receive \$50, except schools entering both boys and girls teams (one payment per school).

A 1.5-mile middle school cross-country meet will follow the main race. The middle school competition will include divisions for fifth- and sixth-grade runners and seventh- and eighth-grade runners. Trophies will be presented to the top three boys and girls in each division.

All participants will enjoy a pancake breakfast sponsored by Buchanan General Hospital. Parking and restrooms will be available at the park.

The event is sponsored by the Grundy Kiwanis Club, Rife's TV, Food City, SunCoke Energy, Legacy Bank, Buchanan County Parks and Recreation and Buchanan General Hospital.

For registration information, contact Jon Rife at 276-935-2181 or jonrife@rifestv.net. You may mail registration forms to P.O. Box 724, Grundy, VA 24614.

Former Grundy standout Porter named SAC Runner to Watch

By CHAD COOPER
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WISE, Va. — Former Grundy High School standout Alexis Porter will enter her senior cross country season at UVA Wise with conference recognition already beside her name.

Porter, a Grundy native, was selected as one of UVA Wise's Runners to Watch as the South Atlantic Conference released its 2026 preseason cross country coaches polls and preseason honors Thursday.

Porter is one of three former Buchanan County high school standouts on the UVA Wise women's cross country roster this season. Former Hurley High School standout Jayda Hilton returns for her sophomore season, while former Council High School standout Ella Rasnake begins her collegiate career as a freshman.

Porter is coming off a junior season in which she established personal-best times in both the 4K and 5K and recorded a pair of third-place finishes.

She turned in a time of 14:58.8 in the 4K at the Virginia Tech Invitational and later posted an 18:41.4 in the 5K at the Southern Showcase.

Porter made her mark as a distance runner at Grundy High School before continuing her career at the collegiate level with the Highland Cavaliers. She now heads into her final season as one of the runners the conference has identified to watch in 2026.

UVA Wise placed ninth in both the men's and women's SAC preseason coaches polls.

Joining Porter on the women's Runners to Watch list for UVA Wise is junior Shay Cannon of Bristol, Virginia.

Cannon recorded a personal-best time of 17:11.6 at the Virginia Tech Invitational last season and finished the 6K SAC Championship in 30:41.7.

Sophomores Dylan Colander and Patton Shortt were selected as UVA Wise's men's Runners to Watch.

Colander, a Waynesboro, Virginia, native, recorded five top-40 finishes during his freshman season.

His year included a sixth-place finish at the Royals Challenge and a 10th-place showing at the SAC Championship Preview, both 8K races. He also finished 35th in the 10K SAC Championship.

Shortt, a Pound, Virginia, native, posted three top-50 finishes last season. He completed the SAC Championship in 37:33.6.

Defending national champion Wingate was selected as the preseason favorite on the men's side. Anderson was picked second, followed by Catawba, Lincoln Memorial, Lenoir-Rhyne, Emory & Henry, Mars Hill, Tusculum, UVA Wise, Carson-Newman, Newberry and Coker.

Wingate also topped the women's preseason poll, followed by Catawba, Anderson, Lincoln Memorial, Lenoir-Rhyne, Carson-Newman, Mars Hill, Emory & Henry, UVA Wise, Tusculum, Newberry and Coker.

Porter, Hilton, Rasnake and the Highland Cavaliers will begin the 2026 season Sept. 4 at the Virginia Tech Invitational in Blacksburg.

UVA Wise is also scheduled to compete in the Queen City Invite and Royals Challenge in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the UAH Invitational in Huntsville, Alabama.

The season will lead into the SAC Championship, which will be hosted by Wingate.

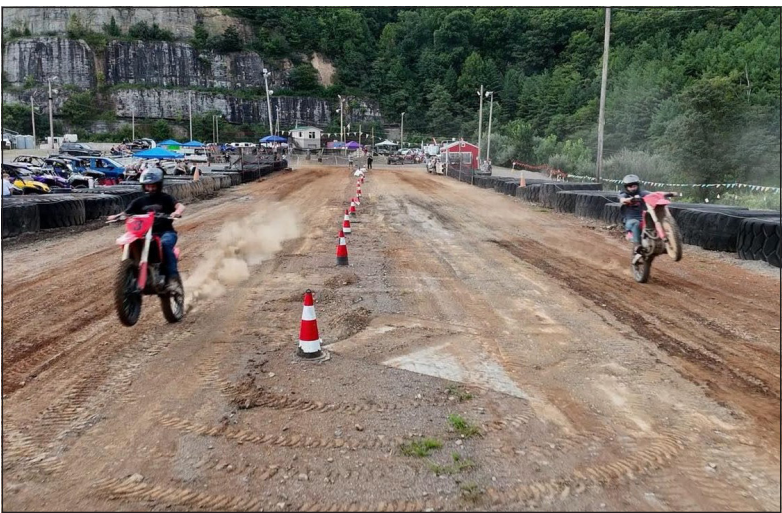


Riders claim top honors at Southern Gap Dirt Drags

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Riders of all ages kicked up the dust and put their skills to the test during the Trails & Tunes Festival at the Southern Gap Dirt Drags, held Aug. 20-22.

The three-day event featured traditional drag races, hill climbs, mud bogs and Crazy 8's competitions, along with several lighthearted contests for competitors and spectators. Participants competed on motorcycles, ATVs and UTVs, with the top three finishers recognized in most events.



Two competitors battle for top honors in the wheelie competition during the Trails & Tunes Festival at the Southern Gap Dirt Drags in Grundy (Contributed photo).

Competition began Thursday, Aug. 20, with Hunter Justus winning the panty race. Gary Jackson placed second, and Matthew Jackson finished third.

Kaden Watkins won the wheelie competition, followed by Jeremiah O'Quinn in second and Nick Lester in third.

The action continued Friday, Aug. 21, with Kinsley Yates winning the kids' tire toss. Corbin Yates placed second, and Brantley Deel finished third. Joe Yates captured the regular tire toss championship, with Matthew Jackson placing second and Josh Viers taking third.

Watkins earned another victory in the Dizzy Daze competition. Judy Dotson finished second, and Kobe Blankenship placed third.

Taylen Clevinger won the MX Crazy 8's competition, followed by Watkins in second and Ayden Bowman in third.

Adam Looney claimed first place in the ATV Crazy 8's. Blankenship finished second, and Shannon Dotson took third. Justin Grizzle won the UTV Crazy 8's, with Preston Hurley placing second and Zsean Hurley finishing third.

Josh Viers captured the UTV

doughnut competition. David Vance placed second, and Tony Viers finished third. Gary Jackson won the ATV doughnut competition, followed by Clyde Jones in second and Jonathan Greer in third.

Greer also earned first place in the ATV mud bog. TJ Greer finished second, and Matthew Jackson placed third. Wesley Ellis won the UTV mud bog, with Olivia Grizzle taking second and Tyler White finishing third.

Eli Baker was the winner of the kids' hill climb.

Justin Taylor won the MX hill climb, followed by Watkins in second and Jeremiah O'Quinn in third.

Looney took first place in the ATV two-wheel-drive hill climb. Chace Fuller placed second, and Blankenship finished third. Rick Baker won the ATV four-wheel-drive hill climb.

Justin Boyd captured the non-turbo hill climb championship. Matt Baker placed second, and Blankenship finished third. Cody Dales won the turbo hill climb, followed by Eric Sparks in second and Kenny Silvia

in third.

Eli Baker added another victory by winning the kids' 12-and-under drag race. Bowman placed second, and Justus finished third.

Clevinger won the MX drag race, with Kentsten Sutherland finishing second and Looney placing third.

Blankenship claimed first place in the two-wheel-drive ATV drag race. Looney took second, and Kiersten Looney finished third.

Lester won the four-wheel-drive ATV drag race, followed by Tyler Young in second and Shannon Dotson in third.

Canaan McClanahan captured the non-turbo UTV drag race championship. Josh Viers placed second, and Matt Baker finished third.

Justin Grizzle closed out the listed racing results by winning the UTV turbo drag race. Shane Fletcher placed second, and Chris Horn took third.

The event also included a tug-of-war competition, with Preston Hurley earning first place in the UTV division.

Southern Gap boys place ninth at Through the Pines

By CHAD COOPER
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Southern Gap's boys cross country team finished ninth against a large regional field Wednesday, Aug. 26, at the 17th annual Travis Hooker Through the Pines Invitational.

The Eagles scored 187 points in their first appearance at the longstanding meet, which featured 86 runners in the boys 5,000-meter race at Lebanon Primary School.

Sophomores Wyatt Street and Ethan Deel led Southern Gap and finished among the top 20.

Street crossed the finish line in 20 minutes, 16.26 seconds to place 19th. Deel followed in 20th place with a time of 20:23.45, finishing less than eight seconds behind his teammate.

Freshman Bentley Jackson was the third Eagle across the finish line, placing 43rd in 22:21.84. Freshman Oliver Breeding finished 54th in 24:08.81, and sophomore Jacob Smeltzer completed Southern Gap's scoring lineup by placing 58th in 24:33.43.

The Eagles' five scoring runners combined for an average time of 22:20. Southern Gap finished ahead of Rye Cove, Gate City and John I. Burton in the 12-team standings.

Abingdon captured the team championship with 40 points after placing four runners among the top 14 and all five scoring runners in the top 18. Lebanon finished second with 76 points, followed by Lee with 107, the Virginia Bearcats with 132 and Honaker with 167.

Twin Springs and Tazewell each scored 173 points. Twin Springs earned sixth place through the tiebreaker, while Tazewell finished seventh. Castlewood placed eighth with 181 points.

Abingdon senior Charlie Brown won the individual championship in 17:45.42. Rye Cove sophomore Ty Hood placed second in 17:48.27, finishing less than three seconds behind Brown.

Abingdon sophomore Max Bodenhorst took third in 18:11.52. Teammate Luke Dorn, also a sophomore, placed fourth in 18:24.52. Lee senior Elijah Stafford finished fifth in 18:34.05.

THROUGH THE PINES INVITATIONAL

Boys 5,000-meter results

TEAM SCORES

- Abingdon — 40
- Lebanon — 76
- Lee — 107
- Virginia Bearcats — 132
- Honaker — 167
- Twin Springs — 173
- Tazewell — 173
- Castlewood — 181
- Southern Gap — 187
- Rye Cove — 203
- Gate City — 265
- John I. Burton — 286

Top 58 individuals

- Charlie Brown, Abingdon, Sr. — 17:45.42
- Ty Hood, Rye Cove, So. — 17:48.27
- Max Bodenhorst, Abingdon, So. — 18:11.52
- Luke Dorn, Abingdon, So. — 18:24.52
- Elijah Stafford, Lee, Sr. — 18:34.05
- Liam Pratt, Virginia Bearcats, Jr. — 18:38.85
- Aybrum Hammond, Lebanon, Fr. — 18:56.68
- Logan Pennington, Lee, So. — 19:03.25
- Isac Cooper, Castlewood, So. — 19:07.45



- Jonesy Roe, Virginia Bearcats, sixth grade — 19:11.43
- Ethan Baker, Tazewell, Jr. — 19:18.22
- Michael Hines, Lee, Jr. — 19:31.49
- Hunter Dye, Honaker, Sr. — 19:36.84
- Aulden Rainey, Abingdon, Jr. — 19:39.59
- Jack Garland, Lebanon, Jr. — 20:02.51
- Elliott Breeding, Lebanon, Jr. — 20:05.42
- Asher Taylor, Lebanon, So. — 20:08.69
- Alistair Chisholm, Abingdon, So. — 20:13.23
- Wyatt Street, Southern Gap, So. — 20:16.26
- Ethan Deel, Southern Gap, So. — 20:23.45
- Clayton Brown, Lebanon, Fr. — 20:23.47
- Lincoln Combs, Honaker, Sr. — 20:23.99
- Dalten Keith, Castlewood, Jr. — 20:28.28
- Seth Nunley, Tazewell, Fr. — 20:28.41
- Landin Littrell, Lebanon, Fr. — 20:33.80
- Colten Johnson, Twin Springs, Sr. — 20:34.87
- Connor Branham, John S. Battle, Sr. — 20:53.70
- Aayden Mullins, Twin Springs, So. — 20:57.92
- Eli Davidson, Twin Springs, So. — 21:00.66
- Brighton Stork, Lebanon, Fr. — 21:01.07
- Daniel Corell, Tazewell, Fr. — 21:17.42
- Luke Robinson, Abingdon, Fr. — 21:31.51
- Jake Osborne, Rye Cove, Jr. — 21:39.70
- Alex Kariuki, Virginia Bearcats, Jr. — 21:41.67
- Lyfe McNew, Gate City, Jr. — 21:42.10
- Josh DeBusk, Virginia Bearcats, Fr. — 21:54.01
- Collyn Chasteen, Lee, So. — 21:54.70
- Loften Fansler, Gate City, Fr. — 22:02.55
- Tyler Boyd, Honaker, Sr. — 22:07.87
- Thomas Hutchison, Abingdon, So. — 22:14.41
- Salem Hall, Castlewood, Fr. — 22:19.29
- Joseph Musick, Honaker, So. — 22:21.62
- Bentley Jackson, Southern Gap, Fr. — 22:21.84
- Koletyn Keith, Twin Springs, So. — 22:26.23
- Drayden Upchurch, Rye Cove, Jr. — 22:22.47
- Wesley Jones, Graham, Sr. — 23:22.85
- Gavin McCann, Tazewell, Fr. — 23:29.88
- Carter Cox, Lee, Jr. — 23:32.84
- Chasten Richardson, John I. Burton, Jr. — 23:33.64
- Dylan Kellogg, Virginia Bearcats, Sr. — 23:37.70
- Bryce Swisher, Twin Springs, Sr. — 23:44.26
- Gideon Mizelle, John S. Battle, Fr. — 23:49.47
- Joseph Skeen, Castlewood, Jr. — 23:54.87
- Oliver Breeding, Southern Gap, Fr. — 24:08.81
- Thomas Caldwell, Virginia Bearcats, Fr. — 24:15.87
- Keaton Cook, Honaker, Fr. — 24:32.64
- Landon Adams, John I. Burton, Fr. — 24:32.67
- Jacob Smeltzer, Southern Gap, So. — 24:33.43

Southern Gap places eighth at Raven Rock

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

Southern Gap continued its inaugural golf season with an eighth-place finish against a 10-team field at Raven Rock Golf Course in Jenkins, Kentucky.

The Eagles posted a four-player score of 347, finishing 10 strokes ahead of Richlands and 66 strokes behind team winner Abingdon.

Abingdon took the team championship with a 279. Marion placed second with a 304, edging John Battle by one stroke. Battle finished third at 305, while Chilhowie placed fourth with a 309.

Holston rounded out the top five with a 315. Central placed sixth at 321, followed by Union at 328, Southern Gap at 347, Richlands at 357 and Ridgeview at 413.

Two golfers shared the lowest individual round. Marion's Campbell Salyers and John S. Battle's Christina Zochowski each shot a 66.

Abingdon's Natalie Lasley finished one stroke back with a 67, while teammate Davis Cook carded a 68. Abingdon's Ross Gibson and Chilhowie's Max Barnes each shot a 71.

Lukas McGraw of Abingdon finished with a 73, and Central's Kaden Adkins shot a 74. Central's Colton Astbury and Holston's Brinton Sweet completed the top 10 with rounds of 75.

Ethan Deel turned in Southern Gap's lowest round, shooting a 77. His score placed him just two strokes outside the top 10.

Braden Hopkins followed with an 86, and Ben Mayhew added an 89. Mason Boyd shot a 95 to complete Southern Gap's four-player team score.

Jaxon Hardin also represented the Eagles and carded a 104. In high school golf, each team's four lowest individual rounds are combined to determine its score.

RAVEN ROCK GOLF MATCH

- Team scores
- Abingdon — 279
- Marion — 304
- John S. Battle — 305
- Chilhowie — 309
- Holston — 315
- Wise Central — 321
- Union — 328
- Southern Gap — 347
- Richlands — 357
- Ridgeview — 413

Top 10 individuals

T1. Campbell Salyers, Marion — 66T1. Christina Zochowski, John S. Battle — 663. Natalie Lasley, Abingdon — 674. Davis Cook, Abingdon — 68T5. Ross Gibson, Abingdon — 71T5. Max Barnes, Chilhowie — 717. Lukas McGraw, Abingdon — 738. Kaden Adkins, Central — 74T9. Colton Astbury, Central — 75T9. Brinton Sweet, Holston — 75

Southern Gap scores

Ethan Deel — 77Braden Hopkins — 86Ben Mayhew — 89Mason Boyd — 95Jaxon Hardin — 104

WOLFORD PLACES

FROM PAGE 1B

training," Wolford said. "The race was tough, but I kept pushing and didn't give up. I'm really proud of how I raced, and I'm thankful that God gave me the strength and ability to do it. I know that everything I accomplish is because of Him, and I just want to use the gifts He's given me to glorify Him."

Three Southern Gap teammates joined Wolford in the Eagles' first appearance at the longstanding event.

Southern Gap sophomore Vieronika Silishchenko placed 21st in 26:22.90. Senior Kelly Ratliff finished 29th in 27:31.40, while senior Ava Ward placed 39th in 28:36.40.

The Eagles did not record a team score because they had four runners in the race. Five finishers are required to compile a team score.

Abingdon won the team championship with 25 points after placing five scoring runners among the top 13. Tazewell finished second with 76 points, followed by John S. Battle with 82.

Honaker placed fourth with 111 points, Lee was fifth with 112, the Virginia Bearcats finished sixth with 130 and John I. Burton placed seventh with 170.

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LEGAL NOTICES

TRUSTEE SALE
1139 Ellis Justus Rd, Grundy, VA 24614

Buchanan County
In execution of a Deed of Trust in the original principal amount of \$107,200.00, dated January 20, 2022 recorded in the Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of the Buchanan County, Virginia, in Document No. 220000070, at the request of the holder of the Note, the undersigned Substitute Trustee and will offer for sale at public auction at the entrance to the Circuit Court of Buchanan County, 1012 Walnut Street, Grundy, on October 7, 2026 at 10:00 AM the property described in said deed, located at the above address and briefly described as:
Tax Map ID No: 2HH112007 C

BEGINNING at a large maple; thence East, uphill, 888 feet to a maple at a strip mine bench; thence Northeast around with said strip mine bench, 100 feet to a basswood and metal stake; thence Northwest downhill, passing a red oak and a cucumber as line trees, 300 feet down a spur to a hickory; thence Northwest 300 feet to a metal pipe and stake; thence Southwest 160 feet to a pine; thence continuing Southwest 300 feet to the BEGINNING, containing 3 acres, more or less, with any improvements thereon
Subject to any and all covenants, conditions, restrictions, easements, and all other matters of record taking priority over the Deed of Trust, if any, affecting the aforesaid property.
TERMS OF SALE: CASH: A deposit of \$20,000.00 or 10% of the sales price, whichever is lower, cash or certified check will be required at the time of sale, but no more than \$9,000.00 of cash will be accepted, with settlement within fifteen (15) days from the date of sale. Sale is subject to post sale confirmation that the borrower did not file for protection under the U.S. Bankruptcy Code pri-

LEGAL NOTICES

or to the sale which affects the validity of the sale, as well as to post-sale confirmation of the status of the loan with the loan servicer including, but not limited to, determination of whether the borrower entered into any repayment agreement, reinstated or paid off the loan prior to the sale. In any such event, the sale shall be null and void, and the Purchaser's sole remedy, in law or equity, shall be the return of his deposit without interest. Additional terms may be announced at the time of sale. Pursuant to the Federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, we advise you that this firm is a debt collector attempting to collect the indebtedness referred to herein and any information we obtain will be used for that purpose.
SAMUEL I. WHITE, P.C., Substitute Trustee
This is a communication from a debt collector.
FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:
SAMUEL I. WHITE, P.C. (95829)
448 Viking Drive Suite 350 Virginia Beach, VA 23452 757-457-1460 · Call Between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
or visit our website at www.siwpc.net
To: Virginia Mountaineer
SAMUEL I. WHITE, P.C.
cc: Nationstar Mortgage LLC d/b/a Mr. Cooper
Ad runs: September 3, 2026 and September 10, 2026

PUBLIC NOTICE APPLICATION FOR RE-NEWAL/REISSUANCE OF

LEGAL NOTICES

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 locations 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 com-

LEGAL NOTICES

ments 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

SERVICES

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

NOTICE is hereby given that the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors will conduct a Public Hearing on the 14th day of September 2026 at 6:45 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 option to purchase the Old Twin Valley High School property owned by Buchanan County, Va. The property is more specifically described in the deeds at Deed Book 288, pg. 658; Deed Book 288, pg. 656; Deed Book 288, pg. 660; Instrument No. 180001823; and Deed Book 291, pg. 841 (order memorializing an agreement resolving a condemnation action) which have all been recorded in the Clerk's Office of the Buchanan County Circuit Court. The proposed option to purchase would be with Maverick Partners Holdings, LLC or its affiliates for future development purposes.

The proposed option to purchase 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 arrangement to obtain a copy of the proposed option to purchase.

PLEASE CONDUCT YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Buchanan County Board of Supervisors invites Proposals for Pre-Audit Consulting Services by a qualified independent certified public accountant firm for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2027, June 30, 2028 and June 30, 2029, which shall be subject to competitive negotiations pursuant to Va. Code section 2.2-4302.2.

Requests for Proposals (RFP) may be obtained after Thursday, September 3rd, 2026. Office hours are Monday - Friday, 8:30 o'clock a.m. until 5:00 o'clock p.m. at the County Administrator's Office, located on the third floor of the Buchanan County Government Center, 4447 Slate Creek Road, Grundy, Virginia. Further information may be obtained by contacting Ms. Sandy Stiltner, at 276-935-6508.

All proposals must be submitted to the County Administrator's office no later than **4:00 o'clock p.m., Thursday, September 24th, 2026.** All proposals received after this time will be returned unopened; any incomplete or deviated proposals will not be accepted. Interview will be established at a later date with selected offerors.

Buchanan County is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The Board of Supervisors reserves the right to reject any and all proposals if it appears in the best interest of the County.

BUCHANAN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator

PUBLIC NOTICE

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BUCHANAN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator

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Pay: Above minimum wage. This is a part time, non-exempt hourly position with no benefits. Hours will include evenings and Saturdays.

Apply: Send or deliver a resume with three references before September 17th to: Buchanan County Public Library ATTN: Mae Broyles, 1185 Poe Town Street, Grundy, VA 24614. Call for more details 276-935-5721.

The Buchanan County Public Library is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



From left, Patty Chambers, Dolly Parton, David Blankenship and Blankenship's caregiver, Rita McGlothlin, share a smile during a reception at Dollywood. Blankenship had the opportunity to meet Parton during the special visit. (Contributed photo)

Dolly Parton leaves lasting impression on Buchanan County man

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

For much of the world, Dolly Parton was a country music legend. For Buchanan County resident David Blankenship, she was also the woman who sat beside him at breakfast, signed a photograph, kissed him on the cheek and made one of his greatest wishes come true.

Blankenship, who turned 75 on Monday, Aug. 31, is remembering that special connection following Parton's death Tuesday, Aug. 25, in Nashville after a brief battle with cancer. She was 80.

His admiration for Parton reaches far beyond her most famous songs. Blankenship has followed her life and career for decades, learning about her music, movies, family and journey from a childhood in rural East Tennessee to international stardom.

That devotion led to an unforgettable meeting in the spring of 2002 — a story first shared with readers of The Virginia Mountaineer in its June 27, 2002, edition.

Under the headline "Hello Dolly!," the newspaper told how the Rowe resident became one of only 10 people from across the country selected to meet Parton through the Dollywood Foundation's outreach efforts.

Blankenship, who has lived with a mental disability since birth, traveled to Dollywood with his sister, Patty Chambers, and his caregiver, Rita McGlothlin. Chambers had contacted the foundation after learning about its programs for children and adults who were mentally or physically disabled or facing terminal illnesses.

"Anything we can do to bring him enjoyment, we try to do," Chambers told The Mountaineer at the time. "I knew this was something that would really, really please him, so I gave it a shot, and it was a wonderful experience for him."

After Chambers reached out to the foundation, Blankenship's physician, Carolyn Thornsbury, wrote a letter on his behalf. His name was submitted, and the family soon learned he had been chosen for the spring breakfast reception held when Dollywood opened for the season.

The foundation provided Blankenship and his family with free parking



Rowe-area resident David Blankenship watches as country music legend Dolly Parton autographs a photo for him during a breakfast reception at Dollywood. Blankenship was one of 10 people selected to meet Parton through the Dolly Foundation, which provides special programs for individuals who are ill or have disabilities. (Contributed photo)

passes, weekend admission to Dollywood and the opportunity to sit down for breakfast with Parton.

"I think we were all thrilled when we found out he had been chosen," Chambers said in the 2002 article.

Parton spent time at each table, speaking individually with those selected to meet her, signing autographs and posing for photographs. When she reached Blankenship, she gave him more than an autograph.

Blankenship asked Parton to run her fingers through his hair, joking that it would make the other men at his church jealous. Parton granted the request, kissing him on the cheek and running her fingers through his hair.

"That was a special request," Chambers recalled, describing Parton as kind and down to earth.

The meeting left a lasting impression on Blankenship.

"It felt pretty good to meet her," he told The Mountaineer. "I really enjoyed it."

Chambers said at the time that Parton took her time with everyone and never appeared to be in a hurry.

"Dolly came across as a really warm, down-to-earth person," Chambers said. "She took her time with everybody who was there and didn't try to hurry things up or rush."

Blankenship's connection with Parton and Dollywood did not end with that breakfast.

During Dollywood's

20th-anniversary celebration in 2005, he left school for the day to attend the festivities. Parton appeared before guests inside a theater, where Blankenship received a prize resembling a golden ticket.

The pass granted him free admission to Dollywood for 20 years. That privilege is scheduled to end this year, closing a remarkable chapter that kept him connected to the park and the entertainer who had given him one of the most memorable days of his life.

The 2002 Mountaineer article also captured something larger than a fan meeting a celebrity. It told the story of a family and community working together to give Blankenship an opportunity he would always remember.

Chambers credited McGlothlin, members of Oakwood Full Gospel Church and others throughout the community for surrounding her brother with love and support.

"When you have a lot of love and support, it makes it easier to care for someone," Chambers said at the time. "Our focus is on helping David and getting him involved in the things we know he will enjoy."

Parton's connection to Buchanan County reaches beyond Blankenship's memories.

Through local support from the Buchanan County Public Library, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library provides age 5. Parton founded the program in 1995 in her native Sevi-

er County, Tennessee, in honor of her father, who could not read or write. The effort eventually grew into an international childhood literacy program that placed hundreds of millions of books into the hands of children.

Parton rose from poverty in Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains to become one of the most celebrated singers and songwriters in American music. Her best-known recordings include "Jolene," "Coat of Many Colors," "9 to 5" and "I Will Always Love You." She also built a successful career as an actress, businesswoman and philanthropist.

Her recordings, movies and charitable work created connections with people around the world. In Buchanan County, that legacy can be found in the books delivered to local children and in an old newspaper page showing a smiling Blankenship beside the woman he had long dreamed of meeting.

For Blankenship, Parton's legacy is personal: a shared breakfast, an autograph, a kiss on the cheek, her fingers running through his hair and a golden ticket that extended the memory for another 20 years.

More than two decades after their meeting, the moment preserved in the pages of The Virginia Mountaineer remains exactly what his sister hoped it would become — a source of happiness that David Blankenship would never forget.



Adopt a Pet

VIRGINIAMOUNTAINEER@GMAIL.COM
Virginia Mountaineer

Rescue is a pledge, not a verb. This ravishing rescue is a one-year-old male mixed breed. His medium coat is colored black with rust and white markings. He has soulful eyes and an inquisitive expression. His personality is friendly, playful and gentle. He enjoys exercise and people. This pledge from the pound will be available for adoption at the Buchanan County Animal Shelter until Monday, September 7, 2026.

Also available for adoption is this ten-month-old female mixed breed. She has a short coat with black and tan markings.

She has dark eyes and tall ears. Her temperament is pleasant and happy.

The animal shelter is located at 1191 Dogpound Road. For more information about these animals, please call the shelter at (276) 935-4067.



ACP to host annual Business and Services Fair

By CHAD COOPER
coopkam@gmail.com

The Appalachian College of Pharmacy will welcome local businesses, organizations and service providers to its annual Business and Services Fair on Thursday, Sept. 3.

The event will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Garden Hall gymnasium on ACP's Oakwood campus.

The fair introduces the college's new students to the businesses and services available throughout the surrounding community. It also gives students and area professionals a chance to meet, build relationships and make valuable community connections.

Local businesses and organizations can use the event to share information about their products, programs and services with students who may be new to Buchanan County and the region.

Those interested in participating should RSVP to Donna Horn at dhorn@acp.edu by Monday, Aug. 31.

The Appalachian College of Pharmacy is located at 1060 Dragon Road in Oakwood. For more information, call 866-935-7350 or visit www.acp.edu.

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