

The Macon Melody

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Bibb County's local source for community news

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Bibb voters overwhelmingly approve SPLOST

Laura Corley
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Macon voters overwhelmingly approved a penny-on-the-dollar sales tax that will raise \$450 million for public projects related to public safety, recreation, road paving, private sector growth and economic development.

More than 5,180 people voted in favor of the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, and 1,058 voted against it.

All told, only 6,250 people voted, representing 5.2% of the 120,000 registered voters in

the county. The SPLOST referendum was the lone ballot item.

Elections in Bibb County typically cost about \$400,000, Macon-Bibb County Elections Supervisor Tom Gillon said, but this one cost about \$300,000. All 31 polling places were open on Election Day.

The last time Bibb County voters approved a SPLOST was in November 2016, when the hotly-contested presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was also on the ballot. A little more than 56,900 people voted in that election, and the SPLOST passed with 61% of voter's approval. The number of registered voters at the time was about

80,000, Gillon said.

The SPLOST voters approved in November 2016 took effect in April 2018 and is anticipated to sunset in September. The 2025 SPLOST voters approved Tuesday will take effect in October.

Mayor Lester Miller posted on Facebook after the results were tallied Tuesday.

"Today marks a significant milestone in Macon Bibb, as we received a mandate from voters regarding our upcoming SPLOST," Miller wrote. "We extend our gratitude to everyone who has placed their trust in our leadership, enabling us to implement initiatives that enhance the quality of life for our community. I

can feel the asphalt trucks heating up to tackle some of our roads that have been neglected for a long time! Sit back, and enjoy the ride while we GO BIG in Macon!"

Promotion of the SPLOST was mostly funded by the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority, a local authority created by an act of the General Assembly in 1962. Miller serves on its board.

The Industrial Authority contributed \$50,000 to an independent committee called "Go Big for Macon-Bibb" that registered with the state in January. The committee also raised another \$25,000 from construction companies and private businesses.

The Otis Redding Center opens its doors



Justin Andrews, director of special projects and outreach at the Otis Redding Foundation leads a tour of the new Otis Redding Center for the Arts. Andrews, Redding's grandson, said the center's goal is to be part of the community.

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter
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Hundreds gathered in the Zelma Redding Amphitheater Tuesday morning for the Otis Redding Center for the Arts' ribbon cutting, celebrating the culmination of nearly five years of planning and building.

The lawn outside the brand new center, which sits at Cotton Avenue and Cherry Street, was populated by county commissioners, chamber representatives, musicians and other local leaders.

The Otis Redding Foundation led the

ceremony by acknowledging the community's support and noting the center's capacity to be part of the community.

"This is not just a building for kids," said Justin Andrews, Otis Redding's grandson and the foundation's director of special projects and outreach.

"This is not just a building for the Reddings. This is not just a building for anybody who wants to do music in the arts. This right here is a community project."

Although it was not yet installed for the opening ceremony, the statue of Otis Redding that was unveiled at Gateway Park in 2002 will be repositioned outside of the center sometime within next week.

Karla Redding-Andrews, Otis Redding's daughter and the foundation's executive director, said she hopes the new statue's site will become one of the most photographed spots in Macon.

"Everything that we've ever done in this community, we're so respected and so supported, and I am just grateful for that," she said. "I think our community knows if we set out to do something, we're gonna tell the truth and we're gonna do it."

Construction on the center, located at the former site of Nu-Way Wieners,

Jason Vorhees / The Melody



Evelyn Davidson / The Melody
House Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) delivers a speech to the congregation at Steward Chapel Sunday afternoon.

Historic Steward Chapel celebrates 160 year legacy

Evelyn Davidson
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Rain evaporated off the pavement and a new layer of pollen settled in as sunlight broke through the stained glass windows of Macon's historic Steward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Community members slid into the church's wooden pews to celebrate 160 years of worship.

"The lord that I serve — there is no rain down," the Rev. Wanda S. West told church-goers.

West led the anniversary service, joined by pastors from neighboring churches in Byron, Eatonton and Milledgeville. Several musical performances brought folks to their feet, clapping

and singing along.

Founded in 1865 from a congregation of formerly enslaved people, Steward Chapel holds a storied history in Macon. The original church burned to the ground in 1869 and was rebuilt in its current location at 887 Forsyth St., from which its members have witnessed history unfold — from the growth of downtown Macon to the fight for equality during the Civil Rights movement.

Macon-Bibb County's executive director of community affairs and school board member the Rev. Henry Ficklin presented West and House Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) with keys to the city.

Mayor Lester Miller has only given three keys to the

See CHAPEL, Page A2

See OTIS, Page A2

Periodical — Mail Label

From Golden Isles Parkway to Bargain Aisles Beltway

Ed Grisamore
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You can shop in a grassy field south of Barnesville and buy a Coca-Cola bottle opener not far from where the man who invented Coke was born.

I know this because we had a field day there last week. It didn't have a price tag, but Jackie Lovejoy sold it to us for a quarter. Her husband, Clay, leaned against his truck and nodded approvingly at the 25-cent transaction, even though his late father was an antique dealer and that stainless steel, bottle-shaped opener had been a family heirloom of sorts.

The state's "longest" yard sale is not a place for sentimental attachment.

Welcome to the annual "Peaches to the Beaches Yard Sale." Or the "Beaches to the Peaches." Our perspective depends on our genesis and terminus on U.S. 341.

The 224-mile shopping spree stretches like a slingshot across 11 counties. Barnesville, once known as the "Buggy Capital of the South," is the official starting

gate. The finish line is in Brunswick, where we can skip across Sidney Lanier's Marshes of Glynn and stick your toe in the ocean on the coast of St. Simons.

Don't expect one-stop shopping. It's mostly stop-and-go shopping. We tap our brakes as we travel from one man's trash to another man's treasure.

Over the past 18 years, Peaches to Beaches has become a tradition on the second Friday and Saturday in March. It's the time of year when Highway 341, which will turn 100 years old next year, transitions to an open-air thrift store and Smithsonian of pocket-books and socket wrenches.

We imagine folks spring cleaning their attics, closets and garages, then dumping them in front yards, pecan orchards and church parking lots. There are pop-up shops at the end of driveways, along fence lines, in the shadows of old sheds and on the tailgates of Ford F-150s.

For 33 business hours, the Golden Isles Parkway is the



Ed Grisamore / The Melody
Columnist Ed Grisamore stumbled upon a guitar made out of old license plates under a shed at Marvin Crafter Park in Fort Valley. After nine hours and some backed up traffic, they had only managed to cover one-third (77 miles) of the marathon rummage sale.

See SALE, Page A3



\$2.00

Otis, from A1:

started nearly two years ago. The land for the center was given to the foundation by Zelma Redding, and the foundation then raised “a little over” \$11 million to erect the new facility, Redding-Andrews said.

Following the speeches from the family, staff, sponsors and Mayor Lester Miller, attendees were invited inside the center. The 15,000-square-foot center contains a state-of-the-art recording studio and several practice rooms and classrooms.

Classrooms were adorned with musical instruments and toys, bright and playful furniture and various pieces of Otis Redding memorabilia.

The center will operate not only as a place for children to practice their music and hang out after school, but also as a concert venue. ORCA offers lessons for instrumentalists, vocalists and songwriters, along with camps teaching kids how to produce music.

Kimberly Kelsey Epps, the center’s director, said the studio’s technological capabilities are among the best in the state.

With the center open, the foundation will begin rolling out new music workshops for kids along with other programs oriented around music education, Epps said.

“It was amazing to see all of these bright smiling faces in the middle of a sunshine filled morning in downtown Macon,” she said. “It was a really magical moment to finally be here.”

Vinson Muhammad, a Macon musician and instructor at ORCA, said the center gives kids in the community a place to unlock their creativity.

He said he looks forward most to watching students grow in terms of their career and their personal character.

“The Otis Redding Center for the Arts is a gem in the community, and a resource that definitely will help propel the community forward,” he said.

ORCA will open up to the public Saturday at 11 a.m., offering tours and information on programming and serving Nu-Way hot dogs and shaved ice.

“Otis Redding’s legacy will live on forever even without this building,” Redding-Andrews said. “We want this building to be Macon’s musical legacy.”



ABOVE: Visitors gather outside the Otis Redding Center for the Arts Tuesday afternoon during the grand opening ceremony. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** A display case in the arts center holds Otis Redding memorabilia and his music records. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Karla Redding-Andrews speaks during the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Otis Redding Center for the Arts. The 15,000-square-foot center has a state-of-the-art recording studio, several practice rooms and classrooms.

Jason Vorhees / The Melody



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Founded in 1865, the original Steward Chapel burned to the ground in 1869 and was rebuilt in its current location at 887 Forsyth St. The Rev. Martin Luther King Dr. delivered a sermon there nearly 70 years ago.

Chapel, from A1:

city in his four years in office, Ficklin said, calling it the “highest attribute.”

Local leaders attended the service, such as former Macon-Bibb commissioner and Macon Water Authority board member Elaine Lucas and her husband, Georgia Sen. David Lucas, as well as Georgia Rep. Anissa Jones.

“Right where you’re sitting could have been one of the places where Dr. King sat when he spoke at this historic church,” said Elaine Lucas, whose family has a long legacy with the church.

Nearly 70 years ago, 600 Maconites filled Steward Chapel’s pews to hear the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. deliver the sermon, “There is No East and No West.”

King, among other influential leaders like civil rights educator and minister Benjamin E. Mays and educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune, once visited Steward Chapel.

In his speech before the congregation, Bishop talked about the foundational pillars of Steward Chapel: purpose, preparation, persistence, principles, patience

and prayer. “God isn’t that interested in men and women who occupy thrones,” Bishop said. “God is interested in people who have altars.”

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Bibb County schools nutrition braces for cuts, regulations



Casey Choung / The Melody

Brookwood Farms employees serve students at the 2nd Annual Bibb County Student Food Show. The food show brought in 326 students from across the county to sample and vote on different culinary offerings.

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter
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Hungry students from across Bibb County poured into the Central Georgia Technical College gym Tuesday morning to taste and vote on their picks for next year's Bibb County School District cafeteria menu.

Students piled their plates high with pulled pork, glowing-ectoplasmic strawberry banana smoothies, rolled up pizza-bites, chicken meatballs and more.

This is the second time Bibb County is holding their Student Food Show — giving kids a say in what goes in their stomachs — but choices for feeding students are becoming harder to make with new regulations and funding cuts.

A little over a week ago, the USDA axed \$1 billion in federal funding for schools and other child care services. The bulk of the funding was for the Local Food for Schools program — established in 2024 — which gave \$660 million to states for schools to buy local food.

Conduis Shuman, the executive director for the Bibb County schools' nutrition department, said the state has yet to inform the district about the cut's impact on Bibb County.

Georgia's agriculture department received \$23.6 million through the program. More than \$2.2 million was used by school nutrition programs for local purchases, according to the Georgia Department of Education.

"We're gonna have to go to some scratch cooking," Shuman said.

The school district also has to get into compliance with new nutrition guidelines, like reducing the amount of sugar in their breakfast foods and sodium in their lunches.

Shuman, who started at Bibb County schools two years ago, said the district's nutrition department is "self-sustaining" meaning it runs on what it makes from federal reimbursements provided by the state.

The school district's central kitchen, the only of its kind among public school districts in Georgia, also allows them to quality control and provide consistent

meals, she said.

"We're pretty flexible with what we have," Shuman said. "Right now, with the recent budget cuts we're having to tailor that (nutrition program)."

All students in Bibb County are eligible for free breakfast and lunch under the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools to provide meals to students without the need for individual household income applications.

Federal legislation could change the eligibility threshold for school districts and require parents to apply for free meals for their children.

"Many of our students that are here, the only meals they receive are the meals that they receive when they come to school," Shuman said.

For now, kids can continue eating turkey sausage and grits, hoppin' John and chicken alfredo before their options change next year.

The student food fair will return next year, Shuman said, hopefully with more than the 326 students that came this year.

Mercer University teacher residency grant program canceled amid nationwide DEI cuts

Evelyn Davidson
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Beatriz Lleras felt a mixture of disbelief and disappointment when Mercer University's Tift College of Education announced the sudden cancellation of federal funding for its GENERATE grant program last month.

The axing of Mercer's Georgia Educators Networking to Revolutionize and Transform Education (GENERATE) program comes as the U.S. Department of Education dismantles Diversity Equity and Inclusion initiatives nationwide.

"There's no concern as to the impacts that this has on regular Americans," said Lleras, who is pursuing a master of arts in teaching through the program.

The three-year teacher residency program, in partnership with five local school districts, is funded by \$9.6 million.

The program aimed to offer residency for teachers without certification or those changing career paths. Participants in the program may pursue a bachelor's or master's degree. They agree to teach for three years in a partnering school district in exchange for stipends for textbooks and free tuition.

In a Feb. 12 letter from Mercer, the university's college of education informed Lleras that the GENERATE grant was terminated as of Feb. 10. Her tuition would be funded until the end of the semester.

Lleras is part of the last cohort of students in the GENERATE program. Fund-

ing cuts come a semester earlier than the program's planned conclusion, which would have covered participating students through December.

"None of us were planning on going into \$10,000 worth of student loan debt this year," Lleras said.

Mercer's letter calls the grant program a "vital resource" but states the decision is a federal one.

The university's letter said it's looking into other funding sources for financial aid and scholarships, but so far Lleras has only been offered the option of a payment plan.

She believes that in the wake of book bans, reduced access to educational resources and struggling federal workers, the defunding of the GENERATE grant program is a drop in the bucket

of a much larger problem.

"I think that's the underlying sort of sense of this all," Lleras said. "It's a scary time."

It's not about government handouts, she said, but about making good investments in the best interest of taxpayers.

"It's not about a party. It's not about politics. It's literally about what the priorities of our country are at this point," said Lleras, an English language learner coordinator for the Dublin City School District.

She feels the decision to nix the grant program was rash and should have been investigated further.

"At the end of the day, we're the ones that fund the government," Lleras said. "So what are our taxes for if not to fund our communities and support the taxpayers?"



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Beatriz Lleras on Mercer University's campus. Lleras is part of the last cohort of GENERATE grant participants.

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Sale, from A1:

Bargain Aisles Beltway. We swear that Smiley's Flea Market has been miniaturized and cloned in every little town along the way.

My professional shopper wife led the charge, and we began our "junkin' journey" at 9:12 a.m. last Friday in downtown Barnesville. We didn't call it a wrap until late in the afternoon when we stuffed a 72-inch bench into the back of our Highlander at the corner of Broad Street and South Dooley Street in Hawkinsville.

The top of the wooden bench had a previous life as a door from a church in Mexico because, after all, everybody and everything has a story.

After nine hours, we had managed to cover only one-third (77 miles) of the marathon rummage sale, stocked with everything from pocket knives to Pez Dispensers, bobbleheads to Barbie dolls and Norman Rockwell prints to "See Rock City" signs.

Veni. Vidi. Visa. (We came. We saw. We spent.)

Life is 98% of stuff we don't need but buy anyway to claim our participation trophies. It's our dollar bill of rights to claim a vintage hat that was a veteran of a half-dozen other yard sales before it finally called our names. Or to purchase a souvenir ashtray someone brought back from Gatlinburg and has been bouncing around as a white elephant gift ever since.

We eventually realize some of these sellers should be paying us to take it all away.

But we hold our ground. It's called the thrill of the hunt.

At the edge of Culloden, I almost forked over \$5 for a

pair of red boxing gloves but fought off the impulse and kept my money in my pocket. I also resisted the lure of a giant universal remote for \$2 that would be next to impossible to lose. If it didn't work, at least I could always use it as a doorstop.

We pulled over near Musella and met a man from Thomaston who was wearing a ladies' mink stole. He insisted it wasn't road kill. He paid only \$5 for it, so that stole was a steal. He laughed and said he was going to wear it to the biggest redneck bar he could find.

Dozens of vendors lined the sidewalks at the city park in Roberta, flanked by the old train depot (now the chamber of commerce) and a Dollar General store at the north end across U.S. 80.

We bought some goat milk soap from former Crawford County Sheriff Kerry Dunaway, had grilled hamburgers from the 3 Lakes Ranch in Knoxville and discussed the merits of barbecue sauce and classic board games with a couple of vendors.

Along the way, we caught glimpses, in various forms, of Milton Bradley, Marilyn Monroe, Hank Aaron, Duck Dynasty, Elvis, Madame Alexander and Mr. Coffee.

At times, Highway 341 was a clogged artery. Traffic moved at the speed of a stagecoach. We endured 20 minutes of bumper-to-bumper misery in Fort Valley. Usually, the only time traffic backs up there is when the train rolls through on the east end of Main Street or there is a shift change at the Bluebird Bus plant near Five Points.

After sitting through the jam I wasn't in much of a buying mood. But I did pretend to jam when I picked up a guitar made out of old license plates under the shed at Marvin Crafter Park. I also found a copy of KC

and the Sunshine Band's "That's The Way" at the top of a stack of 45 rpm vinyl records selling for \$1 apiece. It's hard to believe that song came out 50 years ago.

Who needs a Big Lots store when you have a big lot along Keith Road outside of Perry? After parking at our peril along the crowded highway a few miles east of Sam Nunn's old farmhouse, we went table-hopping and browsed everything from fabric softener to cast iron skillets and homemade jams to hardwood flooring.

My wife picked up a deal on some depression glass from a couple of snowbirds, who split time between Florida and Indiana. Down the road, the heavy traffic crawled through tiny Clinchfield, which doesn't even have a stoplight. At a vendor booth at the First Baptist Church of Haynesville, I reintroduced myself to a lady who had sold us a Cherry Blossom wreath two years ago. She was pleased when I told her we will have it hanging on our front door for the next two weeks.

Shopping does require a different set of muscles. Sorry, but I don't have that shop-'til-you-drop stamina. As the clock moved closer to supper, I was ready to turn the wheels toward home.

I did allow myself to wax sentimental one last time. It was somehow fitting we ended our adventure in the parking lot at First Baptist Church of Hawkinsville, where my parents were married 70 years ago.

There were peaches and beaches back in those days, but no giant yard sale to connect the dots.

Ed Grisamore wants everyone to know he spent only \$1.25, but his wife more than made up for his thriftiness.

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Opinion

SPLOST, the tiniest of turnouts and funding county infrastructure, economic projects

Macon voters overwhelmingly approved what is essentially the continuation of a 1% sales tax Tuesday which will generate some \$480 million. The county intends to spend that money on roads and vital but vague things like “creating jobs” and “promoting private investment.”



Caleb Slinkard

voters in Bibb County, 6,247 voted Tuesday. That’s about 5.2% of registered voters. And while almost all of those 5.2% of voters did vote for the sales tax, there’s a good reason for that.

First, there’s the name. SPLOST sounds like something out of a 1940s Batman comic book. It’s the kind of city politics jargon that makes the average person’s eyes glaze over. Calling it a “penny sales tax,” while common across the country, is disingenuous. It’s a penny... if you’re spending a dollar. It’s a 1% local sales tax.

Secondly, it was the only thing on the ballot in a March election in a

year with no presidential election, no midterm elections, no local elections. It’s true that the county and news organizations, including The Melody, published details about the election. But it’s hard to puncture the cacophony of everyday life, of jobs and getting kids ready for school and grocery shopping and soccer practice and... you get the picture.

If you want people to vote, you put a bunch of stuff on the same ballot. In 2016, the SPLOST was on the November ballot — a general election date during a presidential election year. The result? More than 70% voter turnout.

Finally, sales taxes are regressive. While the county has done a great job of rolling back the millage rate as property values increase, regres-

sive taxes take a higher percentage of income from low-income taxpayers. Macon could make the sales tax less regressive by exempting items like groceries. Or we as a community could decide to generate more revenue via property taxes and less via sales taxes.

It’s worth noting that voters approved the 2016 sales tax, too. I’m not arguing that if more people voted, then the tax would have been voted down. I’m not saying that the SPLOST isn’t important — spending almost half a billion dollars on infrastructure, quality of life and economic development is critical to our future.

My point is that only a relative handful of voters showed up at polling places Tuesday. And there are things we could do to make

sure more folks vote. Additionally, I think it’s worth having a discussion about how we want to fund future county projects.

That’s just one man’s opinion and communities thrive thanks to a diversity of informed opinions. I’d love to hear your thoughts on the election (or about anything going on in our community!)

Email me at caleb@maconmelody.com or send a letter to The Melody at 1675 Montpelier Ave., Macon, GA 31201 and get your letter to the editor published. Please limit your letters to 400 words or less. It would be great to hear from you.

Caleb Slinkard is the managing editor of The Macon Melody.

Picking right back up: part two of Uncle Kyle's ABCs

Welcome back kids. Are you ready to learn a little bit more of the crazy little thing we call the alphabet? Well, you better be because Uncle Kyle is in no mood for your nonsense. You can go back to Snapchats and Tik-Toks later. There’s plenty of time for big corporations and countries, foreign and domestic, to steal your information. Let’s pick up where we left off...



Kyle Dominy

enough that it’s got to work. Let’s try it from the roof...

L is for Lenny. Lenny is one of Uncle Kyle’s alley friends. Stay away from Lenny. He cheats at dice, and he stole my lighter, my good Bic lighter with the monkey on it. That one was my favorite. He says he gave it back, but I know he has it.

M is for money. The love of money is the root of all evil, but money also makes the world go ‘round. Mommy and daddy work hard to make money to buy you video games and ice cream. You should do everything you can to help them save a little money, so they can buy more video games and ice cream. Maybe give yourself a haircut?

N is for Nigerian prince. Posing as one is a great way to get more money. Set up a fake email and send a message to everyone in your dad’s contacts. Pretend to be a big shot in Nigeria who wants to send his riches to the United States. All the people have to do is front a few thousand dollars in “legal” fees. Rich people will do anything to get more money, and it’s only smart for you to take advantage of that. Then you can buy your own video games and ice cream. Just don’t forget your ol’ Uncle Kyle, unless the police show up.

OK kids, that’s all for now. Uncle Kyle is getting bored. And what’s the best part of being an uncle? That’s right, telling you to hit the road.

Kyle Dominy is the writer of the column New Southern Dad

Pulse check: Criminal justice reform in Georgia

Georgia was the nation’s epicenter of criminal justice reform during the Gov. Nathan Deal era, and he left it in much better shape than he found it. The Peach State had long had one of the most troubled justice systems, but Deal sought to reverse those trends. He championed a host of sentencing reforms, establishing accountability courts, expanding parole in lieu of prison time and tackled bail reform.



Marc Hyden

For justice reformers, it was an exciting time, but it couldn’t last in perpetuity. Deal was term-limited, and as he left office and many other lawmakers moved on, both Capitol insiders and outsiders were quick to call time of death on further substantive justice reforms. In light of this, I caught up with Rep. Tyler Paul Smith, R-Bremen, who chairs the committee that vets criminal justice bills, and he understandably takes some umbrage with claims about justice reform being dead.

“If people haven’t been paying attention,” Smith told me, “then they’ve missed it because [criminal justice reform is] alive and well.” He’s quick to rattle off some successes since he’s been in office, but just this year, there are several pieces of justice reform legislation on the move that deserve attention.

Among those, Smith pointed out House Bill 582, sponsored by Rep. Stan Gunter, R-Blairsville, which is also known as the Georgia Survivor Justice Act, and Smith reserves high praise for it: “I think chairman Gunter’s bill—among a few others—is probably one of the better pieces of legislation that we’ve seen come before us.”

If passed, the measure would allow the courts to consider a more complete set of evidence in cases involving defendants who have endured family, dating or child abuse. Put simply, if an abuse survivor retaliates against their tormentor or their abuser coerced them into engaging in illegal activity, then they can introduce evidence of this to reduce their sentence. It is not a get-out-of-jail-free card, but it aims to ensure the justice system doesn’t unfairly punish survivors.

This is just the tip of the iceberg this year. Sen. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough, filed Senate Bill 207, which is designed to help rehabilitated individuals with criminal records to more easily obtain occupational licenses to work. With roughly 40% of Georgians having a mark on their record, this is an important step forward. “Do you have a red flag that comes up in the background search? [If so], you’re going be relegated to minimum wage jobs,” Smith lamented.

While Smith chairs the committee considering criminal justice bills, he has also been sponsoring legislation to fix the justice system himself, including House Bill 535. It is a commonsense proposal that would permit the accused to count time spent in jail for probation revocation hearings toward their total sentence. This helps count time served more consistently across the justice system.

Meanwhile, Rep. Bill Werkheiser, R-Glenville, is pushing House Bill 123 to ensure that the state doesn’t execute intellectually disabled people who have been convicted of capital crimes. This would represent a notable policy shift, and these measures are more than just about rewriting code, they are lawmakers’ passion projects. Smith even admitted, “I shed a few tears when [House Bill 123] passed out of committee.”

These bills are meandering their way through the legislative process, and if passed, will transform the system. This demonstrates that criminal justice reform continues to take center stage in the General Assembly.

While people may have worried that losing Deal to term limits represented the death knell for Georgia’s justice reform, that’s clearly not the case, despite facing some challenges. “A couple years ago, it seemed as if we were trying to put a pen on the balloon that was our criminal justice reform that Gov. Deal passed,” Smith disclosed. “But I think you see that we’re still passing reforms every session. To Gov. Kemp’s credit, he has signed these into law... He’s been a good partner, and his office has been a good partner with us on criminal justice reform.”

For Smith, continuing to promote justice reforms is a particularly important duty in the Peach State. “Georgia was founded as a penal colony,” Smith said, “a place for second chances. Are we really achieving what the spirit of this state—even in its colonial stature—was supposed to be about? Deal understood that and there are some of us that understand that as well.”

While not everyone embraces criminal justice reform, Smith is happy to give them some advice: “You have to be careful to not let re-election scare you away from doing what’s right.” Smith openly admits that there is plenty of work left to do, but he stresses, “[Criminal justice reform is] still alive and well. That heartbeat is going pretty steadily.”

Marc Hyden is the director of state government affairs at the R Street Institute.

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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

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Dear Macon: Get up offa that thing, turnout is key for next week's kazoo record attempt

Sharon, Elaine, Debra, Kris, Bonnie, Nancy, Ruth and Denise.

They don't carry the same name recognition as Sonny and Cher or Sam and Dave. They will never have the star power of John, Paul, George and Ringo.

By this time next week, though, we will get to watch them toot their horns and make their stage debut in Macon.

The eight ladies — all card-carrying “seasoned” citizens — hail from Winston-Salem. They met after moving to North Carolina from other states.

Elaine Potusky and her sister, Sharon, organized a fun-loving, musical group last fall and pronounced themselves the “Ladies Kazoo Band of Greater Winston-Salem.”

The name hit a bit of a B-flat on the musical scale, so they rebranded from snoozy to snazzy. They started referring to themselves as the “Kazoo Sisterhood,” even though Sharon and Elaine are the only siblings in the band.

It was a blessing that the kazoo is considered the world's most “dem-



Ed Grisamore

ocratic” instrument — anyone who can hum can play it — because Kris Ryan was the only “sister” with any music background. She played the flute and piccolo in high school and college, so she was appointed the group's music director by default.

The Kazoo Sisterhood learned some tunes, rehearsed some Christmas songs and performed holiday programs at area nursing homes.

They never expected their stage to get any larger or to travel very many miles from home.

That all changed in January, when they were contacted by Taryn Scher. She is known as “The Sparkle Boss” at TK PR, her public relations firm in Greenville, South Carolina.

“She said she had stumbled upon our band and wanted to be sure that she informed us of this ‘bucket list experience,’” Elaine said.

The opportunity in waiting was a chance to participate in a record attempt for the world's largest kazoo band at the birthplace of the kazoo in Macon.

The shot at the Guinness World Record was on Friday, March 28, exactly two months after National Kazoo Day on Jan. 28 and on the eve of the final weekend of Macon's Cherry Blossom Festival.

They wrote it in ink on their calendars.

None of the Kazoo Sisterhood have been to Macon, much less the festival. It has always been just a dot on the map, a green exit sign along the interstate, a place you bypass on the way to somewhere else.

Not for long. They will pull into town on Wednesday and don't plan on leaving until they know the final score on Friday.

They have been invited to perform on stage in a long lineup of entertainment in the two hours leading up to the world-record try. They will play a couple of “fun” songs and will be accompanied on the tuba by Dr. Buddy Marterre, an associate professor at the Wake Forest School of Medicine.

The Sisterhood, whose oldest member is an octogenarian, has become a mini symphony of media darlings. They were featured in an advertisement in The Melody's special festival section last week.

And, on the day of the kazoo record attempt, they will do a live interview at 9 a.m. on Fox 5 Atlanta's “Good Morning, Atlanta.”

The city with a deep musical heritage has made two previous attempts at the record at Luther Williams Field in 2007 and 2008. Both were unsuccessful.

Now, a kazoo calvary has been resurrected to put melodious tweets in the seats. The current Guinness World Record for the largest kazoo ensemble is 5,190 participants at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Visit Macon has ordered 10,000 kazooos and is counting on a get-out-the-word campaign to fill the Atrium Amphitheater starting at 4 p.m. Organizers are urging folks to register in advance at visitmacon.org. The \$5 entry fee will get you a commemorative kazoo, four hours of entertainment and the opportunity to go home with your fingerprints on a world record.

An adjudicator from Guinness will be in Macon to handle procedural matters. An auditor will be at the amphitheater to certify the results after the crowd performs a five-song medley for the required five minutes.

The song selection is 100% Macon — Otis Redding's “Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay” and “Hard to Handle,” James Brown's “Get Up Offa That Thing,” “Ramblin' Man” by The Allman Brothers Band and Little Richard's “Tutti Frutti.”

Can you imagine 7,000 ... 8,000 ... 9,000 ... 10,000 kazooos playing that musical arrangement for 300 seconds? (Think of it as a way to exact revenge on the cicadas.)

The kazoo is in your court, Macon. Do we want our most telling event of the past three months to be the New Year's Eve implosion of the old 16-story hotel downtown?

Don't be a sit-down town. As the Godfather of Soul — who recorded his first song in Macon — would shout out, “Get Up Offa That Thing.”

At the end of the day on March 28, we should be able to look back and say three words.

We did it.

Ed Grisamore participated in Macon's two unsuccessful attempts for the World's Largest Kazoo Band. He is feeling pretty good this time. Don't let him down.

Local Knowledge: May your brain blossoms be blooming

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

Trivia has returned, and the cherry trees are showing up on time for the pinkest party on earth.

May all the blossoms in your brain be blooming today.

1. How many petals are on a Yoshino blossom?

- (A) Four
(B) Five
(C) Two
(D) 3-14

2. William A. Fickling Sr., who gave away more than 120,000 Yoshino cherry trees in his lifetime, presented nine trees to which Georgia governor, who had them planted at the Governor's Mansion on West Paces Ferry Road in Atlanta?

- (A) George Busbee
(B) Zell Miller
(C) Joe Frank Harris
(D) Sonny Perdue

3. At the inaugural festival in 1983, a hand-carved decorative lantern, 8 feet tall and weighing three tons, was a gift from which Macon sister city?

- (A) Kurobe, Japan
(B) Macon, France
(C) Gwacheon, South Korea
(D) Ulyanovsk, Russia

4. Where is Macon cited as the “Cherry Blossom Capital of the World”?

- (A) Congressional Record
(B) Kelley Blue Book
(C) Ripley's Believe It Or Not
(D) Paula Deen's “Southern Cooking Bible”

5. When singer James Brown appeared for a concert at the 1994 festival, a ceremony was held to name what after him?

- (A) Godfather's Pizza of Soul
(B) Nu-Way's Junkyard Hot Dawg
(C) Grand opening of the “I Feel Goodwill”-Store
(D) Walnut Street bridge across I-75

6. What do Macon-Bibb County firefighters traditionally serve for breakfast at Carolyn Crayton Park on the two Saturdays of the festival?

- (A) Escargot
(B) Macon Bacon
(C) Pink pancakes
(D) Maraschino cherry salsa

7. The National Cherry Festival, where you actually can eat the cherries, was founded in 1926 in what city?

- (A) Pinkistan
(B) Traverse City, Michigan
(C) Soddy Daisy, Tennessee
(D) Booger Hollow, Arkansas

8. What building materials have been painted pink and used to create a cherry blossom design at the Habitat for Humanity “Restore” on Holt Avenue in Macon?

- (A) Attic fans
(B) Toilet seats
(C) PVC pipes
(D) Cinder blocks

9. Which celebrity has NOT been a grand marshal in the festival parade?

- (A) Clark Gable
(B) Barbara Eden
(C) Jimmy Carter
(D) Nancy Grace

10. What is the long-standing theme of Macon's International Cherry Blossom Festival?

- (A) We All Live in a Pink Submarine
(B) If It's Not Nailed Down, We'll Paint It Pink
(C) Love, Beauty and International Friendship
(D) The More, the Cherrier

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

REPORT CARD: (8-10) Pink ribbon (5-7) Blossom worthy (3-4) No cherry ice cream for you (0-2) Pink slip

How AI can enhance the start of the spring season

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



Joe Finkelstein

Spring is a time of renewal — longer days, warmer weather, and the return of outdoor activities.

Whether you're dusting off your gardening gloves, planning community events or tackling spring cleaning, artificial intelligence can be a surprisingly useful tool.

Many of us already use AI in our daily lives, from voice assistants to personalized recommendations, but it can also help us embrace the best parts of the season.

From smart gardening and fitness apps to AI-powered event planning and cleaning assistants, these technologies make it easier to enjoy spring without getting overwhelmed.

If you've never thought about using AI to help with your seasonal routines, now's the time to explore how it can enhance your spring experience.

Smart gardening

Spring is prime gardening season, but caring for plants can be tricky, especially when dealing with unpredictable weather.

AI-powered gardening apps can offer personalized guidance to help plants thrive. Planta and Gardenize use AI to identify plants, provide customized watering schedules and diagnose plant health issues. Simply take a photo of a plant, and the app will analyze its species and recommend the best care techniques based on your local climate.

These tools can help beginner and experienced gardeners alike make the most of the growing season.

Outdoor activities

For those looking to spend more time outdoors, AI can help plan and optimize your activities.

AllTrails is a popular app that uses AI to recommend hiking, biking and running trails based on your location, skill level and weather conditions. Whether you're looking for a scenic nature walk or a challenging mountain hike, AI can guide you to the perfect spot.

If fitness is on your spring agenda, AI-powered workout apps like Nike Training Club, Fitbod and Freeletics create personalized workout plans tailored to your fitness level and goals. Many of these apps use AI to adjust routines based on progress, making outdoor workouts more effective. Whether it's a bodyweight workout in the park or a structured running plan, AI can help you stay active while enjoying the fresh air.

Organizing community events

Spring is filled with festivals, farmers' markets, outdoor concerts and sports events. With so many options, it can be tough to decide what to attend. AI-powered event discovery platforms like Meetup and Eventbrite analyze your interests and past activities to recommend events you might enjoy.

By using AI-driven recommendations, you can find hidden gems in your com-

munity that you might not have discovered otherwise.

For those organizing spring gatherings, AI can simplify the process. Whether you're hosting a school fundraiser, planning a family reunion or organizing a local cleanup event, AI tools can help with promotion, scheduling and logistics.

Canva's AI-powered design tools allow you to create stunning event flyers and social media posts in minutes. AI-driven chatbots like ChatGPT can assist in writing event descriptions, email invitations and promotional messages.

Coordinating schedules can be one of the biggest challenges when organizing a group event.

Doodle and When2Meet use AI to analyze attendees' availability and suggest the best times for meetings and gatherings. By automating these tasks, AI helps event planners focus on making their event memorable rather than getting bogged down in logistics.

Spring cleaning and organization

There's a reason spring cleaning is a tradition — it feels great to start fresh with a clean and organized home. However, deep cleaning an entire house can be overwhelming. AI-powered tools can help break the process into manageable steps.

Tody is a smart cleaning app that creates customized cleaning schedules based on your home's size and habits. It tracks what needs to be cleaned and when, preventing the need for marathon cleaning sessions. AI-powered robotic vacuums like Roomba and Roborock can handle the daily dirt and dust, keeping floors spotless with minimal effort.

Decluttering is another big part of spring cleaning, and AI can even help with deciding what to keep, donate or sell. Apps like Declutter, OfferUp, and eBay's AI-driven pricing tool assess the value of items and help you list them online.

Whether you're clearing out old books, tech gadgets or clothing, these apps can help turn unwanted clutter into cash.

If home improvement is on your spring to-do list, AI can provide inspiration and guidance. Houzz and Pinterest use AI to suggest design ideas based on your preferences, while tools like IKEA Place allow you to visualize furniture in your space before making a purchase. These AI-powered apps help homeowners plan renovations and upgrades without the guesswork.

Making the most of the season with AI

AI isn't just about automation — it's about enhancing our experiences. Whether you're planting a garden, exploring the outdoors, planning an event or tidying up, AI tools can provide personalized guidance, streamline tasks and help you focus on what truly matters: enjoying the season.

So as you step into spring, consider letting AI be your seasonal assistant. A little digital help can go a long way in making this time of year more fun, productive and stress-free.

For questions or comments, visit askaijoe.com.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Passersby enjoy Cherry trees as they bloom in Third Street Park during the 2024 Cherry Blossom Festival in Macon.

People from Austin Scott's district wanted a town hall with the congressman. So they had it without him

Grant Blankenship
GPB News

WARNER ROBINS — Close to 200 people brought their concerns about President Trump's policies to the Warner Robins office of Republican U.S. Rep. Austin Scott on Monday.

Congress is in recess, but Scott (R-Ga.) was not at the office.

So people from around Scott's 8th Congressional District, including Maggie Boxey, a disabled veteran from the South Georgia town of Fitzgerald, put their questions to an empty chair with a blue blazer parked at the back door of the office.

"I would ask the congressman to explain to us, in simple language, why billionaires need a \$4.5 trillion tax cut?" Boxey asked. "And how will that benefit my husband and I, who have 34 years of military service between us?"

She continued. "I have a disabling chronic illness and our health care is in jeopardy. If Medicaid is cut, Medicare is cut, our hospitals in Fitzgerald ... we're at risk of losing our providers. Why is it okay for billionaires to get such a huge tax cut when normal people like us are at risk of losing our social safety nets?"

Faye Banks-Anderson of Warner Robins asked why Scott wasn't standing up for civilian employees at Robins Air Force Base about six miles away.

"I used to work at Robins Air Force Base, so I know how my federal employees feel," Banks-Anderson said. "So I want to know, do you believe in the president's haphazard way of just drastically cutting federal workers fighting fraud, waste and abuse without documentation?"

"All this fraud, waste and abuse that they're supposedly cutting? Where is it? Where is it? Where is the proof?"

Marion McMillan of Warner Robins asked about the future for Georgia farms in the expanding international trade war.

"Georgia's pecan farms are still recovering from Trump's prior 2017 tariffs," she said. "They caused a dramatic drop in Chinese exports. The effect this time on Georgia's biggest agricultural export by Trump's tariffs will



Grant Blankenship / GPB News

Maggie Boxey, a disabled veteran from the South Georgia town of Fitzgerald, asks a blue blazer on a folding chair a question really intended for U.S. Rep. Austin Scott of Georgia's 8th Congressional District during a town hall meeting arranged at Scott's Warner Robins office without his cooperation Monday.

be worse. Why have you been silent on this issue?"

Tree nuts, like pecans, are Georgia's second-largest agricultural export behind poultry.

Other people, from places like Moultrie and Valdosta, asked what would happen to poor or rural Georgia school districts without the U.S. Department of Education.

Those who could not ask their questions out loud by the time the permitted activity was scheduled to end left them in writing to be passed to people in Scott's office, none of whom came outside to the gathering.

In an email to GPB, Scott said he wishes federal agencies had been consulted before cuts made by the Department of Government Efficiency, but that he supports agencies now

working with DOGE.

The email also said Scott will meet with constituents during the current recess, but not when or where.

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

GOP bill outlawing puberty blocking medicine surfaces roiling undercurrent in Georgia House

Ross Williams
Georgia Recorder

The fate of a Senate bill banning puberty-blocking medications for minors with gender dysphoria is unclear after a rocky House Committee hearing Tuesday.

Savannah Republican Sen. Ben Watson's Senate Bill 30 was not scheduled to get a vote in the House Public and Community Health Committee but the meeting ended early after the bill faced skepticism from Democrats on the committee as well as Committee Chair Sharon Cooper, a Marietta Republican.

The bill would bar doctors from prescribing puberty blockers to children with gender dysphoria, a feeling of distress that comes from one's gender identity not matching one's body.

Dr. Michelle Zeanah, a Statesboro-based pediatrician, joined the committee by Zoom to speak in favor of the bill.

"In Georgia, adolescents under the age of 16 are not able to consent to sexual activity," she said. "Adolescents under the age of 18 are not able to consent to a tattoo or genital piercing. And most OBGYNs think that young mothers under the age of 25 cannot really give informed

consent to having their tubes tied to prevent additional pregnancies. So I really don't think that we should be allowing children and adolescents the opportunity to make a life-altering decision that affects them forever because they don't really understand how to give consent, and they don't understand the decisions that they're making."

Children are not allowed to seek treatment for gender dysphoria without parental permission.

Zeanah specializes in treating children with autism, which she said is relevant because children with autism are more likely to be transgender.

But the doctor's testimony was met with skepticism from Democrats on the committee, including Columbus Rep. Tremaine "Teddy" Reese.

"You feel strongly enough that the parents should lose their rights, per state law, with the child they have raised from birth, waking up in the morning when they were two or three months old to give them milk and change their diapers," Reese said. "The person who knows them better than anybody on this committee, anybody in this state, that they should have the right taken away from them to determine how they decide to proceed with their

child's life."

"I think that children should be protected from making life-altering decisions that could be very harmful," answered Zeanah.

"Children should be protected from their parents, that's what you're saying, by strangers that know nothing about what's going on in the household," Reese said.

Watson, who is also a physician, said the bill cleans up another law passed two years ago that outlawed hormone therapy but specifically kept puberty blockers legal. He said new information has come to light indicating that puberty blockers are harmful, and he said parents have confided in him that they wish their children had never been allowed to start them.

"If puberty blockers had not been initiated, or are not initiated, then you allow a natural process called puberty that we've all been through. And that is a lot of fluctuation of hormones, I think that we all can testify," he said.

Watson added that his bill would still allow puberty blockers for treatments other than gender dysphoria.

Johns Creek Democratic Rep. Michelle Au, who is also a physician, said the bill limits doctors' discretion and could bar them from prescribing puberty-blocking medica-

tions even for cisgender patients.

Watson pointed to lines in the bill that carve out people "born with a medically verifiable disorder of sex development" as still being eligible for treatment.

Au said there are conditions that do not fall under that category which are commonly treated with medications that could be deemed hormone-blocking drugs.

Au said she fears the bill could cause doctors to risk running afoul of the law simply by offering standard treatments.

"I generally have a problem with legislation that legislates the practice of medicine, as you sometimes do too, like we've worked together, right? You get this, but that's the situation you're putting doctors in when they're trying to do their job. It makes it hard for us to do our job."

Cooper called the meeting short because she and other members of the panel were required to attend a House Rules Committee to vote on lawsuit damage award limit legislation, but before leaving, she told Watson she had problems with his bill, including that it would go back on the state's protection of puberty blockers from the bill banning hormone therapy two years ago.

Cooper also said she doesn't want the bill to specify that parents who

feel their children have been improperly treated could seek a civil or criminal trial against doctors.

Cooper said the unintentional fallout could be comparable to that from the state's abortion law.

"We're having trouble recruiting OBGYNs because of the criminal part of the law," she said. "Just regular OBGYNs who just want to deliver healthy babies. Well, when you put something like that in the end that says nothing is to prohibit them being sued criminally or civilly then it scares all of them. And then, will they be too scared to (treat) a child with an early period? Are they going to be scared to use the blockers that they're going to need?"

If the bill gets another hearing, it will then need to get a vote and pass the committee. If the committee passes it without changes, it can head to the House for a final vote. If they make modifications, it will need to go back to the Senate in addition to the House. The deadline for either path is April 4.

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

National Weather Service faces funding cuts, layoffs

Emily Jones
WABE

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

Many in Georgia are still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Helene last fall.

Now, firings and funding cuts at the National Weather Service and other agencies have some experts worried about accurate forecasts heading into the next hurricane season, which begins June 1.

Hundreds of workers have been fired from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, including meteorologists at the Weather Service. More cuts by the Trump administration are reportedly on the way.

"The forecast is not going to be as accurate because it won't have as much information in it," said Chuck Watson of ENKI research in Savannah, who studies disaster preparedness and response.

He said he's already seeing the impact of the firings, with the systems weather experts rely on eroding.

"Now, going forward, it's going to get progressively worse because, again, systems fail, they're not funded to replace it, or they don't have the people to replace it."

Forecasters, Watson said, rely on information from lots of sources: NASA and Department of Defense satellites, Federal Aviation Administration weather stations at airports, Army Corps of Engineers and US Geological Survey flood gauges, international weather stations maintained by USAID. Many of those agencies are facing their own cuts, too, which will also have an impact on forecasting, he said.

"It's like a fabric or a carpet. You start picking at it like my cat does, you start pulling that thread out, before long you've got this big rip in the carpet and a big mess," Watson said.

NOAA declined to discuss personnel matters but said in an emailed statement that it remains dedicated to "providing timely information, research and resources."

"We continue to provide weather information, forecasts and warnings pursuant to our public safety mission," a NOAA spokesperson wrote.

Risk of 'fuzzier' forecasts

Watson said even small declines in accuracy can have a big impact.

In the Southeast, where hurricanes are a major concern, forecast accuracy is critical because the precise track of a hurricane can make the difference between an expensive, stressful evacuation and staying put.

Georgia has avoided unneeded evacuations in recent decades, Watson said, because officials have been confident in the forecast, knowing, for instance, that the storm would stay far enough offshore to keep residents safe.

"If the forecasts get fuzzier, you're going to have more evacuations," he said. "Now, ok, you've got to evacuate because you can't be sure that storm is not going to hit you."

The emergency managers who handle those evacuations are also frustrated by the sudden cuts and contradictory announcements, according to Lynn Budd, the president of the National Emergency Management Association.

"We're planners. We like to plan," she said. "We like to know what's going to happen and how do we prepare for it."

Frozen funds

The concerns for emergency managers go beyond forecast and planning uncertainty.

State emergency management agencies serve as a middlemen, delivering federal

funding to cities and counties for disaster preparedness and recovery. Typically, municipalities apply to their states for reimbursement, and the state agencies in turn get reimbursed by FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security.

But currently, those grants are frozen, Budd said.

"It's really the whole system that is put on hold right now," Budd said. "And that's very concerning to us as we have grants that are obligated to us and we hope those will be released or taken off hold sometime soon."

Watson, meanwhile, is concerned the cuts to forecasting and weather data collection are a step toward privatization.

He said that move has been attempted before, and it failed.

One reason, he said, is some services that are essential to local residents might not be deemed profitable by a business.

"A private company's not going to put a gauge on the Ogeechee River or on Lazaret Creek," Watson said, naming two smaller waterways on Georgia's coast. For nearby residents, though, such gauges are critical in the event of a flood.

"It's actually a responsibility of government to do these kinds of things," Watson said.

Events

Empowered Peace Self-Defense Sessions

Friday, March 21
10 a.m.

401 Monroe St.

Learn vital self-defense skills while addressing how to handle anxiety in confrontational situations. Feel more secure and empowered.

Macon Little Theatre's The Crucible

March 21-23 and 27-30
2:30 p.m., 8 p.m.

4220 Forsyth Road

Travel into the gripping world of a timeless tale of fear, power and morality set against the backdrop of the Salem witch trials. Arthur Miller's masterpiece unravels the hysteria and paranoia that engulf a small Puritan community, exposing the dark side of human nature and the consequences of unchecked accusations. Adults \$25, Seniors (65+) \$20, Military \$20 and Students \$15.

Cherry Blossom Festival Concert at St. Joseph Catholic Church

Saturday, March 22
7 p.m.

830 Poplar St.

Trumpet and Organ Concert with Virtuoso Trumpeter, Eric Duhon.

Floral Arranging Class with Mary Pinson

Monday, March 24
11 a.m.

6010 Peake Road

Ready to get creative with flowers? Join Celebrating ART Macon for a hands-on Floral Arranging Class with the talented Mary Pinson. Learn the art of floral design in a fun and relaxed setting and leave with a stunning arrangement you created yourself! Presented by Celebrating ART Macon at Stratford Academy. Tickets are \$75 and include lunch, cocktails and an arrangement to take home.

Men's Mental Health Meet-Up

Tuesday, March 25
7 p.m.

557 Cherry St.

Engage in a monthly Men's Mental Health Meetup at Churchills, where folks come together to foster open and meaningful conversations about mental well-being. Mark your calendars for every fourth Tuesday of the month. Men's Mental Health Meetup fosters a safe and supportive space for men to discuss mental health issues — whether individuals want to share their personal experiences, learn from others or simply listen. These monthly sessions help break the stigma surrounding men's mental health and encourage open dialogue.

Mercer University's Jubilee Artists Series: Anton Nel, piano

Tuesday, March 25
7:30 p.m.

1329 Adams St.

Anton Nel, first prize winner in the 1987 Naumburg International Piano Competition at Carnegie Hall, enjoys a remarkable and multifaceted career that has taken him to North and South America, Europe, Asia and South Africa. Highlights of Mr. Nel's four decades of concertizing include performances with the Cleveland Orchestra, the symphonies of Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit and London among others. He has an active repertoire of more than 100 works. Presented by Mercer's Townsend School of Music at Neva Langley Fickling Hall at the McCorkle Music Building. \$7 advance reservation, select tickets free at the door.

Sidney's Salon with Crystal Sanders, author of "A Forgotten Migration: Black Southerners, Segregation Scholarships, and the Debt Owed to Public HBCUs"

Thursday, March 27
5:30 p.m.

522 Cherry St.

Join the Historic Macon Foundation at Wesleyan College Leadership Lab for a presentation given by Dr. Crystal Sanders, author of "A Forgotten Migration: Black Southerners, Segregation Scholarships, and the Debt Owed to Public HBCUs." A Forgotten Migration tells the little-known story of "segregation scholarships" awarded by states in the US South to Black students seeking graduate education in the pre-Brown v. Board of Education era. Author Crystal R. Sanders examines Black graduate students who relocated to the North, Midwest and West to continue their education with segregation scholarships, revealing the many challenges they faced along the way.

Historic Macon spring Flea Market

Friday-Sunday, March 28-30

357 Oglethorpe St.

Historic Macon's spring Flea Market offers everything under the sun, from furniture and antiques to lamps, artwork, toys, tools and more. Friday, March 28, is a ticketed Preview Party from 5-7 p.m.. The sale is free to enter on Saturday, March 29 (8 a.m.-4 p.m.), and Sunday, March 30 (noon-4 p.m.). Visit historicmacon.org for more information.

From Our Kitchens: Pink does not mean medium rare

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

Macon-Bibb County Fire Chief Shane Edwards and Carlene Howard, his administrative assistant and event planner, were more than happy to share the list of ingredients that go into those famous pink pancakes the fire department has served at the Cherry Blossom Festival for the past 35 years.

Self-rising flour.
Eggs.
Sugar.
Vanilla.
Evaporated milk.
Whole milk.

After that, though, their lips were sealed.

Don't count on a reveal party to find out what makes them pink.

Yoshino cherry blossom petals? Food coloring? Fairy dust?

Even ABC's Barbara Walters was curious about the contents of the unique pancakes when she inquired about the festival on national television in 1999.

"What's in them?" she asked. "What makes them pink?"

The answer is in a vault somewhere.

The secret is as closely guarded as the chili in the hot dogs at Nu-Way and Kentucky Fried Chicken's original recipe from Colonel Sanders himself.

And most folks are OK with that. After all, it's a festival tradition for a good cause.

Over the next two Saturdays (March 22 and 29) — from 7-10:30 a.m. — the fire department will enlist between 60 and 75 off-duty firefighters and other volunteer staff members to feed between 1,000 and 1,500 hungry folks at Luther Williams Field.

The cost is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children. The proceeds will go to local nonprofit organizations to help meet the medical needs of children in the community.

The pancakes are the star attraction, but sausage, coffee, juice and milk are also on the menu. And, since partnering with the Macon Bacon baseball franchise four years ago, plenty of bacon, too.

There will be 90 gallons of pancake batter for the revolving, custom-made cookers. Edwards and Howard use the team approach by dividing the staff into squads of mixers, pancake flippers, sausage turners, bacon friers, coffee makers, cashiers and servers.

Just call it the IFOP ... the International Firehouse of Pancakes.

The crews arrive at Luther Williams as

early as 5:30 a.m. and set the food line in motion for the early birds at 7.

The tradition was started in 1990 by the late Jimmy Hinson, who served as fire chief for 24 years. Hinson borrowed a recipe — minus the pink potion — passed down by former Macon fireman L.A. Williams.

While serving in the Navy in World War II, Williams was asked to whip up some pancakes for President Franklin D. Roosevelt during one of his visits to the Little White House in Warm Springs. Roosevelt was so impressed he began requesting them for breakfast.

The flapjacks have been a Macon fire department staple ever since. And, no, pink does not mean they're medium rare.

Festival-goers will get to enjoy some Saturday morning softball as they enjoy their pancakes and syrup in the bleachers at the second-oldest minor league baseball stadium in the country.

The annual "Guns and Hoses" softball game between the fire department and sheriff's department is on the schedule.

Please submit story suggestions for "From Our Kitchens" to gris@maconmelody.com



Photos courtesy Macon-Bibb County Fire Department

Macon-Bibb firefighter Sgt. Josh Lang, left, and Sgt. Casey Booth flip pink pancakes at last year's breakfast at Luther Williams Field.

The fire department has served the iconic pink pancakes to festival-goers for 35 years.

Composting: The secret weapon for lazy gardeners

Have you ever felt guilty about tossing out wilted lettuce or those last few forgotten strawberries? If so, composting is here to ease your conscience while boosting your garden at the same time. It's the ultimate win-win! Less waste in the trash, more nutrients for your plants, and all you have to do is let nature do its thing.



Susan Fisher

By composting, you're reducing waste.

Worms will become your best friends — Compost attracts earthworms, and guess what? Worms are the major workers of healthy soil. They aerate, break things down and do the dirty work so you don't have to.

Ready to be a composting pro? Join our class!

Still, feeling a little unsure about the whole rotting things on purpose idea? No worries — we've got you covered! Register for our Composting Class on March 22, where we'll walk you through the process, show you the do's and don'ts and answer all your burning (or decomposing?) questions. Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned composter looking to up your game, this class is for you. The class is held at The Gardens at Brookdale, 3600 Brookdale Ave., from 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (registration required).

Find us on Facebook or Instagram "Bibb County GA Cooperative Extension" for more information and links to register, or email susan.fisher@uga.edu.

Susan Fisher is a program assistant with Bibb County Cooperative Extension. She is the champion, teacher, and gardener extraordinaire of the Gardens at Brookdale.

Why should you bother composting? Besides making you feel like an eco-friendly superhero, composting comes with a bunch of benefits:

- Your plants will thrive — Compost is like a vitamin boost for your garden. It enriches the soil, improves its texture and provides essential nutrients.
- You will say goodbye to sad soil — If your soil is the equivalent of dry, cracked toast, compost will turn it into a fluffy, moisture-holding sponge. Roots will dig it!

A&E Briefs

Stratford art showcase returns

Stratford Academy welcomes the community to Celebrating Art, hosted by Celebrating Stratford, March 22-28. This annual event showcases the beauty and diversity of artistic expression, offering a dynamic lineup of exhibits, workshops and interactive experiences.

The Gallery 6010 art exhibit will feature original works of art from over 50 local artists that will be available for purchase.

The Glass Garden offers a breathtaking collection of blown glass pumpkins, exquisite cherry blossoms, stunning ornaments and more.

Local artist Milly Edwards is excited about the opportunity to be involved with Celebrating Art.

"Being part of Stratford Academy's Celebrating Art show is especially meaningful to me — not just as an artist, but as someone deeply connected to this community. Growing up in Macon and having family ties to Stratford, I'm honored to share my work in a place that has shaped so many stories, including my own," Edwards shared.

In addition to the main exhibits, Celebrating Art will offer hands-on experiences, including:

- Glass Blowing classes led by renowned artist Devan Cole
- A floral arrangement workshop with Mary Pinson
- Photography sessions with Stratford's own Stephanie Gore

The event will kick off with Family Fun Day March 22 from noon-3 p.m., featuring bounce houses, food trucks, and a special meet and greet with Fairytale & Friends. The Scholastic Book Fair, "Celebrating You," will be open in the Olson Library from

noon-4 p.m.

With a variety of events and experiences for all ages, Celebrating Art is the perfect opportunity to explore and embrace the artistic spirit of Macon. Join us at Stratford Academy for a week of inspiration, creativity and community!

Mystery and crime writing conference

Readers love mysteries and crime thrillers. A quick check of the best-seller lists tells the tale of their immense popularity. Eatonton is becoming the mecca for everyone who loves a good thriller.

The Southern Fried Crime Conference will be held April 4-5 on Lake Oconee near Eatonton. Whether you are an experienced or aspiring author, this intimate experience will provide a unique setting to learn, network and work. The conference faculty includes renowned authors with deep experience in the mystery/crime-writing arena. From the practical workshops to the encouraging keynotes, to the engaging discussions, you will gain new ways to enhance your writing success as a mystery/crime author.

On Friday, attendees will be treated to an evening of sleuth work in a "Crime & Wine Experience" with Law Enforcement Hall of Fame Inductee, Sheryl "Mac" McCollum. Another special feature of the conference will be the keynote by renowned mystery writer, Wanda Morris. In 2023, she was named Georgia Author of the Year for Best Mystery.

The full conference fee is \$300 or \$145 for one day. Contact Georgia Writers Museum (georgiawritersmuseum.org) to register.

'Pet Sounds Live,' a Beach Boys tribute at the Capitol Theatre

It isn't a tribute band putting on a Beach Boys show; it's a living rock and roll documentary.

What "it" is, is "Pet Sounds Live" at the Capitol Theatre on Friday at 8 p.m. And yes, there is a live band that will play the entire classic Beach Boys' "Pet Sounds" album – but there's more.

Along with the music, there are tons of multimedia tidbits with footage of the original Beach Boys including interviews, band history and, of course, footage of the making of "Pet Sounds."

It sounded interesting, so I searched out Jason Brewer and Jeff Celentano, the producers who put the show together, and gave them a call. The two aren't in the live band but have decades of music experience as players, studio musicians, songwriters, talent representatives, packagers of shows and many other music business endeavors.

They're big music fans, obviously, and particularly huge Beach Boys fans. Though they were born decades after the Beach Boys' early 1960s heyday, they say by the time they discovered the iconic surf and hot rod band's music in the '80s and '90s, they listened to it as much or more than anything popular at the time.

That's part of the reason they believe and found it to be true that Beach Boys music is timeless and keeps cropping up making new fans in every generation.

Add to that the fact that through the years, they've become somewhat a part of the Beach Boys' extended family. They've worked on projects with original and latter-day Beach Boys members, including Celentano playing in original Beach Boy Al Jardine's band.

They said they've been to so many Brian Wilson concerts they've lost count. Talking with the two, it's clear they have good Beach Boys bona fides as fans and otherwise.

But just a brief background for



Michael W. Pannell

those who need it. The Beach Boys formed in California in 1961 consisting of brothers Brian, Dennis and Carl Wilson, their cousin Mike Love and friend Al Jardine. They gained major national popularity with their hit, "Surf City," in 1963 with many, many hits following including "Good Vibrations." Brian

Wilson, who played bass, became an off-and-on performing member of the group but remained its creative mastermind for decades. The band continues to tour with a varied lineup, as do individual members.

Documentaries abound on the group and Brian Wilson and are worth a look.

"Pet Sounds" was released in 1966, reaching 10 on Billboard charts. Initially, it was more highly regarded in the United Kingdom than here, but that changed through the years. "Pet Sounds" was, in some ways, a solo album for Brian Wilson with the bulk of its writing and recording being done by him while the group was on tour and him in the studio. At first, it caused no little controversy within the group but it did successfully move them away from an image as California surfers – which they never really were – to being a musically groundbreaking band.

Paul McCartney of The Beatles was a fan and said without the inspiration of "Pet Sounds," there would be no "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" album which The Beatles released to much acclaim in 1967. McCartney inducted Brian Wilson into the Songwriter's Hall of Fame, saying Wilson's music brought tears to his eyes, referring mainly to "God Only Knows" off "Pet Sounds." He has said, "Pet Sounds" blew me out of the water" and "...I figure no one is educated musically 'til they've heard that album."

"The Beach Boys are just in our DNA," Brewer told me. "We discovered their music and became Beach Boys nerds. We've both been involved in tribute bands and in-



Pet Sounds Live

"Pet Sounds Live" is Friday at 8 p.m. at the Capitol Theatre. The show brings a live band playing the Beach Boys' entire "Pet Sounds" album along with many Beach Boys hits but adds a multimedia show documenting the making of the album.

involved in music professionally for more than 25 years. We love 'Pet Sounds' and for years we approached bands about doing the album, but it just never happened."

Finally, they said, "Let's just do it," but wanted it to be more than a tribute band performance, more of a history of the album and the band with great musicians playing. They came up with the idea of an accompanying documentary/multimedia presentation that takes the place of much of the live band's talking between songs.

"We put together really great, studio-level musicians, mostly from Nashville," Brewer said. "They bring the music live then we have the multimedia part with the interviews, photos and other things that basically tell the whole story of 'Pet Sounds' from front to back. It really is a living rock and roll documentary."

The approximately 80-minute show does throw in a handful of

non-"Pet Sounds" hits.

"We do have 'Good Vibrations' and other hits and best-known songs in addition to all of 'Pet Sounds,'" Celentano said. "But still, it's not a tribute band-type show. You won't see the musicians dressing up in funny beach outfits or the stage lined with surfboards or a hot rod theme. It's really all about the music and honoring it and the band and shining on the period."

Celentano, who is originally from South Carolina and said he's been to Macon many times, said the reaction to the show has been good from old and young, evidence of it being rediscovered again and again and a part of virtually every generation since the Boomers.

"People come out of the woodwork and are intrigued and really enjoy what we're doing with the show," he said.

Brewer added to the idea of the Beach Boys' attraction being multigenerational not only among

listeners but musicians.

"A cool thing about the band is the youngest guy is only 21 and when he first came to join up he already knew the whole 'Pet Sounds' record because the Beach Boys are his favorite band," he said.

Again, the show is Friday at 8 p.m. at the Capitol Theatre, 382 Second St. Ticketing links and information can be found at capitoltheatremacon.com and the "Pet Sounds Live" site at petsoundslive.com. For a Facebook event page, see Pet Sounds Live – The Beach Boys Album Experience.

Brewer said, "Be sure to get there early so you can watch all the cool vintage multimedia TV commercials and other material from the '60s we show before the concert starts."

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

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

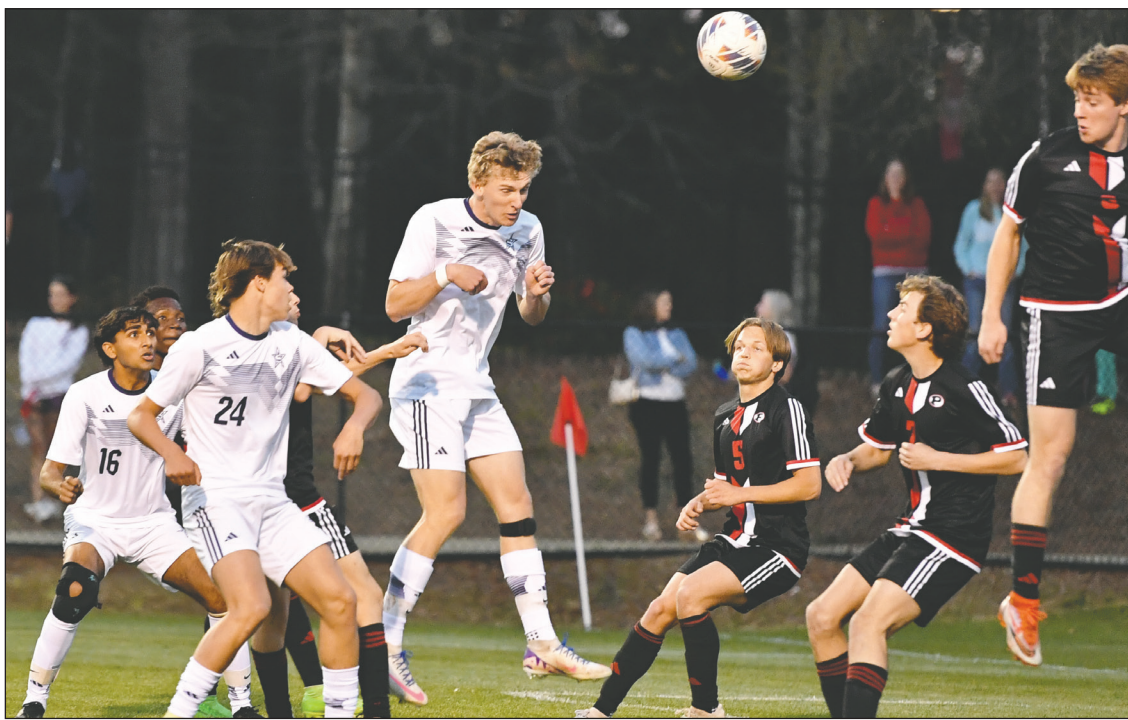
DECEMBER

4 Tree Lighting Ceremony
6 Christmas Parade
10 Family Fun Night
19 Photos with Santa
TBA Pets with Santa



Visit WRGA.GOV to stay up-to-date

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.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

TOP: Stratford's Fiona Leary and FPD's Bella Fritz chase down the ball during the Vikings' 3-1 win over the Eagles Tuesday night in the first of two games. FPD remained undefeated with the win, though Stratford took plenty of momentum out of the close game with one of the stronger teams in GIAA District 6.

BOTTOM: Stratford's Drew Pavlo heads the ball toward goal during the Eagles' game at FPD Tuesday night. Stratford went on to win 3-0 after two late goals, remaining undefeated overall. FPD dropped to 2-7 with the loss after losing steam at the end of the contest.

Hat trick gives FPD girls victory over rival Eagles

Stratford boys even things with 3-0 win in nightcap

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

FPD girls head coach Seth Berkebile would like to have won by more, but he couldn't complain.

Stratford head coach Kate Blankenship would have liked to win, but she couldn't complain much either.

As battles go, FPD-Stratford girls soccer was fairly normal: energetic, aggressive, physical, occasionally a little chippy — and, of course, there were a few discussions with referees.

Equally unsurprising was the fact that FPD rode three goals from sophomore Bowen Matthews to take a 3-1 win Tuesday evening over the visiting Eaglettes in their first battle of the season.

Stratford suffered its first loss of the season while FPD remained undefeated.

"I expected it to be competitive," said Berkebile, in his first season succeeding longtime FPD boys and girls coach Josh Trieste. "The game means so much to players from both teams. It's a time when they get to play against their club teammates, and they come back out here and get to battle against each other."

Blankenship is a veteran of these showdowns.

"This is going to be a game of inches, you know?" she said. "It's going to be about who puts away those chances. Tonight, they were the better team on that. But I think for us, we know that we belong."

There were more than a few collisions, leading to four yellow cards for Stratford and one for FPD. Matthews was involved in a few, one in particular in the second half

See FPD, B2

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

For about 76 minutes, it was a one-goal game.

For Stratford boys head coach Iain Jones, it didn't feel like a one-goal game.

"Clearly, we controlled the game," he said. "We knew what we needed to do and which players to shut down. I wasn't too concerned whether we were going to win the game or not as the game went on. I just felt like that second goal was going to come."

See STRAT, B3

Macon TD Club award winners get Smart advice

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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Wisdom, awards and fried pork chops were slung in spades at the Macon Touchdown Club's annual Jamboree Monday night as the club honored local athletes, scholarship winners and hosted Georgia football coach Kirby Smart at a packed Methodist Home in Macon.

The meal — Smart said chef Lonnie Bivins' pork chops were "the best in the state" — was second only to the stacked slate of Macon athletes in attendance.

Northeast's star running back Nick Woodford won the club's OrthoGeorgia/Edgar Hatcher Back of the Year Award in the wake of the Raiders' run to the A-Division I state title game. It was the second time Woodford took home the award after he won it in his sophomore season. Woodford's head coach, Jeremy Wiggins, won the Marvin Davis Coach of the Year trophy.

Southwest edge rusher and tight end Rinaldo Callaway, fresh off his state title game appearance with the

Patriots' basketball team, won the Bill Turner Line-man of the Year award. Stratford kicker Stebin Horne was named Special Teams Player of the Year.

Other Macon players were honored for receiving Bobby Gene Sanders Memorial Scholarships. Covenant's Asa Wood, Stratford's Brooks Garner, Howard's Donald Williams, Mount de Sales' Nate Frankum and Tattnall's William Stuart received the scholarship for their combination of outstanding performance in the classroom and on the gridiron.

To these athletes, along with the club's "Super 7" team of standout players from around the state, Smart delivered a speech filled with personal stories both humorous and heartfelt.

"Dreams do come true" was the head coach's theme for the night. He spoke about his rise to stardom at Georgia as a player, then how he ascended the rungs of the coaching ladder before arriving as the lead man for the Bulldogs a little

See SMART, B2

NOTEPAD

Bears upset 'Noles on road, Southwest hoops earns honors

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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Mercer knocked off No. 5 Florida State in convincing fashion Tuesday night, snagging a 9-3 win in Tallahassee to improve to 15-7 on the year.

The Bears' offense was fueled yet again by short-stop Bradley Frye, who has been a force all season. Frye notched three hits including a home run and drove in three runs to get his batting average on the year up to .423, a number good for second in the Southern Conference.

Frye's longball came in the first inning and helped Mercer get out to a fast start, as the Bears scored two in the first inning, pushed one across in the second and struck for three in the third inning to go up 6-0.

After another run later

made it 7-0, it looked like Florida State might get back into it when they scored in the sixth inning on a three-run bomb that finally chased starter Jeb Johnson. Johnson still finished with 5 and 2/3 innings of work and nine strikeouts.

Mercer's bullpen was electric to finish the game. Bryce Hawkins polished off the sixth after Johnson was pulled, then Bears ace Colton Cospo appeared in relief despite pitching on Friday. Cospo — who pitched against Florida State last season in relief as well — navigated the inning well after a leadoff walk and bridged the gap to closer Terry Busse, who pitched the eighth and ninth to finish off the Seminoles.

Florida State became the highest-ranked win for Mercer since the Bears took

See NOTEPAD, B2

ACE girls net 6-0 win over Bleckley to control Region 2

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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ACE took control of its region on the pitch Tuesday night in a key league game against Bleckley County, defeating the Royals thanks to precise passing and a hat trick from Kate Thomason.

"We were proud of Kate because she set the tone for the game by scoring early, then finished the game by scoring very late. She played the whole game through and didn't let the lead change the way she was playing," ACE head coach Robby Jones said. "She played really well and that was key for us."

In addition to Thomason's trio of scores the Gryphons got goals from Edy Powell, EG Wood and Bayleigh Loosier to round out the win.

It was a crucial game, as Bleckley County and ACE came in with identical 4-0 region records in a tie for first place in Region 2-A Division I. The Gryphons were 8-2 coming in, while the Royals were 8-1 and had won every game since a loss to begin the season.

"They were the top of the table, and I

told the team that. It was a great match-up to see who was in the driver's seat," Jones said. "They had an eight-game winning streak too, so we were able to snap that. It was great motivation for us in an important game."

Things looked competitive early, though the Gryphons certainly had the edge and put pressure on Bleckley County quickly. The Royals dropped into a very defensive formation, keeping their wings at midfield defending instead of going on the attack.

"I hate to ever say that we're going to focus on keeping them from scoring over scoring ourselves, but we knew we were going against a team like them that's really good at possessing the ball. They really use the width of the field very well," Bleckley County assistant coach Courtney White said of her team's strategy to stop ACE.

"We knew that we needed to sit back and utilize our wings to play more defense than offense, which was different for us."

See ACE, B3



Mark Powell / For The Melody

Bleckley County goalkeeper Jana Tomlin (left) lunges for a rogue kick as ACE's Kate Thomason tries to gain possession during the Royals' 6-0 loss against the Gryphons in region play. Thomason had a hat trick to help ACE move into first place.

Smart, from B1:

less than a decade ago, using his late father's own words when addressing the football players in attendance.

A key point came when Smart talked about how his father recorded a speech for a local event in Bainbridge, their hometown, and that a relative sent him the recording. In the recorded rehearsal of the speech, Sonny Smart used his son's story to inspire folks in his hometown, using the line "dreams do come true."

Smart's father died late last year after he fell and broke his hip while in New Orleans for his son's College Football Playoff game. The head coach was remarkably composed while talking about his dad as a role model.

"You've got your whole life in front of you. Make the most of all those opportunities," Smart said of moments with loved ones and football alike.

His memories of the speech by his father also translated into more nitty-gritty, football recruiting-centric advice with a particular focus on navigating the modern NIL world.

"It has pros and cons, but it's becoming transactional... I challenge you to not make this transactional," Smart told the players. "How do

I do that, coach?' You build relationships.

The coach made reference to a recent interaction he had at UGA's training facility. He visited the dining hall early one morning and spied someone there even earlier than he was.

"It was kinda dark in there, so I flip on the lights, like, 'Who is that?' It was Brock Bowers," Smart said, getting laughs from the audience. "The guy just broke every rookie record out there for tight ends in the NFL and he's in here working out earlier than me... he's back here getting his degree.

"That made me feel like I had to work harder, get here earlier, go home later... He's just that type of player."

After a few more anecdotes, Smart answered questions from the audience about everything from the NCAA having a "commissioner" to UGA's spring scrimmages. Smart even mentioned the Atlanta Braves, surely giving some fans in the house a dream crossover.

"I think people have said that about the Braves, that they don't perform after a bye week, I wouldn't know about that," Smart said in response to a question about teams playing poorly after getting a week off in the CFP. "But in college football, a lot of the teams without the byes were actually favored against the

team that got the week off."

The roughly 40-minute chat wrapped up with an earnest take from Smart on the rapidly changing NIL scene in college football, a hot topic of conversation that several other coaches were asked about when they visited the Touchdown Club in 2024.

"It's great that kids are making money. I want that. I want to be part of what's best for the kid. But I don't want it to be the kind of money where it affects whether or not the kid can see the light at the end of the tunnel," Smart said.

Smart posited that while the huge sums of cash players rake in as part of today's game are beneficial, they can have the wrong effect on some players' work ethic and damage their careers in the long run.

"You can't tell me the kid making more works harder than the 18, 19-year-old that doesn't get anything. Because that kid is hungry," Smart said. "There has to be a balance. And I worry about the other sports (getting enough revenue)."

Smart wrapped up from there, though he was sure to end his annual message with the same greeting that endears him to the majority of the club's members each fall: "Go Dawgs."

FPD, from B1:

that stood out. She took a shot to the gut, headed to the bench, stopped, threw up, then proceeded to the bench. She returned to the pitch less than two minutes later.

"That's Bowen," Berkebile said. "That's a testament to the kind of player she is. She came off and was like, 'Give me a second, and I'm ready to go back in.' That was a hard hit, but she was not going to sit over here for a while."

Matthews put the Vikings on top early, with a pair of goals three minutes apart midway through the first half on assists from Elcee Leslein and Katelynn Jackson.

Eva Morehead got the Eaglettes on the board less than four minutes later with a precise, direct kick that just slipped in under the crossbar and out of reach of FPD keeper Hannah-Claire Kelley.

Stratford started putting a little more pressure on FPD the rest of the first half, though the Vikings still managed more shots on goal.

Possession remained fairly even in the second, as Stratford keeper Tessa Morehead turned in a quality performance in a losing effort with eight saves.

"She had basically a season-ending injury last year," Blankenship said. "But she's a very talented goalkeeper. She's got the one thing you can't teach in goalkeeping, and that's guts. She made a lot of saves because she's got guts."

Stratford got lucky when Morehead was out of possession and an Eagle came up with a deflection at the edge of the net. Matthews was just off on a few other shots. But the Eagles couldn't quite put the same pressure on Kelley.

"They've got some super talented players that have the ability to score goals," Blankenship said. "We've got to figure out a way to combat that defensively, and then on the other end, finish the opportunities we created for ourselves."

The teams battled back and forth. A Stratford goal to tie it was nullified by offside with 19 minutes left, a ruling that sped up the blood flow of Blankenship, who jawed with the far-side official.

A little more than six minutes later, Bowen got control on the left side, cut hard to the middle and drilled in a goal for a 3-1 lead, all but sealing it.

"When she gets the ball at her feet, and her teammates know this, too, she makes special things happen," Berkebile said.

dropped to 0-13. The two squads are near the bottom of the standings in Region 2-A Division I.

The ACE Gryphons remain at the top of the region after staying undefeated in the region with wins over Northeast and Dodge County last week. The Gryphons are 9-0 against region foes and 11-6 overall. Brice Whitley has a .408 average in 58 plate appearances along with 17 stolen bases. Jake McLendon is right behind him with a .395 average and beats him in stolen bases with 22 swiped bags.

FPD baseball stumbles slightly, Tattnall wins multiple close games

FPD and Tattnall seem poised for intense region games soon with both teams at the top of GIAA District 6, although FPD recently faltered against the Gatewood Gators.

Despite two losses to the Gators and another to powerhouse Houston County this month, the Vikings remain formidable at 9-3 on the year.

The Trojans have not lost since a 12-8 shootout March 1 against Prince Avenue Christian. They won two particularly good close games March 8 over Strong Rock, 7-6 and 8-7.

The first win was a narrow escape for Tattnall, as the Patriots scored five runs in the top of the seventh inning to flip the game upside down. After the 4-1 lead turned into a 6-4 deficit, the unfazed Trojans scored two of their own to send it to extras, where they won 7-6 on a passed ball.

The second win was less dramatic, as Strong Rock again plated five runs in an inning but could not score in the sixth or seventh to extend the game. Tattnall got a third win over Strong Rock last Thursday, 6-2.

Mercer lacrosse players honored

The Mercer women's lacrosse team had two players earn conference recognition for their recent performances.

Caroline Glus was named Big South Offensive Player of the Week and goalie Kayla Casey was the Big South Defensive Player of the Week for the week of March 10-16 in the wake of the program's upset of No. 9 Clemson.

Glue scored four goals against the Tigers and four more against No. 6 Florida in a loss Saturday, even getting her 100th career point against the Gators.

Casey had 12 saves in the upset against Clemson, notching a 54.5% save rate while holding the Tigers to 10 points. The effort proved crucial as the Bears defeated Clemson 11-10.

Notepad, from B1:

down No. 1 Florida in 2018. The midweek upset got traction on social media, garnering likes and videos from several college baseball pages.

The Bears open SoCon play this weekend against The Citadel beginning with a 6 p.m. game to start the road series Friday night. The Citadel are 11-10 so far this year.

Southwest hoops players earns awards

Multiple Southwest basketball players earned postseason honors last week after their state championship season came to an end earlier this month.

Chase Dupree was named the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Co-Player of the Year for Georgia's A-Division I classification. Dupree averaged 20 points per game for the Patriots and was an all around player.

Junior guard CJ Howard, who starred all season for Southwest and scored 31 points in the state title game, was named Mr. Middle Georgia by Hypesouth Media. Senior guard Brandon Ashley earned a trip to the 2025 GACA Senior All-Star Game.

The entire runner up team was also recognized by Mayor Lester Miller Tuesday evening at a Macon-Bibb County County Commission meeting at City Hall.

Bibb County baseball sees lots of offense, ACE still unbeaten in region

Some of Macon's public schools played high-scoring games on the diamond last week against rivals.

Southwest and Central stole the show Friday in a slugfest, as the Patriots defeated the Chargers 15-11 in one of Macon's traditional rivalries.

Southwest took an early lead with a three-run first, but Central hit right back with two in the bottom half of the frame. Southwest then scored four in the top of the third to go up 7-2.

The Chargers then roared to life, striking for a whopping eight runs in the bottom of the third to take a 10-7 lead. The Patriots controlled things the rest of the way, though, scoring three runs in both the fourth and fifth inning and eventually holding on for the win.

Jamarea Watkins led the way at the dish for Southwest, getting two hits — including an inside-the-park home run — and scoring four times to go along with two walks and two RBIs.

The win was Southwest's third this season, moving them to 3-8 on the year. Central

5 REASONS WHY ACTIVE SENIORS SHOULD VISIT NATIONAL PARKS THIS SUMMER

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

Sponsored by: **Carlyle Place**
A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



As summer approaches, spending more time outdoors for an afternoon outing or a weeklong vacation is an excellent way to enjoy the sunshine. For a memorable experience, plan to visit a national park this year. With more than 400 areas to choose from, you're sure to find plenty of intriguing options. Use this interactive map to find the parks close to home (or on the other side of the country!). Here are five great reasons to explore a national park this summer to encourage your adventure.

Seniors Get a Lifetime Pass

Entrance fees to national parks can add up, especially if you plan to visit several over the course of a summer. Seniors over 62 are eligible for a lifetime America the Beautiful pass for just \$80. The pass is valid at more than 2,000 sites nationwide managed by various federal agencies and provides free admission for either one vehicle or up to four adults. If you aren't sure whether you'll use the pass enough to justify the \$80, you can buy an annual pass for just \$20. Eventually, you can trade four \$20 passes for that lifetime sticker if you get hooked on the exploration! The earlier you purchase the pass, the more you can take advantage, so buy one now as an incentive to make your travel plans.

Nature Improves Mental Health

Visiting national parks is a fun way to spend time outside. Sometimes, a change in surroundings is all we need to reinvigorate our love for nature. Simply being out in the sunshine and breathing fresh air can do wonders for your mental

health. Research shows that prioritizing regular access to nature is beneficial to overall senior wellness. If you're feeling less than enthusiastic about another visit to your neighborhood park, plan a visit to a national park to get a healthy dose of the outdoors. Other benefits to being outside include increased vitamin D and immune system improvement, extra energy, and improved focus. As one senior care organization explains, "Being outdoors gives the brain a break from everyday multitasking and allows it to form new memories and heal itself from over-extension. This contributes to higher attention levels and improved mental health."

Regular Exercise is Key to Healthy Aging

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that "As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It can prevent many health problems that seem to come with age." While exercise can happen indoors or out, walking through a national park is an excellent way to add diversity to your workout routine. The varied landscape will engage your muscles; the sites will make the time go by quickly; and the fresh air will make it easier to maintain consistent breathing. The National Park Service has highlighted the connection between exercise and its parks in recent years with its "Healthy Parks Healthy People" initiative, so head out to participate!

Find a New Way to Connect with History

The National Park Foundation

works to "safeguard the historic sites and collections that hold our shared history" so that Americans for generations to come can actively engage in what makes the landscape of our country so unique. When you visit a national park, you're not only exploring the natural world and all its beauty, you're also connecting with history in a new way. Whether in a remote area or a more urban monument, these parks serve as a starting point for investigating our nation's past. Take time to research the park you're visiting ahead of time so that you can look out for markers and details during your trip. You may stumble upon a new area of interest!

Form National Friendships

National parks are a vacation destination for travelers from all regions and demographic groups. Visiting a park in your area might help you meet others from across the country! Be open to chatting with people you pass on the trails or meet in the campground. You have a natural conversation opener by asking their opinion on the park, future travel plans, etc. Even after you part ways, it's easy to keep in touch these days—get a physical mailing address for adult pen pal correspondence or use an email for quick connecting. Research shows that seniors who maintain various relationships and social connections have better mental and physical health, so take advantage of this unique way to meet new people! These are just some of the benefits of exploring a national park this summer, so start planning that trip!

Mercer head coaches done with first season — now the rebuilding begins

Schedule

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody

Mercer forward Alex Holt (6) searches for a bucket while under pressure from East Tennessee State forward DJ Hughes (10) during Mercer's 70-68 loss to ETSU this year. Holt scored his 1,000th point for the Bears last week.

It was a year of firsts for the both Mercer basketball teams in the 2024-25 season.

Men's head coach Ryan Ridder and women's head coach Michelle Clark-Heard were both in their inaugural seasons at the helm for the Bears.

The men's team saw the most success of the two, finishing 14-19 with a 6-12 SoCon mark. In addition to being Ridder's first year with Mercer, it was the program's first year truly embracing the era of the transfer portal.

Mercer rostered nine transfer players against five non-transfers. Combined with the fact that most non-transfers were freshmen, it was a group featuring few familiar faces.

Jah Quinones and T.J. Grant were the program's only truly homegrown returning players. Alex Holt was the team's third and final returning player after he transferred in from High Point in 2023.

The Bears went a respectable 7-6 in non-conference play, falling to tougher opponents like DePaul and South Carolina — though they did keep it close for much of the contest with the Gamecocks — while soundly defeating most smaller squads.

Some of the team's high points came early. Freshman Brady Shoulders was a solid contributor all year and had his shining moment when he hit a 3-pointer against Jacksonville State to complete a Mercer comeback Nov. 25. The Bears went on to win in overtime.

Another highlight, albeit less conventional, came in the team's season opener when walk-on favorite Alex Koch got a slam dunk against Virginia University-Lynchburg.

Once the conference slate arrived, the Bears developed a trend of keeping games close. The first four games against SoCon foes were won or lost by four points or fewer, and the lone four-point margin was a win in overtime for the Bears.

Aside from a tough 20-point loss against Wofford the first time around and a blowout win over The Citadel, Mercer's other conference games were separated by five points or fewer. With a 4-5 conference mark and such close margins, it appeared the Bears were in position to finish in the middle part of the conference and have decent chances in the tournament in Asheville.

"We want to be playing our best basketball in Asheville in March," Ridder said at one Mercer press conference in January. It was a sentiment the head coach repeated many times throughout the year.

Unfortunately, the Bears trended in the other direction to close out the year. Mercer went 2-7 its second time through the SoCon, defeating only Western Carolina and The Citadel to finish two spots out of last place in the final standings.

"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 near the end of the season after a tough loss against a conference foe. "I think it's finding a tweak de-

fensively, maybe it's a different personnel group, maybe it's a different alignment, type of pressure, different zone."

While the Bears defeated Western Carolina in the first round of the SoCon tournament and took a six-point lead into halftime during their second-round game against No. 1 Chattanooga, Mercer struggled late against the Mocs and lost to end their season.

Several key players — including Alex Holt, Chip Johnson and Ahmad Robinson in addition to Holt — are out of eligibility.

While rosters aren't certain in the transfer era, the Bears will have a steadier base this time around the recruiting trail. Shoulders, a solid freshman piece, will be a key if he returns along with longtime contributor Jah Quinones and impactful sophomore Angel Montas.

On the hunt for growth

The Mercer women had less luck, though they finished the season with some close losses against quality conference opponents that could be signs of improvements to come.

The women finished the year with an 8-22 overall

record and a 3-11 mark in SoCon play. The team was often banged up, Heard said throughout the season, but found ways to win thanks to different players stepping up in each victory.

Scoring was an issue. Mercer averaged 52.5 points per game, good for last in the conference and about 7.5 points behind the next-worst team. The Bears shot 37.4% from the field on the year and 25.8% from 3-point range while also struggling on the offensive glass, snagging only about eight rebounds a game on the offensive side.

When Mercer did make things happen, it was often thanks to senior Ashlee Locke in the frontcourt. Locke took a leap forward in her senior year and averaged about nine points and 6.5 rebounds per game, becoming a cog on the floor and a key morale leader for the Bears.

Three other key players for Mercer — ones that all have eligibility remaining and could be crucial building blocks in Heard's second season at the helm — were guards Talia Harris and Nahawia Diarra and forward Arianna Bennett.

Heard praised her guard play all season, particularly

down the stretch as Harris, a true freshman from Indiana, got things rolling.

"She's always a player that comes in and evaluates herself. At a young age, sometimes that's hard to do," Heard said of Harris at a press conference earlier this month. "I'm just proud of her and her growth, and I love coaching her."

Diarra, a redshirt junior from Spain, came up clutch in one of the Bears' most impressive moments of the year when she hit a layup to complete a 10-point comeback against Western Carolina on the road Feb. 1.

It was one of the better wins for the team, which Heard said grew a great deal across a difficult schedule.

Bennett became a key scorer for Mercer after taking some time early to develop, Heard said. The 6-foot-1 forward ended up leading the team with 10.5 points per game on the year.

It appeared that the Bears already improved a good deal over the course of the year. Before an ugly loss to UNCG ended the regular season schedule, Mercer played four straight games within three points or less against ETSU, Furman, Wofford and Western Carolina, some of the conference's better competition.

"Our goal is to win games. That's on us as coaches, to put yourself in position to have a chance to win. There's some things to improve on," Heard said. "But we're in the games. They're tough to lose, but we're in the games."

Though neither coach wanted to focus on next season with conference brackets still on the table at Mercer's final basketball press conference, some reflection was still in order.

"It's a guard-driven league, very offense focused," Ridder said of the SoCon.

Ridder regularly acknowledged during the season that the team's key to success was building up the conference's typically high scoring teams.

"It's a tough conference," Heard said at one press conference. "We're just focused on building, getting better."

ACE, from B1:

It worked for a portion of the game. Though ACE did pepper Bleckley County keeper Jana Tomlin with plenty of shots, lots of them went right to her while others whistled past the woodwork.

The Gryphons broke through before long, however, as Thomason drilled the first of her three goals into the top left corner to finally beat Tomlin and put ACE up 1-0 about 17 minutes into the match.

The Gryphons then started taking advantage of somewhat sluggish play by Bleckley County as the half wound down. A few promising possessions ended up out of bounds before a laser corner kick from Thomason passed through the kicking legs of a pair of Gryphons before EG Wood hammered it home to make it 2-0 at the 29:19 mark.

"We used more short passes and quick passes, just stop dribbling and make them chase was the plan," Jones said about breaking

the Royals' defensive game-plan. "They were subbing a lot early and rotating, but I think we had better fitness and it proved problematic for them."

The score held at 2-0 through halftime, and Bleckley County even had better luck moving the ball across midfield early in the second half, but ACE eventually turned on the afterburners.

Powell scored her goal early in the second half, while the Gryphons tacked on a fifth score courtesy of Loosier around 60 minutes in. Thomason's third goal put an exclamation point on the win with a few seconds left.

The win moved ACE into first place and Bleckley County into second, though the Gryphons won't be able to immediately build on that momentum.

"We're headed into spring break, and that'll give us a chance to rest and reflect and heal up, work on some technical issues that we have," Jones said.

The ACE boys rounded out the night with an 8-0 win to complete the sweep of



Mark Powell / For The Melody

ACE's Mia Johnson (11) tries to squeeze a shot past Bleckley County keeper Jana Tomlin during the Gryphons' 6-0 home victory over the Royals Tuesday night. ACE moved into first place in the region with the shutout victory.

Bleckley County and take control of the region in similar fashion.

"The boys region has been hard to predict, where you think someone should win they're losing, and where you

think someone should lose they're winning," Jones said before the boys game. "It's just up for grabs, it's a big dogfight for the top, and we love that."

Sohan Patel led the way

with three goals in the blow-out win. Jack Carter tacked on two scores while Henry Carter, Alex Jordan and Ethan Snow also had goals.

The ACE teams do not play again until April 1.

Strat, from B1:

It did, but not for a while. Drew Southerland put it in from the right side late before John Putzke added another goal less than 90 seconds later to give Stratford a 3-0 win Tuesday night over host FPD.

Jones was happy with the breadth of quality play from the undefeated Eagles.

"We've got some really good, young players that stepped up tonight," he said. "John Putzke, fantastic player. Stebin Horne came off the bench, gave us that early lead. Then Brady Flournoy, he's struggled in the last few games, but he's getting himself involved in games and

creating some problems for teams."

Horne squeezed in a shot to the right side of the net 12 minutes into the game, and the possession battle continued. Jones wasn't stressing at intermission.

"I have faith in our back line and our freshman goalkeeper, who had a tremendous game," he said. "They never really were threatening. What I told them at halftime is to be patient, that second goal's going to come, and it's going to come when they least expect it."

"That's what we got. We caught them on the break, and that's what we were waiting for."

First-year FPD head coach Seth Semones took the blame for the two

late goals.

"Sometimes you've got to gamble a little bit," he said after falling to 2-7 while starting to get some injured players back to a young team. "I was shifting players around trying to give us more on the attack. I call them coaching errors because I shifted the game around in order to potentially gamble."

He pulled two defenders for offense, and Stratford took advantage. Still, despite the shutout and late clinchers, Semones had few complaints.

"The boys battled harder than they have all season," he said. "I'm super stoked about the energy that they put into this match."

"It really showed ... also the work that we've been putting in. Everything up to this point has kind of led to tonight. I'm very proud of the boys. We took our lickings tonight, and as you take them, I think we learned and grew from them."

Jones continues to prepare his team to get that kind of opposing effort every time out.

"I've been telling the guys since the fall that every team is going to come out for us because we're the hunted," he said. "We've got a target on our back. When it comes to the Macon schools, when it comes to soccer, it's always been a target on our back."

Friday, March 21

Soccer

- Boys Teams
- Rutland vs. Morgan County, 7:30 p.m.
- Westside vs. Callaway, 7:30 p.m.
- Northeast @ East Laurens, 7:30 p.m.
- Mount de Sales @ Piedmont, 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA @ First Prep Christian, 4 p.m.
- Girls teams
- Westside vs. Callaway 5:30 p.m.
- Rutland vs. Morgan County, 5:30 p.m.
- Mount de Sales @ Piedmont, 5:30 p.m.
- CFCA @ Westminster, 5:30 p.m.

Baseball

- Mount de Sales @ Covenant, 6 p.m.
- Northeast vs. Dublin, 4 p.m.
- Central @ Washington County, 6 p.m.
- ACE @ East Laurens, 6 p.m.
- Rutland doubleheader vs. Morgan County, 5 and 8 p.m.
- Howard vs. Hephzibah, 4:30 p.m.
- Mercer sports
- Track and field, Yellow Jackets Invitational and 49ers Classic
- Beach volleyball vs. Emmanuel, 10 a.m.
- Beach volleyball at UNC Wilmington, 2 p.m.
- Beach volleyball vs. Jacksonville, 6 p.m.
- Baseball @ The Citadel 6 p.m.

Saturday, March 22

Baseball

- Stratford vs. Citizens Christian, Doubleheader at 1/3:30 p.m.
- Mercer sports
- Track and Field at Yellow Jackets Invite (All day)
- Track and Field at 49ers Classic (All Day)
- Beach Volleyball vs UNC Wilmington, 8 am
- Beach Volleyball vs Jacksonville, 2 p.m.
- Baseball @ The Citadel, 2 p.m.
- Softball at Samford, 2 p.m.
- Softball at Samford, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, March 23rd

Mercer Sports

- Men's Tennis at Chattanooga, Noon
- Baseball at The Citadel, 1 p.m.
- Softball at Samford, 2 p.m.

Monday, March 24th

High School Soccer

- Boys:
- Stratford vs Mary Persons 7:30 p.m.
- CFCA @ Gatewood 7 p.m.
- Girls:
- Howard vs Westside High School (Augusta), 5 p.m.
- CFCA @ Gatewood, 5:30 p.m.
- Baseball
- Northeast vs. Howard, 4 p.m.
- Mercer Sports
- Women's Golf 1st Round of Dr. Donnis Thompson Invitational

Tuesday, March 25th

High School Soccer

- Boys:
- Westside @ Morgan County High School, 7:30 p.m.
- Howard @ Aquinas High School, 7:30 p.m.
- Northeast vs Central High School, 7:30 p.m.
- FPD vs Mount de Sales, 7 p.m.
- Tattnall Square vs John Milledge Academy, 5:30 p.m.
- CFCA @ Bulloch Academy, 7 p.m.
- Girls:
- Central @ Northeast High School, 5:30 p.m.
- Westside @ Morgan County, 5:30 p.m.
- Howard @ Aquinas, 5:30 p.m.
- FPD vs Mount de Sales, 5:30 p.m.
- Tattnall vs John Milledge Academy ,4 p.m.
- CFCA @ Bulloch Academy, 5 p.m.
- Baseball
- Mount de Sales vs Tattnall, 7 p.m.
- Stratford vs. FPD, 7 p.m.
- Northeast vs. Bleckley County, 4 p.m.
- Southwest vs. East Laurens, 4:30 p.m.
- Central @ Jefferson Co., 5:30 p.m.
- Rutland vs. Callaway, 4:30 p.m.
- Howard vs. West Laurens, 4:30 p.m.

Mercer Sports

- Women's Golf 2nd Round of Dr. Donnis Thompson Invitational
- Women's Lacrosse vs Jacksonville 3 p.m.
- Baseball vs Georgia State, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, March 26th

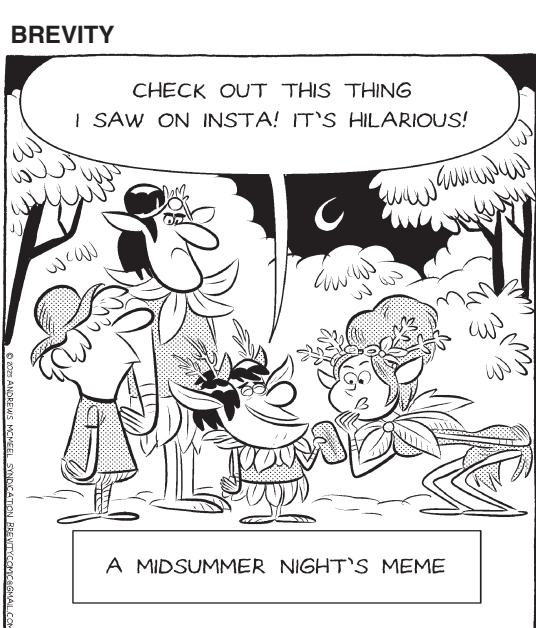
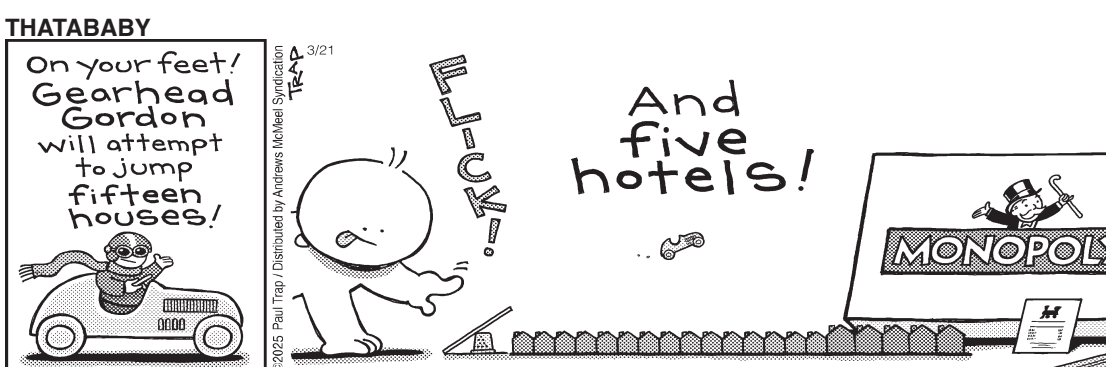
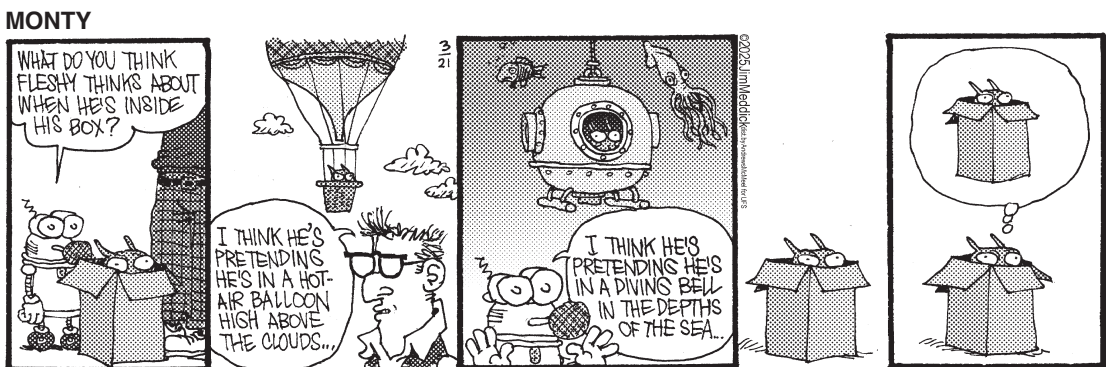
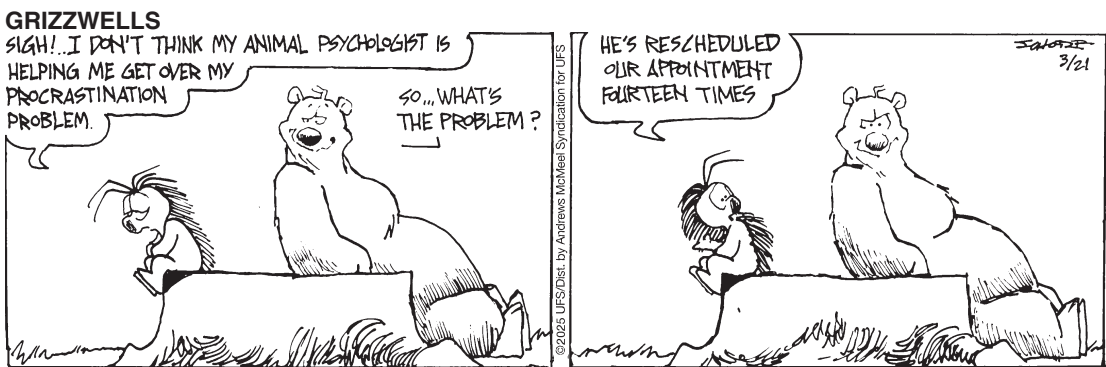
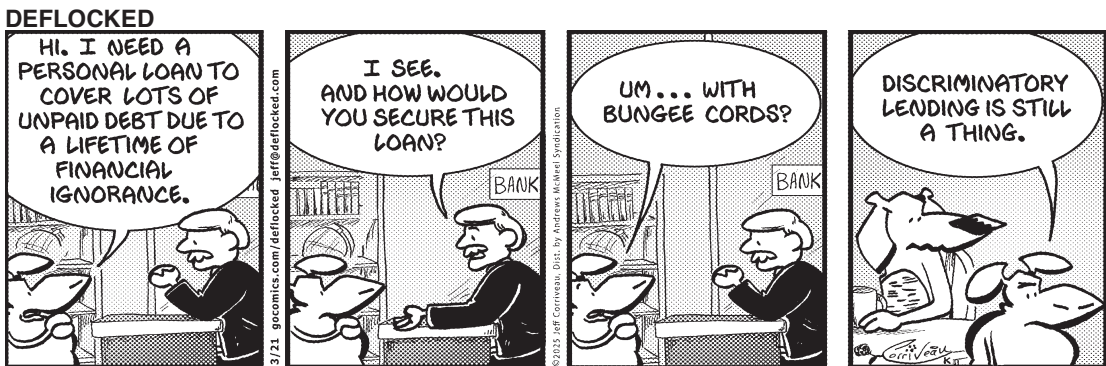
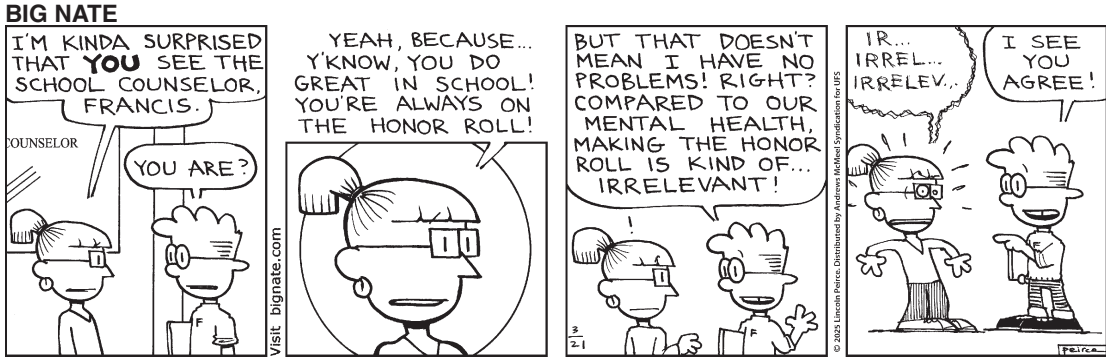
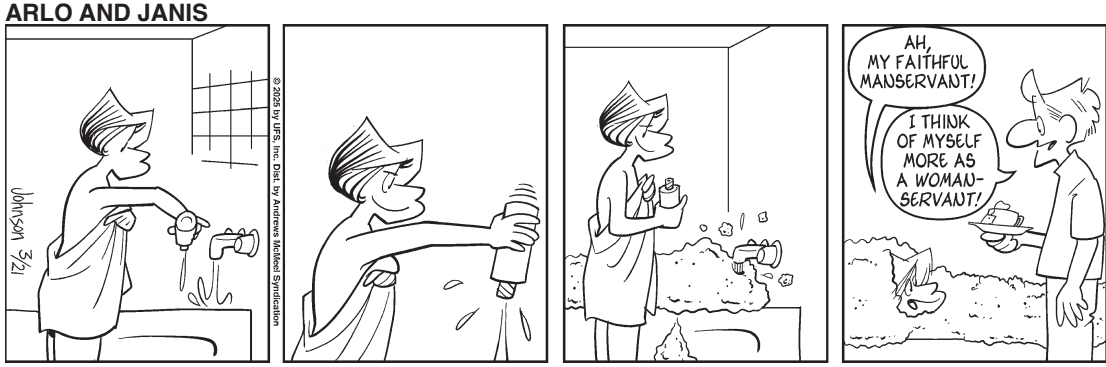
High School Soccer

- Boys:
- Central vs Peach County High School, 7:30 p.m.
- Rutland vs Pike County High School, 7:30 p.m.
- Girls:
- Rutland vs Pike County High School, 5:30 p.m.
- Mercer Sports
- Women's Golf 3rd Round of Dr. Donnis Thompson Invitational
- Women's Lacrosse vs Jacksonville 3 p.m.
- Baseball vs Georgia State, 6 p.m.

Thursday, March 27th

High School Soccer

- Boys:
- Howard vs FPD, 5:30 p.m.
- Stratford @ Westminster Schools of Augusta, 7 p.m.
- Tattnall vs Calvary Christian Soccer, 7:30 pm
- CFCA @ Trinity Christian, 7 p.m.
- Girls:
- Stratford @ Westminster Schools of Augusta Soccer, 5:30 p.m.
- Tattnall vs Calvary Christian Soccer, TBD
- CFCA @ Trinity Christian, 5 p.m.
- Windsor vs Westfield School, 5:30 p.m.
- Baseball
- FPD vs. Stratford, 7 p.m.
- Tattnall vs. Mount de Sales, 7 p.m.
- Central vs. Jefferson Co., 4:30 p.m.
- ACE @ Dublin, 5:30 p.m.
- Rutland @ Callaway, 5:30 p.m.
- Mercer Sports
- Men's Tennis vs ETSU, 2 pm



NEA Crossword Puzzle

- ACROSS**
- 1 Big — hamburger
 - 4 Make a mistake
 - 7 Gust
 - 11 Area 51 secret
 - 12 San — Obispo
 - 14 Latest fad
 - 15 Rocky hill
 - 16 Flat-topped hill
 - 17 "God's Little —"
 - 18 Trunk
 - 20 Rapped
 - 22 "This — shall pass"
 - 23 Payable
 - 24 Distress call
 - 26 Slugger's need
 - 27 Church seat
 - 30 Aim
 - 32 Sick
 - 33 Fish eggs
 - 34 Part of speech (Abbr.)
- DOWN**
- 1 Dog with no papers
 - 2 Underway
 - 3 Caustic
 - 35 Plant bristle
 - 37 Emissary
 - 39 Teeny-tiny
 - 40 Cloth for cleaning
 - 41 Intelligence
 - 42 Fall mo.
 - 43 Earn as profit
 - 45 Detested
 - 49 Dugout
 - 51 St. Louis' Gateway —
 - 52 Raise
 - 54 Noise
 - 55 Off-posted image
 - 56 New Haven school
 - 57 Actor — Wallach
 - 58 From the U.S.
 - 59 Cold and wet
 - 60 Flushed

Answer to Previous Puzzle

M	O	W		C	H	A	S	M		A	M	A			
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S	E	A				A	G	A	V	E		N	O	R	
E	E	R				G	O	N	E	R		T	E	E	

- 4 Sailors' saint
- 5 Regret
- 6 Hazard
- 7 Supporting piece
- 8 Be without
- 9 Fearsome giant
- 10 Garden spoiler
- 13 Shoe of a kind
- 19 Anon
- 21 Make illegal
- 25 Shirt stiffener
- 26 — cherry
- 27 Impostor
- 28 Long, long time
- 29 Like fresh paint
- 30 Forefoot
- 31 "— to Joy"
- 36 Diluted
- 38 Actress — Lollobrigida
- 42 Different
- 44 Sheer fabric
- 45 Tibetan monk
- 46 Town in Utah
- 47 Summit
- 48 Letter start
- 49 Work group
- 50 Writer — Blyton
- 53 Wing

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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4				9	5				7
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			5	3					6
9	2				8			1	

Almanac

Today is the 80th day of 2025 and the second day of spring.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1788, a fire destroyed most of the city of New Orleans.

In 1963, the federal penitentiary on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay was closed.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter announced that the United States would boycott the Moscow Olympic Games.

In 2006, the social media site Twitter was founded.

In 2011, a team of over 30 surgeons and other physicians at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston announced the completion of the first full face transplant in the United States.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Phyllis McGinley (1905-1978), author; Walter Lincoln Hawkins (1911-1992), scientist/inventor; Timothy Dalton (1946-), actor; Ayrton Senna (1960-1994), race car driver; Matthew Broderick (1962-), actor; Rosie O'Donnell (1962-), actress/talk show host; Ronaldinho (1980-), soccer player; Adrian Peterson (1985-), football player; Scott Eastwood (1986-), actor.

TODAY'S FACT: Bertrand Picard and Brian Jones completed the first nonstop hot air balloon flight around the world on this day in 1999.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1989, an investigative report by Sports Illustrated revealed evidence that Major League Baseball player-manager Pete Rose had illegally gambled on baseball games.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "Words can sting like anything, but silence breaks the heart." – Phyllis McGinley

TODAY'S NUMBER: 14 – attempted escapes, involving 36 inmates, from Alcatraz Penitentiary over the 29 years that the prison operated. None of the attempts are believed to have been successful.

TODAY'S MOON: Between full moon (March 13) and last quarter moon (March 22).

Accomplished scientist, research advocate to deliver Mercer's Lester Lectures

The Phi Beta Kappa Society's Zeta Chapter of Georgia at Mercer University will host the seventh annual Malcolm Lester Phi Beta Kappa Lectures on Liberal Arts and Public Life on March 31 and April 1 in the President's Dining Room on the Macon campus.

Holden Thorp, editor-in-chief of the "Science" family of journals for the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, will present three lectures on the theme "Sticking to Our Values in a Chaotic Age: How to Rebuild the Partnership Between America and Higher Education."

"Higher education is in yet another crisis. There couldn't be a better time to take stock and gear up for the long, slow path back to a more generative relationship with the American public than now," Thorp said. "I'm honored to be able to deliver the Malcolm Lester lectures and look forward to my time at Mercer."

Thorp joined "Science" from Washington University, where he was provost from 2013-19 and professor from 2013-23. He is currently a professor at George Washington University and on leave to serve as the editor-in-chief at "Science."

In this free-and-open-to-the-public lecture series, Thorp will discuss "the deterioration of public trust in higher education and the extent to which that has been enabled by external ideological attacks, internal detachment and self-inflicted wounds."

Lecture Schedule:
– "How We Got Here: Attacks, Detachment, and Self-Inflicted Wounds" on March 31 at 10:10 a.m.

– "Interregnum: Why Intercollegiate Athletics is Not a Hill to Die On" on April 1 at 11:15 a.m.

– "Rebuilding the Partnership: Research Integrity as a Test Case for a New Model" on April 1 at 6 p.m.

Sens. Ossoff, Grassley introduce bill to protect children from human traffickers

Sens. Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) introduced the bipartisan Preventing Child Trafficking Act of 2025 to strengthen coordination between the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to prevent child trafficking.

According to a 2023 U.S. Government Accountability Office report, agencies within the departments collaborate to prevent human trafficking broadly, but no mechanisms were in place to collaborate specifically on child trafficking prevention.

Improving collaboration would "enable the offices to overcome challenges specific to children and meet the distinct needs of child trafficking survivors," the report said.

"Child trafficking in Georgia and nationwide is a crisis," Ossoff said. "That's why I'm introducing this bipartisan bill with Senator Grassley to strengthen federal protections for vulnerable children and increase support for victims of trafficking."

Flying Biscuit Cafe coming to downtown Macon

An Atlanta real estate developer is set to open Flying Biscuit Cafe, a southern-inspired breakfast food chain, downtown on Mulberry Street.

The all-day breakfast joint, founded in 1993, serves breakfast foods at locations in and around metro Atlanta, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas.

The restaurant, which will occupy a 2,756-square-foot space where Michael's on Mulberry once operated, is under construction and is expected to open in May.

The building, one of a handful of intact antebellum commercial structures still standing in Georgia, is owned by Atlanta-based developer of renewable energy and real estate Ryan Deene Sanders.

The restaurant, known for its famous biscuits, grits and pancakes, also offers gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian options.

"We are thrilled to bring the very first Flying Biscuit Cafe to Macon in this beautiful space in downtown," co-owner of Flying Biscuit Cafe in Macon Ariel Esteves said. "My husband, Jason, and I look forward to bringing a great restaurant to the area."

Ariel and Jason Esteves, a Democratic state senator who represents part of Fulton and Douglas counties, opened a Flying Biscuit restaurant in Columbus in 2023.

The announcement about the new-to-Macon eatery was made by the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jessica Walden, who said the chamber "is pleased to welcome our latest investor into Macon-Bibb's most significant, organized business community ... and can't wait to see the Flying Biscuit's contribution to downtown Macon's continued vibrancy."

'Pace Day at the Capitol'

Pace Center for Girls recently celebrated its program model under the Gold Dome.

Pace Center for Girls Macon, which supports girls at 10 Bibb County schools with weekly counseling and life-skills development, met with house representatives and senators to share the impact of the program on Feb. 26.

The program, part of a nationally recognized model, started operating in Bibb County in 2019 and was driven by the growing need for mental health

resources for girls between ages 11 and 18. The model is community-based, ensuring accessibility for girls regardless of barriers such as transportation or finances.

"Through initiatives like Pace Day at the Capitol and our daily work, we empower girls to create the change they want to see in their homes, neighborhoods, and communities," said Rebecca Richard, Pace program director in Georgia. "Seeing and engaging with their local legislators firsthand reinforces the powerful message that 'if she can see it, she can be it,' inspiring our girls to envision themselves as future leaders and changemakers."

Sen. Ossoff aims to protect CDC's work

Sen. Jon Ossoff recently launched a push to pass the bipartisan Rural Health Focus Act, legislation he's cosponsoring to continue improving and supporting rural health through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Rural Health.

Through the Office of Rural Health, the CDC partners with rural communities to address health disparities and challenges unique to rural public health. This legislation is meant to strengthen rural health infrastructure and authorize grants to improve health outcomes.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch FRIDAY

March 21, 2025

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

NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament: First Round

ESPN, ESPN2 & ESPNU, beginning at 11:30 a.m. Live

The NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament begins the First Round with 64 teams aiming to get to the Final Four next month in Tampa, Florida.

NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament: First Round

CBS, TBS, TNT & truTV, beginning at noon Live

First-round action concludes today at venues around the country on CBS, TBS, TNT and truTV.

CATCH A CLASSIC

March Madness

TCM, beginning at 6 a.m.

The NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament is underway, but if you're not a hoops fan, you can enjoy "March Madness" of a different sort with this lineup of films featuring literal madness of all sorts. The titles are **Mad Love** (1935, aka *The Hands of Orlac*), a horror film directed by Karl Freund and starring Peter Lorre, Frances Drake and Colin Clive; **Mystery of the Wax Museum** (pictured), a 1933 mystery/horror feature led by Lionel Atwill and Fay Wray; **Dr. Jekyll**



'Happy's Place'

NBCUNIVERSAL

Crash Course Cuisine With Hudson Yang

Nat Geo, 6 p.m. ■ Season Finale

The first season of this series in which actor Hudson Yang tries to sharpen his cooking skills while reconnecting with his Asian heritage finishes up tonight with its remaining six episodes, most of which follow him in Singapore and, ultimately, trying to impress and cook for the U.S. ambassador to that country.

Happy's Place

NBC, 8 p.m. ■ Season Finale

In the first-season finale, "Alarm Bells," Bobbie (Reba McEntire) and Emmett (Rex

Linn) compete over who is a better protector after Isabella (Belissa Escobedo) looks into a security system. Happy's Place has been renewed for Season 2.

Beachfront Bargain Hunt Renovation

Magnolia Network, 9 p.m. ■ Season Finale

This series returns for Season 11, again following families who achieved their dream of buying an affordable vacation home and are now tasked with the tough job of turning it into the relaxing oasis they envisioned when they purchased it. In each episode, they work together to transform their new properties into a home away from home.

Animals, They're Just Like Us!

Nat Geo Wild, 9 p.m. ■ New Series

Peek inside the lives of penguins, giraffes, chimps and other animals that behave a whole lot like humans. A visit to all seven continents throughout these episodes shows how these wild creatures compete, cooperate, love and grieve like we do. The series begins with two hourlong episodes tonight. In "A Penguin Proposal," meet a lovey-dovey penguin, a flamingo makeup artist and a badger that makes great escapes. Then, in "House Hunting Hermit Crabs," attend a crabby shell swap, meet a chimp's pet, and size up an otter kidnapper.



WARNER BROS.

inated role, and Crawford; and **Eyes Without a Face** (1960), a creepy and influential French horror movie.

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



'Charlie's Angels' COLUMBIA PICTURES

Monsters, Inc. (2001, Children) John Goodman, Billy Crystal **Freeform, 6:30 p.m.**

The Hustle (2008, Comedy) Charlie Murphy, Al Shearer **VH1, 7 p.m.**

Jurassic World Dominion (2022, Action) Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard **E!, 8 p.m.**

Mystery Island: Winner Takes All (2025, Mystery) Elizabeth Henstridge, Charlie Weber **Hallmark Mystery, 8 p.m.**

Trapped in Her Dorm Room (2025, Suspense) Ciara Hanna, William Sparks **LMN, 8 p.m.**

Beverly Hills Cop (1984, Action) Eddie Murphy, Judge Reinhold **IFC, 8:30 p.m.**

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2007, Fantasy) Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint **Bravo, 8:30 p.m.**

Field of Dreams (1989, Fantasy) Kevin Costner, Amy Madigan **BBC America, 9 p.m.**

Charlie's Angels (2000, Action) Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore **VH1, 9:30 p.m.**

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022, Action) Letitia Wright, Angela Bassett **FX, 10 p.m.**

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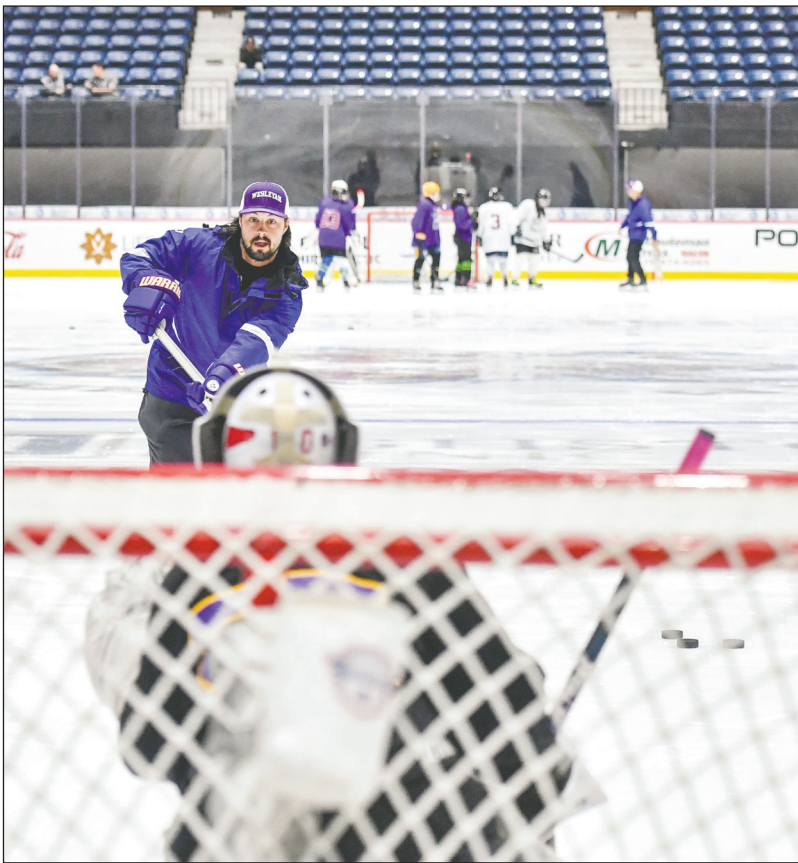
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Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody and courtesy Pace Center for Girls, Bike Walk Macon and Macon Little Theatre

Top row from left: Karla Redding-Andrews holds up a large pair of scissors after cutting the ribbon at the new Otis Redding Center for the Arts. The 15,000-square-foot center has a state-of-the-art recording studio, several practice rooms and classrooms. | Otis Redding memorabilia hangs on the walls outside the recording studio at the new Otis Redding Center for the Arts. **Second row from left:** Wesleyan College head hockey coach Caleb Cameron shoots a puck towards goal during the Wolves' first hockey identification camp Monday at the Macon Coliseum. Wesleyan is planning to start a team in 2025. | Volunteer assistant coach Kyle Blight speaks with student-athletes interested in being recruited by Wesleyan College during a hockey identification camp at the Macon Coliseum. | **Third row from left:** The cast of Macon Little Theatre's production "The Crucible" rehearses a scene earlier in the week. The show runs March 21-30, and tickets can be purchased at maconlittletheatre.org. | Current members and alumni of Macon-Bibb County Pace Center for Girls (Pace) met with members of the Georgia House, Senate and other elected officials and leaders to share the impact of Pace's model during the annual Pace Day at the Capitol event. **Bottom photos from left:** Guests pose for a picture during Bike Walk Macon's Walk 'n' Talk series Tuesday evening. Visit Macon's Rhythm & Roots Stroll featured a one-hour walking tour through downtown Macon. | Members of the Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation Department break ground on a new improvements project March 17 at Memorial Park Recreation Center.

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

