

The Macon Melody

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Brandon Harrell cuts a customer's hair at Harrell's & Son's barber shop. His grandfather James Harrell started the family business in 1965, and Brandon hopes to pass the tradition on to the next generation. The shop calls the Greenwood Bottom neighborhood home.

Greenwood Bottom family barber keeps history alive

Evelyn Davidson
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The painted faces of James Harrell and his wife, Nellie, look out at cars zipping by on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The mural, which spans one side of the building, was painted to commemorate the family that opened the barber shop in 1965.

The mural also depicts Macon legends Otis Redding, Little Richard and James Brown. The three musical icons frequented the Greenwood Bottom neighborhood, which was once the heart of a thriving Black community.

Inside Harrell's & Son's, Brandon Harrell cuts hair in the same shop where his grandfather did 60 years earlier.

The barber shop has cemented its place in Macon history. Little Richard performed at the nearby historic Roxy Theatre, and James Brown was rumored to have visited Harrell's & Son's.

Since then, many folks have forgotten about Greenwood Bottom, Harrell said. A once lively community of Black businesses and entertainment gave way to deteriorating roads and empty storefronts.

"We're the last thriving business (in Greenwood Bottom) since the '60s that's still up and going," he said.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The mural on the side of the barber shop depicts the shop's founders, James and Nellie Harrell, along with music legends Otis Redding, Little Richard and James Brown. These Macon icons frequented the Greenwood Bottom neighborhood when it was a thriving Black community.

His uncles ran the barber shop before he and his cousin, Daude, took over the business. They now have a second location on Pio Nono Avenue.

Harrell, who grew up in Atlanta then moved to Macon in 2004, said his family's shop is a community staple.

Although he was only 5 years old when his grandfather James passed away, he left behind a legacy of family, community and love — words which are now painted along the shop's walls.

See BARBER, Page A2

Bibb Schools plan safety improvements

Casey Choung
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State lawmakers are moving to increase school safety spending, which could bring tens of thousands of dollars to Bibb County Schools for upgraded security equipment.

At the school board's monthly meeting, members voted unanimously to buy new badges and "teacher boxes" for 1,700

classrooms. The boxes allow classrooms to stream live audio and video camera feeds directly to the main office.

The upgrades introduce safety features to the boxes, which are already used for instructional purposes, Superintendent Dan Sims said.

The purchase was made ahead of "pending state legislation," according to the

See SCHOOLS, Page A3

MDS students commit to MIT, Williams College

Casey Choung
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Two Mount De Sales students were accepted into prestigious colleges in Massachusetts following their participation in pre-college programs, rigorous studies and extracurriculars.

Evan Lin is headed to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study computer science, an interest cultivated through AP computer science and his Minercraft server development experience.

Julia Byron will attend Williams College where she will major in English and geoscience. She hopes to one day become a science journalist.

Lin is a first-generation college student and Bibb's STAR Student, obtaining one of the highest SAT scores in the entire county and one of the highest GPAs

See MDS, Page A2



Evan Lin



Julia Byron

Periodical — Mail Label

'Xylopotamus' has never stopped playing

Ed Grisamore
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PERRY — He can't be certain, but Jason Fuchs believes he once spotted a Xylopotamus when he was flipping through a Dr. Seuss book.

The animal he created was fighting for space on a crowded page with assorted Seuss characters.

"I swore I saw this long-necked

thing with a drum major hat in the crowd," he said. "If it was, it would make me feel great ... even if he (Seuss) just threw it in there and said, 'Let me put this kid's thing in the book. I can't write a story about it, but we'll put it in there and see if he ever notices.'"

Fuchs was born in 1972, the year after his favorite Dr. Seuss book, "The Lorax," was published. He graduated from Warner Robins High School in 1991, the year

Theodor Seuss Geisel died.

He has been a teacher at Perry Middle School for 28 years. He teaches life science and social studies, so there aren't abundant opportunities in his lesson plans to share the story of his childhood brush with fame.

But, earlier this week, Fuch brought a red three-ring binder from home and placed it on the corner of his classroom desk. It is the official scrapbook of when he was in the

fifth grade, only a few years younger than his students are now.

There are photographs, newspaper clippings and the original "Xylopotamus" character he drew for a contest in the spring of 1984. (There is also one replicated by his daughter, Addison, when she was 7. She is now a senior at Perry High School.)

Perhaps the most treasured page in

See SEUSS, Page A2



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Seuss, from A1:

the binder is a personal note from Dr. Seuss, announcing Fuchs as the winner.

If everyone has their proverbial 15 minutes of fame, he is convinced this was his.

"No one else can say they got a letter and a proclamation from Dr. Seuss," he said. "It's the one thing in my life I've done that no one else has."

That fame, however fleeting, still rears its head like a giraffe-necked Xylopotamus at this time every year. The beloved children's author and illustrator was born March 2, 1904. So Sunday is celebrated as Dr. Seuss Day and the beginning of National Read Across America Week, an annual event fostered by the National Education Association to promote reading by students, teachers, parents and community volunteers.

In May 1984, Fuchs was a fifth grader at Clough Elementary School in Rome, New York, where his father was stationed at Griffiss Air Force Base.

The following year — 40 years ago on the calendar — the family was transferred to Warner Robins.

But not before his Seuss-inspired character gave him the ride of his young life.

To borrow a line from the Doctor — Oh, the places you'll go.

As a reading assignment, students were instructed to find animals in Dr. Seuss books that started with every letter of the alphabet. The research turned up with something for every letter — except "X."

A faculty member wrote to Seuss through his publicist to inquire why the letter was "X-cluded."

Much to the delight of the students and teachers, Seuss wrote back and apologized for the "X-asperating" oversight.

Seizing on a teaching moment, the youngsters were encouraged to create a cast of "X" characters.

"I wasn't an artist, but I

had always been able to draw a little bit," Fuchs said. "It was something neat to do. An idea popped into my head and, when it comes easy, you just go ahead and do it."

He took his box of crayons and gave birth to a hippopotamus with a xylophone on its back. The "Xylopotamus" donned a red drum major's hat and played the xylophone with its tail. It had a long neck, like a giraffe, so it could turn its head to watch its own musical performance.

Fuchs said he was inspired after learning to play the trumpet in the school band that year.

Of the 100 entries, his was chosen as one of the 11 finalists. Seuss graciously agreed to judge the final round, informing the school that he had appointed the "Cat in the Hat" to be the official judge. Because of his busy schedule, his publicist was surprised the children's author consented to participate.

"A letter was sent to the school, and I didn't know I had won until they called me to the office," Fuchs said.

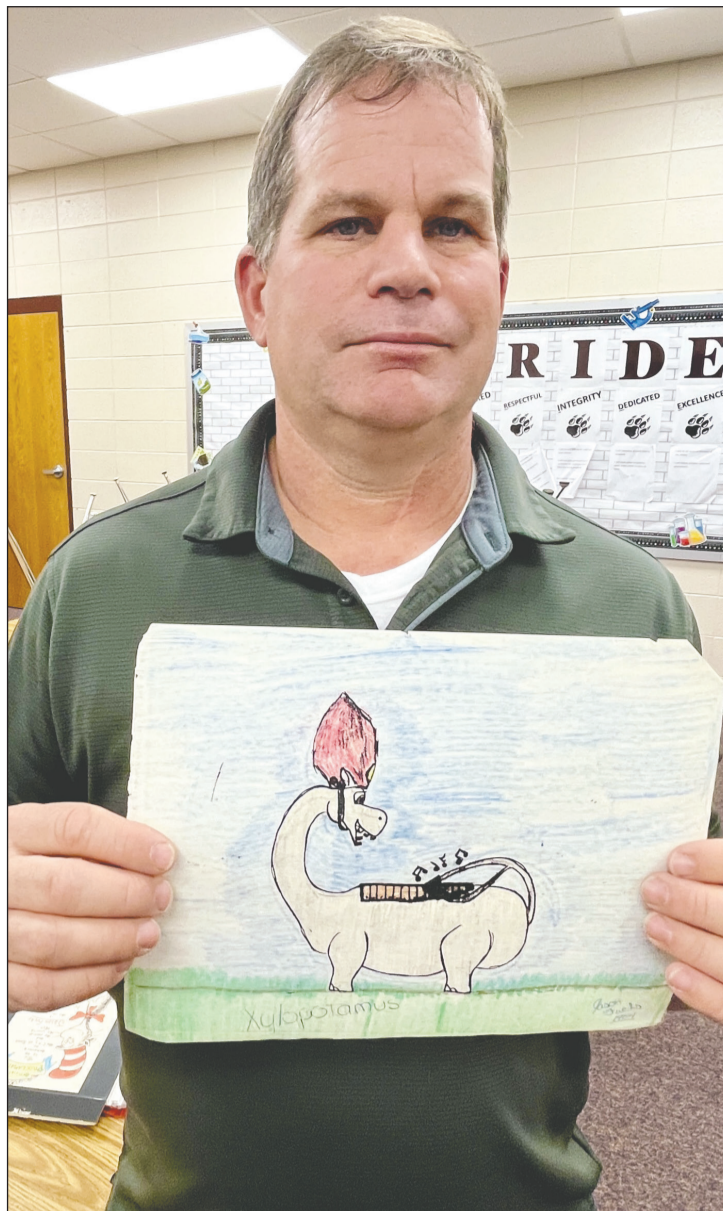
It was an "official proclamation" by Seuss, free-handed in ink and crayon with a drawing of the "Cat in the Hat."

"This is to announce to the City of Rome and the rest of the world that Jason Fuchs is the winner of the Animal X-ing Contest with his most amazing Xylopotamus. Signed, The Cat in the Hat and Dr. Seuss."

There was a separate congratulatory letter, commending the students for their "X-traordinary hunt for the X-traordinary X-ample of Dr. Xeuxx fauna."

Both Fuchs and the school were the beneficiaries of a measure of notoriety. Stories were written in local and state newspapers. The Syracuse Post-Standard cleverly reported the story in the form of a Dr. Seuss rhyme.

His last name, Fuchs, is pronounced "Fox," so it is not lost on him that "Fox in Socks" is the title of a Dr. Seuss book. He has been a foxhole of his own, of sorts,



Ed Grisamore / The Melody
Jason Fuchs shows off his original Xylopotamus he created in fifth grade.

spending a year in Afghanistan in 2002-03 with the Army Reserve special forces.

He said "The Lorax" is his favorite Seuss book not only because he is a science teacher but because of its message about ecology and the importance of being good stewards of the earth. He went with his family to see the movie when it opened in the theatres on the March 2 birthday of Dr. Seuss in 2012.

"We should be protecting our world for our kids," he said. "If we mess it up now, they're not going to have what we had."

Over the years, Fuchs has joyfully shared the memory with his wife, Beth, and children, Spencer and Addison. He has had parents of some of his students bring him the Seuss book, "Oh, the Places

You'll Go," and ask him to write a note in it to their children.

He doesn't bring it up at dinner parties or think about it every day, but it's a nice memory.

"It does mean more to me now, especially having something he created in his own writing and autograph," he said.

And, even if he was wrong about spotting his creation on that busy page of zany Seuss characters, no one can take away the conversation piece he has held onto for more than 40 years.

The Xylopotamus has never stopped playing.

Bike Walk Macon celebrates 10 years with Macon-themed rides and walks

Casey Choung
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The Streets for All Fest next weekend features a series of walks and bike rides all around Macon, emphasizing the importance of the city's progress toward being more pedestrian friendly.

The festival, which spans from March 6-8, marks the 10th anniversary of Bike Walk Macon, the city's first pedestrian and bicycle advocacy group. The nonprofit runs bike rides across the city year-round.

Rachel Umana, executive director for Bike Walk Macon, said the event is not only a fundraiser but a way to get people involved in conversations about the bikeability and walkability of Macon.

The festival's eight events are a "mix of fun and entertaining" but also "informational rides," she said, including a tour of Macon's women-led public space improvements, a look at downtown's street art and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail.

Some of the tours cost \$20, but the historic Vineville Pet Parade and the Decades Ride are free. The organizers are also offering a \$75 pass to all paid events.

The festival will be capped off with a party at Cotton Avenue Square on Saturday at 5 p.m. Tickets

to the events may be purchased at bikewalkmacon.com.

"We're hoping that by having this event that it brings people together," Umana said. "We can demonstrate that there is a culture of biking and walking here, there's an interest, and we can continue to push for improvements."

One of the bike tours, led by Macon-Bibb County Traffic Safety Manager Weston Stroud, will take riders through East Macon and highlight areas where a federal grant will pay to build miles of sidewalks and trails.

Part of Bike Walk Macon's mission is to encourage improvements to roads and public spaces which increase accessibility to transportation, create public health benefits and make getting around more affordable, Umana said.

Gray Highway, one of the roads receiving sidewalks as part of the federal grant, has seen its fair share of safety improvements. Umana said the grant is a "huge win," and an unprecedented investment in pedestrian safety in Macon.

"I am hoping to change the image of what a pedestrian looks like. Investing in biking doesn't mean investing in one type of bicyclist, one type of pedestrian," she said. "We have people interested in this from all across Macon, they all look different, they all have different interests."

Barber, A1:

Harrell didn't expect to fall in love with the art of barbering but now works to honor his grandfather's legacy and one day pass the torch to a new generation of barbers, like his 16-year-old son.

"This is a barber shop where you can bring your whole family," he said. "We operate out of love."

Authenticity and trust, Harrell said, are what has kept the business alive for so long. The key is to "embrace the people."

"You gotta see yourself in everyone," he said. "I think if we all do that, the world would be a whole lot easier."

The barbers who work at

the shop are part of the family, too. Most were friends or family members before joining Harrell's & Son's.

Gilly has worked with Harrell since he was 18 or 19 years old and is now in his 30s.

"To keep it going, you gotta stay dedicated to what you do," Gilly said, reflecting on the barber shop's longevity.

The Harrell family has cut generations of hair.

"What greater joy for you to say, 'Hey, I want you to cut my son's hair, and then, it keeps going, going and going,'" Harrell said. "I think it's pretty cool for a generation of family to entrust in your services for that long."

His grandfather, James, once said everything he did was for his children's

children. Harrell hopes to keep the barbering tradition alive and see an era of revitalization for Greenwood Bottom.

"We have to create our own momentum to make things happen," he said. He now owns seven storefronts in the area for rent. "Truthfully, all the noise has really been made by just us."

MLK Jr. Boulevard needs infrastructural changes like more lights and speed bumps, he noted, but the challenge is finding community partners willing to invest in bringing back Greenwood Bottom's rich history.

"I want to see people walking around," Harrell said. "I want to see a thriving community."



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The inside of Harrell's & Son's barber shop off of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The shop originally opened in 1965.

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Mercer SGA questioned over university DEI stance



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mercer University is following suit with other colleges and universities across the United States after executive orders filed by President Donald Trump targeted DEI policies.

Gabriel Kopp The Mercer Cluster

The Mercer University Student Government Association fielded questions last week about the school's stance on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), according to multiple people at the meeting.

Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students Douglas Pearson started the meeting by saying he was "not here to speak on behalf of the university on this topic."

"I'm not an expert on this topic and I'm not the president of the university," he said, referring to the discussion on DEI.

Pearson added that Mercer is working to meet guidelines sent in a Feb. 14 "Dear Colleague" letter from Craig Trainor, the acting assistant secretary for civil rights at the United States Department of Education. In the letter, Trainor gave universities two weeks to scrub any remnant of "overt and covert racial discrimination that has become widespread in this Nation's educational institutions" from their websites and enrollment processes, and threatened to cut federal funding to those colleges that do not comply.

In order to protect the university from losing federal funding, Pearson said that Mercer would move away from "promoting any programs that could possibly jeopardize that funding" but that the guidance from the Education Department would not change the values of the university.

"We continue to value the worth of every individual, we continue to advocate for the study of truth and understanding," Pearson said before directing questions to SGA President Dalton Loyd, who answered the majority of questions at the meeting.

It was the first time since last April that the SGA had

to field questions from the gallery about the university's actions, and one of the students who spoke Monday was among those who were most vocal in April. Sky Grzybowski started with acknowledging that they had been detained in the days before the April SGA meeting, which led to their being "fired up" about talking to SGA.

Grzybowski opened by asking the senators when they knew that mentions of the university's DEI and anti-racism policies were deleted from Mercer's website.

Loyd said that the university still has an anti-discrimination policy listed on its website, but when he was told that the university's anti-racism policy had been removed, he spoke out against that decision. "I think all of us understand the concern and gravity of the situation if an anti-racism statement has been taken down within the last two months," Loyd said.

In a copy of the Mercer University Student Handbook previously revised June 20, 2023, the definition of harassment includes "communication of threats, use of profanity, verbal assaults, derogatory comments, racist remarks or behavior." The handbook, most recently revised Feb. 7, however, does not include the term "racist." The recent edition's definition of harassment includes "communication of threats, use of profanity, verbal assaults, derogatory comments, or behavior."

"That's something that's been very much worrying a lot of the students I have been able to chat with," Grzybowski said. "There is a lot of panic going around at the moment about how dark this process has been. A lot of us only now learned about this during the civil rights and LBGTQ town hall that was held a week ago."

The Human Rights Cam-

paign of Georgia and Mercer's Common Ground organization hosted a town hall in Toney Auditorium on Feb. 12 where students could speak to Mercer professors about legislation impacting the LGBTQ community, according to a flyer circulated for the event.

Over the summer, Mercer's Office of Diversity and Inclusion merged with the existing Title IX office to create the Office of Equity and Compliance, Loyd said. He added that he could "see that concern" about the lack of communication between students and the administration as it pertains to the Office of Diversity of Inclusion's closing.

When communication between the administration and the student body came up, Pearson addressed the gallery to say that President Bill Underwood often listens to student voices and "meets regularly with your student leaders here," and suggested that students address Underwood directly when they have questions. Loyd said that the request for more open communication lines is one that "all 33 of us on SGA have made and that we as students desire."

Loyd asked that students remain engaged with their civil duty to school and federal governments to fight misinformation and the rumor mill.

Late in the meeting, Sen. Sreeja Pandiri summed up different services on campus which students can use utilize that could give them an opportunity to voice their concerns or push for change on campus.

"The least we can do is listen," said Pandiri, who chairs SGA's campus safety and improvements committee.

Gabriel Kopp is co-editor-in-chief of The Cluster, Mercer University's student newspaper. Contact him at editor@mercercluster.com.

"The rigor could be a little intimidating, but I think it's going to be challenging in a really good way," Byron said.

High school students are starting the college application process earlier, MDS college counselor Kari Alderman said, and qualifying for the state's HOPE scholarship is more competitive than ever.

Alderman said MDS worked to optimize its curriculum to maximize the opportunities available to its students and consulted with families through the admissions process to ensure they find a good fit.

The private school brings in about 40-50 college representatives every year and has built a "level of trust" with universities, Alderman said.

"In their discussions, it's really about what works well for that student," said MDS Principal Emily Brown. "That's where building on 9th through 10th grade, all the work that they've done, all the introspective work they've done together, can really, really be helpful."

As Lin and Byron prepare to leave MDS, both students take with them a greater appreciation for the connections they've made and excitement for the ones they will make.

Lin said the teachers and staff at MDS have helped pull him out of his shell. Byron said her 10th grade English teacher, Michael Muth, pushed her to look within herself and learn more about her own aspirations.

"I remember that kind of being the first time where I made a really good connection with a teacher who saw the things that I was wanting to pursue and go towards," she said.

Schools, A1:

proposal. House Speaker Ron Burns, R-Newington, presented a school-safety package at the state Capitol earlier this month.

Gov. Brian Kemp has already requested an additional \$50 million this year to bolster the state's school safety grants.

The proposal comes after the shooting at Apalachee High School last fall in Winder that left two teachers and two students dead.

"Any time a school shooting happens, it hits close to home," Sims said. "Then to have one that's geographically close to home, it's just heightened our awareness of ... the need to ensure we have strong safety protocols."

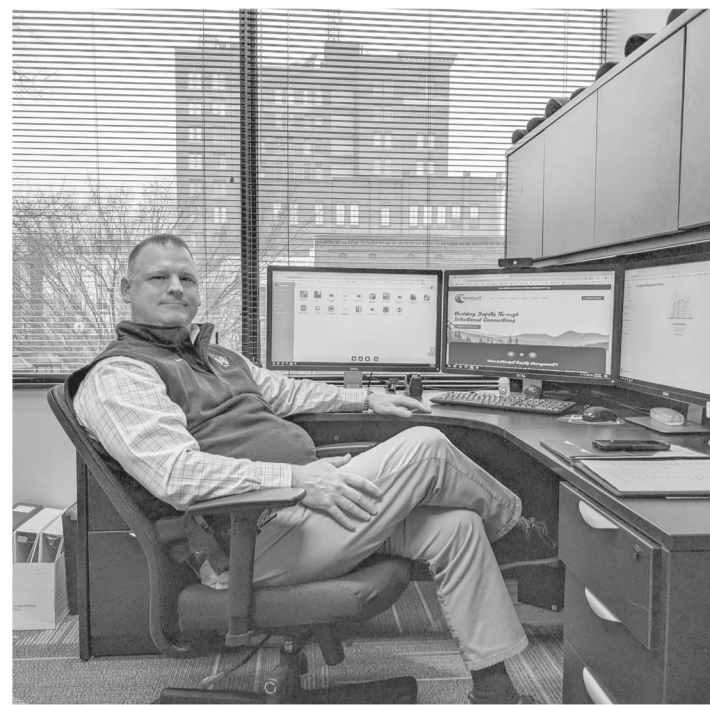
Sims added that the proposed legislation, which has yet to pass, reflects how state lawmakers are taking safety "seriously" and seeing the need for proper funding.

The Bibb County School District already receives funding through the Safe Schools Act, which was passed in 2023 and requires schools to send safety plans to Georgia Emergency Management Agency and Homeland Security.

Safety funds from the state would help "increase the efficiency" of the morning entrance system, which schools seem to have gotten the hang of, Sims said.

Matthew Giegler, Bibb County Schools safety and security manager, said new funding from the state would go toward "augmenting" the school's collection of metal detectors.

The school board approved a \$1.3 million purchase of metal detectors in December 2023, and Giegler said all schools have metal detectors at all their points of entry. There are three per high school and two per middle and elementary school — schools are able to request more



Casey Choung / The Melody

Matthew Giegler, Bibb County Schools' safety and security manager, at his desk. Giegler primary work involves keeping up with the latest safety technology for Bibb County public schools.

if need be.

Giegler has worked a number of security roles for school district over the past 20 years. In his current role, he focuses most of his energy on modernizing security measures and keeping them up to date.

He said funding from the state is needed to "get up to speed" with all the new technology and take on some of the more "high cost initiatives."

Giegler said Bibb County Schools have never experienced a mass shooting.

"We've found guns and we've found weapons, and we've thwarted some things," he said. "A lot of that was due to the security measures we had in place."

In addition to the metal detectors, the district uses

camera systems, safety vestibules and check-in stations to control who is entering school buildings.

"I would be shocked to go into any school system, big or small, here in Georgia, and not find some of the same things Bibb County is doing," Giegler said.

State lawmakers have also presented a proposal that would develop a system for sharing data between schools, an anonymous app for reporting threats to law enforcement and an incentive program for firearm safety devices.

Bibb County Schools already gets information on students who are transferring into the county, and all offices are involved with the threat assessment process.

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MDS, from A1:

at MDS. He's managed to keep his grades high while putting in full weeks at his family's restaurant, Chen's Wok.

He said he first thought about going to MIT because of his brother's obsession with the university. Those thoughts started to become reality when he took an online STEM camp run by MIT in the summer and later toured the university.

"The people, they really connected with me," Lin said. "The students, they were very honest. They were very humble, despite all of their talents, and that really captivated me."

Byron has more of an interest in the arts, seen through her involvement in theatre and mock trial. She got nominated for the Governor's Honors Program for visual arts, which led her to a summer program with college-level classes alongside fellow nominees.

She sent in an art portfolio to Williams, which she said may have "sealed the deal" for her admission.

"I think that especially my involvement in the arts steered all my decisions on where I wanted to go," she said. "I wanted to go somewhere with a lively arts community."

Byron's first visit to Williams was on a very snowy Massachusetts day, a stark contrast to her upbringing in Macon, but she fell in love with the school nonetheless.

She said she's excited to "just get to learning" and "branch out" by taking new classes, following Williams College's emphasis on well-rounded scholarship.

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Opinion

Bo Jackson's Cotton Bowl loss, reporting on your personal folk heroes and Buck Wilson

Sometimes, books just seem to leap out at me.

I'm a habitual buyer of books. I read a bunch of them too, but it would take me a very long time to run out of new things to read. Occasionally, I'll purchase a book and it'll sit on a shelf for years before I open it. Then there are the ones I have to crack open as soon as I get home. Or before I get home, at a coffee shop or a park or a stoplight.

I don't know exactly what prompts me to disrupt the carefully constructed order of my "to be read" list. I do know reading for me, first and foremost, is a tactile experience. The weight of the book, the feel of the cover (paperback, always), the texture of the pages.

Jeff Pearlman's "The Last Folk Hero: The Life and Myth of Bo Jackson" is one such book. It found its way into my hands after I found my way into a Macon bookstore last weekend (no idea how I got there). And it wormed its way to the top of my list, casually relegating NK Jemisin's "The Fifth Season" to back-up "currently reading" status.

I'm only about halfway through it, but Pearlman is a great storyteller. And he has a great story to tell. Bo



Caleb Slinkard

Jackson is enigmatic. He is, as Pearlman argues (building on a comment from journalist Joe Posnanski, whose book "The Baseball 100" I also devoured) the last athlete to rise to prominence before ESPN and smart phones and streaming services turned "you're not going to believe this" and "you had to be there" into well... you do believe it, because you just saw the replay.

I didn't watch Bo Jackson play football or baseball, but he was firmly entrenched in '90s pop culture — bowling over defenders in the video game Tecmo Bowl, reminding kids to drink milk as part of the "Grow with Bo" campaign. The image that sticks out to me the most is from the "Bo Knows" Nike ad campaign. Jackson poses in shoulder pads, a bat across his shoulders, all muscles and intensity. Who could be cooler than a guy who runs past Bruce Smith and throws out Harold Reynolds at home plate?

The most personal piece of Bo Jackson mythology, though, is a round, maroon Christmas ornament that still makes its way onto my parents' Christmas tree. My folks met at Texas A&M in the 1980s, and the ornament celebrates the Aggies' 36-

16 Cotton Bowl victory over Jackson (fresh off of a Heisman Trophy victory) and his Auburn Tigers on Jan. 1, 1986. My dad still talks about the day his Aggies defeated Bo by 20 points with pride.

If you talk with a veteran sports reporter, particularly one who covers high school sports, they'll tell you about their own folk heroes. Athletes who stuck out from the seemingly endless parade of Friday night football games in poorly lit stadiums and basketball matches in humid field houses. Kids who had "it," something special, something that made sportswriters and coaches and other players sit up and pay attention. Those kinds of athletes are rare. When you get to write about them, you remember it.

Decades later, you tell other sportswriters and parents and heck anyone who will listen about the track star who turned into an NFL wide receiver or the softball player who led her team to a College World Series title. The greatest ones, it seems, never actually make it big. They struggle with injuries or family situations or the general unfairness of life.

Former Norman Transcript sports editor Clay Horning has the requisite list on hand, off the

"If you talk with a veteran sports reporter, particularly one of high school sports, they'll tell you about their own folk heroes. Athletes who stuck out from the seemingly endless parade of Friday night football games in poorly lit and basketball games in humid field houses."

top of his head: Marcus Dickinson, a Norman North High basketball star who played at Boise State ("the best high school player I think North's ever had," Horning writes, and Trae Young played for North); soccer player Mauro Cichero; Norman High running back Donovan Roberts who committed to Arkansas but couldn't make it at the college level; Woodward High's Chad Mead, a football and baseball star who threw for OU one season but couldn't stick.

I was never a full-time sports reporter, but I covered my fair share of high school, college and professional games. I can remember several athletes who had "it" — I saw Tyrone Swoopes bulldoze competitors for Whitewright (Texas) High School; I watched linebacker Danny Mason lead Division II in tackles per game for East Texas A&M; I covered Kyler Murray playing outfield for the University of Oklahoma (Murray looked good, but the best player that day was Steele Walker, who spent six seasons in the minors but could never break through).

But the high school athlete I was the most impressed with? That would be Commerce (Texas) High School's Buck Wilson. Wilson was a stud wide receiver, he played baseball, he was a track star. He was fast... so fast. When he jumped, you'd think he was about to fly. He even carried himself like a future star: a casual stride, confident but not cocky.

Wilson attended East Texas A&M in his hometown and had a fantastic career, graduating as the Lions' all-time leader in kick return yards while scoring 20 touchdowns and helping the Lions win the 2017 Division II championship. Buck Wilson isn't returning kicks Sunday afternoons for the Cowboys, but I think he could have.

Don't believe me? You had to be there.

Caleb Slinkard is the managing editor of The Macon Melody. Email him at caleb@maconmelody.com.



Georgia Legislature looks to move on from dated price controls

The very day that the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic, I told my girlfriend at the time (now my wife) to grab her cat and move in with me. We didn't know how bad the virus might be and despite being incredibly allergic to her mostly deaf, one-toothed, geriatric cat who liked to howl into the night, we were determined to get through the pandemic together.

We did, and we thrived. However, we had to find a way to consolidate our household furnishings, which still makes my wife grimace. I have long had a motley collection of furniture, but bachelors aren't exactly known for their fashion sense. I was no different. Nevertheless, to get her possessions to my house, she hired professional movers. The results were disappointing and expose a patently backward and indefensible law.

As the movers arrived, they struggled with my wife's large couch. They simply couldn't figure out how to get it through a narrow doorway. So they kept banging it into the door—leaving it dented. Once they squeezed it through, they trashed the ceiling and scraped up the wall. If that wasn't enough, they broke some of her dishes and kindly hid them behind her abused couch.

This wasn't my only run-in with terrible movers. Another time, one broke an armoire and tried to conceal it. In a different move, movers bashed a hole in a wall and simply said "that's easy to fix" before fleeing the scene. I probably sound like sour grapes, and you may be wondering why I don't just pay more for quality professionals. Well, according to Georgia law, you can't exactly do that.

Years ago, the Georgia General Assembly passed a measure empowering the Georgia Department of Public Safety Commissioner with regulating professional movers. By movers, I mean exactly what you think: a couple guys in a truck who transport your personal furniture across town. More specifically, the law states, "The commissioner shall prescribe just and reasonable rates, fares, and charges for transportation by motor carriers of household goods."

Why the government felt compelled to get involved in the moving business is beyond me. There is no market failure requiring the government's intervention, and no public safety issue to my knowledge demands price caps. It's almost as if officials believed that they had solved every problem in Georgia and decided to then tackle professional moving, but the problems with this approach are obvious to just about anyone who has studied price controls. And that's what the Pub-



Marc Hyden

lic Safety Commissioner is tasked with doing—establishing price controls by setting the maximum permissible rate for movers—in the same manner that the Soviet Union used to regulate prices.

I don't know what expertise the Public Safety Commissioner has in the moving industry, nor why the government believes it is in a good

position to determine "just and reasonable" rates. What's more, how is the commissioner able to account for inflation and fluctuations in gas prices on a real-time dynamic basis? He isn't. How about accounting for scarcity and increased quality? He doesn't. This is the kind of top-down, one-size-fits-all approach that never works well.

"Typically, no entity is well informed enough to be able to exactly identify the imperfection, choose the correct price to rectify the situation and then provide ongoing adjustment and enforcement," writes the Cato Institute. Rather, market forces—like supply and demand and negotiations between consumers and movers—could settle on what is truly just and reasonable. That's not the case in Georgia, and there are many other problems with price controls.

"Many researchers have found that price controls reduce entry and investment in the long run," according to the Cato Institute. "The controls can also reduce quality, create black markets and stimulate costly rationing." In the case of movers, price controls may limit the ability to hire more seasoned and quality professionals, and it severely limits consumers' options. After all of the terrible experiences I have endured, it would be wonderful to have the option to pay more for movers who don't break your furniture or damage your house.

Nobody likes moving, and I am sure that there are many more moves in my future. Whether they are seamless moves led by quality professionals or incompetent individuals who destroy my property may be up to the legislature. Lawmakers have been debating House Bill 204, which would make movers no longer subject to Soviet-styled price controls, and that is something I can get behind. We should let market forces—not bureaucrats—dictate prices and then enjoy the benefits.

Marc Hyden is the director of state government affairs at the R Street Institute. You can follow him on X at [@marc_hyden](https://twitter.com/marc_hyden).

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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A doctor who still makes house calls: once again watching 'Seussical the Musical'

I fixed our grandchildren a plate of green eggs and ham last Saturday morning. I scrambled a half-dozen eggs – not exactly a cheap meal these days – and added green food coloring. They turned up their little noses. There were no takers on the leftovers, either.



Ed Grisamore

While I must give myself a high grade for effort, I will concede low marks for presentation. It was not my most aesthetically pleasing moment in the kitchen. OK, it was disgusting.

It probably had nothing to do with the slime-colored star of the show. After all, the grands usually love green. They rarely refuse a second helping of green beans. Heck, they even eat broccoli.

With apologies to Dr. Seuss, green eggs are an acquired taste. I probably should blame my culinary failure on Sam I Am, who neglected to email me the correct recipe.

Sigh. My brunch menu seemed fitting since Friday was the opening night for "Seussical: The Musical" at Ma-

con Little Theatre. Our granddaughters were part of the 83-member cast. Sterling Gray was a Thing 1, and Ginny Pope was Cindy Lou Who.

I felt the need to get them into character. I thought I had all the right props. They had to perform in a Saturday matinee, followed by an evening performance and another matinee on Sunday. That's a turnaround of three shows in 24 hours.

We have now seen "Seussical" more than any play in our family history. It all began when our son, Jake, was 10 years old. Director Jim Crisp cast him as a tiny Who down in Whoville in his stage debut at Theatre Macon in December 2004. By the time Jake was a sophomore at Mount de Sales, he had returned to the "Seussical" cast as one of the Wickersham Brothers.

Our grandson, Brewer, followed in his Uncle Jake's footsteps as part of the Wickersham band of monkeys when Stratford performed "Seussical" two years ago. Sterling Gray played Yertle the Turtle, and

Ginny Pope was a cute kitten under a hat in the preshow musical number.

Our family may one day have all the Seuss characters covered. If my wife and I ever wanted to audition, we practically know all the lines and songs by heart. (With Delinda's stage fright, don't count on that happening, though.)

Sunday is the birthday of Dr. Theodor Seuss Geisel, one of the most beloved children's authors of all time. His birthday always marks the start of Read Across America Week. Schoolchildren will gather at the feet of guest readers – some of them dressed as cats in red-striped top hats – who will tell stories about green grinchies, blue fishes, star belly sneetches, hopping on pops and Horton, always my favorite elephant in the room.

I owe plenty of authors a debt of gratitude for instilling in me a passion for reading, and Dr. Seuss is ranked high on that list. His most famous book, "The Cat in the Hat" was published one month before my first birthday. (Who knows? "Super luxurious omnidirectional whatchamacajigger" could have been the first four words out of my mouth.)

When she was with the Detroit Free Press, veteran journalist Ellen Goodman called the carefree book a "little volume of absurdity that worked like a karate chop on the weary little world of Dick, Jane and Spot."

Even when I was too young to distinguish a noun from a verb – or how to punctuate a sentence and avoid using the Oxford comma – the magic of his words and the rhythm of his sentences brought his stories to life.

I am blessed to have been able to pass along the gift of reading to my children and grandchildren, as well as to the many school groups I have read to over the years. I first volunteered with the Rolling Readers program in the fall of 1997 and made weekly visits to bond with a second-grade class at Bruce Elementary on Houston Avenue.

Over the years, I have read regularly at McKibben Lane, T.D. Tinsley, Alexander II, Morgan, Sonny Carter and L.H. Williams elementaries. Since last October, I have had a standing date every Thursday morning with my 4-year-old grandson's class in the preschool at Stratford Academy. You can be sure

I will have some Dr. Seuss books in the queue for next week.

Despite some disturbing signs, I hope and pray we are not becoming a nation of non-readers. We must never forget how important reading was to the doctor.

He urged folks to "fill your house with stacks of books, in all the crannies and all the nooks." He reminded us that we are "never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child."

As we settled into our seats at the theater last weekend, I asked the family sitting in the same row if they were there to see someone in the show.

"No," the man said. "Our son just loves Dr. Seuss."

Thank you, Theodor Seuss Geisel. You're still on the clock ... a doctor who makes house calls.

Ed Grisamore never had the chance to meet Dr. Seuss. But a curator at The Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts, once thanked him for a column he wrote on the children's author and invited him to visit the museum. It's on his bucket list.

Gris List: Macon's Blake Clark still makes us laugh

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
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This week marks the anniversary of "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen" – the final episode of the CBS television series "M*A*S*H" on Feb. 28, 1983.

For 27 years – from 1983 to 2010 – the two-and-a-half hour episode was the most-watched show (105.97 million viewers) in U.S. history.

It remains the most-watched single episode of a TV series. The only television events with more viewers have been the Super Bowls, the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969 and President Richard Nixon's resignation speech in 1974.

Macon native Blake Clark, a nationally known comedian and film star, was a member of the cast. Clark, a Vietnam War veteran, played the role of an MP (military police) in the episode.

A 1964 graduate of Macon's Lanier High School, Clark is a veteran of 54 films and 49 television shows.

Here are some tidbits about the Macon actor in the event you're ever a contestant on "Jeopardy!"

13 facts about comedian and film star Blake Clark

1. Since 2010, he has provided the voice of "Slinky Dog" in the "Toy Story" movies, taking over for his friend, Jim Varney, who died 25 years ago this month. "Toy Story 5" is in production and scheduled to be released next year.
2. He has been cast in the role of "Daddy John" in Leanne Morgan's upcoming Netflix comedy series, "Leanne," which will make its debut this year.
3. He played "Harry the Hardware Guy" in the series "Home Improvement," and Chet Hunter, the father of one of the main characters in "Boy Meets World." Like "M*A*S*H," he was in the series finale for both shows.
4. In two episodes of "The Drew Carey Show," he was Carey's redneck neighbor, Jules Lambermont, whose wife, Millie, was played by another Macon native, Cassie Yates, best known as Sarah

Curtis on "Dynasty." He was born on Feb. 2, 1946 (Groundhog Day) and earlier this month celebrated his 79th birthday.

5. He has appeared in nine Adam Sandler films – "The Waterboy," "Mr. Deeds," "50 First Dates," "Little Nicky," "Eight Crazy Nights," "Bedtime Stories," "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry," "Grown Ups" and "That's My Boy."

6. He was captain of the football team at Lanier. His father, the late Lem Clark, was a legendary baseball coach at the school and was posthumously inducted into the Macon Sports Hall of Fame in 2003.

7. He was an Army lieutenant with the 101st Airborne Division. He later developed a stand-up comedy routine based on his experiences in Vietnam. As part of his act, he often joked that when he was in Vietnam, he had flashbacks of Macon.

8. He graduated from Lanier in 1964. Another nationally known comedian – Durwood "Mr. Doubletalk" Fincher – graduated the following year.

9. His film debut was 40 years ago in "St. Elmo's Fire" in 1985. He played the role of Wally.

10. In 1989, he appeared in the movie "Fast Food" with former Macon actress and model Randi Layne.

11. His voice has been featured in four video games.

12. Along with Jeff Foxworthy, he was part of a showcase of stand-up comedians on the "Redneck Comedy Round-up."

13. In an interview with A to Z Entertainment talent agency, he once claimed he preferred to keep a low profile during his career. "Some people do a couple of 'Tonight Shows' and – bam – they're on the cover of People (magazine)," he said. "I've done 22 'Tonight Shows,' two HBO comedy specials and nobody knows who I am. That takes work."

How AI is changing the game in spring sports, especially baseball

Spring is here, and for sports fans, that means the return of baseball, track, tennis, and other warm-weather competitions. For many, baseball is the heart of spring sports, carrying with it generations of history, statistics and passion.



Joe Finkelstein

In Macon, Braves fans eagerly anticipate the start of a new season, while Phillies fans, like myself, remain ever hopeful for October glory. But while we cherish baseball's traditions, the game is evolving in ways that past generations never imagined.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly changing how athletes train, coaches strategize, and fans engage with the sports they love.

AI is no longer confined to futuristic sci-fi stories – it's here, actively shaping the way games are played and experienced. From professional teams to local high schools, AI is becoming a game-changer in training, scouting, and even the fan experience. Let's explore how AI is stepping up to the plate this spring.

AI in player performance and training

Athletes and coaches are always looking for an edge, and AI is providing tools that were once unimaginable. Wearable technology, for example, has become an essential part of training.

Devices like smart sleeves, wristbands and even sensor-equipped cleats track an athlete's movement, speed and biometrics. These AI-powered wearables help players refine their techniques and reduce the risk of injury.

In baseball, AI can analyze a pitcher's throwing motion, identifying inefficiencies or potential injury risks. A slight mechanical flaw that might go unnoticed by the human eye can be detected by AI, allowing coaches to make adjustments before small issues become major injuries.

Pitchers can use this technology to

perfect their delivery and hitters can analyze their swings to improve contact and power.

Motion capture technology and AI-powered video analysis are also transforming training.

Systems like Hawk-Eye and Rapsodo provide real-time data on ball trajectory, pitch velocity and spin rate. In other sports such as

track and field, AI helps sprinters refine their starts and distance runners optimize their pacing strategies.

Personalized training plans are another major AI breakthrough. AI-driven coaching platforms analyze a player's strengths and weaknesses, then tailor workouts and drills to address specific needs. It's like having a personal coach that continuously adjusts and evolves training regimens based on an athlete's performance.

AI in game strategy and scouting

Sports have always been about strategy, and AI is taking game-planning to an entirely new level. Teams are using AI-driven data analytics to break down every aspect of the game, from opponent tendencies to in-game decisionmaking.

Take baseball, for example. AI can process massive amounts of game footage and player statistics to predict what pitch a batter is most likely to see in a given situation. Defensive shifts, once determined by coaching instincts, are now mapped out by AI models that analyze where each hitter is most likely to place the ball.

Scouting is another area where AI is making a huge impact. Gone are the days of scouts relying solely on gut instincts and clipboards full of handwritten notes. AI-driven scouting tools compile and analyze performance data from high school, college and professional players, helping teams identify talent more efficiently.

AI can spot trends that might take human scouts years to recognize. For instance, it can identify pitchers with

an unusually high spin rate on their fastballs or hitters who excel against certain types of pitches.

Recruiting at all levels, from high school to the majors, is being influenced by AI. College and pro teams use AI to identify under-the-radar prospects based on statistics and predictive modeling. Even smaller programs can access data that helps them make smarter decisions about which athletes to pursue.

AI in fan engagement

AI isn't just for the players and coaches – it's also transforming how fans experience sports.

Whether you're watching a game from the stands or following along from home, AI is working behind the scenes to enhance your experience.

Sports teams and broadcasters are using AI to personalize fan interactions. AI-driven apps provide real-time updates, custom highlight reels and predictive insights about upcoming matchups. Want to know the probability of your team making a comeback in the ninth inning? AI can generate real-time win probabilities based on historical and current data.

Virtual reality (VR) and AI are also coming together to create immersive fan experiences. Some teams are experimenting with AI-generated VR simulations that allow fans to experience the game from a player's perspective. Imagine stepping into the batter's box against a 100-mph fastball – with no risk of getting hit!

As we dive into this season of spring sports, whether you're cheering for the Braves, the Phillies, or your local high school team, keep an eye on the subtle ways AI is influencing the action. The next great baseball innovation might not come from a new rule change or a superstar player – it just might come from an algorithm.

AI is no longer just a tool of the future; it's here now, and it's changing the game for athletes, coaches and fans alike. Play ball!

For questions and comments, visit askajoe.com.





Grant Blankenship / GPB News
Mercer University sophomore Taylor Boyd mounts a piece of the "Freedom Seekers" exhibit at the Tubman African American Museum in Macon in 2025. The exhibit features so-called "runaway slave ads" researched by students like Boyd.

The Tubman's 'Freedom Seekers' newspaper ad exhibition honors humanity of enslaved people

Grant Blankenship
GPB News

On a recent weekday near the end of January, Jeff Bruce, curator at Macon's Tubman African American Museum, and Matt Harper, professor of Africana Studies at Mercer University, put down their hammers for a quick debate.

"Are you worried about crowding?" Harper asked. "We've got — we've got 18 ads on this wall."

"Well, that's the bulk of what we have," Bruce responded, as he and Harper prepared to mount two dozen newspaper ads from the mid-1800s on the expanse of white space in the narrow, second-floor gallery of the Tubman.

The ads, part of an exhibition called "Freedom Seekers," running until March 22, weren't for goods or services, but solicitations placed by enslavers trying to recover the people they considered their property.

Printed at the top of each framed ad was the name of the person who fled: Ann. Sandy. Moses.

Details such as the simple facts of individual names are easy to lose in the magnitude of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade: Some 9 million people were trafficked across 35,000 voyages.

Harper said that, in addition to names, enslavers often ignored other things that made the enslaved human, too — that is, until an enslaved person fled. Then, facts had to be acknowledged and published in so-called "runaway slave ads" like the ones in the museum gallery.

"They're writing about people as property," Harper said.

But enslavers couldn't stop there. "They can't help, if they actually want to get these people back, to describe them as people, right?"

The Tubman exhibit invites visitors to see how the ads offer glimpses into the individual lives of the enslaved.

Each of the ads appeared in The Macon Telegraph, which is still in operation today, between 1826 and the end of the Civil War. The names on the ads are almost without exception simply first names.

Harper pointed out one of those exceptions.

"The owner will only call him Tom, but he says he goes by Tom Hammons," Harper said, paraphrasing the advertisement text.

"He's not going to give him his last name," Harper said.

But if someone is trying to find a person, it helps to tell other people exactly who they're looking for.

When Tom Hammons, a boat hand on the Ocmulgee River, made his escape, he took control of his name by forcing the man he ran from to share it, in full, with the larger world.

Harper said it's the kind of detail he hoped his students would encounter when they began researching so-called runaway slave ads last year.

"This is who they are," Harper said of the ads' descriptions of escapees. "This is who their family members are. These are the things they like to do. This is what they're good at. This is how you'll know them. This is how you distinguish this one from that, this person from

that person.

"Their loves, their talents come through."

One named Isaac was described as a good carpenter, fleeing on a sorrel mare in his blue satinet round coat.

Bill was a wagoner on the road between Augusta and Macon who took with him a season's earnings.

Jim is described as missing a finger and likely on the way to his mother.

Judy and her daughter Unity escaped together, with the mother's right arm said to be disfigured from being broken and the child described as "almost white" by the man seeking them both.

Later, in the gallery, some of Harper's students came and helped. Simone Walker and Taylor Boyd mounted the panels for the most famous people to escape slavery and Macon: Ellen and William Craft.

Boyd said the details in the ads imbue the enslaved people with humanity.

"They had everyday problems just like us," Boyd said. "Reading their stories and reading that they were running away to families or they had lovers, that really just exemplifies the importance of why we need to showcase this."

The ads were common in newspapers across the early colonies, North and South.

An 1764 ad from the New York Mercury asks for help finding Jack, described as about 5 feet, 8 inches tall with a face pitted by smallpox.

"His hair [is] pretty long and [he] stares very much; was born at Hackensack; when he talks, he speaks very quick. He had on when he went away, a short scarlet Duffil Waistcoat, made without flaps," the enslaver goes on to say before concluding with a warning.

"All Persons are forbid to harbour him, as they shall answer it at their peril."

By 1850, the federal Fugitive Slave Act had made it unlawful nationally to offer sanctuary to someone fleeing enslavement. And by that time, the ads were mostly a phenomenon of southern cities.

Not only were the ads threats to anyone who might render escapees aid because of the slave act, they also gave people the opportunity to make money as a bounty hunter — starting with a browse through the ads, which, as graphic design student Naluchi Okonkwo found, included a consistent look.

"It's essentially an icon," Okonkwo said.

Or a set of icons.

"I found a lot of them were repeating. You see it's essentially the same exact graphic of the person walking with the stick."

That was for men. Ads for women show them running with a bundle. Okonkwo said the icons helped cut through the other visual clutter, like ads for lost oxen or a plantation for

sale.

"That way theseslave catchers, if you will, for lack of a better term, know that you're looking for a man in this time or you're looking for a woman," Okonkwo said. "Or you're looking for a man and a woman or you're looking for an older man or you're looking for a more spritely man or any of those things."

It seems unlikely the icons would have worked as visual shorthand if people weren't seeing them all the time, the way we see brand iconography like Apple's logo, and Nike swooshes and Facebook's lowercase blue letter "f" today.

"That shows how prevalent slavery was," Okonkwo said.

Harper said the visual evidence of that prevalence got his students' attention.

"Students were really surprised by how frequent the ads were, that they were on every single issue, multiple ads per issue," Harper said. "Some were surprised about how long someone might be looking for someone for two years, three years. Keep running the ads, over and over again, in the paper."

That definitely struck Tamaya Morrison.

"There were just so many," Morrison said.

Even a couple months after the class, she still finds herself thinking about the ads.

"Definitely — because my family is from Macon," she said. "I think this class has really put a lot into perspective as far as, not only my Macon heritage, but like my Southern Black heritage in general. This is how I got here. And it makes so many things make sense."

And in all the ads, there's one she found particularly ironic.

"The one that sticks out to me the most is the one about Moses, because his name is Moses, of course," she said.

Even to slaveholding Christians, of which there were many, the biblical figure Moses was known for leading his people from slavery.

"How can you hold a slave named Moses?" Morrison asked. "But, I mean, he still manages to escape and gain his freedom on Christmas Day."

Yes, many of the ads depict suffering, even as the subjects they sought attempted, and often succeeded, in leaving suffering behind, Morrison acknowledged.

"Even through the suffering, you're able to see the resilience of the people," she said.

The "Freedom Seekers" exhibit at Macon's Tubman African American Museum is on display through March 22.

This story comes to The Melody through a reporting partnership with GPB News, a nonprofit newsroom covering the state of Georgia.

New restaurant, food service store, government office at Macon Mall

Liz Fabian
The Macon Newsroom

When hundreds of pickleball aficionados travel to the Macon Mall for tournaments, there's one question organizers hear over and over.

"Where can I go to get something to eat?" In the coming months, Rhythm & Rally's general manager, John Roberts, will be able to point to a 1,200-square-foot restaurant on the upper floor of what is billed as the world's largest indoor pickleball facility.

It's the latest development in the revitalization of the old shopping center that also includes design work for a new government office and sale of one of the outparcel buildings to a food service company.

Sports Facilities Companies, which manages the pickleball courts, has its own food service division that will run the new bar and restaurant offering Americana fare.

"Every tournament we have, I lament the money that's walking out the door because this weekend we have 700 players," Roberts told The Macon Newsroom at the start of the Macon Love tournament over Valentine's Day weekend. "If we had this (restaurant) active already, that becomes a pretty good financial driver."

As plans are being put to paper, Roberts will know more in the coming weeks about when the restaurant could open. Warren Associates, which built 32 courts in the old two-story Belk, will also construct the kitchen, bar and dining room in current storage space.

It would become only the second sit-down restaurant in the mall which currently has Ole Times Country Buffet and a limited food court.

The old O'Charley's restaurant on an outparcel along Bloomfield Road remains vacant. On the opposite side of the mall's campus on nearly 4.7 acres behind the Atrium Health Amphitheater, Gordon Food Service purchased the old Office Depot building near the Eisenhower Parkway entrance.

The Michigan-based company with \$21 billion in annual sales is the largest family-operated food distribution service in the country, according to its website.

With over 125 years in business, the compa-



Liz Fabian / The Macon Newsroom
Rhythm & Rally and Visit Macon incentivized pickleballers to spend nights in hotels by extending the Macon Love tournament to five days. The tournament took place on Valentine's Day Weekend.

ny prepares food and meals for restaurants, healthcare and education facilities.

"Wherever food is served, Gordon Food Service can have a hand in getting it on the table," the website states.

The Macon Mall store is expected to be open to the public and operate like a grocery store, but no further details were immediately available about how many employees it will hire or when it expects to open.

The company's existing stores advertise items such as rotisserie chicken, fresh squeezed fruit juices and other grocery items. Renovations have been underway for months and the property is fenced off.

Although the building was valued at about \$350,000 in the last assessment, it sold for \$4.2 million last April, according to tax records.

"All that property is much more valuable now," Macon-Bibb County Urban

Development Authority Executive Director Alex Morrison said.

The UDA took over about half of the mall property more than three years ago through a donation from Hull Property Group that still owns the rest.

Since then, UDA's \$44 million in bonds built the amphitheater, pickleball facility, a library branch and Macon-Bibb County offices for the Board of Elections, Planning & Zoning, Building and Fire Safety, Middle Georgia Regional Commission and a community meeting space.

In Mayor Lester Miller's plan, rent paid by those county offices and other entities in Macon-Bibb's portion of the mall are paying back the bonds.

Populating empty stores with office workers provides the necessary foot traffic to lure new stores and restaurants, he has said, but commercial progress is slow.

UDA has a new tenant moving into an 11,000-square-foot space on the first floor across from P&Z and next to the Middle Georgia Regional Commission — WorkSource Middle Georgia of the Middle Georgia Consortium.

This office of workforce development receives federal funding to support Baldwin, Crawford, Houston, Jones, Macon-Bibb, Monroe, Peach, Pulaski, Putnam, Twiggs and Wilkinson counties.

Architect Gene Dunwody Jr. of Dunwody/Beeland Architects, who designed the other county offices, is also working on this project.

Some people were skeptical about Macon-Bibb's plans for the mall, amphitheater and pickleball haven, but Roberts is impressed by how fast Rhythm & Rally caught on.

"The level of sustained enthusiasm has surprised me a little bit. That we were this successful this fast, had the membership growth in the first year," Roberts said.

When opening in January of 2024, they set a goal of 500 memberships the first year and topped that in July. Rhythm & Rally now is nearing 800 members.

As more people come to the mall, local leaders hope to see additional businesses spring up.

"This facility as an economic driver for the community is already tremendous," Roberts said. "I think of us as a community asset, community resource, and in that vein especially that we have this many people coming from outside the community to spend their money in our town."

Visit Macon, which works in tandem with Roberts in scheduling events around tournaments and other activities, has the stats to back that up.

In January, the Southern Pickleball Southeastern Championship and World Pickleball Tour Amateur Invitational Championship tournaments drew nearly 2,000 attendants, who booked nearly 1,000 hotel room nights with an economic impact of over \$1.6 million.

Civic Journalism Senior Fellow Liz Fabian covers Macon-Bibb County government entities for The Macon Newsroom and can be reached at fabian_lj@mercer.edu or 478-301-2976.

Events

Historic Macon Cemetery Tours: Allman Brothers and Friends

Friday, Feb 28
2 p.m.

1071 Riverside Drive

Join local historian and tour guide Kathleen O'Neal for a walking tour of historic Rose Hill Cemetery, presented by Historic Macon Foundation. These tours promise an insightful journey through Macon's past, highlighting notable figures, architectural marvels and the fascinating tales that lie within Rose Hill's gates.

First Sundays on the Fisk: Nathan Laube

Sunday, March 2
5:30 p.m.

582 Walnut St.

Join Walnut Street Music at Christ Episcopal Church as we continue the 2024-2025 season of "First Sundays on the Fisk" with Mr. Nathan Laube! Free and open to all.

Shovels & Rope play Society Garden

Sunday, March 2
7 p.m.

2389 Ingleside Ave.

Shovels & Rope are an American folk duo from Charleston, South Carolina composed of husband and wife Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst. Combining threads from their individual solo careers, Shovels & Rope blends traditional folk, rock and roll and country rock. The award-winning husband and wife duo comes to Macon for a special Sunday evening show presented by The Society Garden.

On the Table | My Macon Minute

Thursday, March 6
5:30 p.m.

427 Poplar St. Suite A

Sometimes, all it takes is one moment, one story, or one idea to spark change. In this storytelling-driven discussion, we'll explore the small yet meaningful experiences that shape our community and inspire action. Whether it's a moment that deepened your connection to Macon, a time you saw positive change in action or an idea that could make a difference, your voice matters. Presented by Storytellers Macon at Serenity Entertainment Complex.

Wonderful - The Marvelous Music of Stevie Wonder

Saturday, March 8
7:30 p.m.

415 First St.

Prepare to be enchanted by the soulful sounds of Stevie Wonder with Macon Pops at Macon City Auditorium. Go on a musical journey through Stevie Wonder's legendary career, as talented musicians pay homage to his iconic hits.

From Our Kitchens: Mom's Chicken Salad is sure to 'Grow' on you

Saralyn Collins
Special to The Melody

Doris Collins became my mom when I was 18 years old. My mother had died two years earlier.

One of the things I noticed right away was what a close-knit family she had. Doris' mother, Miss Carolyn, was an amazing cook. Her apple tarts were my favorite, but everything she cooked was delicious and made from scratch. Doris learned from the best.

My father, Sam Collins, was also pretty famous in our neck of the woods for his barbecue and Brunswick stew. He was definitely my culinary inspiration. His barbecue sauce was called SOBS — Sam's Original BBQ Sauce. We thought that was the funniest thing to say as kids. "Pass the SOBs!"

My dad was also a very adventurous eater, and he liked spicy food. I wanted to impress him, so I tried what he tried. That had maybe the most influence on my life of anything. I'll still try just about anything that

someone has prepared with care.

At many of our blended family gatherings, Doris would put out a platter of chicken salad.

It was different than I was used to, with the inclusion of pecans and grapes. When I opened Good To Go restaurant in Macon in 1997, I asked her if I could use her recipe.

And we've had Mom's Chicken Salad on the menu ever since, now serving it at Grow.

Keesha Beard has been making it daily for almost 20 years. These are the quantities. But you have to make it with love! The reason it's so popular is that it's always made fresh and tastes delicious every time.

Mom's Chicken Salad

- 1.5 pounds chicken breast, boiled, cooled and shredded
- 1 cup grapes, halved
- 1/2 cup finely diced celery
- 1/4 cup, roasted pecan pieces
- 1 cup of mayo
- 1/4 cup sweet relish



Bike, A8:

start and designed the Cherry Street artwork depicting the Ocmulgee River with notes from Little Richard's song "Southern Child."

"My first project was painting a crosswalk mural at Mount de Sales Academy in 2019," she said. "It was pivotal for my mural business. At the time, I had only completed a few mural projects and the opportunity helped launch me into more public art. Since then, I've been fortunate to collaborate with them on additional projects and love how Bike Walk Macon engages local artists while creating a safer, more vibrant and family-friendly community. Their work not only improves walkability and bikeability but brings art into everyday spaces where people of all ages can enjoy it."

Unlike most involved in Bike Walk who are average, everyday cyclists like Umana, Renee Corwine is of the more serious sort. She's Bike Walk's board president and a long-time mountain biker and triathlete.

And she's eager for the festival. "What a great opportunity to grab your bike or walking shoes and explore Macon," she said. "As an avid cyclist, it's important to me that I feel safe when I'm riding on our streets."

As Bike Walk Macon networks people and organizations across the community, the impact is an enjoyable brand of community building.

Successes and awards

Bike Walk Macon has records proving organizational success, from the number of people involved to goals accomplished. For instance, in 2024, the group carried out 115 events reaching over 6,000 adults and 1,600 kids. They've led or been involved with educational ventures, traffic calming projects and 2024's 10 walking events, 14 group bike rides and 22 children's activities. Since starting, the number of city bike-lane miles has increased from one to 12 and, thanks to the growing Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, there are 13 additional bike-walk miles.

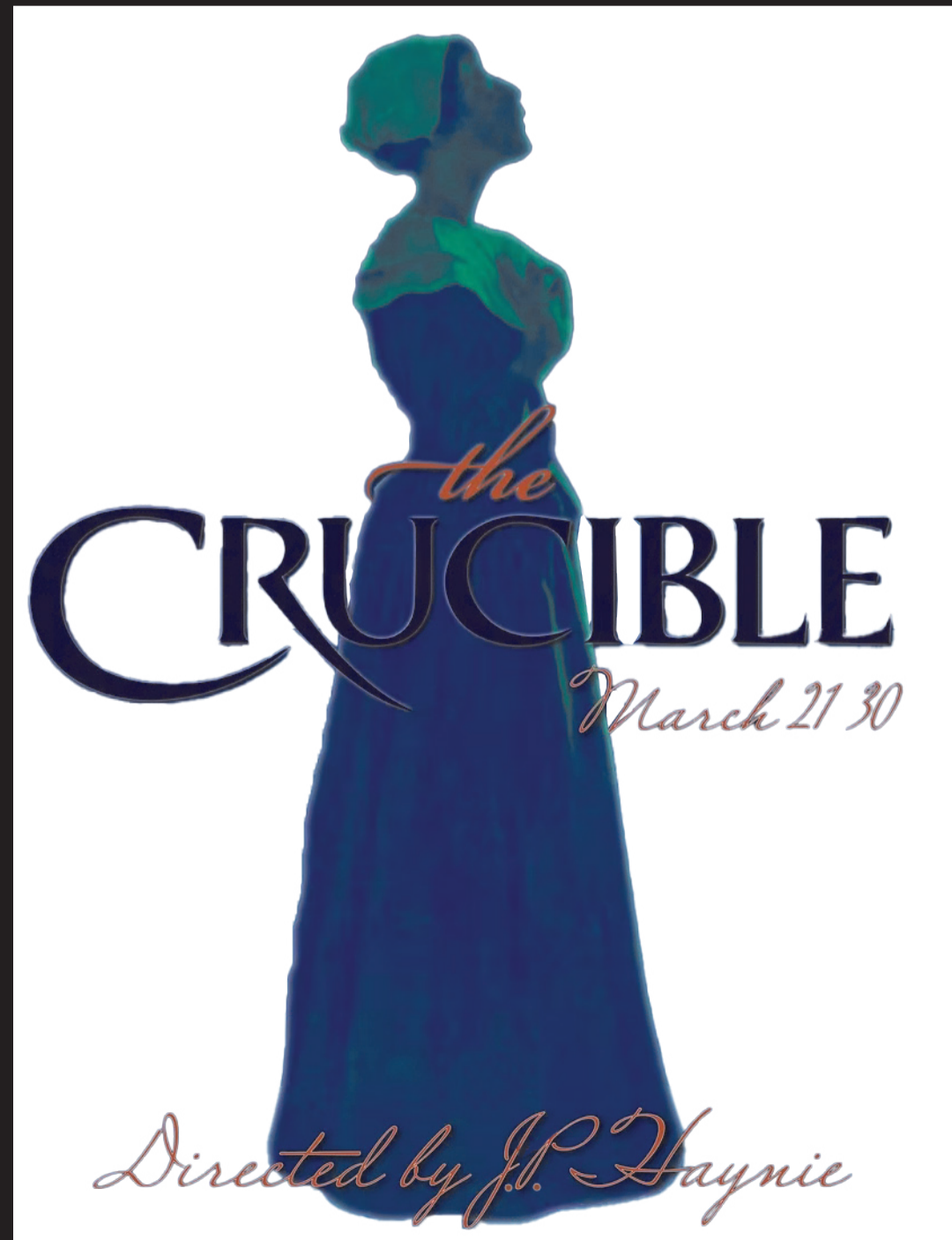
Thousands of people have been engaged through rides, open streets and play streets where short and long stretches of roads have been closed temporarily to cars and opened to walkers and cyclists of all skill levels. Laws and policies have been established to govern future road building and repairs by Vision Zero values.

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

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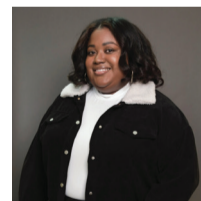
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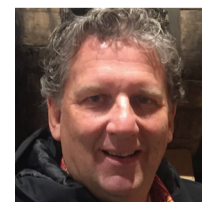
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John C. Barker
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Registration fee for the Songwriting Seminar is \$169, or \$99 for current Mercer students, faculty and staff (limit 20 discounts).

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER



capricorn.mercer.edu/songwriting-seminar

Bike Walk Macon's first Streets for All Fest

There's more to Bike Walk Macon than meets the eye, though the group has offered a lot to see and do in its brief 10-year history.

The non-profit works to make biking and walking safe, healthy and convenient options for recreation and transportation throughout Macon and they've set a first-ever Streets for All Fest for March 6-8, just a week away.

The three-day collection of events is an invitation to have fun while exploring Macon's streets and neighborhoods, learning about pedestrian possibilities and getting to know Bike Walk and what it's up to. They've planned a community party and a variety of group rides and walks to do it.

The festival is a fundraiser as well as an awareness-raiser so there's a fee for most activities, but two are free so no one is left out:

- An event kickoff Bike Party Decades Ride on Thursday, March 6, starting at 6 p.m. at Bike Walk's 830 High St. office. It's family-friendly and for all skill levels with participants encouraged to come outfitted in the garb of their favorite decade. Ten years, get it? It's about a 7-mile, slow-paced ride.
- A festival-culminating Plaza Party on Saturday, March 8, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. celebrating 10 Years of Bike Walk Macon on Cotton Avenue Plaza. Another family-friendly affair, it will include music, outdoor games and activities and chances to learn about Bike Walk advocacy efforts, activities and achievements.

A full schedule with ticketing plans is at the Bike Walk website. Paid events start at \$20 with all access at \$75.

"We liked the idea of a multi-day festival with a number of smaller events," said Rachel Hollar Umana, Bike Walk's founder and executive director. "We liked the idea of catering to different interests."

"(We) came up with activities like a pet parade walk in historic Vineville, the Decades Ride, rides and walks exploring different perspectives on Macon and ones involving behind-the-scenes looks at what's going with paths and trails and pedestrian safety. The Cotton Avenue Plaza party gives us a chance



Michael W. Pannell

to bring the community and our partners together to celebrate, have fun and look at what's happened over 10 years, what's going on now and what's ahead.

"We're nowhere near completing our mission, but we've come a long way and are eager for the next 10."

Bike Walk's start

Bike Walk Macon grew naturally from Umana's own experience plus serendipitous circumstances aligning in Macon. Growing up just outside of Augusta, Umana came to Macon to attend Mercer and, after, spent a year teaching English in Thailand. Among the year's many takeaways was experiencing life in a car-free environment where walking and bikes were the norm. Returning, she found herself living and working downtown where it made sense to bike to work and walk to restaurants.

"I'd never known anything about any kind of transportation other than driving," she told me. "Thailand forced me to live without a car and I saw benefits. When I got back it was natural to commute by bicycle. But still, I knew little about transportation and wasn't trying to find out."

But Umana did get together with others to talk about the ins, outs and challenges of biking in Macon. To expand on that and start what at first amounted to social rides around town, Umana applied for and got an 80 Cities and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Emerging City Champions fellowship and micro-grant for young civic innovators.

"That was the start," she said. "And I learned more and more about city spaces being re-imagined and made not just for cars but for people. People walking and riding bicycles, enjoying where they live and work. We wanted to act and be a voice for that."

That was in 2015, and Macon Bike Walk rides and street events started happening.

Around the same time, Macon found itself heading a list of Georgia communities it didn't want to be on.

Synergies for betterment

Macon found itself listed high on a state pedestrian fatalities list. City leaders were ready to see that change and grappled for answers. Eventually, what is now Macon's Vision Zero Action Plan came into being along with the



Photo by Bo Greene

In late 2024, a Bike Walk Macon Big Ride drew nearly 200 cyclists showing an ever-growing community desire that the city's streets and roadways be utilized for walking and biking in safe, healthy, enjoyable and practical ways.

city's Pedestrian Safety Review Board. By definition, Vision Zero is a multidisciplinary strategy bringing together diverse stakeholders to address the complex problem of eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy and equitable mobility for all.

It values human life over mobility and safe streets for all users and modes of transportation.

Umana and Bike Walk members became a go-to community-connected voice and resource while connecting with a cross section of community organizations from NewTown Macon to neighborhood associations.

Weston Stroud is Macon's traffic safety manager.

"One of the things that makes a great city is having advocates who push for progress," he told me. "The biggest public space in any city is its roadways and we must consider how they're built and used and how it impacts the most vulnerable users. Local agencies can only do so much so having a group like Bike Walk Macon advocating and working on the grassroots level is of real value."

Umana recognizes that the organization's role is more than just having fun out walking or riding bikes and that its growth comes

from filling a need.

"We tapped into something, into an issue that hadn't been tapped into," she said. "But there were a lot of things happening. There was the development happening downtown, the issue of pedestrian safety, the growing number of people walking and biking for different reasons – they were all present. We're lucky to have champions among our partners and in the city-county from engineering to parks and recreation to the mayor's office and all around. They understand the vision whereas a lot of places don't get it. We wouldn't have the success we've had without them."

So, who is it for? The community

Whether aware or not, involved or not, Bike Walk Macon serves the whole community, whether in the background through policy advocacy and bike giveaway programs or more visible, public activities like creating bike rides and traffic-calming, street-decorating workdays that aid safety and touch lives in various ways.

Painter-designer Erin Hawkins has worked with Bike Walk's street paintings since the

See BIKE, Page A7

CITY OF WARNER ROBINS

2025 EVENTS

FEBRUARY

8 Literary Festival

AUGUST

6 Family Fun Night
21 Food Truck Roundup

MARCH

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

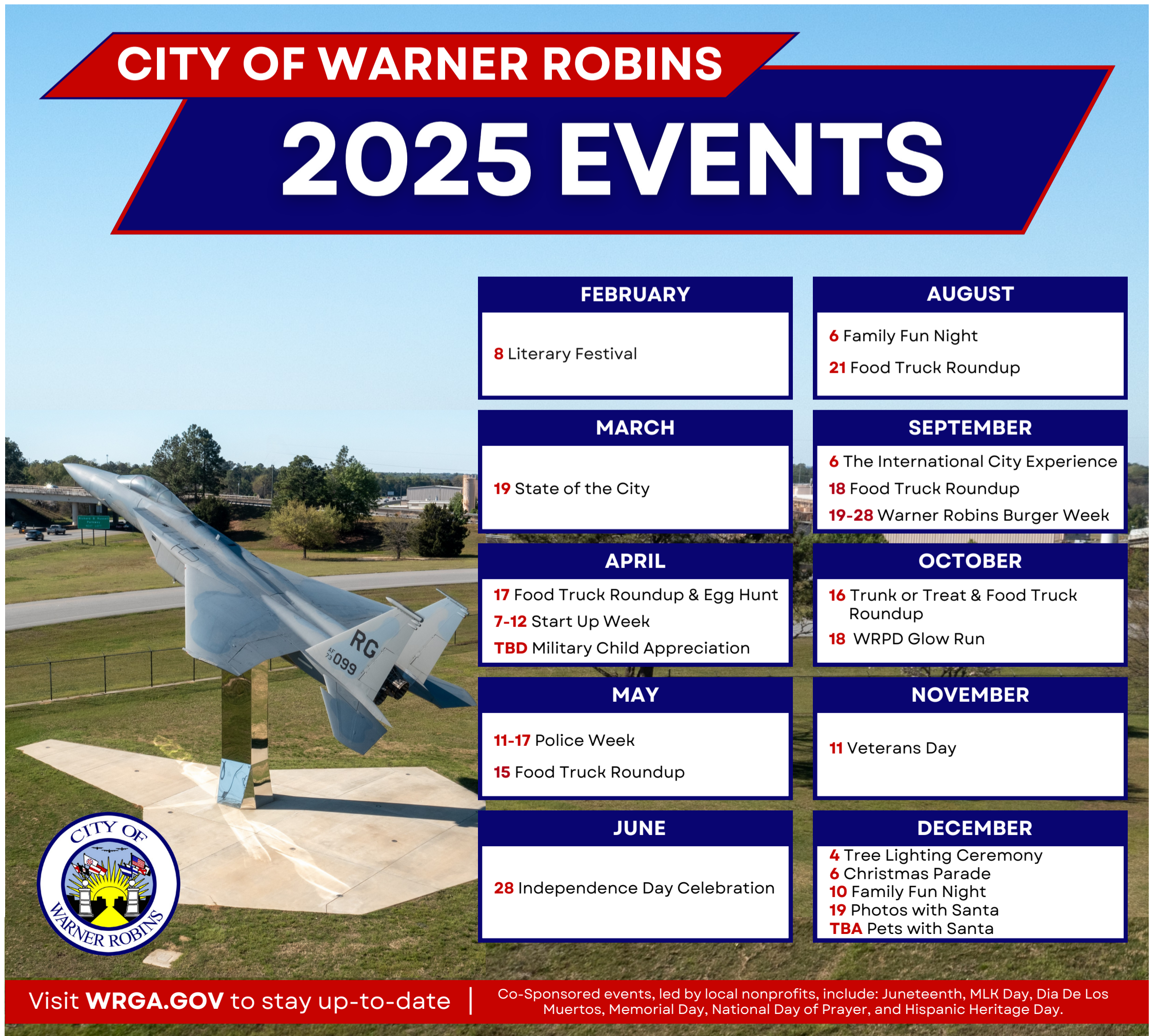
11 Veterans Day

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



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Co-Sponsored events, led by local nonprofits, include: Juneteenth, MLK Day, Dia De Los Muertos, Memorial Day, National Day of Prayer, and Hispanic Heritage Day.

Georgia Sports Hall of Fame inductees talk family, fun and more at emotional ceremony

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

When it's time to accept praise for a career, it's time to hand out praise to parents.

More than 600 were on hand to celebrate the induction of the Class of 2025 into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame on a night when several of the 10 new members went back to the impacts of parents.

If not for \$25, Terance Mathis wouldn't have been on that stage.

Back in his first days of football, Mathis was at running back and faced his first exposure to the Oklahoma drill, a physical one-on-one battle.

He got popped, and he got popped again.

"Oh my God, I did not know that they tackled that hard," recalled the former Atlanta Falcon receiver who is now head coach at Morehouse College. "Mmm mmm."

He began reconsidering his choices, and didn't go to the next few practices, but left the house in uniform like he had. He waited until practice was likely over, dove on some grass to get his uniform dirty, and bounced into the house each day telling his Mom how great he'd done.

"She said, 'Boy, you ain't been to practice in two days. Coach called me and asked me what's wrong with

you,'" Mathis related. "She said, 'We paid this money for you to play, you're gonna go play.' It was only \$25.

"If it wasn't for those \$25, I wouldn't be right here today."

The Hall expanded the class to 10 members this year, adding to the night's length and to the attendance.

The weekend began with a golf tournament at The Brickyard on Friday, followed that night by the jacket ceremony, a private event at the Hall during which each new inductee, in a full theater, received the official hall jacket.

The new members joined old members on Saturday afternoon for

90 minutes of autographs and pictures at the hall before the induction ceremony capped the weekend.

UGA was represented by Courtney Kupets-Carter (gymnastics) and Jeff Wallace (tennis). Pitching coach Leo Mazzone, pitcher Tim Hudson of Columbus and outfielder Marquis Grissom became the latest Atlanta Braves to join.

Dennis Scott was a shooting ace at Georgia Tech in the late 1980s as the Yellow Jackets went to four straight NCAA Tournaments.

Bob Rathbun has been the play-by-play man for the Atlanta Hawks for nearly three decades, adding the Atlanta Dream for several years during a career spanning several

networks, sports and decades.

This year's Legends Class is Augusta-born boxer Vernon Forrest and two-sport athlete Bunky Henry of Valdosta. The Legends Class was created for athletes who likely would have been Hall of Fame candidates before their deaths.

Mothers and wives drew plenty of praise, inspiring some emotion from inductees like former Atlanta pitcher Tim Hudson, whose composure collapsed for a moment.

"My family... I love you guys. It takes a special wife to put up with a baseball player's crazy schedule. I thank the Lord that he put Kim in

See HOF, B3

At a key playoff game, choose your seat wisely

It's been a few weeks since a proper column of mine has appeared in The Melody.

It's not that I haven't wanted to write one. I enjoy putting my thoughts together here and trying to pen something of worth that revolves around local sports in some way or another.

No, instead it's been because of all the sports action we've had in Bibb County recently. Regular season and playoff basketball are in full swing, baseball is underway and soccer started up. And, as always, I've got my newspaper duties to attend to — editing, laying out the sports pages, assigning stories and the like.

The trade off, though, is that I've gotten to mine myself a treasure trove of great moments from a menagerie of hoops action, one of the best of which came during Southwest's great Sweet 16 playoff game last weekend.

I know that's cheating — an entire game is not really a moment — but it was too much fun, mostly because of where I chose to sit for the playoff showdown between the Patriots and the Banks County Leopards.

The scorer's table was placed in the bleachers and, thanks to the scoreboard console and all the stat books, did not have enough room for me and

my laptop when I arrived about 15 minutes before the game.

So, wanting to be close to the clock officials and the scoreboard so I could quickly take a picture of stats after the game ended and hurry off to interview the head coach, I sat in the stands next to the table.

It turns out that was the best decision I've made in a minute.

On the other side of me was the largest and loudest throng of Southwest fans in the building — a group consisting of toddlers, parents and grandparents that carried the energy in the gym during the postseason game.

Directly to my left was a woman named Shirley Sanford. She was the heart and soul of the group, toting pom-poms and posterboard signs with encouraging messages for her Patriots.

When did she graduate from Southwest?

"Man, a long time ago."

Was she a fan because a son or grandson played for the team?

See JOHNSTON, B3



Micah Johnston



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Southwest head coach Monquencio Hardnett holds up the net he finished cutting down while celebrating the Patriots' 65-52 Class A-Division I Elite Eight win over No. 8 Temple. The top-seeded Patriots will face No. 5 Toombs County in the Final Four at Georgia College in Millidgeville at 3 p.m.

Southwest defeats Temple 65-52, advances to Final Four

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

The first time Rinaldo Callaway threw down a massive dunk in No. 1 Southwest's third-round playoff game against No. 8 Temple, his team trailed by two points in the fourth quarter and had struggled to get the ball inside all night.

Since the refs waved the basket off because of a foul on the prior shot, Callaway's jam was rendered moot — in the score book, at least. It did make an impact in another way: the slam gave the Patriots a surge of momentum. After Cal-

laway gave them the lead with a layup on the next play, they never looked back.

The second time the junior big man slammed the ball home, it sent a packed Duck's Court into chaos, upped the Patriots' lead to seven points and more or less cemented a 65-52 win that sent Southwest to the Final Four of the GHSA Class A-Division I state tournament.

As Patriots head coach Monquencio Hardnett celebrated with his team and the Southwest community on the court — he could not take two steps without a familiar face greeting him and dapped up at least three dozen people within minutes of the final horn sounding — the

emotions in the building were high.

"One thing about Macon, Georgia, I know we'll come together when it's time to. They were big tonight," Hardnett said. "(The crowd) gave them the energy in the second half, and that's what made the difference."

Callaway said he fed off of the crowd's reaction to his crucial plays inside, including his first dunk that was nullified and the second dunk that seemed to shake the building.

"Felt like I had to make up for (the first one), and I got the chance," he said. "The

See SOUTHWEST, B3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mercer men's basketball coach Ryan Ridder speaks to the media at Mercer's press conference Monday afternoon ahead of the last week of the regular season. The Bears have struggled recently but will be looking to make tweaks as they head into the SoCon tournament.

Mercer hoops teams prep for SoCon tourney

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

In the final week of the regular season, neither one of Mercer's basketball coaches were looking to reflect too much on the 2024-25 season just yet.

After all, it's not quite over. Though both the men's and women's teams have struggled recently, the Southern Conference tournament next week after the regular season concludes will provide an opportunity at redemption for both squads and, obviously and tantalizingly, a longshot at an NCAA Tournament ticket.

While the men's team started the conference portion of this season's schedule strong with a barrage of close games, the Bears struggled recently. After a win over The Citadel broke a five-game skid, Mercer took a lead into

halftime against UNC-Greensboro, one of the SoCon's strongest teams.

Then they gave up 52 points to the Spartans in the second half — the same number they'd given up against The Citadel in one game — for a gut punch after what seemed like a much-needed momentum swing.

"I'd say if we'd ended our week at about 3 p.m. Saturday [at halftime], we would say we had a pretty good week," men's head coach Ryan Ridder quipped at Mercer's athletics press conference Monday afternoon. "But you gotta hit perimeter shots and you gotta hit free throws. We weren't there on defense in that second half."

The Bears (12-17, 5-11 in conference play) have hit a snag in their second time through SoCon games, going 1-6 against their

See MERCER, B3

NOTEPAD

Central girls fall while Stratford advances; ACE, FPD and Rutland baseball off to hot start

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Bibb County's GHSA schools had a tough showing in the second round of the state basketball playoffs, with four of five teams falling on the road last week to end their seasons.

The Central girls made things the closest when they played powerhouse No. 3 Model in Rome but lost in a low-scoring game, 32-30.

The ACE girls also had to travel pretty far north, going against Fannin County for their second-round game. The Gryphons lost to the high-powered Rebels, 64-35.

The Westside girls got a strange schedule, playing a region opponent for the third time this year when they lost to No. 5 Morgan County, 70-54. The Westside boys fell in a surprising blowout against No. 6 Union County in their second round game, losing 75-33.

The Southwest boys were the only public school to win their second-round game, blowing out Banks County.

On the GIAA side, the No. 2 Stratford girls look like one of the strongest teams remaining after defeating rival FPD in the quarterfinals last week. They get a tough task against No. 3 St. Anne-Pacelli Thursday after The Melody goes to print.

No. 4 Tattnall will have an even more difficult opponent. While they're also playing the Vikings at the semifinals in Columbus, the boys team for St. Anne-Pacelli has won 35 straight games dating back to last season and are the top seed in the bracket.

The Tattnall girls, the No. 11 seed, lost to the Pacelli girls in a quarterfinal blowout. The Stratford boys lost a barnburner to Tattnall, living up to the hype after the previous two games between them ended with buzzer-beaters.

The CFCA girls are still alive in 2A and will play their semifinal matchup against Southwest Georgia at Brewton-Parker Thursday. The CFCA boys lost a heartbreaker in



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Stratford's Reagan Ray (15) escapes pressure from FPD defenders during the Eaglettes' 60-48 win Friday night. Stratford, one of the top teams in GIAA all year, will play a strong St. Anne-Pacelli team in the 4A semifinals Thursday afternoon in Columbus.

overtime to end their season in the quarterfinals.

ACE, FPD and Rutland baseball off to fast starts

The ACE Gryphons baseball team started region play in impressive fashion, dominating against Region 2-A Division I opponents Central and Jefferson County in blowout fashion early in the season.

The Gryphons defeated Central 10-0 and 15-0, then walloped Jefferson County on the road 19-0.

The key players for ACE at the plate so far are Jake McLendon, Brice Whitley and Slade Hodge, who are all near the team lead in plate appearances and are hitting at least .375.

McLendon leads with an exact .400 average through 29 PAs, a figure bolstered by his seven walks.

He also leads the team with an impressive 12 stolen bases in 14 tries. Whitley is not far behind, hitting at a .391 clip with 10 swipes of his own on 11 tries. Hodge has stolen seven bags without getting caught once while notching a .375 average.

The Rutland Hurricanes look strong to start their season as well, getting 15-0 and 23-3 wins over Twiggs County and defeating Wilkinson County 7-2 in a road game Tuesday.

Tate Summerday is the early player to watch for the 'Canes. So far Summerday has notched six innings on the bump, getting 13 strikeouts and not allowing any earned runs while giving up one hit and one walk. Summerday also already has two triples while going 6-for-9 in the early going.

FPD will be the team to watch in

the GIAA as the Vikings try to make it back to the championship after losing in the title series last season.

The energy is certainly there. FPD took on GHSA Class 5A Veterans at home Monday night and pulled off an electric walk-off win.

Pitcher Connor Strandmark went seven innings, allowing just two hits and a walk while striking out 10 and giving up no earned runs. The Vikings had a 1-0 lead until a throwing error in the sixth tied things at 1-1.

Then Veterans struck for the go-ahead run in the ninth when FPD walked in a run with the bases juiced, a deflating outcome when third baseman Wyatt Waters had just nabbed a runner at home for the second out of the inning.

The Vikings got out of the jam without further damage, though,

then tied the game in the bottom half of the frame on an RBI double by Major Simmons when down to their final out.

After star shortstop Keon Johnson was intentionally walked, catcher Tinsley Lewis made the Warhawks pay when he smashed a walk-off, three-run shot to left field to get the win and send his teammates pouring out of the dugout.

The Vikes followed the win with a 17-0 drubbing of George Walton Academy to move to 4-0 Tuesday.

Mercer baseball streaks, softball gets POTW

The Mercer baseball team continued its winning ways last week, sweeping Kent State in convincing fashion before defeating Florida A&M in a mid-week game to move to 7-1.

It was the Bears' seventh-straight win, a streak they've rattled off since surprisingly losing their opener against Milwaukee. Mercer scored at least seven runs in all seven of those wins, including a high watermarked of 14 against the Rattlers Tuesday.

The game against FAMU also marked longtime head coach Craig Gibson's 700th win.

The recent stretch of high scoring also netted one player Southern Conference Player of the Week honors. Shortstop Bradley Frye earned the award by hitting an impressive .647 over a four-game stretch while driving in seven runs and scoring six times. Frye is hitting .467 on the season with a 1.296 OPS.

Hallie Langford snagged Southern Conference Player of the Week honors for softball after a red-hot span across which she hit .533.

That consisted of an 8-for-15 run where all of her hits were extra bases, including a long ball against Georgia State that started the torrid stretch and a 4-for-4 night against Middle Tennessee State with two doubles to cap it.



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Johnston, from B1:

“Nope. I just love cheering for them.” And then, the age-old staple of any sports small talk: how ‘bout em? You think they’ll win here? I asked that last question when the Patriots, the No. 1 team in the state for their classification, were already up by double digits.

Shirley Sanford looked at me like I was crazy. “Oh, they’re going to win,” she said with absolute certainty. “And they’ll keep winning.” Stupid questions aside, her confidence was that of a die-hard fan, something Sanford has been for her alma mater for decades, though she did not specify how long. She does have a grandson that goes to school there, but he doesn’t play on the team.

That didn’t stop her from being — as far as I could tell — the most engaged fan in the arena. Sanford knew every player’s name and hollered congratulations after they hit a shot, or yelled consolatorily if they missed one. She let the refs know when she thought a foul should be called — she was loud when it came to these, and she knew the basketball lingo to back up her arguments — and made some folks around her laugh.

Sanford was a joy to be around, even if I really didn’t know her. She was very kind, not minding my backpack taking up some space in the stands. She even offered to watch my laptop for me when I went down to the court at halftime to chat with some other journalists at the game. Then, late in the game, Sanford turned an examining eye to me. She thought she recognized me and, as it turns out, she had seen me before. Sanford works as a housekeeper at the Lofts in Mercer Village, where The Melody’s office is located.

Southwest wrapped up its ringing 30-point win over Banks County, much to Sanford’s delight. I shook her hand. “I hope I see you at the championship,” she said. “I’ll be looking for you.”

It’s easy to be confident after a 30-point playoff win, but I got the sense that Shirley Sanford is like that all the time, win or lose. Southwest had the benefit of the home crowd again Wednesday when they punched their ticket to the Final Four. Sanford was there, all smiles.

The semifinals will be on the road, but I get the feeling lots of Southwest fans will make the trip. I’ll have the luxury of being there. Hopefully Sanford has a lot to cheer for.

Mercer, from B1:

league foes when facing them in rematches.

While that win on the road against The Citadel was a good one — Ridder said Mercer is one of only a handful of teams that have defeated The Citadel by double-digits at their place — the other six games are hard to diagnose. Ridder has mentioned that sometimes it seems the Bears need to fix their defense, while other games the offense is lacking.

He keyed in on something different, more conceptual, while discussing the team’s recent woes Monday afternoon, and what things he might try to tweak when the conference tournament rolls around.

“We’re really focused on four minutes or so of the game. We’ve shown to be really good for 32 minutes, or 36 minutes of the game,” Ridder said. “I think it’s finding a tweak defensively, maybe it’s a different personnel group, maybe it’s a different alignment, type of pressure, different zone. I think it’s finding those four minutes and trying to help eliminate those lulls.”

Mercer has two more games to make a change prior to the tournament, one Wednesday after The Melody goes to print and another Saturday. The recent 1-6 stretch has put Mercer in the bottom tier of the standings. The Bears rank eighth in the SoCon as of Wednesday.

Saturday’s final home game could give a litmus test for a

possible opening round SoCon tournament game, as Western Carolina is in ninth place in the standings. The Catamounts would be Mercer’s opponent in the No.8 vs. No. 9 game unless the Bears can catch VMI, which looks unlikely — the Keydets are up two games with as many left to play.

While the men’s team looked better earlier in the season, the Mercer women might be hitting their stride at the right moment in the season, though the Bears’ recent record would not show it.

The women’s team lost each of its last three games by three points or fewer, including a one-point loss where they just missed a game-winning shot at the horn against Wofford, one of the SoCon’s stronger teams.

“We’ve progressed to where we need to be. They say you’re supposed to be playing your best basketball in February. We’re not quite there, but we’re close,” women’s head coach Michelle Clark-Heard said Monday.

The Bears (7-20, 2-10 in conference play) had also just missed signature victories in the prior two games, allowing a go-ahead layup in the final 10 seconds against Furman Feb. 20 and manufacturing an impressive 14-point comeback only to lose on a late 3-pointer Feb. 15 against East Tennessee State.

“Those games were heart-breakers,” Heard said. “But

the game doesn’t really come down to one play. There were a lot of different things where we could’ve been up by more than we were and closed it out.”

Mercer will likely be the No. 10 team in the conference tournament as they sit in last place with two games left, though a win over Western Carolina in Thursday’s game could get them the No. 9 spot. Regardless of seed and opponent, the players look forward to a chance at key wins and an unlikely run.

“One word I can say for this team is resilience... moral victories are not what we’re looking for, but one thing I can say is I’m proud of how hard they’re working every single day,” the head coach said.

Both coaches, while reminding everyone the season was not over, did reflect some on players they’ve admired over the season.

“I have to give a shoutout to Ashlee (Locke). I can’t say enough about her. From day one, our first phone conversation, she’s been incredible,” Heard said. “And Nahawa (Di-arra), man, she’s just evolving every single day.”

Ridder talked about the players who are “seniors,” or the ones who will run out of eligibility come season’s end.

“They’re proud of what they’ve done,” he said. “I think they’re juiced up and ready to make a run in the conference tournament.”

Southwest, from B1:

ball came to me, my guard passed it to me. You know I had to finish it off.”

After a gruelling football season — Callaway was a star tight end for the Patriots on the gridiron — the win was emotional.

“Last year we lost in this round, so we came in the summer and developed and got the win tonight,” Callaway said. “It was so big for us, for me.”

The big man’s late surge stood out because of its effect on the raucous crowd, but he was far from the only contributor in the electric playoff win.

Junior C.J. Howard continued his clutch ways and hit key shots, finishing with a team-high 20 points. Junior Chase Dupree chipped in with 11 points, mostly in the first half. Montese Green, a key morale man for the Patriots, figured into the game late with passes and rebounds.

Callaway had only eight points, but they all came in the second half. Six of them came in the final six minutes on crucial layups — and, of course, the jam.

“I don’t even know what to say,” Hardnett said of his team’s performance. “I’m so proud of them... Rinaldo is impressive because of how hard he works. Montese Green is right up there with him. They made a difference tonight.”

Though Southwest did struggle with free throws in the second half, its defense — particularly the defensive rebounding — suffocated Temple in the fourth after the Tigers had kept great pace in the first three quarters.

“We knew what we wanted to do defensively, we knew it would be a tough game. We knew we had to sustain through their runs,” Hardnett said. “It was adversity, but we’re better for it. It’s a game to go to the Fi-



Southwest guard C.J. Howard (1) puts up a shot in the lane during the Patriots’ 65-52 Elite 8 win over Temple. Howard, a force for Southwest all season despite being only a junior, led the team with 20 points and hit key shots late to help the Patriots pull away in the fourth quarter.

Jason Vorhees / The Melody

nal Four, it’s going to be tough.”

The Patriots will play No. 5 Toombs County, a red-hot team that won their region tournament despite finishing fourth in the regular season, this Saturday at 3 p.m. in Milledgeville. The Bulldogs defeated Vidalia on the other side of the bracket.

In a frenetic first half, it looked a bit like the Patriots might get out to an early lead with 3-pointers just as they did against Banks County in the Sweet 16. Howard made a pair of long-range jumpers as Southwest jumped out to a 10-2 lead quickly, but Temple fought hard and used a 3-pointer of their own and some foul shots to keep things tight in the opening quarter.

Point guard Darren Drayton did an excellent job managing the ball for the Tigers, especially in the second quarter. His good decisions gave Temple solid looks under the basket, and a brilliant pass at the baseline to save the ball from going out of bounds gave the Tigers a three and a 23-20 lead with three minutes left in the quarter.

Southwest was shaky and struggled to score, as they could not move the ball inside with any consistency. Temple was plagued by traveling calls stemming from indecisiveness — a Tiger would think about hoisting a 3-pointer for a split second, long enough to stop his dribble, and then try to resume the play. The refs were unconvinced and blew the whistle at

least five separate times for traveling in the first half.

Southwest bounced back from the slow start to the quarter and capitalized on a trio of foul shots to take a 27-24 lead at halftime.

The third quarter was similar to the first half. The Patriots jumped out to a bit of a lead, 34-28, before scrappy defense and shooting from Temple got the Tigers back in front. A half-court heave at the buzzer swished in to give Temple momentum and a 41-37 lead heading into the final frame.

The momentum did not last long, however, as Southwest roared to life in the final quarter. Callaway was the focal point with his dunk and layup game, getting the crowd loud and helping the Patriots pull away.

HOF, from B1:

my life. She was my tutor at Auburn, so she’s the smart one of the group.” Central Georgia had two connections. Baseball coach Terry Holder grew up in Cochran, and actually played in a state championship basketball game in the auditorium for the old Cochran High Royals, throwing out a “Go Royals” at some former teammates on hand.

Theron Sapp was born in Dublin and grew up in Macon, becoming a star football player at Lanier before moving to Georgia, where he’ll forever hold legendary status as “The Droughtbreaker.”

He recovered a fumble at midfield, and then his one-yard touchdown run on fourth and goal in 1957 gave Georgia a 7-0 win over Georgia Tech and broke an eight-game losing streak to the Yellow Jackets.

Sapp was on hand, along with four children and nine of his 11 grandchildren. His daughter Jan spoke on his behalf.

“When we told Dad he had been chosen for the Georgia Sports Hall

of fame, he said, and I quote, ‘Hall of fame? I’m too young to be in the hall of fame.’”

She recalled how he fractured three vertebrae in an all-star game while at Lanier, and how Georgia head coach Wally Butts said he’d still have a scholarship with the Bulldogs whether he played for them or not.

A doctor told Sapp that if he were his son, there’d be no football.

“I told my doctor, with all due respect, I’m not your son, and I will play again,” Jan said, relating her father’s story. “So here I am today at this fantastic event. Too young to be in the hall of fame, but I’ll take it.”

“I still tell people today, no one has gotten more miles out of a one-yard touchdown run than I got in that touchdown run against Tech.”

The weekend left an impact as well. “This has been an unbelievable event for me,” said former Braves outfielder Marquis Grissom, holding his thumb and index finger an inch or two apart. “Right up there with the World Series, and being from Atlanta, winning the World Series in Atlanta. This is that special.”

Former Braves pitching coach Leo

Mazzone, after sharing some mighty entertaining stories from his career rocking in the Atlanta dugout next to Bobby Cox, was dazzled.

“The state of Georgia is the state where all of my childhood dreams came true,” said the West Virginia native who grew up in Maryland. “From the time I was 9 years old until now.

“This is a tremendous honor. I can’t believe it. I didn’t know what to expect. This is a first-class operation. I see the recipients of (induction), and I don’t feel I’m as good as they are. I also know that I had the fortune of being with the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball, and they went to the post when it was their turn.”

FanFest afforded Mathis reminders of the past, and present.

“I sat next to Brian Jordan today at the (FanFest) and I felt like a kid in a candy store, looking at all the cards and pictures,” Mathis said. “I felt young all over again.”

“Until I stood up. I said, ‘Ohhh, my knees and back.’”

The ceremony is always a combination of thanks, emotion and humor.

Grissom combined two in one tale, earning one of the biggest laughs of

the night when talking about how he learned of the importance of family over baseball.

Often, Grissom would come home from work at the stadium and play some ball with his son D’Monte. Grissom had a particularly bad game one day, and was in no mood for anything or anybody.

“He wanted to play and I didn’t want to play,” Grissom said. “The next day, I cried like a baby, because that game is not more important than my family. That stuck with me for the rest of my baseball career, kind of changed my life and my career.”

“We play baseball as a sport, but that family value is the key. I want to thank him today.”

With his son in attendance, Grissom recounted one of the funnier anecdotes of the night.

“I used to drag him around in this basket, around the house in this basket real fast, and he loved that,” Grissom said. “One time, he hit his head on the wall.”

Grissom paused, starting to giggle as he looked toward D’Monte. “He ain’t been right since.”

Schedule

Friday, Feb. 28

Soccer

Boys Teams

- ACE vs. Northeast 7:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Aquinas 7 p.m.
- Tattnell vs. Tallulah Falls 7:30 p.m.

Girls Teams

- ACE vs. Northeast 5:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Aquinas 5 p.m.
- Tattnell vs. Tallulah Falls 5:30 p.m.

Baseball

- Central vs. Dodge County 4 p.m.
- ACE vs. Jefferson County 6 p.m.
- Southwest @ Dublin, 5:30 p.m.
- FPD vs. St. Anne-Pacelli 6:30 p.m.
- Tattnell vs. Savannah Christian 7 p.m.
- Mount de Sales vs. Bulloch 6 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Softball vs. College of Charleston (in Tallahassee) 10 a.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball @ North Florida 10 a.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs Chattanooga 2 p.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. Florida State 5:30 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. High Point 6 p.m.

Saturday, Mar 1

Basketball

- GHSA Class A/DI Final Four: No. 1 Southwest vs. No. 5 Toombs County (at Georgia College) 3 p.m.
- GIAA State Championships @ Columbus State, all day

Soccer

Boys teams

- Stratford vs. Tallulah Falls 4 p.m.

Girls teams

- Stratford vs. Tallulah Falls 4 p.m.

Baseball

- FPD vs. Stony Brook 4 p.m.
- Tattnell @ Troup County 4 p.m.
- Tattnell at Prince Avenue Christian, 7 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Beach Volleyball @ Jacksonville 10 a.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. Florida Gulf Coast 12:30 p.m.
- Mercer Women’s Tennis vs. Georgia State 1 p.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Saint Leo 2 p.m.
- Mercer Women’s Basketball vs. UNC Greensboro
- Mercer Softball @ Florida State 3 p.m.
- Mercer Men’s Lacrosse vs. Drexel 4 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. FAMU 4 p.m.
- Mercer Men’s Basketball vs. Western Carolina 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Mar 2

- Mercer Softball vs. College of Charleston 10 a.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. High Point 1 p.m.

Monday, Mar 3

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Westside vs. Macon County 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA @ Piedmont Academy 7 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Windsor @ Trinity Christian 5:30 p.m.

Baseball

- Central vs. Rutland, 4 p.m.
- Northeast @ Warner Robins, 6 p.m.
- Mount de Sales @ GMC 5:30 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Women’s Tennis vs. East Tennessee State 2 p.m.

Tuesday, Mar 4

Soccer

Boys teams

- Central @ Dublin 7:30 p.m.
- Rutland @ Pike County 7 p.m.
- ACE vs. West Laurens 7:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Cross Creek 7:30 p.m.
- Northeast @ Jefferson County 7:30 p.m.
- FPD @ Landmark Cristian 7:30 p.m.
- Stratford @ Piedmont Academy 7:30 p.m.
- Tattnell @ United Home Schoolers 7 p.m.
- Mount de Sales @ John Milledge Academy 5:45 p.m.
- CFCA vs MACHS 7 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Central @ Dublin 5:30 p.m.
- Rutland @ Pink County 5 p.m.
- ACE vs. West Laurens 5:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Cross Creek 5:30 p.m.
- Northeast @ Jefferson County 5:30 p.m.
- FPD @ Landmark Cristian 5:30 p.m.
- Stratford @ Piedmont Academy 5:30 p.m.
- Tattnell @ United Home Schoolers Time TBA
- Mount de Sales @ John Milledge Academy 4 p.m.

Baseball

- Northeast vs. Rutland 4 p.m.
- Central vs. East Laurens 4 p.m.
- Southwest @ Bleckley County 5:45 p.m.
- Stratford vs. Southland 5 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Softball @ Bethune Cookman 5 p.m.
- Mercer Women’s Lacrosse @ Arizona State 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Mar 5

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Westside vs. Morgan County 7:30 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Westside vs. Morgan County 5:30 p.m.

Baseball

- ACE vs. Peach County 7 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Beach Volleyball @ CSU North Ridge 1 p.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. CSU Bakersfield 3 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball @ Alabama State 7 p.m.

Thursday, Mar 6

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Central vs. Washington County 7:30 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Central vs. Washington County 5:30 p.m.
- Windsor vs. Vidalia Heritage Academy 5 p.m.

Baseball

- Northeast @ Jefferson County (Doubleheader) 4 p.m.
- FPD @ Gatewood 5 p.m.
- Mount de Sales vs. Crawford County 5:30 p.m.
- Tattnell vs. Bulloch 5:30 p.m.

Other Sports

- Mercer Men’s Lacrosse @ St. Bonaventure 12 p.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. St. John’s 3 p.m.
- Mercer Women’s Basketball SOCON tournament First round (Time and Opponent TBD)

Friday, Mar 7

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 7:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 7:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 7:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA vs. Vidalia Heritage Academy 7:30 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 5:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 5:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 5:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 5:30 p.m.

Other sports

- Mercer Men’s Basketball SOCON tournament First round (Time and Opponent TBD)
- Mercer Women’s Golf vs. Florida
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Southern Miss noon
- Mercer Women’s Lacrosse vs. UC Davis 2 p.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. Jacksonville 2 p.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Vanguard 6 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. Southern 6 p.m.
- Mercer Softball @ North Florida 7 p.m.

Friday, Mar 7

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 7:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 7:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 7:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA vs. Vidalia Heritage Academy 7:30 p.m.

Girls Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 5:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 5:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 5:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 5:30 p.m.

Other sports

- Mercer Men’s Basketball SOCON tournament First round (Time and Opponent TBD)
- Mercer Women’s Golf vs. Florida
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Southern Miss noon
- Mercer Women’s Lacrosse vs. UC Davis 2 p.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. Jacksonville 2 p.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Vanguard 6 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. Southern 6 p.m.
- Mercer Softball @ North Florida 7 p.m.

Friday, Mar 7

Soccer

Boys Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 7:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 7:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 7:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA vs. Vidalia Heritage Academy 7:30 p.m.

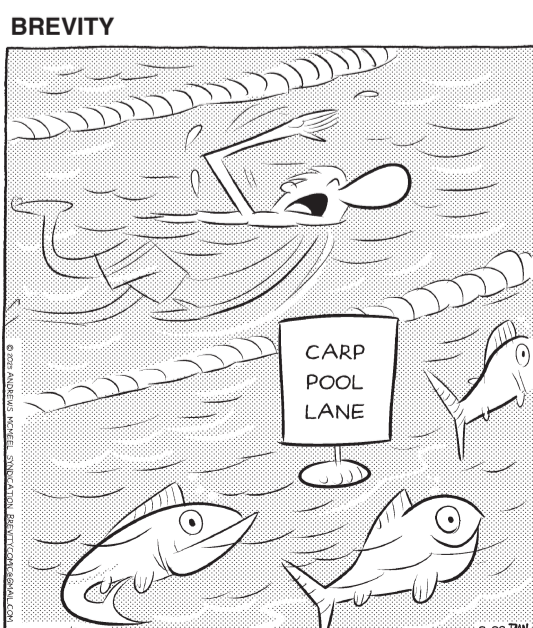
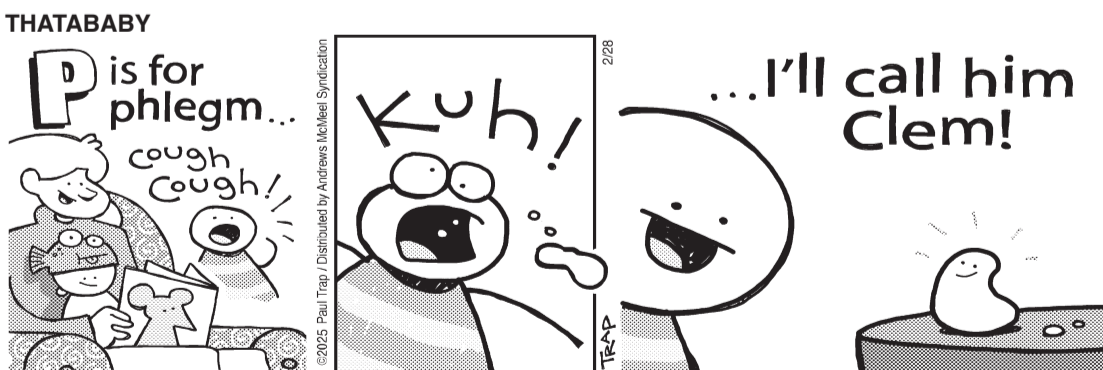
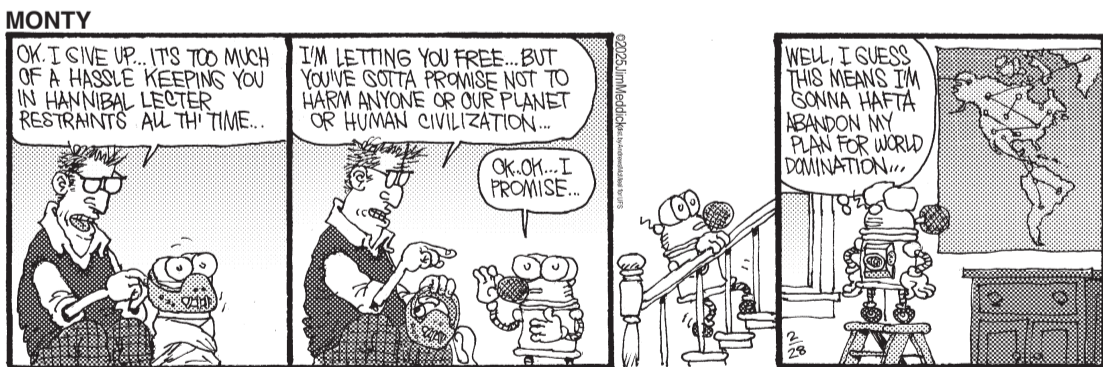
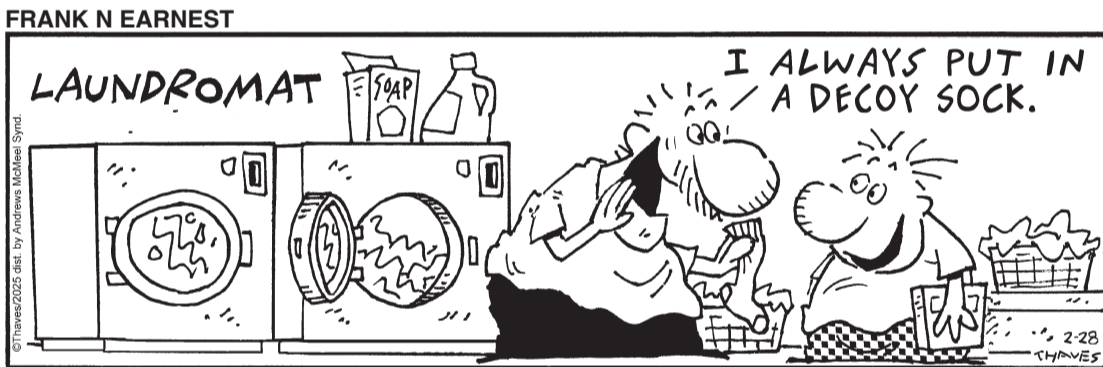
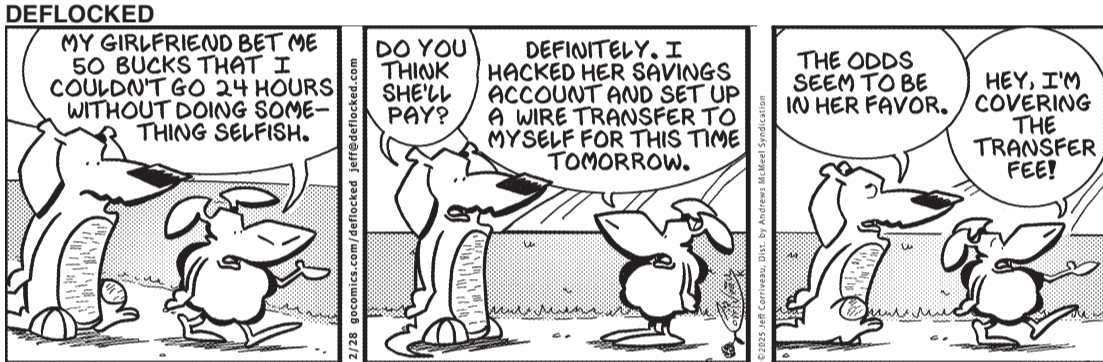
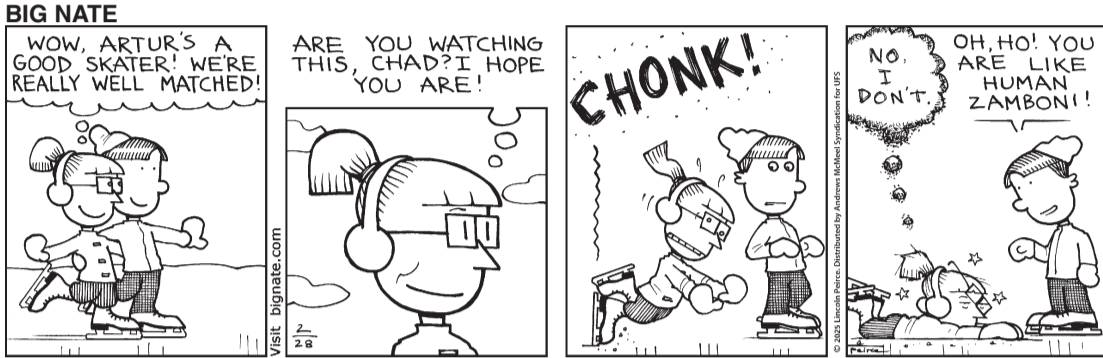
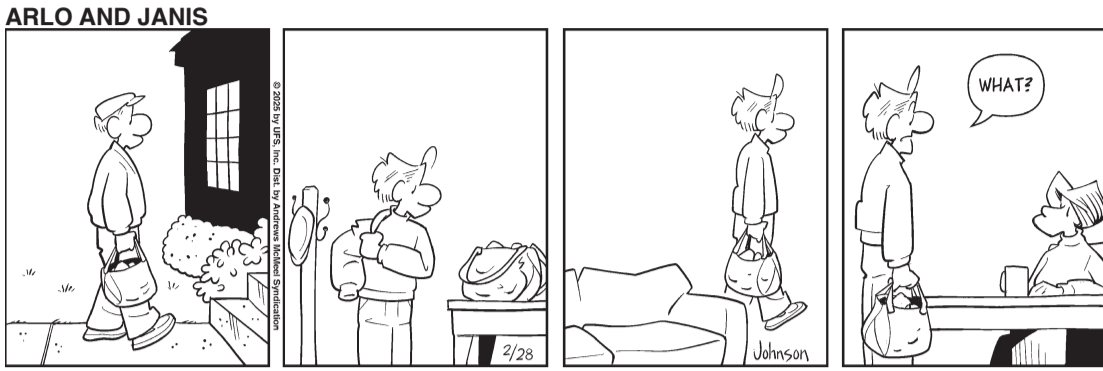
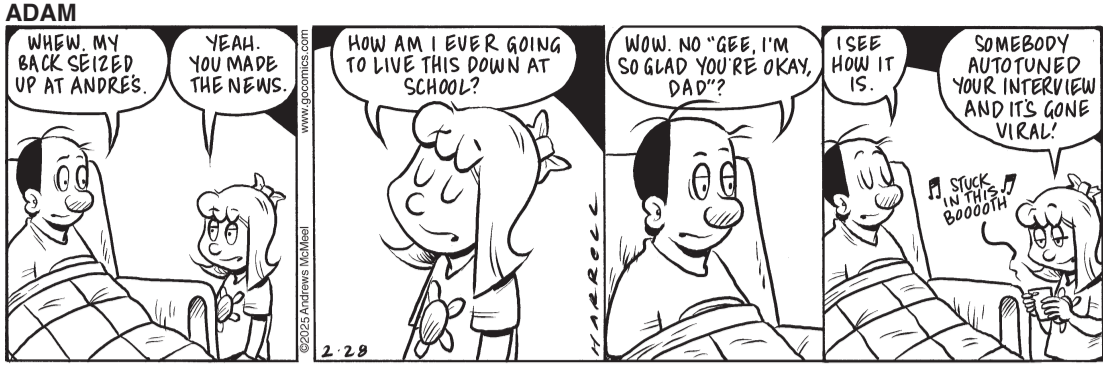
Girls Teams

- Westside @ Pike County 5:30 p.m.
- ACE vs. Dodge County 5:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. Harlem 5:30 p.m.
- FDP @ Piedmont Academy 5:30 p.m.

Other sports

- Mercer Men’s Basketball SOCON tournament First round (Time and Opponent TBD)
- Mercer Women’s Golf vs. Florida
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Southern Miss noon
- Mercer Women’s Lacrosse vs. UC Davis 2 p.m.
- Mercer Softball vs. Jacksonville 2 p.m.
- Mercer Beach Volleyball vs. Vanguard 6 p.m.
- Mercer Baseball vs. Southern 6 p.m.
- Mercer Softball @ North Florida 7 p.m.

Friday, Mar 7



NEA Crossword Puzzle

- ACROSS**
- 1 Datebook abbr.
 - 4 Youngster
 - 7 Fancy
 - 11 Ventilate
 - 12 Not wild
 - 13 Pennsylvania port city
 - 14 Sgt., for one
 - 15 Leave
 - 16 Yield
 - 17 Dead duck
 - 19 Impaired
 - 21 "Elvis — left the building"
 - 22 Actor — McKellen
 - 23 Inlet
 - 24 — Arbor, Michigan
 - 25 Big cheese (Abbr.)
 - 28 Golfer's cry
 - 29 Hasten
 - 30 Refer to
 - 31 — Geller in "Friends"
 - 32 "Loneliest" number
 - 33 Affirm
 - 34 Beer
- DOWN**
- 35 Away from home
 - 36 Metric unit
 - 37 Spring mo.
 - 38 Imaginary bird
 - 39 Plant with prickly leaves
 - 43 Tolerate
 - 46 Family member
 - 47 Candid
 - 49 Wood for barrels
 - 50 Monster
 - 51 Tidy
 - 52 Sporty truck
 - 53 Prophet
 - 54 Understand
 - 55 Feeling blue
- Answer to Previous Puzzle**
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| T | E | N | D | R | A | S | P | E | L |
- 6 One in custody**
- 7 Nut for pies**
- 8 Beaver State (Abbr.)**
- 9 Aspect**
- 10 Obey**
- 12 Not wordy**
- 18 Roof edges**
- 20 Chess piece**
- 23 Refrigerate**
- 24 "— Misbehavin'"**
- 25 Full of energy**
- 26 News bit**
- 27 Parts — million**
- 28 Monk's title**
- 29 Lasting 60 minutes**
- 30 Chocolate substitute**
- 35 Choose**
- 36 Allow**
- 37 Ray flower**
- 39 Town in New Mexico**
- 40 Gigantic (2 wds.)**
- 41 About (2 wds.)**
- 42 Sword**
- 44 Numerical info**
- 45 Got with effort (with "out")**
- 48 Corrode**

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Almanac

Today is the 59th day of 2025 and the 70th day of winter.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1935, DuPont scientist Wallace Carothers invented nylon.

In 1993, federal agents raided the Branch Davidian cult compound in Waco, Texas.

In 1997, two heavily armed and armored bank robbers were killed in a shootout with police on the streets of North Hollywood.

In 2013, Pope Benedict XVI became the first Catholic pope to resign since 1415.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Vincente Minnelli (1903-1986), film director; Milton Caniff (1907-1988), cartoonist; Frank Gehry (1929-), architect; Mario Andretti (1940-), race car driver; Bernadette Peters (1948-), actress; Paul Krugman (1953-), columnist/Nobel laureate; John Turturro (1957-), actor; Daniel Handler aka Lemony Snicket (1970-), author; Eric Lindros (1973-), hockey player; Jason Aldean (1977-), singer-songwriter; Luka Doncic (1999-), basketball player.

TODAY'S FACT: The 2-1/2-hour series finale of "M*A*S*H," which was watched by 60.3% of U.S. TV-owning households, remains the highest-rated TV series finale in history, with a 77 share of the Nielsen ratings during its original airing on this day in 1983.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1967, Wilt Chamberlain of the Philadelphia 76ers missed a shot for the first time in four games, ending his NBA-record streak of consecutive field goals at 35.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "It is one of life's bitterest truths that bedtime so often arrives just when things are really getting interesting." -- Lemony Snicket, "The Grim Grotto"

TODAY'S NUMBER: 51 -- days that the 1993 Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas, lasted.

TODAY'S MOON: Between new moon (Feb. 27) and first quarter moon (March 6).

Community Briefs

Maconites travel to the capitol to celebrate Macon Day

More than 100 people represented Macon at Macon Day on Feb. 19. The full day at the State Capitol was hosted by the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce.

The day began with an early morning of loading two buses of community partners, program sponsors and the Leadership Macon Class of 2025, heading to the Gold Dome. They had a full day of speakers such as Georgia public officials and state policy experts discussing issues and opportunities impacting the Macon region.

"Macon Day made our presence seen and heard at the State Capitol," said Chamber President/CEO Jessica Walden. "From our full day of advocacy at the Gold Dome to our fish fry reception that showcased the best of Macon, it was a day for Georgia to remember, especially when it comes to our collective impact on the State."

Following the day at the Gold Dome, people headed over to the Georgia Freight Depot for the Macon Day Fish Fry. The reception was aimed to showcase the best of Macon, including recent headlines like *Wall Street Journal* naming Macon one of the "Top 25" to visit in 2025.

Bipartisan bill aims to protect Georgia's poultry industry from Avian flu

Amid a national bird flu outbreak, U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff is introducing a bipartisan bill to protect Georgia's poultry growers and families buying groceries.

Ossoff is working to bring Republicans and Democrats together to pass the bipartisan Healthy Poultry Assistance and Indemnification Act (HPAI ACT) of 2025, bipartisan legislation he helped introduce aimed at expanding support for the poultry industry during avian influenza outbreaks. The bipartisan bill was recently introduced by Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Roger

Wicker (R-MS).

"Georgia farmers work tirelessly to feed the nation and the world. They need strong protections against avian flu outbreaks," Ossoff said. "That's why I'm working to bring together Republicans and Democrats to support Georgia poultry producers."

During avian influenza outbreaks, all farmers within the control area of an outbreak — even those without an outbreak themselves — are barred from placing flocks. However, only farmers whose poultry flocks test positive for avian influenza are currently eligible to receive financial support through the USDA.

The bipartisan bill would strengthen USDA's compensation program to make all farmers in a controlled area eligible for support.

Last month, Avian Influenza made its way into Georgia's commercial poultry following positive bird flu cases in Elbert County. In response, more than 100 commercial poultry operations within a 6-mile radius were temporarily placed under quarantine and all poultry exhibitions, shows, swaps, meets and sales in the state were suspended.

Mercer University faculty members tapped for prestigious governor's teaching fellows program

Three Mercer University faculty members were recently selected for the prestigious governor's teaching fellows program.

College of Professional Advancement Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. Tugba Ertan-Bolelli and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Associate Professor of Physics Dr. Chamaree de Silva were selected for the 2025-26 academic year program, and College of Professional Advancement Assistant Professor of Writing and Interdisciplinary Studies Dr. Stefanie Sevcik was accepted into the May symposium.

"We are thrilled that all three of our nominees were selected," Vice

Provost Kelly Refitt said. "Not only will they benefit from participating in the program, but through the program, they will enhance the education of our students and share their experiences with faculty colleagues."

The Fellows are selected based on:

- Commitment to undergraduate teaching - Applicants demonstrate how they have improved their teaching practices and how they would like to enhance their teaching and professional development.

- The Ripple Effect - Applicants outline a plan to share the fruits of their fellowship experience with faculty at their home institutions.

Stratford Academy announces the opening of Little Eagles Learning Center

Stratford Academy is proud to announce the launch of the Little Eagles Learning Center, set to open in August 2025. This year-round early childhood program will serve children ages 6 weeks to 2 years, providing a nurturing, play-based environment that fosters growth, exploration and developmentally rich experiences.

"At Stratford Academy, we believe that nurturing young children with love, care, and purposeful engagement lays the foundation for their growth into confident, compassionate, and curious learners," Head of School Rachel Adams said. "Through meaningful interactions, age-appropriate activities, and a sensory-integrated curriculum, even our youngest learners will grow, explore and learn through play. Every milestone matters and we're excited to nurture each step of your child's journey."

Little Eagles will offer a thoughtfully designed curriculum tailored to each stage of early development. The infant program will focus on hands-on, responsive interactions with teachers fostering meaningful connections. Infants will benefit from tummy time, classical music and storytime to support cognitive

and motor development. A private nursing room also will be available for mothers to bond with their babies.

For 1 and 2-year-old Eagles, a developmentally appropriate curriculum will promote growth, exploration and a seamless transition into Stratford's preschool program. Learning will extend beyond the classroom with students exploring Stratford's 107-acre campus, including visits to the library, athletic events and practices, theater rehearsals plus outdoor adventures at Rocky Creek and the cross-country trails. Activities such as free play, storytime, movement and music will create an engaging and enriching environment.

Mercer Visionary Student Panel program wins national award

Mercer University's Associate Director of Engaged Learning Lauren Shinholster and her Visionary Student Panel program have been selected for Campus Compact's Excellence in Civic and Community Engagement Programming Award.

The national award recognizes initiatives that use on-campus civic and community engagement to address meaningful areas of need and make effective and long-lasting positive changes in communities.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch FRIDAY

February 28, 2025

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

College Basketball

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

Say farewell to February and get ready for March Madness with Davidson at VCU (ESPN2), UCLA at Purdue (FOX) and Iowa at Northwestern (FS1).

NBA Basketball

ESPN, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Live

February's NBA schedule closes out with a doubleheader on ESPN featuring the Cleveland Cavaliers at the Boston Celtics and the L.A. Clippers at the L.A. Lakers.

NCIS: Sydney

CBS, 8 p.m.

In the new episode "Truth Sabre," NCIS is thrown into the murky world of online conspiracies after a car owned by a U.S. Navy cyber engineer explodes just as her teenage daughter was about to take a driving lesson.



RONALD MARTINEZ

Fur Babies

Nat Geo Wild, 9 p.m. ■ Season Finale

Two hourlong episodes close out the

first season of this series that follows veterinarians as they provide support to people during the experience of their pets' pregnancies and the arrival of newborns.

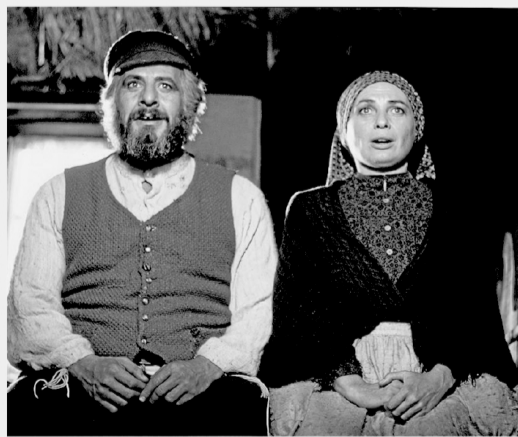
CATCH A CLASSIC

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

TCM, beginning at 9 a.m.

Today's 31 Days of Oscar daytime lineup features films that were nominated for or won Academy Awards for their costume design: **The Wonderful World of the Brothers**

Grimm (1962; winner in Color category), **What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?** (1962; winner in Black-and-White category), **Raintree County** (1957; nominee) and **Tess** (1979; winner). The evening theme is "Oscar-Worthy Dads," featuring **Life is Beautiful** (1997; Best Actor winner, Best Director nominee and Best Original Screenplay co-nominee Roberto Benigni), **On Golden Pond** (1981; Best Actor winner Henry Fonda), **Fiddler on the Roof** (pictured) (1971; Best Actor nominee Topol), **The Great Santini** (1979; Best Actor nominee Robert Duvall) and **Life With Father** (1947; Best Actor nominee William Powell).



UNITED ARTISTS

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



MARVEL STUDIOS

If I Can't Have You (2023, Suspense) Jackée Harry, Bailey Kai **LMN, 6 p.m.**

Kill Bill: Vol. 2 (2004, Action) Uma Thurman, David Carradine **IFC, 6 p.m.**

Sparkle (2012, Drama) Jordyn Sparks, Whitney Houston **BET, 6 p.m.**

The Fifth Element (1997, Science fiction) Bruce Willis, Gary Oldman **Bravo, 7 p.m.**

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

Daddy Day Care (2003, Children) Eddie Murphy, Jeff Garlin **VH1, 8 p.m.**

Nickel Boys (2024, Drama) Ethan Herisse, Brandon Wilson **MGM, 8 p.m.**

The Perfect Killer (2025, Suspense) JaNae Armogan, Laura Provenzano **LMN, 8 p.m.**

Mo' Better Blues (1990, Drama) Denzel Washington, Spike Lee **BET, 9 p.m.**

Doctor Strange (2016, Action) Benedict Cumberbatch, Chiwetel Ejiofor **TNT, 10 p.m.**

The Killer I Picked Up (2024, Suspense) Patrice Goodman, David D. Wilson **LMN, 10 p.m.**

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Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody and courtesy Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, Larry Najera, Bibb County Schools

Top row from left: More than 100 people of community partners, program sponsors, and the Leadership Macon Class of 2025 have their picture taken on the steps inside the Georgia State Capital for Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce's Macon Day. | Albert Crumbley III and Violette Funk were crowned 2025 Little Mr. and Miss Cherry Blossom last week. **Second row:** Bibb County SOAR Academy students in the Communities in Schools of Central Georgia program help paint a mural created by Mama Hawk Draws' Erin Hawkins. **Third row:** Heather Maguire, co-owner of Slate Aviation, speaks during a ribbon cutting ceremony Tuesday at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport. The company will use the 80,000 square-foot facility at 100 East Dr. to support maintenance and cabin conversions of its CRJ-200 aircraft to VIP and shuttle seating configurations. **Bottom row from left:** Students at Alexander II Magnet School celebrated Arbor Day last Friday by planting a tree on campus. | Wesleyan College celebrated Black History Month with a music, fashion and talent program along with a keynote address from Mr. Willie Dumas, Vice President of the Macon-Bibb NAACP Wednesday in the school's dining room.

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

