

The Macon Melody

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Bibb County's local source for community news

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Southwest, Mount de Sales, Stratford earn region titles



TOP: Brandon Ashley hoists the region trophy as Southwest players celebrate their 79-76 triple overtime win over Dublin in the Region 2 championship. (Jason Vorhees / The Melody)

BOTTOM LEFT: Mount de Sales players celebrate after winning the GIAA District 6-4A/3A championship game against Stratford Academy on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025, at First Presbyterian Day School. The Mount de Sales Cavaliers defeated the Stratford Eagles 55-54. (Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody)

BOTTOM RIGHT: The Stratford Eaglettes celebrate after winning the GIAA District 6-4A/3A championship game against Piedmont Academy on Friday at First Presbyterian Day School. The Eaglettes defeated the Piedmont Lady Cougars 67-55. (Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody)

For more on local basketball region titles, **see Page B1.**

Macon voters to weigh extending increased sales tax

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Macon voters are set to decide next month whether to approve a penny-on-the-dollar sales tax to raise \$450 million for county projects related to public safety, recreation, road paving and economic development.

The proposed 2025 SPLOST, which stands for Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, would continue the 2018 SPLOST penny sales tax, which was approved by 60% of voters in 2016 and helped the county pay for new fire stations, sheriff's patrol cars, debt retirement,

new parks and road repairs among other projects.

Mayor Lester Miller has floated ideas including the possibility of a new local or regional jail and extending the regional airport runway, but specific projects will be determined at a future date.

The 2025 SPLOST will be the lone ballot item. Election Day is March 18.

The deadline to register to vote in the election is Feb. 18 and the last day to request an absentee ballot is March 7. Early voting is set for Feb. 24 – March 14 at the Macon Mall and the Elaine Lucas Senior Center. Saturday voting is set for March 1 and 8 at the Macon Mall from 1-5 p.m.

See SPLOST, Page A3

Local OB-GYN opens doors for patients in underserved regions

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Dr. Keisha Collins

cial assistance program.

"Finding the diagnosis is the easy part," she said. "(But the hard part is) making sure they have the money to get it, or they have the transportation to come to me, or what kind of things in the community need to change so they can access that care."

She says a big part of her

See OB-GYN, Page A2

Periodical — Mail Label

MGA technology museum plugs into past

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If you want to wax nostalgic over a Nintendo GameCube or listen to the clackety-clack of an IBM Wheelwriter keyboard, you can punch your ticket at the Museum of Technology.

If your fingers long to push the buttons on a TEAC reel-to-reel tape recorder, then slide over and take a spin on a rotary dial phone, the corner room in the Middle Georgia State University library could be your happy place.

It is vintage Epson, Atari and Tandy. It's all about microprocessors and monochrome monitors. Apple artifacts abound.

The Museum of Technology is free and open to the public for self-guided tours during library hours.

Don't come expecting the Smithsonian, though. It's not much larger than your grandmother's kitchen. But rather than grandma's collection of cookbooks, there are user guides for WordPerfect word processors and instruction manuals for Radio Shack gadgets.

"It's important to have a connection to the past and seeing and learning from the way we did things," said Tina Ashford, associate pro-



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Guests can play a game of "Gridrunner" on a working Commodore 64 at Middle Georgia State's Museum of Technology located in Macon campus library.

See TECH, Page A2



Tech, from A1:

essor of information technology at MGA and the faculty curator for the museum.

Ashford and her son, Ryan, collaborated on the idea for a museum after growing weary of an empty display case in the hallway at the university's IT department.

They filled it with a computer relic that had been gifted to Tina by a former colleague.

It wasn't long before their idea needed more ... er, disk space.

"I had been collecting old computer stuff for years," said Ryan, a computer information technology instructor at Central Georgia Technical College. "Having grown up with the newer stuff, I found it interesting. It was a more fun time in computing."

Thus began the search for vintage video consoles and mature motherboards. They tracked down Commodore 64s and Atari 5200s. They found Apple iMac G4s and Epson QX-10s.

Estate sales and eBay became their best friends.

They purchased a Macintosh SE at an estate sale in Warner Robins. It was practically right out of the box ... as if it had "teleported" from the 1990s, Ryan said.

Tina said many recycling centers do not accept computers and other outdated electronics. They often end up in the garbage and landfills.

The Ashfords are not immune to dumpster diving for computer antiquity.

"We're junkers," Tina said, laughing. "We've dug some out of dumpsters."

One man's modem is another man's treasure.

The Ashfords sought items of historical significance and restored them. They located an original Macintosh from 1984 and an IBM RT PC workstation computer that was released two years later.

A former student Tina taught in her first year at Middle Georgia State in 1998 contacted her about his collection.

"He asked if I was still interested in old computers, and I said, 'Of course,'" she said.

He loaned the museum a rare and ex-

pensive Altair 8800 from his archive. It has special significance because of a local connection.

The late Ed Roberts was often referred to as the "father of the personal computer." He developed the Altair 8800 in 1974. (It was featured on the cover of Popular Mechanics magazine in January 1975.)

Roberts was a member of the first graduating class at Mercer's School of Medicine in 1986 and became a small-town physician in Cochran. (Middle Georgia State has a campus in Cochran.)

He was Bill Gates' first employer, and the Microsoft founder visited him in a Macon hospital when Roberts died in April 2010.

One of the most popular exhibits in the museum is a red rotary dial telephone. Students who stop by are often curious about how it looks, feels and even how to use it.

Just for fun, Tina purchased a \$49.95 Bluetooth adapter on Amazon that can pair the rotary phone with a cell phone. (There are also acoustic couplers that were once used to transfer data.)

The Ashfords said there are no plans to expand the museum, although with technology constantly being outdated and updated, it could easily outgrow its walls.

There are visitors old enough to remember party lines, pay phones, answering machines, floppy disks and cumbersome keyboards that can weigh more than a fat puppy.

Some folks can recall when Microsoft Windows software was introduced with games — Solitaire and Minesweeper — as standard equipment, which helped teach a generation of computer neophytes how to use a mouse. (And how to not get much work done at the office.)

"I think there are a lot of lessons on what we did right and the missteps we took," Tina said.

She said a lot of seemingly outdated devices are still being utilized. Until it was upgraded last year, San Francisco's subway and light rail transportation system was running on 1980s technology.

"You would be surprised at how much legacy is still out there," Tina said.



Top row from left: Senators David Lucas, John Kennedy and Rick Williams.

Bottom row: Representatives Miriam Paris, Floyd Griffin, Dale Washburn, Tangie Herring and Anissa Jones.

Here's what Macon legislators are pushing this session

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Macon's legislative delegation has introduced a slew of legislation under the Gold Dome so far this session.

Here's what our senators and representatives are pushing:

EDUCATION

Rep. Floyd Griffin, D-Milledgeville, introduced House Bill 436, which would repeal the Georgia Promise Scholarship Act passed last legislative session and championed by Senate President Pro Tem John Kennedy, R-Macon. The scholarship act provides up to \$6,500 in state money to help cover the cost of private school tuition for students who have been enrolled for at least one year in one of the hundreds of schools identified by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Kennedy introduced legislation to address chronic absenteeism in schools. The bill calls for public school districts to file written student attendance protocols with the education department outlining detailed procedures used to identify, report, investigate and prosecute cases of alleged violations of the compulsory attendance requirement.

The bill also revises language in the attendance law to ensure no student is expelled by a public school sole-

ly due to absenteeism.

Rep. Tangie Herring, D-Macon, introduced House Bill 333, which calls for the state to annually update its salary schedule for professionals in elementary and secondary education and include adjustments for inflation.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Sen. David Lucas, D-Macon, introduced a bill calling for a 10-day waiting period for the purchase or transfer of certain firearms.

Rep. Dale Washburn, R-Macon, introduced House Bill 225, which calls for the abolishment of automatic speed detection cameras.

Sen. Rick Williams, R-Milledgeville, introduced Senate Bill 32, which would set a minimum sentence of 10 years for people convicted of knowingly and willfully obstructing, opposing or doing violence to a law enforcement officer.

HEALTH

Lucas introduced the Peach Care Plus Act of 2025, which calls for expanding Medicaid coverage to individuals earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level. The bill also would create an 11-member advisory committee for the Peach Care Plus Program. Savings from the program would be deposited into the state's indigent care trust fund.

Herring introduced House Bill 332, which would create a temporary state advisory

group to develop and update protocols for screening children for trauma. The advisory group would meet before October and report its findings, recommendations and funding estimates to the General Assembly by October 2026. The advisory board would be dissolved by 2027.

MONEY

Kennedy introduced Senate Bill 68 aimed at lowering insurance costs for doctors, businesses and residents, a priority of Gov. Brian Kemp. The Georgia Recorder reports the bill would cap evidence of pain and suffering and limit an owners' liability for injuries that occur on their property. It also would limit special damages awarded for medical bills to the actual amount paid by the plaintiff.

Another piece of legislation introduced by Kennedy, Senate Bill 69, would require third-party sources of funding for lawsuits to register with the Department of Banking and Finance. It also prohibits foreign governments from funding lawsuits.

Rep. Anissa Jones, D-Macon, introduced House Bill 292 which would allow certain employers to claim an income tax credit of \$3,500 for each employee it has who qualifies as a "living wage employee," meaning they make at least \$15 and work 30 or more hours each week for at least one year. Employers must have at least five "living wage employees" to qualify.



Tina Ashford, an associate professor of information technology at Middle Georgia State and the faculty curator for the Museum of Technology and her son, Ryan, collaborated on the idea for a museum after growing weary of an empty display case in the hallway at the university's IT department.

Lit award recognizes Macon author, Mercer professor

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Every two years, one Georgia writer receives the Townsend Award for an extraordinary work of fiction.

The award, managed by the Atlanta Writers Club in partnership with the Georgia Writers Museum, was created in honor of magazine mogul Jim Townsend. This year, it will be presented April 16 at the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center in Atlanta.

The suit-and-tie event will include a cocktail party before the award ceremony, which will recognize all 10 finalists and their work.

Chip Bell, one of the event's organizers, said awards like the Townsend are especially important when taking a look at student reading scores and how many adults read for leisure.

"It's primarily a way to recognize literary greatness," he said. "We're trying, this ties back some ways into literary excellence within the study, to encourage people to read."

Merger University English professor Gordon Johnston is among 10 finalists for the award. His book is titled "Seven Islands of the Ocmulgee: River Stories."

The collection of short stories centers around the Ocmulgee River and was inspired by Johnston's familiarity with the river's history and geography.

The stories came to him as "responses to the river," accumulated over his many trips.

"The river is a presence," he said.

"The book is about how it kind of figures into the lives of these people."

The book is Johnston's first work of fiction. He's written other poetry books and co-authored a guide to the Ocmulgee Mounds National Monument.

The Ocmulgee gives many people life in Macon, he said, and his book is a testament to the idea that rivers and bodies of water everywhere are integral to people and cultures.

"I'm a big believer in putting down roots where you are," he said. "Most Americans don't have a very deep sense of the landscape they live in."

The same places that inspired his book also inform his teachings. He takes classes into nature and tries to develop a shared sense of the landscape.

Johnston does not consider himself a traditional professor, but "more of a writer who teaches," he said.

Johnston's classes have a strong connection to nature, like "Writing the American Wild" or his backpacking course.

Like a river, he said, his book has many "tributaries" feeding into it or many people who have contributed to its formation.

"To have my book in the company of books by writers of that caliber, that's a real validation of my writing," he said. "So I'm just happy to be in the finals, honest to God I feel like a winner already."

Editor's note: Gordon Johnston is the father of Macon Melody Sports Editor Micah Johnston.

Napier Heights Food Co-op to bring fresh food directly to the neighborhood

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The Napier Heights Food Co-op Market has returned, bringing fresh food and locally made goods to Macon's Napier Heights and Pleasant Hill neighborhoods.

Vendors set up booths outside of Booker T. Washington Community Center Thursday afternoon for the grand opening.

While the initiative originally launched in Tattnall Square, the market's new location will bring fresh products directly to neighborhoods with limited food accessibility.

"We're trying to get the good quality vegetables in the community to the people who need it," said Ashley Woodford, the co-op's market manager.

Folks can use EBT at the market to buy fresh produce and foods. If they spend their EBT, then they can earn the same amount in tokens, which they can spend on more fruits and veggies at the market.

"I'm glad it's here. I think it's something great for the community," said Joe Booze, who has an office in the community center for his organization, Wealth ASAP.

Booze grew up in Napier Heights and still has family in the area. He noted that there aren't a lot of fresh food options within walking distance of the residents.

One vendor, John Pope owns



Clifford Porter stands in front of his handmade woodworking and ceramics. He hopes to come back to the Napier Heights market every week.

Creekside Farm, a 15-acre farm in Monroe County. He brought jalapeño salt, greens, bread and other goods to the market this week. He plans to have spring and summer veggies, like tomatoes and corn, available at market days later in the year.

Clifford Porter owns a shop in Baldwin County and frequents markets — like the food co-op and the one on Poplar Street — to sell his handmade ceramics and woodworking.

Porter said he hopes to come back to the Napier Heights market every week.

Not only is the market meant to fill a need within the community, but it also supports small business efforts, Woodford said.

Currently, vendors only pay a \$10 fee to be a part of the market if they make more than \$50 in sales.

Woodford hopes to gain new vendors in the near future.

The market will be open to the public every Thursday from 3:30-6 p.m.

Those interested in becoming a vendor can visit napierheightsfoodcoop.org, email napierheightsfoodcoop@gmail.com or call 478-227-0997.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Macon's regional airport will replace flights to Baltimore with flights to Washington Dulles International Airport starting May 1.

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Macon's regional airport will replace flights to Baltimore with flights to Washington Dulles International Airport starting May 1, increasing access for travelers not wanting to make the trek to Atlanta.

The airline will also start offering flights to Plattsburgh, New York starting May 1.

Contour Airlines, a commercial airline flying out of

Middle Ga. Regional Airport will begin flying to D.C., upstate NY

the Middle Georgia Regional Airport, currently only sends passengers to Baltimore / Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

One or two flights will run per day, all week. The airline is offering an introductory \$99 ticket, which includes a checked bag, according to a Macon Bibb-County press release. A one-way ticket normally costs about \$140.

"This change not only opens connections for Macon travelers, it creates a new audience of visitors to Middle Georgia from across the country," said Gary

Wheat, president and CEO of Visit Macon. "We now have the opportunity for a broader reach in our marketing efforts in showcasing our community as a premier destination."

The airport received \$4 million from the Georgia Department of Transportation last summer to construct new hangars and build out other infrastructure. The grant came as the airport looks to build a new guitar-shaped fixed base operation and work on its runway expansion project.

OB-GYN, A1:

job is advocating for her patients' needs and directing them to additional care. If she can't provide the necessary help, she works to find someone who can.

"Someone walks in, they share something and I can either do nothing with that information or I can make the call," she said.

When the patient in front of her shares a problem, she often asks herself, "how many people go through that?"

For instance, Callins noticed many of her patients needed a specific probiotic that the pharmacy in Twiggs County did not carry. After talking with pharmacists, Callins helped ensure they would stock the drug.

"A patient came to me and we had a wall," she said. "That patient helped me create a door, and that door becomes a door for everybody else."

Callins has always gravitated towards a broader-picture approach. Her focus on improving quality of care for the whole community stems from her childhood experiences growing up in Jamaica.

Destined from a young age

Callins' mother always said her daughter wanted to be a doctor at just six years old.

An appendix removal procedure at age eight further solidified Callins' interest in the medical field. Her pediatrician did not take her concerns seriously at first and thought she was trying to avoid school. After the removal surgery, Callins recalled vomiting from the pain and having to sleep in it because the nurse was too busy to check on her.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'I don't want a child to ever experience that,'" she said.

At 16, Callins finished high school and headed to New York. A first-generation American and college student, she majored in biology at the University of Virginia.

After not getting into medical school, she juggled two jobs at a Holiday Inn during the day and evenings at Victoria Secret.

"People see you where you are now... but there are all these speed bumps along the way," she said. "It's not like it was a paved road."

Callins pursued her masters in public health, specializing in health behavior at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Public health is not direct patient care, she explained, but instead focuses on seeking solutions to systemic healthcare issues and healthcare accessibility. Although she didn't know what public health was growing up, she later realized her interests have always had a particular community focus.

It wasn't until Callins met a woman after church — who would one day be her mother-in-law — that she decided



Photo provided by Keisha Callins

Dr. Keisha Callins, pictured during her swearing in ceremony, was appointed to the Georgia Sandra Dunagan Deal Early Language and Literacy Board in 2018 by Governor Brian Kemp.

to reapply for medical school.

She attended Morehouse School of Medicine for her doctor of medicine.

Callins gave birth to her son in her third year of medical school, which delayed her graduation by six months. She ended up graduating just two days after her birthday — a bittersweet moment for Callins who had just lost a close classmate on her birthday.

Personal struggles, like loss, helped shape her, Callins said, but she has always wanted to work in rural underserved communities.

Before beginning her residency, she fell in love with women's health and switched specialties from pediatric to obstetrics/gynecology.

"If you take care of a mom or a grandma, and they're well, then they take care of everybody else," she said. "When you get a woman to just feel well, her ripple effect on everything she does is just unbelievable."

Callins had her second child, a daughter, during her residency.

Coming to Middle Georgia

Following six years of clinical practice in Albany, Callins moved to Macon in 2017 and became the chair of Mercer University's Department of Community Medicine.

When she joined Community Healthcare Systems, Callins offered Mercer students hands-on clinical teaching opportunities either in Twiggs or Jones County.

Callins believes she can better serve her community if she is actively engaging with it. From rotary club to serving on various committees and boards, she says medicine alone can't solve everything, so it's important to have a pulse on what's happening.

Understanding the struggles faced by her own community is what got her involved in serving Twiggs County, she said.

In 2018, she joined Georgia's governor-appointed Sandra Dunagan Deal Early Language and Literacy Board. At a conference, Callins began working with a woman she sat next to by chance on a literacy grant project for

Twiggs County.

At the grant meeting that followed, Callins suggested including Twiggs' local physician in the grant process, but was shocked to find out that the county did not have a regular physician.

Callins began traveling to Twiggs County every week to serve as their local physician.

"If there's a need for something, and it's not there, create it," she said.

Most recently, Governor Brian Kemp appointed Callins to the Georgia Maternal and Infant Health Advisory Commission, which will develop a report with recommendations to the legislature and governor for 2026.

Callins sees herself as a "microphone" for others' ideas to be brought before the commission and often asks herself: "Whose voice is not here? Who's not at this table?"

Fourteen people don't have a 360 view of everything, she said. "If I'm the microphone, then that means I get a chance to amplify the voices around me."

There are many voices who are qualified to speak at the table. Callins noted that although she may be the only one serving Twiggs, colleagues in other underserved areas are just as dedicated to helping their communities.

"I'm not the only 'only one,'" she said.

Despite the demanding nature of her job, Callins never feels burdened by her responsibilities as a physician. She always tells her students to pursue a career that doesn't feel like work.

"I get a chance to help a woman in distress or improve someone's quality of life or help someone with their delivery... and be a part of that miracle," she said.

Sometimes, it's the small wins — helping a person who was denied care or connecting a patient to a new avenue of care — that remind Callins of her impact.

"There are days where I don't think it's gonna be fixed at the top level," she said. "So then I just have to get down, and I have to just help the person in front of me."

SPLOST, A1:

Go Big for Macon-Bibb, a committee that registered with the state late last month, is raising money to educate voters about the importance of SPLOST and campaigning for its approval.

"We're serving at the pleasure of the mayor but we're not an entity of the county government by any stretch of the imagination," said committee member Erin Keller, who is vice president for development at New-Town Macon. "This is one of those necessary things that we need to continue."

Others on the committee include longtime Macon City Councilperson Theron Ussery, lawyer Virgil Adams, realtor Stephanie Folsom and insurance broker Izza Sola, according to a news release from political consultant group Southern Majority.

A 2009 study by Georgia Tech on county exports shows more than 70% of SPLOST revenue for Bibb County came from the pockets of people who do not live here. Data on how much revenue was generated by non-county residents for the 2018 SPLOST is not available.

State law limits how the county can spend SPLOST dollars to capital improvements and special purposes such as public safety, recreation and transportation.

The 2018 SPLOST was capped at collecting \$280 million. As of late last year, the county collected \$253 million and had spent \$232 million, county spokesperson Chris Floore said. Annual revenue was higher than expected, causing the county to collect near the capped limit years earlier than anticipated.

Among projects the 2018 SPLOST helped pay for are:



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Voters cast ballots at Greater Bellevue Baptist Church on Mumford Road in Macon in the 2024 general election.

Walker Road Landfill

- **Improvements to the campgrounds at Lake Tobeofkee** — \$597,270

- **Improvements and additions to the courthouse** — \$2.5 million

- **Improvements to the district attorney's office** — \$305,000

- **Renovations to the Robert Train Building and the Grand Opera House**

- **Improvements at Claystone and Arrowhead parks**

- **Crossing guards for Bibb County schools** — \$300,000

- **Verkada cameras, FLOCK cameras and other sheriff's office equipment** — \$2.7 million

- **Flashing lights for school speed zones** — \$500,000



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Opinion

Visiting the Douglass Theatre, 'Spotlight', and one famous journalist comes to Macon

Last week, I and several other Melody journalists attended a showing of the 2015 film "Spotlight" at the historic Douglass Theatre in downtown Macon. The showing was part of the College Town Film Series (a Mercer, Wesleyan and Middle Georgia State collaboration), which this year featured three journalism films: "Ace in the Hole," "The Paper" and "Spotlight."

It was my first time in the Douglass — I know, shame on me — and it is a beautiful space. More than 100 years old and the site of performances from legendary musicians like Otis Redding, Little Richard, James Brown and Ma Rainey, it has tons of things going on, including free admission Feb. 21 and 28 for its Black History Month Film Series. Check it all out at douglasstheatre.org.

It had been almost a decade since I'd seen *Spotlight*, which depicts a special investigative team of Boston Globe journalists — the titular



Caleb Slinkard

Spotlight team — reporting that dozens of Boston-area priests had sexually abused and raped children and Catholic Church leaders knew about it and covered it up.

It's a heart-rending story, one that forces the reporters and editors to grapple with the church, community leaders, their own family members, their bosses and coworkers and even their own pasts.

It's the kind of story — stories, really, the *Spotlight* team published hundreds of articles uncovering the scandal beginning in 2002 — that gets to the heart of why journalists do what we do.

One of our most important jobs is to be a voice for people who don't have a voice, to uncover corruption, crime, unethical activities, etc. and put that information in context, publishing it in a form that people can understand, so that they can make decisions based on our reporting.

All of that requires a good deal of trust. It requires the whistleblowers and other sources to trust the re-

porters they're talking to. It means the reporters have to have faith in their sources, working hard to confirm information and acquire public documents whenever possible. It means editors have to trust that their reporters have done their due diligence, have collected their facts in a comprehensive and ethical manner. And it means the newspaper's readers have to be able to trust that what they're reading is accurate.

That kind of trust takes years to build and can be destroyed in seconds. It's why I take the Melody's relationship with Macon very seriously.

The movie does a good job of depicting how investigative reporters go about their jobs — cajoling whistleblowers to go on the record, confirming facts with trusted sources, suing for public records, constructing databases — all while keeping the most important thing at the very top. The "why." That hundreds of innocent, vulnerable children were preyed upon by the very people who were supposed to protect and guide them.

There's a lot of blame to go around, starting with the priests themselves, the Catholic Church, a

law enforcement and justice system that looked the other way. But as a journalist, sitting in the Douglass and watching "Spotlight" again, the most damning indictment is against The Boston Globe itself.

"Spotlight" is based on reality, but it's not a documentary, so every scene should be consumed with that in mind. I don't know how much the Globe staff knew about the scandal, how obtuse editors and reports might have been when sources tried to come forward. But it's a strong reminder that newspapers, like our other institutions, have to be held to a high standard. It's our job to be connected to our community. To listen. To empathize. To investigate.

"Spotlight" does a good job of depicting a newsroom. I've spent my entire career at small community papers, none near the size of the Boston Globe in the early 2000s. But I recognized the general layout, the dual-tone pressroom walls, the overused, stained coffee makers.

As I assume it does with most professions, Hollywood often gets journalism wrong. The most erroneous trope is that of the woman

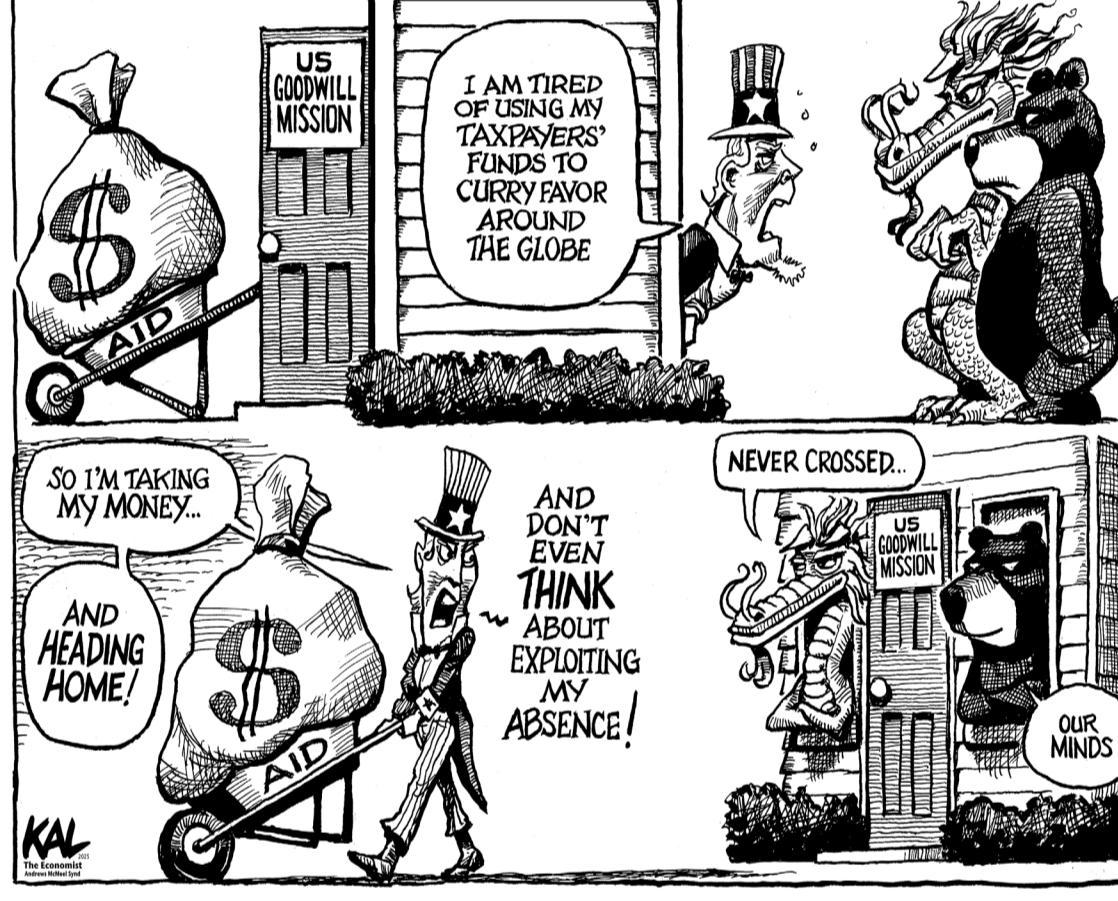
reporter who sleeps with a source. If a TV show or movie uses that trope, I walk out or turn the TV off. It's offensive, it's inaccurate and it's harmful.

It's often clear that the writers have never visited a real newspaper. In "Batman v. Superman," The Daily Planet's editor Perry White stands in the middle of the newsroom and calls out long, complicated headlines that end in question marks or exclamation points. He reassigns Clark Kent from an investigation to cover a football game. Major metropolitan newspapers don't juggle beats like that. Managing editors don't craft headlines.

Maybe James Gunn's upcoming "Superman" can get a little closer to the mark. (By the way, if you watch the latest "Superman" trailer, you might notice that the Daily Planet's newsroom looks awfully familiar: that's because it's not a newsroom at all, but rather the Terminal Station in downtown Macon).

After all, Clark Kent is the most famous fictional journalist. He deserves a real newsroom.

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A look into the modern American family road trip

The family road trip dates back to the period of American history known as the Westward Expansion. Those pioneers really had a lot of guts loading up their covered wagons, telling their kids to climb aboard and hitting the road.

For days and months on end, those brave souls pushed forward, not knowing where they were headed and not even exactly what they were looking for. All they had to go on were crudely drawn maps and personal aspirations. At some point surely a child looked up at their father, the courageous patriarch and said: "Are we there yet? I really have to go to the bathroom."

To which the father lovingly looked down and replied: "I don't expect you to make it. And you should have gone in St. Louis."

It was quite dangerous crossing the country back then and Bucc-ee's hadn't been established yet. Many a life and pair of pants were ruined on the treacherous journey.

Of course, in our modern times, anywhere in the country is easily accessible via automobile and taking the family on an annual trek, even multiple times a year if you're a glutton for punishment, via the highway is a tradition. Though, it still requires a level of bravado.

I am a survivor of a recent family road trip. We had a long weekend at Lookout Mountain and Chattanooga. The pioneers of old often kept journals chronicling their adventures, so here is an entry in my travelogue ...

We departed Sunday afternoon for the roughly four-hour drive. I no longer trust my beautiful 2011 Honda Pilot on the open road (Honda executives, your window to secure a sponsorship deal is thinning. Please contact my management team before I'm forced to upgrade.) so I borrowed my mother's new



Kyle Dominy

car. It's a tank of automobile with every imaginable luxury, making travel easier than I thought humanly possible. It really makes you feel like you own the road, and I drove as such; thus, we made excellent time.

Soon the surroundings so familiar to us were gone, and Georgia's coastal plain gave way to Atlanta's sprawling urban landscape to foothills and then to the mountains. This splendor was lost on my passengers, faces down, eyes entranced by the blue glow of their devices, comfortably nestled into what I can only assume is Corinthian leather.

"Y'all look at that skyscraper? See that mountain?" I said like the bumpkin I am from the helm of the tank. I was answered in small grunts of affirmation, the best possible reaction from a generation that's always had the whole world at their fingertips.

With so much entertainment, gone are the days of the pleading "Are we there yet?" from the backseat. You still get requests for bathroom breaks, but that's only after the batteries are dead.

Time at our destination was more pleasant, with the family enjoying all the attractions of the area distraction-free, only stopping for the occasional photo. It was a good couple of days, reconnecting without the daily grind.

Pouring rain made the return trip a little more grueling, but the tank was the perfect armament for battling the flooded, in water and cars, downtown connector.

Everyone survived, and we're ready to go again.

You can reach Kyle Dominy at k.l.dominy@gmail.com or write to 115 S. Jefferson Street Dublin, Ga. 31201



The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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To submit a letter to the editor or guest column, email caleb@maconmelody.com, mail it to our office or drop it by our front desk. The Macon Melody is located in the Reg Murphy Center for Collaborative Journalism in Mercer Village (1675 Montpelier Ave.). Our office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Macon Melody is a community newspaper that connects Maconites to all the stories of Bibb County. Our staff lives, works, and plays here. We know Middle Georgia, and our reporting illuminates and celebrates what makes this area special.

The Melody is part of the Georgia Trust for Local News a subsidiary of the National Trust for Local News, the nation's largest nonprofit newspaper company. We build stronger communities by protecting and growing community news across Georgia. Our 19 newspapers serve one in 10 Georgians.

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Connecting downtown dots of amazing origin

Stretched across a square mile of downtown, Macon is a genesis of American history.

A seven-block grid — from Cherry Street over to Walnut down to Seventh and back up to Third — was once an incubator for groundbreaking music, air travel, famous flowers and one of the most iconic brands on the planet.

If we connect all the dots, our community could make the case to call it the Delta/Camellia/Cola/Ka-zoo Corridor. And maybe throw in some Tutti Frutti.

It's our birthright.

One hundred years ago this week, on Feb. 18, 1925, the first aerial crop-dusting company in the country was founded in Macon.

That's the date Huff Daland Dusters moved into the Bibb Building at 401 Cherry St. and established its headquarters for a crop dusting operation for Georgia's cotton fields and peach and pecan orchards.

Huff Daland's planes featured a symbol of Thor, the Norse god of thunder, war and agriculture. It was a battle cry against the evil boll weevil, the insect that was destroying the South's agricultural economy and threatening its way of life.

When the company began recruiting pilots, among those under consideration was a barnstormer named Charles Lindbergh. Two years earlier, Lindbergh had purchased a surplus World War I biplane from John Wyche, of Macon, assembled it in a week and made his first solo flight at Souther Field in



Ed Grisamore

Americus. Of course, the rest is aviation history. He went on to become the most famous pilot in the world.

After only six months in Macon, Huff Daland moved its operation to Monroe, Louisiana, where it eventually added passenger and mail service and took the name of its new home in the Mississippi Delta Region.

It is now the largest passenger airline in the world and is headquartered in Atlanta. It has long been a point of pride that Macon, despite the company's short stay here, was the cradle for Delta Air Lines.

A block up Cherry Street, at the corner of Third, the first public camellia show in the United States was held at the Burden Smith & Co. department store on Feb. 5, 1932. Thirteen years after that, in a meeting across the street at the Dempsey Hotel, the American Camellia Society was founded.

A large mural proclaiming "Welcome to Macon: Where the South Rocks" adorns the back of the old seven-story Bibb Building — now the 401 Lofts at Cherry — next to the Douglass Theatre, another historic music venue.

Who could have known a legendary Macon maternity ward would later be just a jaywalk across Broadway from the former Huff Daland office?

It is where Little Richard Penniman, the self-professed architect of rock n' roll, cut his teeth and honed his style at Ann's Tic Toc Room, along the sidewalks between Cherry

and Poplar. Ann Howard, the club's owner, gave Little Richard his first break in the music business, so you can make the argument that this patch of real estate was the birthplace of rock.

You will hit another musical high note on our tour when you cross the railroad tracks toward Carolyn Crayton Park (formerly Central City Park). This is where the kazoo was introduced at the Georgia State Fair in 1852 by Alabama Vest, a Black inventor, and Thaddeus Von Clegg, a German-American clockmaker.

Yes, Macon is the birthplace of the kazoo, often referred to as the world's "most democratic instrument" because it doesn't require any special musical talent (all you have to do is hum).

The city will get a chance to toot its horns when an ambitious attempt is made at setting the record for the world's largest kazoo band on Friday, March 28 at the Atrium Health Amphitheater as part of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

The current Guinness World Record holder for the largest kazoo ensemble is 5,190 participants at the Royal Albert Hall in London in March 2011. Since Macon's amphitheater seats 10,000 — and there is already a significant level of interest in the event — we have a shot at being the title holder.

A hop, skip and a jump back to the foot of Mulberry Street will bring us to the site of what was once the Reform Medical College of Georgia. It was formerly known as the Southern Botanico Medical College when it moved to Macon from Forsyth in 1846. (There's nothing there now, but it was located on the same

stretch of block where the federal courthouse and Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority are now and the site of the old Cassidy's Garage.)

Among the medical college's graduates was Cassandra Pickett Durham, the state's first female physician. But its most famous student was John Stith Pemberton, a native of nearby Crawford County.

After being licensed as a pharmacist at the age of 19, Pemberton went to war with the 12th Cavalry Regiment of the Confederacy and was wounded in Wilson's Raid in Columbus, the final battle east of the Mississippi.

His gift to the world was the invention of Coca-Cola, one of the most valuable and recognized brands in the world.

Although Pemberton historically is more closely associated with Columbus and Atlanta, you can make the case that those first chemistry lessons he learned right there on Mulberry Street provided the impetus to create the most famous soft drink in the universe.

Macon might not have been the origin of Coke's birth, but at the very least it was a midwife.

I've long been intrigued with Delta's local connection, especially since the airline has been a legacy in my family for almost 75 years.

My mother was a Delta stewardess in the early 1950s. My oldest sister was a Delta flight attendant for seven years in the 1980s. My younger brother spent 10 years in the Air Force before he got his dream job at Delta, where he has been a pilot since February 1997.

One of my cousins, who is now deceased, retired after more than

40 years as a Delta mechanic. And his wife served as secretary for long-time Delta President C.E. Woolman, who started with Huff Daland.

Circling back to come in for a landing, I would like to thank local attorney Christopher Smith for helping me with all the pieces to this quintet of epic local history.

Two weeks ago, Chris hosted the Sixth Annual Global Trade and Investment Symposium at Wesleyan College. More than 100 people from across the state, many of them from Atlanta, were in attendance and a number of foreign companies were represented.

Among the guest speakers was Virginie Durr, of Delta Air Lines, who has led Delta's initiative to fly military veterans back to her native Normandy, including last June for the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

To celebrate the Delta anniversary, a 100th birthday cake was made for the occasion.

In our collaboration to fact-check and verify where the Huff Daland offices were located 100 years ago, Chris researched and found a map and a photograph of the seven-story Bibb Building posted on the Vintage Macon Facebook page.

When he sent it to me, I knew it looked familiar, and I immediately recognized it as the former Southern United Building.

I had a flashback to 1981 when I walked into an office on the third floor of that building and met a young lady who was a caseworker for Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

That's the girl I'm going to marry, I told myself. And I did.

Local Knowledge: Getting the facts straight with trivia

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist

Sadly, I put the "oop" in Whoopee last week.

So I must begin "Local Knowledge" with a correction. The wrong answer was published in the answer key to the Macon Whoopies trivia last week.

The correct answer to No. 8 "Which of the following did NOT make reference to the Whoopies infamous nickname?" should be "multiple choice answer on the Scholastic Aptitude Test."

1. The Grand Theatre (Grand Opera House) in Macon was the site of the Feb. 21, 1945 world premiere of the movie "God is My Co-Pilot," based on the book by Macon native Gen. Robert L. Scott. In the movie, Alan Hale played the role of Big Mike Harrigan. What character was Hale best known for during his acting career?

- A. Skipper on "Gilligan's Island."
- B. Jethro on "The Beverly Hillbillies."
- C. Sgt. Carter on "Gomer Pyle"
- D. Mr. Haney on "Green Acres"

2. There is a plaque on the sidewalk on the 500 block of Cherry Street of an airplane propeller marked with the date Feb. 18, 1928. It commemorates the site of a plane crash that killed the pilot, co-pilot and a pedestrian and injured more than a dozen people. The plaque is located in front of what downtown restaurant?

- A. The Rookery
- B. Fatty's Pizza
- C. Parish on Cherry
- D. Baldino's

3. Riverside Drive in Macon was once known by what name?

- A. Wharf Street
- B. Easy Street
- C. Dock of the Bay Boulevard
- D. Cotton Candy Avenue

4. Which of the following is NOT true about Macon native John Birch?

A. He graduated from Lanier High for Boys and Mercer University.

B. He was the founding artistic director at Macon Little Theatre.

C. He was an American military intelligence officer and fundamentalist Baptist missionary.

D. The John Birch Society, a national organization dedicated to restoring and preserving constitutional freedoms, was founded in 1958, some 15 years after his death.

5. Scenes from the movie, "I, Tonya," a biopic on Olympic figure skater Tonya Harding, were filmed at the Macon Coliseum in February 2017. Harding was played by Australian actress Margot Robbie, who was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress. Robbie later appeared in the lead role in the highest-grossing film of 2023. What was the name of it?

- A. Ariel in "The Little Mermaid."
- B. Phoenix Trace in "Top Gun: Maverick."
- C. Barbie in "Barbie."
- D. Maddie Barker in "No Hard Feelings."

6. Cartoonist Johnny Hart, who would have been 94 years old this week, was a graphic artist at Robins Air Force Base when he met his wife, Bobby, a lab technician at the old Macon Hospital. What was Hart's famous comic strip, which was first published on Feb. 17, 1958, the day before his 27th birthday?

- A. B.C.
- B. The Far Side
- C. Blondie
- D. Family Circus

7. Which Middle Georgia community had the first volunteer fire department certified by the state of Georgia?

- A. Musella
- B. Bolingbroke
- C. Haddock
- D. Jeffersonville

8. Playwright Tennessee Williams wrote parts of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" while spending time with friends in Macon. Williams was the recipient of what award for the play 70 years ago this year?

- A. Nobel Peace Prize
- B. Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- C. Lifetime Achievement Award from the Humane Society
- D. Golden Globe Award

9. Which of the following is NOT true about the Rev. Pearly Brown, the iconic blind preacher and singer who roamed the streets of Macon for more than 40 years?

- A. He accompanied the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on marches during the Civil Rights Movement.

B. He played at such renowned venues as Carnegie Hall and the Monterey Jazz Festival and was the first black performer at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville.

C. He made it to the final round of "American Idol."

D. The Southern rock group Wet Willie, which recorded at Macon-based Capricorn Records, used an unauthorized photograph of Brown on the cover of its "Keep on Smilin'" album in 1974.

10. President William Howard Taft weighed 335 pounds and was the heaviest of the U.S. presidents. On his visit to Macon in 1909, he consumed a breakfast consisting of sausage, ham and eggs, fried chicken, hominy, rolls, waffles, pancakes, biscuits and fried sweet potatoes. In need of a large carriage to support his ample weight and girth, Taft had it ordered from the "Buggy Capital of the World," manufactured in which nearby town?

- A. Abbeville
- B. Wrightsville
- C. Hawkinsville
- D. Barnesville

ANSWERS: (1) A. (2) C. (3) A. (4) B. (5) C. (6) A. (7) D. (8) B. (9) C. (10) D.

REPORT CARD: (9-10) Cruise control. (7-8) HOV lane. (5-6) Road work ahead. (3-4) Detour. (0-2) Roadside assistance.

Bringing AI to Macon's classrooms: supporting teachers and students

AI Joe (Joe Finkelstein) has been a technology educator for over 20 years



Joe Finkelstein

As artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly changes the world around us, it's only natural to ask: What role should AI play in our local classrooms? Here in Macon, where our schools are striving to provide every student with the tools for success, AI could offer an exciting opportunity to enhance both teaching and learning. While I've touched on AI in education before, this time I want to focus on the potential right here in our community—how AI can support our teachers, empower our students and strengthen STEM education.

Supporting teachers: AI as a teaching assistant

Let's be clear: AI is not here to replace teachers. Our educators are the heart and soul of the classroom. But what if AI could handle some of the busywork and free up teachers to focus on what they do best—connecting with students and helping them grow?

Imagine a teacher preparing lesson plans. AI-powered tools like ChatGPT can help generate ideas for classroom activities, tailor lessons to different learning levels, or even provide quick quiz questions. Need a draft of a letter to parents? AI can whip one up in seconds, saving valuable time.

Grading is another area where AI can assist. For objective assignments like multiple-choice quizzes, AI systems can grade and analyze results quickly. This allows teachers to identify which concepts students are struggling with and adjust their teaching accordingly.

Administrative tasks, like compiling progress reports or writing routine emails, can also be streamlined with AI. When teachers spend less time on paperwork, they can devote more attention to their students.

Engaging students: AI as a learning partner

For students, AI opens up exciting new ways to learn, especially in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Personalized tutoring apps powered by AI can adapt to each student's pace. If a child struggles with fractions, for instance, the app can provide extra practice until they master the concept. If another student is ready for algebra, AI can challenge them with more advanced material.

Interactive tools can also spark creativity. Students can use AI to generate stories, create digital artwork or even build simple computer programs. Platforms like Scratch, a coding environment for kids, increasingly incorporate AI features to guide young programmers.

For STEM subjects, AI can simulate complex experiments that might not be

possible in a traditional classroom. Virtual labs can allow students to explore chemistry reactions or physics concepts safely and at their own pace. This kind of hands-on learning makes STEM more accessible.

Bridging the STEM Gap in Macon

We know that access to quality STEM education can vary depending on a school's resources.

AI could help bridge that gap. Even in classrooms without the latest technology, AI tools can run on basic devices like tablets or Chromebooks. This means students across Macon, from North Bibb to South Macon, could have similar opportunities to explore STEM fields.

Imagine after-school AI and coding clubs, where students work together on projects like building chatbots or creating simple video games. Partnerships with local institutions like Mercer University, Wesleyan College, Middle Georgia State University, Central Georgia Technical College or the Washington Memorial Library could provide spaces and support for these programs. AI isn't just for tech giants; it can thrive in our own backyard.

Challenges and concerns

Of course, introducing AI into classrooms isn't without challenges. Teachers need training to feel comfortable using AI tools. Professional development sessions focusing on practical classroom applications could make this transition smoother.

There's also the human element. AI should never replace the warmth and understanding that a teacher brings to a classroom. Technology should enhance human interaction, not reduce it. We must also remain cautious about issues like bias in AI systems and ensure that the content students receive is accurate and inclusive.

What's next for Macon's schools?

So, where do we go from here? School leaders and parents can start by exploring the potential of AI. Pilot programs could introduce AI-powered learning platforms into a few classrooms, giving both teachers and students a chance to experience these tools firsthand.

Community workshops, like the AI sessions I conduct, can provide families with a better understanding of how AI works and how it can support education. Collaboration between schools and local organizations can ensure that AI is implemented thoughtfully and equitably.

For questions or comments, you can email askaijoe.com.

Georgia health workers face flu surge, measles outbreak, rare mpox

Allen Siegler
Healthbeat

This story was originally published by Healthbeat.

Influenza viruses have continued to steadily circulate within Georgia communities as the state contends with other concerning infectious diseases.

Health care visits for flu-like symptoms and community virus levels detected in wastewater sites remain near their highest marks of the winter, according to data released Friday from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Close to 3,000 residents had overnight stays for the flu at metro Atlanta hospitals in January, according to the Georgia Department of Public Health.

None of these indicators have reached last year's peak. But Dr. Mark Griffiths, an Emory University pediatric medicine associate professor and director of the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's downtown emergency department, said his hospital is experiencing one of the largest flu surges he's witnessed.

"We're seeing higher levels of kids testing positive than probably seen the last decade or so," he said. "And they are coming in of all ages."

He attributes the spike in flu hospital visits to multiple factors. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of other viruses fell to lower than normal rates. But now that some pandemic prevention steps have been relaxed, many airborne diseases have exceeded their baseline numbers.

Additionally, Griffiths said he's seen fewer kids vaccinated against the flu compared to previous winters. The CDC estimates that as of early February, between 33% and 56% of children over 6 months old received this year's shot.

He said the low vaccine uptake is concerning for the health of Georgia kids, as the shots add an extra layer of disease protection.

"Since COVID, we've seen the persistence of this vaccine hesitancy," he said. "Now, we're seeing it as these really high flu surges."

Griffiths said it's not too late for parents to have their children immunized this year, as traditional flu seasons last until March. Additionally, he highlighted new tools, like over-the-counter flu and COVID combination tests, and familiar protections, like wearing a mask when sick, as useful ways for people to prevent respiratory virus spread.

The state is also contending with a variety of other infectious diseases.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

An Atlanta pediatrician said he's seen fewer kids vaccinated against the flu compared to previous winters. In addition, nearly 3,000 residents had overnight stays for the flu in metro Atlanta hospitals in the month of January.

es. Over the past few weeks, state and local public health officials have been responding to a small measles outbreak that has infected three members of the same family. None of the family members were vaccinated against measles. No other Georgia residents have tested positive, according to the state DPH.

A study published by the CDC on Thursday also found that public health officials detected a travel-associated Georgia case of Clade

I mpox in January, the second case ever detected in the United States. The report says that Clade I cases lead to death more often than Clade II infections, which are still rare but more common domestically.

The Georgia patient's case was not severe, according to the CDC study. Nancy Nydam, a DPH spokesperson, said the department monitored people who had been in contact with the patient for 21 days — the time in which symptoms usually ap-

pear — and none of them contracted the disease.

Allen Siegler is a reporter covering public health in Atlanta for Healthbeat. Contact Allen at asiegler@healthbeat.org.

Healthbeat (Healthbeat.org) is a nonprofit news platform reporting on public health from Civic News Company and KFF Health News

Biaprtisan effort to revive state office to advocate for Ga. utility customers

Emily Jones
WABE

This coverage is made possible through a partnership between WABE and Grist, a nonprofit environmental media organization.

Some Georgia state legislators are again trying to revive a state office to advocate for utility customers. A similar effort passed the state Senate last year but floundered in the House.

Most states have a consumer utility counsel, or CUC, which represents the interests of utility customers before state and federal regulators and in courts. Georgia used to, until budget cuts during the 2008 financial crisis.

A bipartisan group of two dozen senators, led by Republican Chuck Hufstetler of Rome, is sponsoring a bill to revive it. The measure passed the Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee this week.

"Forty-six states have seen the wisdom of having an independent person looking out for the consumer that has legal standing," said Hufstetler in a hearing before that vote.

Currently, a group of staff at the Georgia Public Service Commission is tasked with public interest advocacy, and PSC officials have argued that's sufficient. The five PSC commissioners are directly elected by voters, and agency representatives have argued elections provide another layer of accountability to consumers — though no elections have been held for several

years because of legal challenges.

"We're not opposed to [the CUC]," said PSC director of utilities Tom Bond in this week's Senate committee hearing. "We just think it's redundant."

But critics disagree that the PSC advocacy staff is doing enough to protect consumers, pointing to repeated rate hikes for Georgia Power electric customers in recent years.

The CUC's purview would also extend beyond the PSC, which deals primarily with the state's largest electric utility, Georgia Power, as well as landline telephones and natural gas. The proposed CUC office would have legal standing to represent customers of any public utility before federal regulators and in courts.

Another bill this session also aims to protect electric utility customers, specifically from the costs of building new infrastructure to power data centers. Again sponsored by Hufstetler, the bill prohibits those costs from being applied to the power rates of ordinary residents and small businesses. It reinforces steps already taken by the PSC to prevent that kind of cost shift, though unlike the new billing rules approved by the commission, the bill singles out data centers.

Both the bill and the commission's new rules deal only with Georgia Power, not with other electricity providers that new data centers could choose to contract with, like municipal utilities and electric membership cooperatives. Consumer advocates have argued those utilities' customers need protections as well.



Stanley Dunlap / Georgia Recorder

Rep. Martin Momtahan, a Dallas Republican, presents House Bill 215 at the Feb. 18 House Elections Subcommittee meeting. The bill would regulate how voter list maintenance is conducted in this state.

State House Republicans advance Voter Integrity Act

Stanley Dunlap
Georgia Recorder

A Georgia House elections panel advanced a bill Tuesday that would prevent the Secretary of State from participating in a multistate database that state election officials and voting rights advocates say helps maintain accurate voter rolls.

Republican members of a House elections subcommittee voted Tuesday in favor of passing the so-called Voter Integrity Act. House Bill 215 would prohibit state election officials from remaining in the Electronic Registration Information Center, or ERIC, and sharing voter registration data with non-governmental entities.

The bill was amended Tuesday to allow the Georgia secretary of state to enter into other intra-state compacts for voter list data.

Georgia Secretary of State's office officials and various voting rights advocacy groups defended the ERIC system as a way to maintain accurate voter rolls and cautioned that leaving the system would be costly and inefficient for the state. Georgia now spends about \$97,000 annually as one of 24 members of the election registration database.

ERIC is a multi-state voter list database that has been used by state election officials to identify 72% of people during voter list maintenance since 2021. Using various sources such as property tax records and motor vehicle department reports, the voter lists database attempts to identify people on voting rolls who have moved out of state, died or may be ineligible for other reasons.

The bill now advances to the full House Governmental Affairs Committee after advancing by a party-line vote Tuesday.

Rep. Martin Momtahan, a Dallas Republican, sponsored the bill and said Georgia should follow several other states in moving away from the ERIC system in favor of more state-based solutions.

"Some of this has to do with voter data and confidentiality," Momtahan said. "Obviously, sending that information to a third party is not always foolproof or safe from a cybersecurity standpoint."

In recent years, President Donald Trump and a number of Republican officials across the country have targeted ERIC as they've questioned election security. They've complained about the potential cybersecurity threats, including the sharing of personal information.

Critics also focus on ERIC's expansion of voting access because states are notified when individuals have not registered to vote after moving to a new district.

State Elections Director Blake Evans said obtaining data from one state takes 20 times as long as getting data from the entire ERIC membership.

Evans said the ERIC database is the only multi-state entity capable of detecting duplicate voter

registrations across state lines. Last year, the state received an exemption from the provision that requires Georgia to mail notices to unregistered eligible voters, he said.

Marisa Pyle, senior democracy defense manager with All Voting is Local, said HB 215 would have unintended consequences by making it harder to maintain accurate voter rolls.

Pyle spoke about the difficulties faced by states that have left the ERIC system, including increased costs and inefficiencies.

Garland Favorito, co-founder of Voter GA, said that a pressing concern about ERIC is that it violates public trust by sharing personal identifying information without their consent. Favorito repeatedly cast doubt on former President Joe Biden's 2020 Georgia win over President Donald Trump.

According to Favorito, there are other options for maintaining voter lists, such as Eagle AI and state-to-state exchanges that share information such as public tax records without requiring personally identifiable information to be shared with third parties.

"We can use out-of-state voter registrations that can be matched to detect permanent moves and public tax records, all without third-party access, all without giving our data away," Favorito said.

State Rep. Saira Draper, an Atlanta Democrat, said state law does not prevent Georgia from joining other voting list compacts with other states. Draper, who is an elections attorney, said the Republicans supporting the bill are focused on a "solution in search of a problem."

Draper said Eagle AI lacks the level of security protocols implemented by ERIC, which has not been hacked.

When sharing certain voter information with other member states, ERIC adheres to rigorous security protocols such as encryption, she said.

"You can get into an agreement with Alabama but if there is a breach in Alabama then it's out of your hands," Draper said after Tuesday's meeting.

Draper said she believes security concerns aren't the prime motivation behind Republicans in Georgia wanting to change the current system.

"I think part of the motivation was to remove that requirement that we registered unregistered voters, because they didn't realize that we already are exempt from that provision of ERIC," she said. "I think the other motivation is to try and push the legitimacy of Eagle AI, which is far from a legitimate data source."

The nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice describes Eagle AI as a project developed by election deniers that could undermine voting rights.

This story was originally published by the Georgia Recorder on georgiaRecorder.com.

Educators, groups want to address teacher shortage

Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA — The Georgia Department of Education kicked off a new teacher recruitment campaign Tuesday to address a teacher shortage.

The move is necessary as a generation of teachers nears retirement after two decades and more in the classroom, State School Superintendent Richard Woods said.

"A little over a third of our workforce is 20 years and above, so we're looking at how do we replace that many people in a relatively short period of time," said Woods, a former teacher who has served in his current role for a decade.

"We're getting to a point where we're going to lose over a third of our workforce in a relatively short period of time," he added. "And that is very, very concerning because we're not seeing the numbers in our colleges of education to replace those individuals."

The state education department oversees 180 school districts educat-

ing more than 1.7 million students. The new strategy, unveiled Tuesday, is fueled by \$3 million from corporate donors and athletic foundations.

Britton Banowsky, executive director of the College Football Playoff Foundation, is among those leading the effort. His group, with help from the Atlanta Sports Council, kicked in about half the funding.

The initiative will drive a messaging campaign in an effort to lure more young people to the profession. The "Teach in the Peach" program will also include a website that helps people find jobs as teachers (more at teachinthepeach.org). And it will host a test that people can take to find out whether a career in teaching would fit them.

Banowsky said his foundation wanted to address a problem facing communities. About a decade ago, they started casting about for an issue.

"We sat around a table, and we all said, 'Well, my mom's a teacher, my sister's a teacher. You know, I've got a kid who's a teacher. And they need the help.'"

Events

Irish Night

Friday, Feb. 21

6 p.m.

133 Ward St.

A night of Irish music, dancing and craic with Harry O'Donoghue and The Kinnigans. Presented by St. Peter Claver Catholic School. Buy a table (\$500, \$400) that seats 10. Decorate your table (prizes available) and bring your own dinner. Refreshments available by donation. Individual tickets available. \$50 at the door.

Kool-Aid & Canvas

Saturday, Feb. 22

10:30 a.m.

456 First St.

At Kool-Aid & Canvas, an artist takes children ages 6-12 step-by-step through the process of creating a fun painting with acrylic paints on a real canvas. Presented by The 567 Center for Renewal.

Resin Charcuterie Board Workshop

Saturday, Feb. 22

2 p.m.

456 First St.

Presented by The 567 Center for Renewal, create your own resin photo plaque with a personal photo that you can hang on the wall or display on an easel. You'll be guided step-by-step through mixing, adding colors and pouring to create your own custom look. \$50 includes all materials

Bands at The Grand Honor Band Festival

Friday, Feb. 21 -

Saturday, Feb. 22

3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

651 Mulberry St.

Join the Mercer University Wind Ensemble and High School Honor Bands at the Piedmont Grand Opera House. Friday night will be the first of two concerts in the Bands at the Grand Honor Band Festival. The Mercer University Wind Ensemble will perform a program inspired by hard rock, pop and jazz. The Saturday afternoon concert concludes the second Bands at the Grand Honor Band Festival. Top high school students auditioned and traveled from around the region to participate in this three-day festival full of masterclasses, performances and community building

Opening night of Macon Little Theatre's Seussical the Musical

Friday, Feb. 21

7:30 p.m.

4220 Forsyth Road

Macon Little Theatre Family presents Seussical the Musical. Embark on a whimsical adventure into the fantastical world of "Seussical: the Musical," where Dr. Seuss's beloved characters come to life in a vibrant spectacle of imagination, music, and poignant lessons. The show will run from Feb. 21-23. Adults \$20, Senior (65+) \$15, Military \$15 and Student \$10.

2025 Greek Stroll Off

Sunday, Feb. 23

3 p.m.

355 MLK Jr. Blvd.

The 2025 Greek Stroll Off is back by popular demand! This electrifying and high-energy showcase brings together the Divine Nine for a night of unique steps, smooth strolls, and powerful calls and chants. Proceeds from the event will benefit the MMG-NPHC Scholarship. Presented by Douglass Theatre. \$10 admission.

Shapeshifter: Echoes of Her Many Selves

Through Thursday, Feb. 27

10 a.m.

486 First St.

Macon Arts Alliance presents the February gallery, "Shapeshifter: Echoes of Her Many Selves," by Wendy Kusmaul Keeling. This gallery celebrates the multifaceted nature of a woman's identity through abstract female sculptures. Free.

From Our Kitchens: Grandma Fisher's delicious tomato jam

Robert Fisher
Special to The Melody

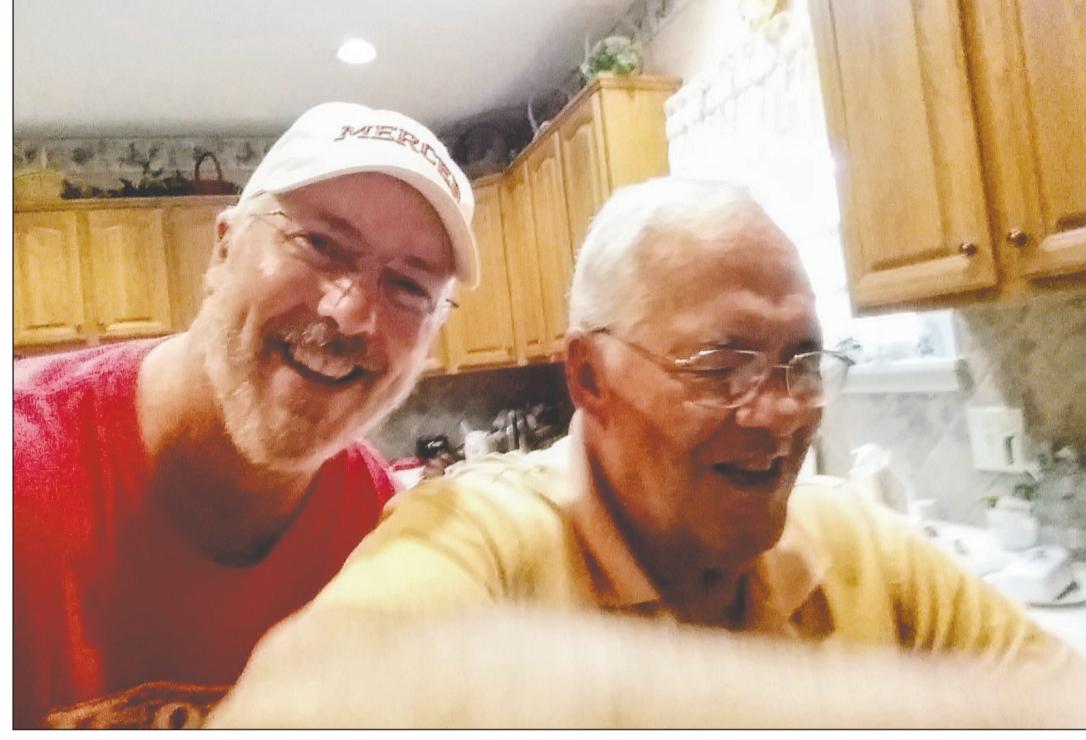
about their younger years. Our home smelled like history.

Now, if you grow tomatoes, you know that there always seems to be more grown than you know what to do with in the kitchen. You can eat only so many tomato sandwiches.

Well, apparently, my great-grandma heard about a new way to preserve tomatoes that could be used for all types of meals — sweet tomatoes. Now, one of the things to know about this recipe is that it's a process and it's more fun when family and/or friends are involved in canning a batch of this tasty treat.

Here in the South, we know this recipe as Tomato Jam. Either way, it's absolutely delicious on everything from cream cheese to meatloaf. I grew up eating it as a condiment for steaks and prime rib. Friends of mine enjoy it on their eggs, like a sweet salsa. Like most condiments, to each his own.

I'm sharing this recipe with the hope that it'll become a family tradition in



your house. Remember to laugh and share stories during the process.

Cooking is smoked into Robert Fisher's DNA. Robert started a catering company, Mama Honey's Catering & Side Show, in Macon in the early 2000s. Building his menu with personalized recipes, he's cooked for small wedding celebrations, events hosted by the Redding Foundation and at an opening concert featuring Mike Mills and Bobby McDuffie. Robert is passionate about food.

His new love is Scoot's Cafe & Ice Cream Emporium in Tennille, which opens in the spring of 2025.

Grandma Fisher's Sweet Tomato (Tomato Jam)
Ingredients

- 30 pounds of very good ripe tomatoes, skinned, cored and coarsely chopped, I use beefsteak or large

- field tomatoes
- 5 pounds light brown sugar
- 5 cups apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt

Instructions

1. Skin the tomatoes.
2. Core and chunk the skinned tomatoes into a heavy bottom non-stick pot, cover and let them drain for a day or two
3. Drain the liquid off of the tomatoes (I save this and use it in soups/stews/sauces. It's a tomato stock.)
4. Add all the ingredients to the pot that you used to drain the tomatoes and bring the mixture to a low boil, stirring frequently to prevent the bottom from burning. Stirring is very important

because if the mixture 'sits,' the brown sugar will burn on the bottom of the pot.

5. Reduce the heat and simmer, stirring constantly, until the mixture has thickened to the consistency of jam.

6. Remove from the heat.

7. Transfer to sanitized jars while still hot. Be sure the lids are turned tight. Listen for the 'pop' of the lids.

Notes

- The mixture will go from a frothy bubbling to a thicker bubble.
- The color should go from red to a brownish red and the mixture should be noticeably different in the stirring feel.
- This recipe should produce 11 to 12 pint-size Ball jars.
- Shelf life lasts years if the jars seal successfully.

Enjoy.

Exhibit, A8:

Chamber Music Festival in Detroit and visiting professor of cello at Yale School of Music.

A dedicated chamber musician, he was a member of the famed Nash Ensemble from 1997 until 2013 and the Emerson String Quartet from 2013 until 2023.

Watkins has been in Macon at the McDuffie Center many times and his connections to it and center director Amy Schwartz-Moretti and founder Robert McDuffie go back years.

"I've played with Amy at music festivals and such and we've always hit it off really well," he said. "She's had me play at the Fabian chamber series concerts in Macon and I've taught at the school. My wife is American, and when I moved to New York 30 years ago my mother-in-law, who was a pianist, told me of this wonderful violinist named Robert McDuffie. I can't think of anything better for a musician to do than form a school and pass on what they know to future generations."

Ticketing for the Monday MMSO concert can be found at www.thegrandmacon.com. Students with ID are admitted free.

Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at mwpannell@gmail.com. Find him on Instagram at [michael_w_pannell](https://www.instagram.com/michael_w_pannell).

Photo courtesy
Paul Watkins

Celebrated cellist and conductor Paul Watkins will guest conduct the Macon-Mercer Symphony Orchestra during a performance Monday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House.



MARCH 29, 2025 8:30 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Our award-winning presenters for this day-long seminar include both up-and-coming songwriters who are rapidly making a name for themselves in Nashville, to songwriters with decades of experience and multiple Emmy® and GRAMMY® Awards and/or nominations.



Kim Albritton
Licensing Manager,
ClearBox Rights, LLC



John C. Barker
President & CEO,
ClearBox Rights, LLC



Cameron Bedell
Singer/Songwriter/
Producer



Steve Ivey
Musician/Songwriter/
Producer/Studio Owner



Jason Nix
Songwriter

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Writing songs and music for other artists
- Writing songs and music for film and television
- Getting a writing deal
- Songwriter contracts
- Licensing your songs and music

Registration fee for the Songwriting Seminar is \$169, or \$99 for current Mercer students, faculty and staff (limit 20 discounts).

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER



capricorn.mercer.edu/songwriting-seminar

Museum of Arts and Sciences immersive exhibits, Macon-Mercer Symphony Orchestra

"On A Human Scale" opens Friday at the Museum of Arts and Sciences, the second of five immersive, multimedia ART+TECH exhibits at the museum over the next two years in collaboration with Wonderspaces.



Michael W. Pannell

tors bring the audio-visual installation to life.

Operating at the intersection of music, film and technology, Matthew sees himself using creativity as a force for positive change.

Wonderspaces presents the artwork of over 125

partner artists through permanent exhibitions in Scottsdale, Philadelphia, and Austin, Texas as well as the two-year cooperative exhibits in Macon.

Wonderspaces' mission is to deliver art to new audiences. Its partnership with the Museum of Arts and Sciences offers area attendees the opportunity to regularly see and experience works by internationally known artists in the ART+TECH field.

An accompanying onsite workshop is Friday at 10 a.m. for those interested in what goes into the staging and installation of such high-tech artworks and exhibits. The workshop is free. Regular admission to the museum includes the exhibit during regular hours through June 21.

"I love that this exhibit is a high-level technological work that is extremely accessible to all ages," said the museum's Susan Welsh. "It's hands-on and involves art, music and technology in a fun and vibrant way."

"On A Human Scale" features an interactive instrument — a modern keyboard mounted in a traditional harpsichord — that triggers musical notes sung by people who were pre-recorded and appear singing their notes in real time on television monitors.

The exhibit highlights diversity and shared humanity and started as an experiment in filming everyday New Yorkers singing. The individual voices are woven into the installation and activated by visitors playing notes on the keyboard. The exhibit's visi-



Museum of Arts and Sciences

A new ART+TECH exhibit opens Friday at the Museum of Arts and Sciences on Forsyth Rd. There will also be an accompanying workshop on the ins and outs of creating and staging high-tech works of art. The exhibit is called "On a Human Scale" and was created by artist Matthew Matthew.

ity and learning stations, including:

- Learning about shadows and color mixing
- Creating personal self-portraits
- Exploring video light microscopes
- Examining scientific specimens
- Participating in a maker space with 3D

printers
• And Interactive Discovery Stations aligned with Georgia's science and art curriculum

The exhibit builds on the museum's recent technological advancements and partnership with Wonderspaces, which equipped the museum with advanced multimedia

and interactive capabilities.

Since its beginning, the museum has been known for blending art and science and providing interactive learning experiences for children.

The museum is located at 4182 Forsyth Road with regular hours from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

To learn more, visit macon.org and onahumanscale.com.

Macon-Mercer Symphony Orchestra

The third concert of the 2024-2025 season of the Macon-Mercer Symphony is Monday at 7:30 p.m. at The Piedmont Grand Opera House.

See EXHIBITS, Page A7

CITY OF WARNER ROBINS

2025 EVENTS



FEBRUARY

8 Literary Festival

AUGUST

6 Family Fun Night

21 Food Truck Roundup

19 State of the City

SEPTEMBER

6 The International City Experience

18 Food Truck Roundup

19-28 Warner Robins Burger Week

APRIL

17 Food Truck Roundup & Egg Hunt

7-12 Start Up Week

TBD Military Child Appreciation

OCTOBER

16 Trunk or Treat & Food Truck Roundup

18 WRPD Glow Run

MAY

11-17 Police Week

15 Food Truck Roundup

NOVEMBER

11 Veterans Day

JUNE

28 Independence Day Celebration

DECEMBER

4 Tree Lighting Ceremony

6 Christmas Parade

10 Family Fun Night

19 Photos with Santa

TBA Pets with Santa

Thrilling wins highlight region title games



TOP: Southwest and Dublin players scramble for a loose ball during the Patriots' win in the Region 2-A Division I championship game last week. BOTTOM: Mount de Sales' Abner Livingston has a shot blocked by Stratford's Sal Phillips (13) as other players look on during the Cavaliers' 55-54 upset win over the Eagles in the GIAA 4A/3A District 6 tournament championship last week. (Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody)

NOTEPAD

Westside girls win in playoffs, baseball begins

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Several boys basketball teams played Wednesday night in the playoffs after The Melody went to print. For full coverage, visit maconmelody.com.

The Southwest boys, who earned the No. 1 seed in the GHSA Class A-Division I tournament and beat No. 32 Bacon County in the first round. The Westside boys also played at home as the No. 11 team in Class

2A and defeated North Murray.

The Central Chargers boys team made it in as a bubble team thanks to the new power ratings system, earning the No. 27 seed. The Chargers got an unlucky matchup, however, as they will face powerhouse Putnam County, who went undefeated deep into the season and are ranked No. 1 in several statewide polls.

The Rutland boys also have a difficult pairing in Class 2A, as they eked into the playoffs as the No. 32 seed only to be matched up with Carver-Columbus, a tra-

ditional juggernaut on the basketball court.

The Westside girls team got an upset win on the road in the 2A playoffs Tuesday, defeating region rival Callaway 38-37 to advance to the round of 16. It was a revenge game for the Seminoles, as the Cavaliers knocked them out of the region tournament just a week earlier.

Now, in an interesting turn, Westside will get a second region opponent in a row when

See NOTEPAD, B2

ACE gets first hoops win in playoffs as girls beat Bleckley Co. by 10

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

In a scrappy game with turnovers galore and solid defensive efforts, the No. 16 Academy for Classical Education Gryphons claimed the school's first-ever basketball playoff win Tuesday night when they defeated No. 17 Bleckley County 57-47 on their home court.

"It feels great to get this win, we made a little history tonight and we're proud about that," ACE head coach Todd Whetsel said.

As he talked, his team — still in uniform and wearing their bright pink shooting sleeves and other accessories — surrounded him and leaped in the air in celebration, making the coach smile.

The 10-point win was business as usual for the Gryphons (21-4), who had already

defeated the Royals (14-11) twice in the past few weeks, winning 56-44 back on Feb. 1 and then getting another victory 54-39 Feb. 7.

"With the power rankings, that could happen, you see a region opponent earlier," Whetsel said. "If it was a traditional bracket, you wouldn't see them until the Final Four. But if it was a traditional bracket, neither one of us would've been in the playoffs, so we're grateful to be here."

ACE and Bleckley both failed to make the semifinals of the Region 2-A Division I tournament, a fate that normally meant elimination from the playoffs under the GHSA format used in years past. But with the possibility for at-large teams this time around, both schools had good

See ACE, B3



ACE's Khloe Stanley drives past the Royals' defense during the Gryphons' win over Bleckley County 57-47 in the first round of the GHSA Class A Division I girls basketball playoffs. Stanley finished with 22 points, including 15 in the second half. (Mark Powell / For The Melody)

Patriots defeat Dublin in triple overtime thriller, 79-76

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

At about 11 p.m. Saturday in Dublin High School's sweltering gym, Southwest's Brandon Ashley only thought about one thing when he pulled up and fired a shot from beyond the arc.

There were about 15 seconds left on the clock in triple overtime. After a grueling Region 2-A Division I championship game, the Irish had a 76-75 lead.

Even with all that in his head, Ashley wasn't overthinking it.

"All I thought was 'I gotta make this,'" Ashley said, smiling. "Have to make it. It was just a God moment. I thank God for it."

The 1000-point scorer drained the long-range shot, giving the No. 2 Patriots a

78-76 lead they would not relinquish. After Dublin lost the ball on their ensuing possession, one last Southwest free throw and a failed long-distance shot by the Irish sealed the 79-76 Patriots win over No. 1 Dublin.

"I'm so excited for these kids, man. We've been waiting a long time for this," Southwest head coach Monquencio Hardnett said. "I've been coaching all these guys for several years. They've worked for this. We came out on top, we finally made it."

It's the first region title for Hardnett, who came on as head coach for Southwest in 2021 and built the Patriots into a juggernaut reminiscent of the school's hoops heyday in the '70s and '80s.

Southwest (23-2) spent much of the year in multi-

See SOUTHWEST, B3

Mount de Sales' Livingston wins it against Stratford

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

Livingston, they'll really have to do some digging.

Livingston forced a huge turnover with 10.5 seconds left, then took the inbounds pass, went down court and swished a 12-footer with two seconds left to cap No. 4 Mount de Sales' double-digit fourth quarter and defeat No. 2 Stratford 55-54 Friday night in the GIAA District 6-4A/3A championship.

Thursday night, the night of Mount de Sales' semifinal upset of No. 1 Tattnall, Taylor only knew that his team hadn't played for a region tournament championship since his arrival, and he had no earthly idea when it had last happened.

The next day, he and longtime Mount de Sales scorekeeper Thom Mead figured it had been at least a dozen years since it happened.

Now, thanks to Abner

See MDS, B3

See B3 For Stratford girls
For full playoff coverage,
visit maconmelody.com.

NOTEPAD

Central girls get home playoff win over Temple

Christopher Hill
For The Melody

it down the court and hit a floater for Central's first bucket of the game.

After a slow start to the quarter, the Lady Chargers picked up some momentum after taking a few steals and scoring on the fast break on back-to-back drives. After a made three by JiKaylee Marshall, the Chargers took an 11-point lead. Temple found a little steam at the end of the quarter, but thanks to Johnson's 10 first-quarter points, the Chargers finished the first up 18-9.

The Chargers opened the second quarter with a made pull-up midrange

See CENTRAL, B2

Schedule

Friday, Feb. 21

BASKETBALL

Girls teams:

- GHSA second round: A-Division I – No. 14 Central @ No. 3 Model, TBA; No. 16 ACE @ No. 1 Fannin County, TBA
- 2A – No. 21 Westside @ No. 5 Morgan County, TBA
- GIAA second round:
- 2A – No. 3 CFCAs vs. No. 6 Furtah Prep, 3 p.m. (at Tattnall)
- 4A – No. 2 Stratford vs. No. 7 FPD, 7:30 p.m.
- No. 11 Tattnall at No. 3 St. Anne-Pacelli, 6 p.m. (at Stratford)

BASEBALL

- Mercer vs. Kent State, 6 p.m.
- ACE @ Central, 4 p.m.
- Rutland @ Twiggs County, 4 p.m.
- CFCAs @ Piedmont, 4 p.m.

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer beach volleyball @ Stetson, 10 a.m.
- Mercer beach volleyball vs. Eckerd, 2 p.m.
- Mercer's MUSB Invitational: Mercer vs. MTSU, 4 p.m.
- Mercer women's golf @ Reynolds Lake Oconee Invit.

Saturday, Feb. 22

BASKETBALL

Boys teams:

- GHSA Second round:
- A-Division I – No. 1 Southwest vs. TBA
- GIAA Second round:
- 2A – No. 2 CFCAs vs. TBA, 5 p.m. (at FPD)
- 4A – No. 4 Tattnall vs. TBA, 7:30 p.m. (@ Tattnall)

College:

- Mercer men vs. UNCG, 2 p.m.
- Mercer women @ Wofford, 6 p.m.

BASEBALL

- Mercer vs. Kent State, 2 p.m.
- Tattnall double-header vs. George Walton, 2 and 4 p.m.

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer women's golf, 2nd round of invitational
- Mercer beach volleyball vs. Nebraska, 9 a.m.
- Beach volleyball vs. Stephen F. Austin, 1 p.m.
- MU softball vs. Jacksonville, 12:30 p.m.
- Mercer men's lax vs. Army (in Naples, Fl.)
- Mercer men's tennis @ Georgia State, 2 p.m.

Sunday, Feb. 23

BASKETBALL

- Mercer vs. Kent State, 1 p.m.

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer women's golf, 3rd round of invitational
- Mercer softball vs. UConn

- Mercer men's tennis vs. North Florida, 1 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 24

BASKETBALL

- FPD vs. Veterans, 5:30 p.m.
- Mount de Sales vs. Covenant, 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 25

BASKETBALL

Girls teams:

- GHSA Class A-Division I playoffs, Round 3
- GHSA Class 2A playoffs, Round 3

BASEBALL

- Mercer vs. FAMU, 6 p.m.
- Southwest vs. Dublin, 4:30 p.m.
- Central @ Dodge County, 5 p.m.
- ACE @ Jefferson County, 5:30 p.m.
- Northeast @ Washington County, 6 p.m.
- Rutland @ Wilkinson County, 4 p.m.
- FPD @ George Walton, 5:30 p.m.
- Tattnall @ Pinewood Christian, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 26

BASKETBALL

Boys Teams:

- GHSA Class A-Division I playoffs, Round 3
- GHSA Class 2A playoffs, Round 3
- GHSA Class 3A playoffs, Round 3

College:

- Mercer men's @ ETSU, 6 p.m.

BASEBALL

- Mercer vs. FAMU, 4 p.m.
- Central vs. Taylor County, 4 p.m.
- Northeast vs. Baldwin, 4 p.m.
- Stratford vs. Athens Christian, 6 p.m.

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer women's tennis @ Ga. Southern, 2 p.m.
- Mercer women's lax vs. Kennesaw State, 4 p.m.
- Mercer softball vs. Ga. Southern, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 27

BASKETBALL

High school:

- GIAA semifinals for boys and girls, all day

College:

- Mercer women vs. Western Carolina, 7 p.m.

BASEBALL

- ACE vs. Crawford County, 6:30 p.m.

- Rutland vs. Wilkinson County, 4 p.m.

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer men's and women's tennis vs. Queens NC

Scores

Friday, Feb. 24

BASKETBALL

Boys teams:

- GHIA District 6-A/3A Championship: Mount de Sales 55, Stratford 55 (at FPD)

- GHIA District 2-2A Championship: CFCAs 72, Brentwood 59

- GHSA Region 2-A Division I semifinal: Southwest 59, East Laurens 52

Girls teams:

- GHIA District 6 Championship: Stratford 67, Piedmont 55

- GHIA District 2-2A Championship: Brentwood 62, CFCAs 49

- GHSA Region 2-A Division I semifinal: East Laurens 66, Central 52

- GHSA Region 4-3A Consolation game: Academy of Richmond County 46, Howard 42 (2OT)

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer softball double-header in Nashville: W vs. Story Brook, 9-6, L vs. Tennessee State, 8-6
- Mercer women's tennis @ Clemson 7
- Mercer baseball: Milwaukee 6, Mercer 3

Saturday, Feb. 25

BASKETBALL

Boys Teams:

- GHSA Region 2-A Division I Championship game: Southwest 79, Dublin 76 (3OT)

- GHSA Region 2-2A, Championship game: Morgan County 54, Westside 40

Girls Teams:

- GHSA Region 2-A Division I Consolation game: Central 44, Washington County 33

- GHSA Region 2-2A Consolation game: Westside 46, Jackson 27

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer women's lax: Virginia Tech 11, Mercer 7
- Mercer men's lax: VMI 14, Mercer 11
- Mercer baseball: Mercer 12, Milwaukee 4
- Mercer women's basketball: ETSU 70, Mercer 67
- Mercer men's basketball: VMI 80, Mercer 71

Sunday, Feb. 26

OTHER SPORTS

- Mercer tennis vs. Army, in Columbus, GA

- Women: Mercer 4, Army 3

- Men: Mercer 4, Army 0

- Mercer baseball: Mercer 10, Milwaukee 3

Tuesday, Feb. 27

BASKETBALL

Boys teams:

- GHSA Class A-Division I playoffs, Round 1: Central 57, Temple 36

- GHSA Class 2A playoffs, Round 1: Westside 38, Callaway 37

- GHSA Class 3A playoffs, Round 1: Pickens 68, Howard 22

- GHSA Class 4A playoffs, Round 1: FPD 50, Strong Rock 32

Notepad, from B1:

they travel up north Friday night to face No. 5 Morgan County, who won their shared Region 2.

In GIAA play, the Tattnall girls snagged an upset win, as the No. 11 Trojans defeated the No. 6 King's Academy 57-54 to advance to the second round. They will play No. 3 St. Anne-Pacelli at 6 p.m. Friday at Stratford.

The No. 12 Mount de Sales girls lost their road game, falling 58-40 against No. 5 Loganville Christian Academy. The FPD girls won at home and will face Stratford at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

Mercer basketball in final stretch
Mercer's basketball teams continue to search for answers as the season winds down, with both teams taking losses last week.

The men's team took a tough loss on the road against Western Carolina last Wednesday, then couldn't bounce back and fell to VMI at home for their fifth straight loss.

"We're using the word urgency right now. We've been having defensive issues, lacking defensive presence... we want to have more urgency," men's head coach Ryan Ridder said Monday afternoon at the school's press conference. "I thought at Furman we had great urgency... but then they made a couple tough shots, we missed, and that urgency turned to panic."

The loss put the Bears in eighth in the Southern Conference with a 4-10 record. To avoid a play-in game in the conference tournament Mercer would need at least a sixth place finish, but the two teams ahead of them have 7-7 conference records.

The Bears will need to win all four of their remaining conference games to have a shot. Either way, Mercer will



Mercer men's basketball Ryan Ridder speaks to reporters at the school's athletics press conference Monday. The Bears have lost five straight games and are looking to turn things around with four games remaining before the Southern Conference tournament in the first week of March.

play in the SoCon tournament beginning March 7.

The women's team suffered a blowout on the road last Thursday, losing to Chattanooga 69-39, but bounced back with a solid performance against East Tennessee State. The Buccaneers pulled it out, though, saddling Mercer with a heartbreaking 70-67 loss Saturday.

"It was very encouraging that we were able to turn it around like that," head coach Michelle Clark-Heard said. "I'm not proud to say we got beat by 30 points on our home floor. But the way we came back and fought on the road shows who we really are. That's my job as a coach, to get them refocused."

The Bears dropped to 7-18

on the year and 2-8 in SoCon play, putting them in ninth place ahead of only Western Carolina.

Mercer has had some bright spots, though Heard made it clear she does not want to reflect on the year until it's over after the conference tournament.

"I can really hang my hat on Nahawa (Diarra) this year, she's done everything we need from her," Heard said. "And I'm grateful, especially the seniors, they know we're getting down to the wire. They're playing hard."

Baseball teams hit the diamond

The season is underway in Georgia, and some Macon teams came out of the gate swinging.

One of the city's best public school teams in recent seasons has been ACE, and the Gryphons started off this year with a fittingly challenging schedule, going 3-2 to open the season.

ACE first defeated Lake Oconee Academy 7-1 on the road Feb. 10, then beat Jasper County 10-0 in their home opener Feb. 13.

Though they could not get the win over powerhouse Mount Paran Christian or get revenge for last year's playoff loss against Pierce County, the Gryphons rebounded with a region win against Central 10-0 Tuesday night.

While ACE won their region with mostly Macon and Columbus schools multiple times in recent years at the

2A level, the new Region 2-A Division I should provide ample challenge for the program. Stronger programs like Washington County and Bleckley County will be vying for region titles right with the Gryphons.

On the private school side, FPD will try to run it back and avenge last year's championship game loss. The journey began Tuesday, as the Vikings defeated George Walton Academy 8-3 in their season opener at home.

Tattnall lost in the semifinals last season to FPD. The Trojans began their season Tuesday as well, defeating Georgia Military College 5-0 at home.

Central, from B1:

shot by Gabrielle Knowlton, continuing their run. The second quarter was very back-and-forth with Central failing to truly pull away and Temple unable to dig into the Chargers' lead. After a few lay-ups and a few tough finishes around the rim, Central was able to extend its lead as halftime approached. The Chargers went into the half up 32-17.

Johnson was all over the court in the first half making her presence known on both sides of the ball while putting up 14 points and grabbing a handful of rebounds on the defensive end.

"We can't get relaxed because of the lead," head coach Tamara Bolston-Williams said about what she told the team during halftime. "Teams are going to go into halftime and try to adjust to us and try and get back into this game."

The Lady Chargers opened the second half aggressively trying to put Temple away, starting right away in their press defense and getting takeaways on their first two defensive possessions. After the first five minutes of the quarter, it seemed that Central had finally opened the floodgates and the Chargers were in full control. Their lead climbed to 26 with three minutes left in the quarter, an advantage they rode to the win.

"One of the key points to today was to not let them get a huge lead on us. We wanted to make sure that we played for four quarters and not take ourselves out of the game so we don't have to climb back from being down," Bolston-Williams said.

Johnson would finish the game as the leading scorer, going 10 of 19 from the field and putting up 26 of Central's 57 points. She also would have six rebounds, three assists, two steals and two blocks in the game. Senior forward Frances Anyakudo would be the game's leading rebounder as she was able to snag

Stratford defeats Piedmont in region title at home, 67-55

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

At halftime, it was easy to figure out what it would take to win.

It would be whoever cracked 30% shooting, most likely — but guessing whether it would be Stratford or Piedmont was much tougher.

They were both cold.

Stratford warmed up first, making four of its first five shots in the third quarter to get in front for good before extending the lead in the fourth to beat Piedmont 67-55 Friday night for the GIAA District 6-4A/3A girls championship at FPD.

Both teams will head to the GIAA state playoffs as high seeds. The GIAA splits up 3A into two divisions for the postseason. Piedmont will be a favorite in 3A and Stratford in 4A.

The Cougars, though, will need a sharper shooting night, which often follows struggles like the one they had Friday.

"That's our game," Piedmont head coach Michael Wilson said. "We average about 36 threes a game. We struggle shooting here, for some reason."

"It is what it is. We didn't shoot well tonight. We knew we were at a disadvantage on the inside, so we've got to make our shots or we get behind the eight-ball."

Most of Stratford's second half was pretty much what head coach Ed Smith likes to see. And he was grateful to see the Cougars, who are a fast-paced long-distance shooting team.

"They constantly pressure you with that," he said. "It's unbelievable. They're relentless. Nonstop hold your breath."

The game went as expected early, though neither team was on target at all. Stratford (22-2) went 7 for 27 and Piedmont 7 for 29 from the floor in the first half. The Eaglettes went nine straight possessions with nothing, and the Cougars (23-5) countered with one good trip among nine at the same time.

Piedmont took a 24-23 lead at halftime, with scoring ace Marissa Holder — who is nearing 3,000 career points — off to a 5 for 15 start from the floor.

"The last couple years, we're playing in a lot of big games," Wilson said. "We just go in at halftime, take a breath, regroup. Shooters shoot. That's our saying."

Smith wanted to see more patience.

"At times in the first half, even though we hit a shot or two, we were settling for the three," he said. "We're tired. That pace, just what they do gets you worn out."

Soon enough, he did.

"We talked about coming inside, they had no answer for the inside game," Smith said. "That was the plan, get the ball in."

Stratford made four of its first five shots in the third quarter en route to a 31-29 lead. Piedmont stayed close, thanks to three threes from Sarah Ellen Stroud and Kylee Keck, the last one pulling the Cougars within 43-39, which was the score to begin the fourth quarter.

It was a 46-45 game after a Keck shot from beyond the arc at the 6:13 mark, but the Eaglettes embarked on a 10-2 run — including hitting five straight free throws — for a 56-47 lead with 4:06 left.

Stratford's efficiency eliminated Piedmont's comeback chances. The Eaglettes scored on 13 of 16 possessions in the fourth quarter, to seven of 19 for the Cougars.

"We don't play a lot of zone," Smith said. "But we feel like we find (shooters) better, we move them all over the place. We were able to tilt toward the shooters."

Holder struggled from the floor, tossing up several air balls and side-of-the-rim misses.

"Marissa battles," Wilson said. "She plays good defense, and when she's got to battle, sometimes that affects your shot."

Holder entered the game with 2,864 career points in five years, 715 this year. She led Piedmont with 22, while Keck added 18 and



Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody

Stratford's Reagan Ray (15) looks to pass as Piedmont's Teagan Hinson (15) guards the GIAA District 6-4A/3A championship game against Piedmont Academy on Friday, at First Presbyterian Day School in Macon, Georgia.

Stroud 13.

Guard Da'Laila Lowe was money all night long on both ends, finishing with a game-high 24 points, boosted by a sizzling 13-of-14 night at the free-throw line.

"She's about a 90% shooter (at the line)," Smith said. "This was nothing new. Every time she went to the line, you felt pretty good about it."

Post player Kaliya Walker added 23 (7 of 9 at the line), and Camiyah Hudson 11.

Now the Eaglettes can worry about facing teams unlike Piedmont.

Smith and assistant coach Kurt Greene thought about that before the game.

"I said, in all our years, I don't believe I've ever had three kids that you have to constantly know where they are," Greene said. "At that depth, Holder puts a lot of pressure on you insofar as you want to help on her, but you know when you do what's going to happen."

ACE, from B1:

enough records and resumes to get a playoff spot.

While persistent defense from the Royals made it harder for ACE to pull away, the Gryphons rode their superior shooters to the eventual win.

"Bleckley is a great team, they put as much ball pressure on the ball as any team. They caused us problems tonight, but we found a way," Whetsel said.

ACE got its biggest performances in the later parts of the game and, as usual, were led by their two sets of twin stars, seniors Karlee and Karsyn Yates and freshmen Khloie and Zhoie Stanley.

Khloie Stanley had 15 of her game-high 22 points come in the second half. Karlee Yates followed with 11 points, including a smooth layup and a back-breaking 3-pointer that both came in the final two minutes and helped silence a late Bleckley County comeback attempt. Sarah Rhett Farmer also had 10 points, including some key free throws in the third quarter.

While the Gryphons' shooting improved late, they also played solid defense all night. The Royals occasionally went on runs thanks to some threes and free throws but struggled all evening to move the ball inside.

"That's the most we've ever played a 2-1-2 in a game all year," Whetsel said. "We've been working on it, and that was the moment we were able to make it work."

And once the twins wore out Bleckley County's defense, it was tough to hold ACE out of the lane as they had done earlier in the game. Just like in their two games earlier this month, head coach John Stanley and the Royals could not quite piece it all together.

"Playing a team that's in our region, it makes it even tougher because they know your ins and outs," Stanley said after the game. "With that being said, we have some older girls, but we have some younger girls coming back. We have two starters that were seniors, Amiyah Roberts and Jordan Mathis. The others will be back."

"Those two seniors will be greatly missed," he said. "It was a great season."

Roberts was a key contributor for the Royals all year and made her presence known again Tuesday when she led her team with 13 points, including a trio of 3-pointers.

After their inaugural playoff win, the Gryphons have their work cut out for them. They travel to Blue Ridge in North Georgia on Saturday to take on the bracket's No. 1 team, Fannin County, in the second round.

Wearing down the defense

The Royals came out of the gate scrappy, playing pesky defense and regularly picking ACE's pocket at the top of the key to create opportunities. Even with a little poor shooting, Bleckley county was able to manufacture enough buckets for a 9-5 lead that felt a lot larger with both teams turning the ball over.

The Gryphons got things moving before the quarter ran out, though, sinking some free throws and getting good ball movement from the Stanley twins to make it a 9-8 Bleckley lead going into the second quarter.

What little success shooting the Royals had quickly evaporated as ACE kept the ball at the perimeter for most of the period. Aside from a big three by Roberts, Bleckley County had to settle for free throws for most of their other points, and they struggled to hit more than one of two on most trips to the line.

ACE was inefficient from the charity stripe as well but made up for it with better shooting toward the end of the half. The Yates twins each had nice putbacks, and Karlee knocked down two free throws to piece together a run that gave the Gryphons a 23-19 lead at the break.

ACE came out of the locker room shooting much better, sinking a couple deep balls to eventually stretch the lead to double digits.

But every time it felt like the Gryphons might pull away for good, a Royal would knock something down, be it a pair of foul shots by Jenkins or another shot from beyond the arc by Roberts.

Bleckley County, down by as many as 11 at points in the second half, used a key block by Jenkins and some quick transition points to get it to 45-40 with about four minutes remaining.

It wasn't to be, however, as Karlee Yates stepped up for ACE in the final two minutes. Her layup and 3-pointer sequence down the stretch got the home crowd energized and put the game away for good as the Gryphons' defense did the rest.

MDS, from B1:

Sales' Terry Odom Jr. just past mid-court. Stratford retained possession with nine-tenths of a second left. Wooten got it to Frankie Raines Jr. on the right wing, but his turnaround from just beyond the three-point line was short.

"We had our opportunities," Stratford head coach Jarvis Smith said. "They stayed in the game. We got comfortable, and those guys kept fighting."

Livingston is one of the more dangerous perimeter shooters in the region to go with a heady game. He read the inbounds pass and deflected it off an Eagle, then almost lost possession at half-court before regaining it and cruising down for the shot in front of the Mount de Sales bench.

"I'm just trusting him to make a play," Taylor said. "I'm letting it play out. He had just made a couple pull-ups earlier in the game, and I think he has one of the best pull-ups in the region, for sure."

It wasn't quite over, and then it was. "Zay was to do a curl, we were hoping

Southwest, from B1:

ple Top 10 rankings for the A-Division I classification but finished second in the region after the Irish defeated them 57-48 earlier in the year, making the title game a highly anticipated matchup.

Now, with the region trophy finally in hand, Southwest seems poised for a top-five seed in the state playoffs after navigating a bloodthirsty, 10-team region.

"This just gives us more motivation. We did this, we can do anything. We worked years for it," star point guard C.J. Howard said. "Now we have one more (goal)... now we have to take it all the way."

Howard led the Patriots with 25

to get it to him," Livingston said of Zavion DeShazier. "I was popping back to be the safety valve.

"I saw the clock and I had to make a decision, I had to go. I was really going to work it down there (to Alex Roseboro or Jackson Rowley). But Sal (Phillips) did a really good job of blocking him on the ball... So I did what my daddy taught me to do: pull-up jumper."

Taylor grinned.

"I believe in my team," he said. "I thought they were capable of so much. I just needed them to believe in themselves, and I think that's exactly what they did tonight."

Livingston finished with 11. Rowley led Mount de Sales with 17 points, while Roseboro and DeShazier added 13 each.

Raines topped Stratford with 17, while Justin Sewell had 12.

The Cavs watched a 6-0 lead turn into a 9-6 deficit after one, Stratford not getting a bucket from the floor until the 1:13 mark. Stratford started to pull away, taking a 26-21 at the break.

The third quarter became Stratford's after five points from DeShazier pulled Mount de Sales within 28-26. The Ea-

gles got eight points from Raines as part of a surge that led to a 15-point lead, and 47-35 advantage heading into the fourth quarter.

The plan?

"Just locking in defensively, the same thing against Tattnall," Taylor said of the semifinal upset of the top seed. "I think we gave ourselves shot opportunities, put ourselves in a great position."

"So really, locking in on Frankie, he's a really great player."

The Cavaliers plugged away and the Eagles slowed down a little. Stratford was up 54-50 when another three-point play from Rowley on a huge baseline drive made it a one-point game with 1:12 left.

The Eagles wasted another second chance after a hustle play by Raines, setting up the biggest win for Mount de Sales since, well, the current players were little Cavs.

It was a rare scenario for the Eagles, winners of two straight region titles.

"We were doing the same stuff, we just weren't making plays," Smith said. "We probably went three or four times not making a play, and they went down and made plays."

each time to send it to another third extra period.

"Dublin has a great team, man, so much credit to them," Hardnett said. "This does a lot for us for the playoffs, a triple overtime against a team like them, even if we're tired. Now it's just five more, and we're in that championship."

Hardnett said the victory cemented his faith in the group he's watched grow in leaps and bounds across his four years as head coach.

It's safe to say his players were riding high as well.

"It gives us a Mamba mentality," Howard said. He and Ashley looked at each other and laughed.

"Like Kobe," Ashley said. "That's the mindset. C'mon."

Georgia Sports HOF set for inductions

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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The Georgia Sports Hall of Fame is set to induct its 2025 class this weekend, ringing in the new honorees with a variety of ceremonies and fan events.

The annual ceremonies begin with the traditional Golf Classic, which has an 8:30 a.m. check-in Friday and starts with a shotgun blast at 9:30 a.m. at Brickyard Golf Club. Spots were still available as of Monday, according to the GSHOF website.

The jacket ceremony and cocktail reception, both private events, cap Friday's festivities. Previously inducted members gather to celebrate and watch new inductees don the blue GSHOF jacket. The most popular leg of the weekend arrives Saturday afternoon with the Fan Fest, where guests can snag autographs from some of the inductees at the Hall of Fame's museum in downtown Macon. Fans can meet athletes and coaches from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturday.

The induction ceremony brings things to a close Saturday from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Guests may contact the Hall of Fame to

purchase tickets for the induction or the golf tournament. The fan fest is a free event open to the public.

The hall's latest group of inductees includes icons from a variety of professional, college and high school sports with both athletes and coaches making the list for their achievements.

One inductee will represent Macon well. Though Theron Sapp was born in Dublin, he grew up in Macon and starred at Lanier High School as a half-back when the football team reached the state championship game in 1953. He became a statewide legend when he went to Georgia, earning the nickname "Drought Breaker" — though some also called him as "Thundering Theron" — when he helped the Bulldogs beat Georgia Tech for the first time in eight years in 1957.

Sapp then went to the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFL Draft, where he won an NFL Championship in 1960 against the Green Bay Packers in Vince Lombardi's only playoff loss. He played seven years in the NFL with the Eagles and Pittsburgh Steelers. His number, 40, is one of only four numbers retired by the University of Georgia.

Terry Holder will represent nearby Cochran when he's inducted. The long-time baseball coach was also a multi-sport athlete for Bleckley County and even brought the Royals a basketball state championship. He's better known for his dominance on the diamond as a coach, though, as he found success at Evans High School near Augusta for 22 years before winning three straight state titles with Greenbrier.

The group consists of multiple Georgia-born icons who have made names for themselves playing for Georgia's professional teams — Braves all-star pitcher Tim Hudson, World Series champ outfielder Marquis Grissom, Falcons all-time great receiver Terance Mathis.

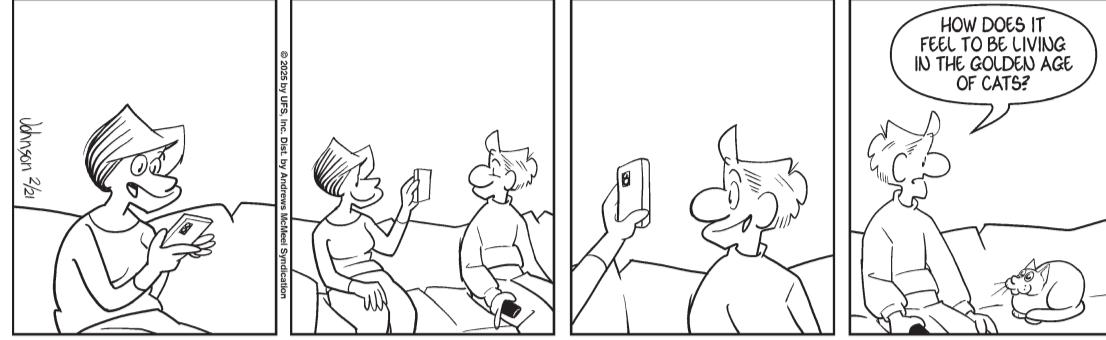
Others like Georgia Tech basketball icon and NBA star Dennis Scott, noted Atlanta pitching coach guru Leo Mazzone and Olympic medal-winning gymnast Courtney Kupets Carter were born elsewhere but built their legacies in the state.

Iconic UGA women's tennis coach Jeff Wallace and classic Hawks play-by-play TV announcer Bob Rathbun round out the 2025 class.

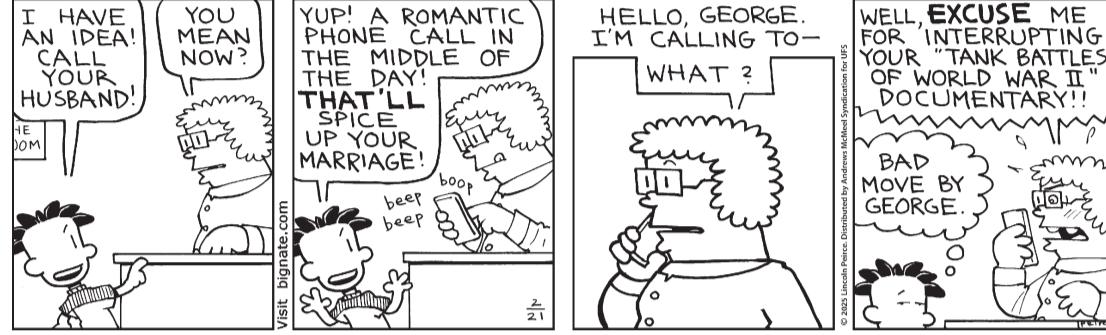
ADAM



ARLO AND JANIS



BIG NATE



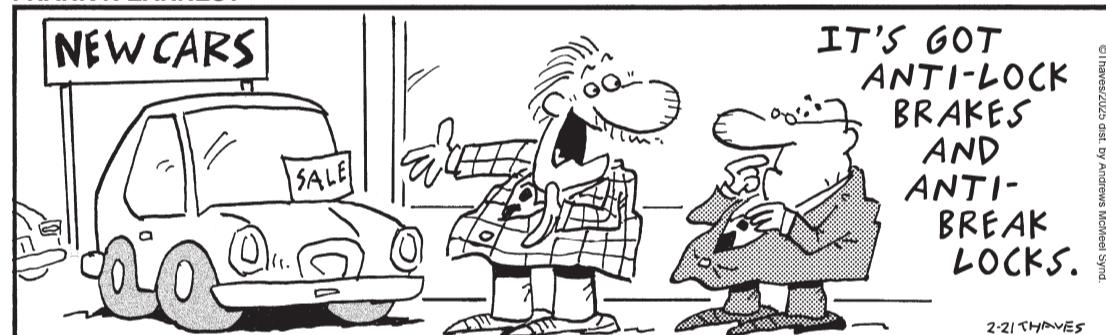
BORN LOSER



DEFLOCKED



FRANK N EARNEST



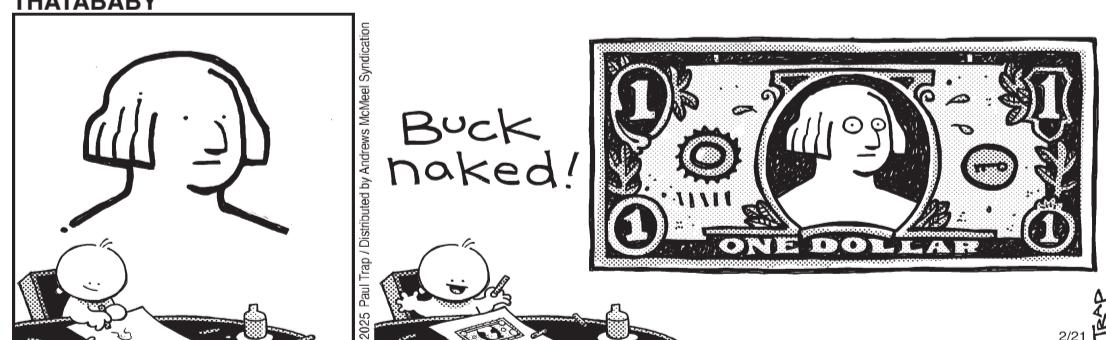
GRIZZWELLS



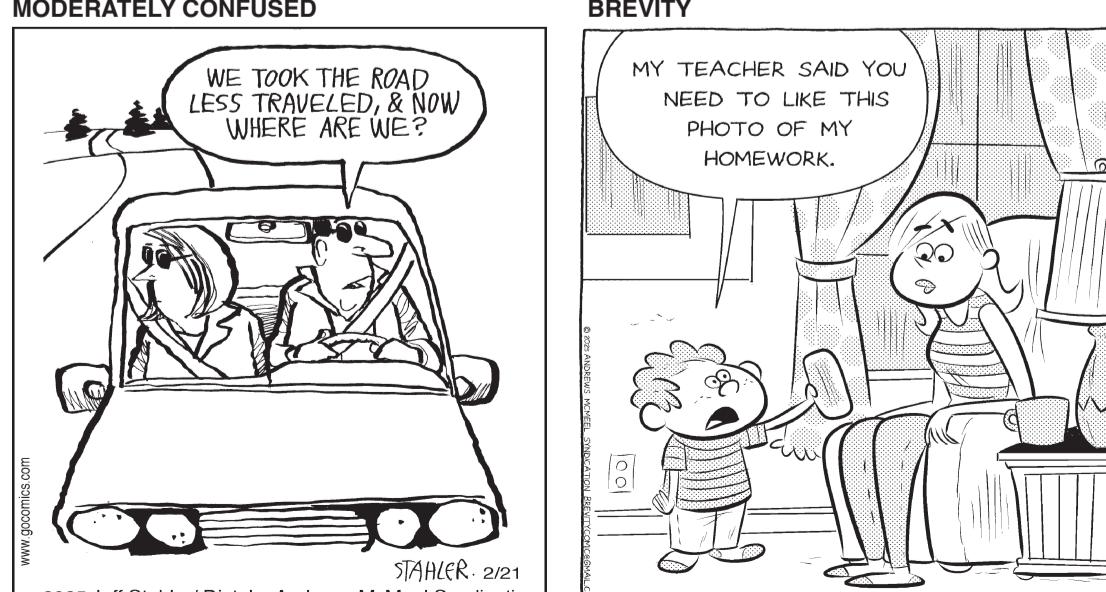
MONTY



THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



NEA Crossword Puzzle

Answer to Previous Puzzle

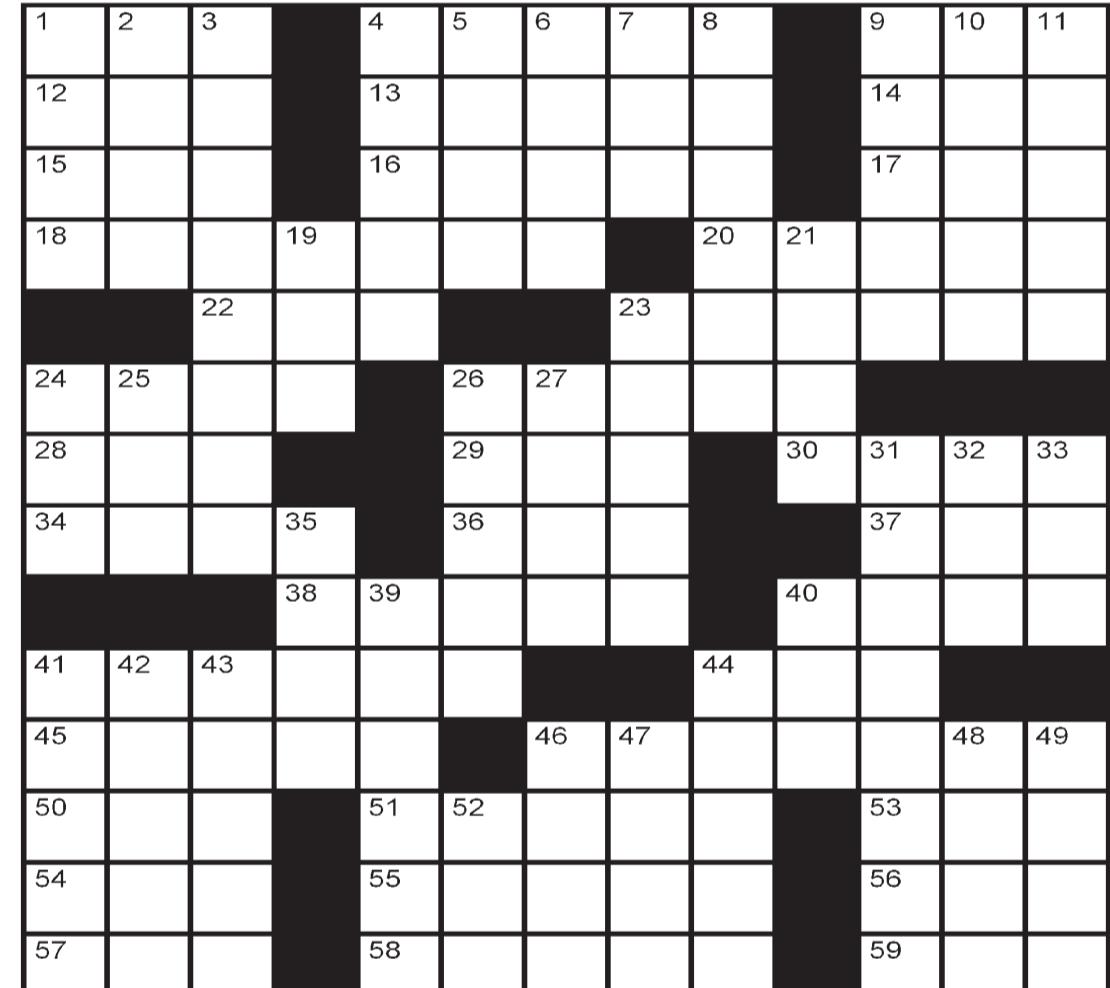


ACROSS

- 1 TV alien Romano
- 4 President John Quincy —
- 9 Rule
- 12 Mauna —
- 13 Unearth (2 wds.)
- 14 In the past
- 15 Toward the stern
- 16 Get away from
- 17 Crater's edge
- 18 Paint with dots
- 20 Bird of prey
- 22 Acquired
- 23 Laptop part
- 24 Former student, for short
- 26 Wash
- 28 Caviar
- 29 Kimono accessory
- 30 Like two peas in —
- 34 Thick porridge
- 36 Hair goo
- 37 Actor — Romano
- 38 Sharp
- 40 Be too fond
- 41 Takes hold of
- 44 Wrigley product
- 45 "See you —, alligator!"
- 46 Weary (2 wds.)
- 50 Can. neighbor
- 51 One of the Muses
- 53 PreCheck org.
- 54 Director — Brooks
- 55 Buenos —
- 56 Moray
- 57 Cunning
- 58 Weaving machines
- 59 Opposite of NNW

DOWN

- 1 "Woe is me!"
- 2 Upper room
- 3 Duds for GIs
- 4 Skilled
- 5 Pickle flavoring
- 6 Fever
- 7 Mire
- 8 Oration
- 9 Greater than average
- 10 Nimble
- 11 "Little —"
- 19 Small dog
- 21 Length times width
- 23 Subway entrance
- 24 Sleeve
- 25 "— Grant"
- 26 Fake
- 27 Aid and —
- 31 Elevates
- 32 Cheerios — Crunch
- 33 Tint
- 35 Light fog
- 39 Breakfast fare
- 40 Payable
- 41 Urban renewal targets
- 42 Canvas support
- 43 Tuscany setting
- 44 12 dozen
- 46 Poi base
- 47 Particular
- 48 Employs
- 49 "The Winter's —"
- 52 "Flying Down to —"



2-21

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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

Almanac

Today is the 52nd day of 2025 and the 63rd day of winter.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1842, John Greenough received the first U.S. patent for a sewing machine.

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published "The Communist Manifesto."

In 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City.

In 1972, Richard Nixon became the first U.S. president to visit China while in office.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Leo Delibes (1836-1891), composer; Anais Nin (1903-1977), author; John Rawls (1921-2002), philosopher; Sam Peckinpah (1925-1984), film director; Erma Bombeck (1927-1996), humorist; David Geffen (1943-), record producer/filmmaker; Alan Rickman (1946-2016), actor; William Petersen (1953-), actor; Kelsey Grammer (1955-), actor; Mary Chapin Carpenter (1958-), singer-songwriter; Chuck Palahniuk (1962-), author; David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), author; Mark and Scott Kelly (1964-), astronauts; Tituss Burgess (1979-), actor; Jordan Peele (1979-), actor/filmmaker; Elliot Page (1987-), actor; Sophie Turner (1996-), actress.

TODAY'S FACT: The first issue of The New Yorker was published on this day in 1925.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1948, race car driver Bill France and various members of the auto racing community formed the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR).

TODAY'S QUOTE: "The best comedy and horror feel like they take place in reality. You have a rule or two you are bending or heightening, but the world around it is real." -- Jordan Peele

TODAY'S NUMBER: 555 -- height (in feet) of the Washington Monument, dedicated on this day in 1885.

TODAY'S MOON: Between last quarter moon (Feb. 20) and new moon (Feb. 27).

Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful celebrates Georgia Arbor Day

Georgia Arbor Day is observed every year on the third Friday in February. Although National Arbor Day takes place in April, participation varies depending on climate and suitable planting conditions. Georgia Arbor Day is in February because it is the ideal time to plant trees in the state.

This year Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful will have two celebrations in observance of Georgia Arbor Day. On Feb. 20 the organization partnered with Alexander II Elementary School.

The third graders visited Tattnall Square Park for a "Walking With Trees" Tour with an Arborist. The students learned basic tree identification by understanding leaves found in the park. Using math, the students learned how to measure and compute a tree's critical root zone. They also learned about the importance of pruning and how angles are used in tree work for safety. Additionally, each student received a tree saplings, compliments of the Georgia Forestry Commission.

On Feb. 22, Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful is set to host a "Sip & Stroll" Georgia Arbor Day event at Wesleyan College's Arboretum from 2-4 p.m.

Middle Georgia Center for Academic Excellence, Westside High School to host mastery Prep SAT Bootcamp

The Middle Georgia Center for Academic Excellence, in collaboration with Westside High School, is proud to host the Mastery Prep SAT Bootcamp for 100 11th grade students in preparation for the March SAT. This intensive, full-day event will take place Feb. 25, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., at Westside High School.

The SAT Bootcamp is designed to equip students with key test-taking strategies, time management skills, and content mastery to maximize their performance on the digital SAT. Through this targeted program, students will receive expert

guidance, practice materials, and proven techniques to help improve their scores and enhance their college readiness.

"We are thrilled to offer this opportunity to our students," said Sheldon Hart, director of MGCAE pre-college programs. "The SAT is a critical step in the college admissions process, and we want to ensure our students have access to the best preparation available. This bootcamp is a game-changer in helping them reach their goals."

Middle Georgia State to offer University System's first degree in Applied Artificial Intelligence

The USG's Board of Regents approved the degree program Feb. 11. MGA will launch the degree this fall and base the program on the university's Warner Robins campus.

MGA expects an initial enrollment of 65 students with significant growth over the next few years.

"We are grateful for the confidence and support of the University System as we pioneer this AI degree program," said Alex Koohang, dean of MGA's School of Computing.

"Our degree will prepare students to thrive in an era where AI technology is transforming industries and societies globally. It was strategically designed to address Georgia's key economic sectors in agriculture, aerospace, logistics and others as they use AI more and more to optimize their operations and foster innovation."

MGA Provost David Jenks said the "first-of-its-kind undergraduate program" emphasizes hands-on, interdisciplinary learning and will prepare students for immediate workforce entry.

"This strategic degree directly aligns with the University System's broader objective to develop a robust pipeline of AI professionals," he said. "It's designed to ensure that graduates are equipped to progress within the system and contribute directly to Georgia's economic de-

velopment as we continue to be the best state to do business."

Applied AI is the practical use of artificial intelligence technologies to address real-world issues. It focuses on developing and using AI tools to improve industries such as healthcare, business, cybersecurity and more. Instead of only studying theories, MGA students will learn and develop ways to apply AI to make tasks smarter and more efficient.

Kevin Floyd, the MGA School of Computing's associate dean, said applied AI also supports Georgia's manufacturing, film and TV production and financial industries. In addition, Robins Air Force Base, a key economic driver in the region, relies on AI for logistics optimization, contracting, predictive analytics and advanced simulation technologies.

"By addressing the immediate and future demands of Georgia's economy, the applied AI program solidifies MGA's role as a leader in workforce development," Floyd said.

Graduates of the program could build careers in a variety of areas, including market research analysis, agri-tech data science, logistics, transportation planners and distribution managers, AI solutions architects, compliance managers and computer and information system managers, among many other roles.

Dr. Lisa Murphey Lundquist named Mercer University Senior Vice Provost

Mercer University's Lisa Murphey Lundquist, founding dean of the College of Health Professions, has been named senior vice provost effective immediately, Executive Vice President Penny Elkins recently announced.

In this new role, Lundquist will lead new academic program initiatives and innovations, partner with the College of Pharmacy to enhance strategies for success and will continue leading the College of Health

Professions.

"Dr. Lundquist is a proven leader who brings exceptional credentials to her new role," Elkins said. "She has demonstrated outstanding leadership and organizational skills that will serve her well as senior vice provost. I am confident that she will provide the leadership needed to sustain excellence and achieve goals in the Colleges of Pharmacy and Health Professions."

Lundquist has served as dean of the College of Health Professions since it became operational on July 1, 2013, and oversees graduate programs in physical therapy, physician assistant studies, public health, clinical psychology and athletic training, and undergraduate programs in public health and kinesiology with a presence on both the Macon and Atlanta campuses. She joined the College of Pharmacy faculty in 2006 and has served in a variety of roles, including assistant dean for administration, associate dean, interim chair and program director of the Department of Physician Assistant Studies, and chair of the planning committee for the College of Health Professions. Dr. Lundquist also holds the rank of professor.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch

FRIDAY

February 21, 2025

All times Eastern. Start times can vary based on cable/satellite provider. Confirm times on your on-screen guide.

NBA Basketball

ESPN, beginning at 7 p.m. Live

Catch the N.Y. Knicks at the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Minnesota Timberwolves at the Houston Rockets for ESPN's Friday night NBA twin bill.

College Basketball

ESPN2, FOX & FS1, beginning at 7 p.m. Live

Friday night's featured college hoops matchups are Marquette at Villanova (FS1), Dayton at Loyola Chicago (ESPN2) and a Big Ten rivalry game with Michigan State at Michigan (FOX).

NCIS: Sydney

CBS, 8 p.m.

In the new episode "Back in the USSR," a human body is discovered buried in concrete, and the team identifies the remains as a U.S. Navy engineer who went missing in 1985.

Happy's Place

NBC, 8 p.m.

In the new episode "Sisters Ink," when Isabella (Belissa Escobedo) gifts Bobbie (Reba McEntire) matching sister mugs, Bobbie is forced to quickly think of an equally thoughtful gift, which results in Isabella expecting the sisters to get matching tattoos. Meanwhile, Steve (Pablo Castelblanco) and Takoda (Tokala Black Elk) investigate where Emmett (Rex Linn) has been sneaking off to. A repeat episode follows.

Fire Country

CBS, 9 p.m.

While on a risk-assessment trip to Trinity



'The Couple Next Door'

STARZ! MOVIE CHANNEL / EVERETT COLLECTION

National Forest, Bode and Jake (Max Thieriot and Jordan Calloway) attempt a daring rescue despite avalanche danger in the new episode "I'm the One Who Just Goes Away."

Fur Babies

Nat Geo Wild, 9 p.m. ■ New Series

Follow veterinarians Dr. James Greenwood

CATCH A CLASSIC

31 Days of Oscar 2025: Best Costume Winners and Nominees/Oscar-Worthy Comic Relief

TCM, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

Today's 31 Days of Oscar daytime lineup features films that were nominated for or won Academy Awards for their costume design: *Gate of Hell* (1954; winner), *Les Girls* (1957; winner), *Adventures of Don Juan* (1948; winner), *The Night of the Iguana* (1964; winner), *Indiscretion of an American Wife* (1954; nominee) and *8 1/2* (1963; winner). The evening theme is "Oscar-Worthy Comic Relief," featuring *The Circus* (1928; an honorary award to Charles Chaplin for writing, directing, producing and starring), *Born Yesterday*

and Dr. Bolu Eso as they provide support to people during their pets' pregnancies and the arrival of the newborns. The docuseries uses the latest medical technology to show how the pregnancy is proceeding and a special camera rig to capture the crucial moments. Two hourlong episodes air tonight. First, emotions soar when families welcome new puppies, kittens and guinea pigs. Then, families learn that things do not always go as expected in pet pregnancies.

American Masters

PBS, 9 p.m.

In "The Disappearance of Miss Scott," jazz virtuoso Hazel Scott gets caught up in the Red Scare of the 1950s.

The Couple Next Door

Starz, 9 p.m. ■ Season Finale

This dark psychological thriller about the obsession, jealousy and intrigue that arises between a couple and their new neighbors wraps up its first season. Sam Heughan, Eleanor Tomlinson, Alfred Enoch and Jessica De Gouw star.



TURNER ENTERTAINMENT CO.

(1950; Best Actress winner Judy Holliday), *Some Like It Hot* (1959; Best Actor nominee Jack Lemmon), *My Favorite Year* (1982; Best Actor nominee Peter O'Toole) and *Ninotchka* (1939; Best Actress nominee Greta Garbo).

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



BARRY WETCHER

Life (1999, Comedy-drama) Eddie Murphy, Martin Lawrence **BET, 6 p.m.**

The Great Outdoors (1988, Comedy) Dan Aykroyd, John Candy **IFC, 6 p.m.**

The Matrix (1999, Science fiction) Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne **Bravo, 7 p.m.**

The Mummy (2017, Action) Tom Cruise, Russell Crowe **SYFY, 7 p.m.**

22 Jump Street (2014, Comedy) Jonah Hill, Channing Tatum **VH1, 8 p.m.**

Captain America: Civil War (2016, Action) Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr. **FX, 8 p.m.**

Cast Away (2000, Drama) Tom Hanks, Helen Hunt **AMC, 8 p.m.**

Creed II (2018, Drama) Michael B. Jordan, Sylvester Stallone **TBS, 8 p.m.**

The Wrong Obsession (2025, Suspense) Vivica A. Fox, Gina Hiraizumi **LMN, 8 p.m.**

Crooklyn (1994, Drama) Alfre Woodard, Delroy Lindo **BET, 9 p.m.**

Straight Outta Compton (2015, Biography) O'Shea Jackson Jr., Corey Hawkins **TNT, 10 p.m.**

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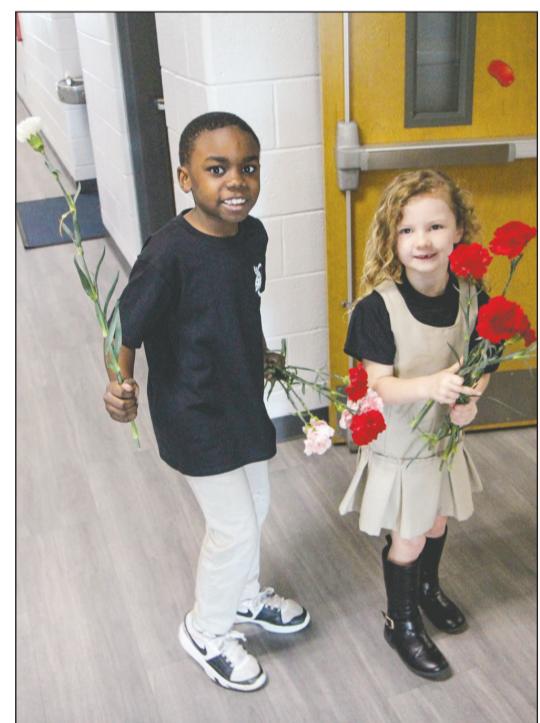
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People

Friday, Feb. 21, 2025

B6



Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody, Leah Yetter, Bibb County Schools, Historic Macon and Macon-Bibb County

Top row from left: Wesleyan students perform STUNT cheers during lunch Wednesday in the dining room to promote the event scheduled for Feb. 22 at 7:00 p.m. This year marks the 130th year of the event, a student-led performance where each class competes for the STUNT Cup. | Harper Slaton of Byron receives a high-five to director of programming Andrea Lee during a pickleball youth clinic Monday at Rhythm and Rally. | **Second row:** Mercer University's Engineering Honors Program and Tift School of Education hosted a Go Baby Go build event Saturday at the University Center. Mercer freshman and senior engineering students modified battery-powered toy cars for children with limited mobility. **Third row from left:** Matilda Hartley Elementary School hosted a Black History Month celebration Feb. 13. The event included student performances and recognitions of notable figures in American history. | Skyview Elementary celebrated the "Love of Learning" with a Valentine's Day-themed Leader in Me Leadership Day. The day included student performances, classroom tours, club showcases and flowers for teachers from the Student Lighthouse Team. **Bottom row from left:** The Macon-Bibb County Recreation Department hosted a "Sweet Heart MIXER" Sunday at the Randy Stephens Tennis Center. | Historic Macon Foundation welcomed over 300 members to their 2025 Patrons Party Feb. 13 at SoPop Studios.

To submit photos to the People page, email them to photos@maconmelody.com

