The Macon Melody

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Bibb school board approves budget, nixes superintendent's propositions

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Board members voted almost unanimously Friday morning to adopt a slimmer 2026 budget without the superintendent's recommendation for a truancy consultant and elementary literacy director.

The budget will have the district operating at a $20.8 million deficit, which the board will have to cover with be abated by additional state funding or raising property taxes.

The budget includes a 3% raise for teachers, fewer vacant jobs and a new classified salary schedule. The raise and new salary schedule are meant to make the district's wages more competitive.

Since the board failed to pass a tentative budget at its May 15 meeting, the school district identified an additional $973,520 in savings between teacher salaries and operating expenses.

District and CFO Eric Bush presented the cuts along with three options for the tentative budget:

- Option A: Included the 3% raise, new salary schedule and reduced vacant positions. This option included hiring a truancy specialist and K-5 ELA school improvement coordinator. This option also included raises and new titles for the district's director of elementary services, maintenance director, accounting clerk and student information system manager.
- Option B: Included everything in option A except for the title reclassifications.
- Option C: Included everything in option B except for the truancy specialist and K-5 ELA coordinator.

See BUDGET, Page A3

Honoring Maconites on Memorial Day



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Soldiers present the colors and officials hold their hands over their hearts as an audience looks on during the annual Memorial Day ceremony hosted by the Macon Cemetery Preservation Corporation. The service was held at Greater Allen Chapel.

To see more photos from the past week, See B6.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Kellie Divis gestures towards a projector screen while teaching some of her students in a cozy room at Kellie Divis Educational Services, her homeschool location.

More than 700 Bibb students could get Promise scholarship

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Kellie Divis homeschooled her own kids and now does the same for 25 to 30 Macon families out of her office on Walnut Street. She teaches group classes — sometimes going to the park or Washington Memorial Library — and hosts one-on-one tutoring.

Her company is one of five tutoring services in Macon approved by the Promise Scholarship, which awards public school students in Georgia $6,500 for alternative education options, like private schools or homeschooling.

The scholarship has received 732 applications from Bibb County Schools students, about 3.5% of the district's students, according to a Georgia Student Finance Commission spokesperson.

"I think public school can work for a lot of people, but it's good to have choices and something else could be a better fit for a lot of kids," Divis said.

The first round of applications for the Georgia Promise Scholarship closed April 15. Every student attending the Bibb County School District is eligible for the program because every attendance zone in the district has at least one school

See PROMISE, Page A2

Teacher retires after 41 years

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English teacher Julia Manard still makes her students write essays with pen and paper. She refuses to have laptops in her classroom and can't believe that her students sometimes hand in AI-written essays.

This year she walked her students through "Beowulf," "Frankenstein" and "The Crucible," but her favorite novel to teach is "To Kill a Mockingbird."

"Every year I did 'To Kill a Mockingbird' I told my students it was like I didn't want to retire because it was like I was leaving Atticus," she said.

Though she is now retiring and leaving Atticus behind after 35 years in Bibb County Public Schools, Manard said she will miss her students the most.

She's taught all grades at Northeast, Rutland and Howard high schools.

She subscribes to the idea that

See RETIRED, Page A2

Periodical — Mail Label

New supermarket brings fresh foods to Houston Avenue neighborhoods

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Residents along Houston Avenue don't have to walk or bus to a grocery store anymore in order to put fresh food on their table. Mike Supermarket opened in February, offering a selection of fresh produce, meats and dairy products directly to the community.

The new grocery store — formerly a Dollar General beside Bruce Elementary School — sat vacant for a few years until Manishkumar "Mike" Patel decided the community he has serviced for 15 years needed a place to buy fresh food.

Mike owns Pelican Foods convenience store down the road and is well-known in the community. Customers would come in and share their struggle to find groceries nearby.

"People around this neighborhood are so happy because a lot of people don't have a car," said Sawan "Sam" Patel, the supermarket's general manager and Mike's nephew. "They don't have to go 15-20 minutes away, getting rides."

Renovation of the former Dollar General took nearly two years to complete and included installing new flooring, roofing and coolers. Mike and Sam did much of the work themselves, including painting the floors and having a staff member build custom produce shelves out of wood with one of their employees.

People would come into Mike's convenience store everyday while the supermarket was being worked

See MIKE, Page A3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mike Supermarket butcher Marvin Hunt places a selection of pork out for sale at the newly opened grocery store on Houston Avenue. The store provides a sorely-needed supply of produce and other fresh food.

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$2.00

Wesleyan's 'She Will' campaign raises cash

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Wesleyan College recently launched "She Will," a $61 million campaign to raise funds for the school. In the last three years, Wesleyan has raised nearly $30 million, half of its campaign goal. Wesleyan president Meaghan Blight said the plan is to raise the rest of the funding in the next three to five years.

"We're the oldest college in the world chartered to grant degrees to women," Blight said. "We want to make sure we're around for another 190 years and to do that it requires investment."

The campaign is divided into three buckets: She Will Pursue Her Path, She Will Have a Place to Call Home and She Will Find Her Voice.

"We've known what we needed from day one," Blight said of the funding campaign's priorities and focuses.

The school's She Will Pursue Her Path aims to raise $35 million to expand scholarships for first-generation college students, recruitment, leadership programs, internships, athletics and faculty development.

She Will Have a Place to Call Home plans to put $18 million toward on-campus renovations. Banks Residence Hall remained closed for eight years before renovations funded by the campaign brought the building back into use as a first year residence hall.

She Will Find Her Voice is an $8 million endeavor to renovate the Porter Gym, including expansion of the space to NCAA regulation size and updates to the indoor pool.

"It really is about expanding access to women's education," she said. "It's about investing in developing leaders and ensuring that we have spaces and places to ensure that women can lead in all walks of their life."

The campaign's name, "She Will," means something different to each member of the Wesleyan community, according to Blight.

Students might see themselves as "She" — she will succeed, graduate and lead, Blight explained — while alumni might view "She" as the college itself: she will survive and thrive.

Stan Brown and his sister, Mary Beth Swearingen, a Wesleyan graduate of '89, grew up hearing about Wesleyan from their mother, a '63 graduate.

"I'd say this place really opened the world for her," Brown said of his mother's experience, during a time when women did not have many educational opportunities available to them.

Brown and Swearingen are both members of the college's board of trustees.

Their family's long history with the college inspired them to donate $5 million to kickstart the "She Will" campaign.

"I'm thinking about the graduates — the young women. 'She Will' succeed, 'She Will' go on to do great things. She Will, and the next part of that being 'will you?'" Swearingen said. "We need to support the campaign so that the next generation of women can succeed."

Retired, A1:

teachers who "learn with their students last forever," something she picked up from Socrates.

Manard said she does her best to develop connections with students and treats them like they're 25-year-olds and not teenagers. She prides herself on not having any troublemakers in her classes.

"I tell them always, 'never settle,'" she said. "That's one of my big things."

Before starting teaching at Northeast High School in 1990, she worked as a substitute at a now-defunct Macon private school.

Manard's parents were both teachers. Her mother taught at the same Macon private school and her father taught law at Mercer.

"I kind of got thrown into it thinking I was just gonna sub and it just became a passion," she said.

In between starting at Northeast and retiring at Howard, she taught English and drama classes at Rutland.

Cameron Chesnut was one of her students in 2011. He got back in touch with her recently when he saw she was retiring on Facebook.

As someone with cerebral palsy, Chesnut said Manard took his condition into consideration when teaching him reading comprehension and helped him through book reports and quizzes.

She led him to an appreciation for reading stories like "Macbeth," he said, especially now that he's older and doesn't have to take a test on the books.

"She's just a really supportive teacher," he said. "She helped me the most when it came to learning to not get discouraged when I didn't immediately grasp a concept within a story."

She said she's seen it all during her 41 years, from Columbine to 9/11. Manard came close to quitting during the pandemic because of having to teach from home, but said she wouldn't let COVID-19 dictate when she would retire.

But with Howard undergoing renovations and starting a new schedule, Manard decided it was time to close this chapter in her life.

"I feel like they kept me young," she said of her students. "I tell them that I've learne d from them, and that just made me keep going."



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Howard teacher Julia Manard, who spent time at a variety of schools across 41 years of teaching English, smiles as she chats with other teachers at a graduation ceremony last week. Manard will call it quits after this school year, choosing to retire after a rewarding career in Macon.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Kellie Divis (back middle) and a group of her students at the homeschool program Kellie Divis Educational Services smile for a photo as they build model homes as part of a lesson plan.

Promise, from A1:

in the bottom 20% of Georgia public schools based on state testing. Charter schools are not included in the calculation of school performance.

While scholarships have not been awarded yet, families that applied have been informed about their eligibility. Decisions are to be released "as soon as possible," according to the scholarship's website.

Stephanie Hartley, spokesperson for the Bibb County School District, said the district is currently working with limited data on the number of students who may leave the district. The district has its biannual enrollment count in October.

Bibb County Board of Education member Daryl Morton noted the scholarship of $6,500 barely covers tuition, and students who move lose their federal right to an individualized education plan.

Families can denote an intended place of study on their application, whether it be a private school or home study. Fourteen private schools in Macon are participating in the Promise Scholarship program.

First Presbyterian Day School has 100 Promise scholarship applicants who have noted the school as their intended place of study, said Kris Vaughn, FPD's admissions director. Those applicants still have to make it through the school's admissions process before being accepted.

A spokesperson for Tattnall Square Academy said the school does not have the number of applicants who chose Tattnall.

St. Peter Claver has about 13 applicants who listed the school as their choice.

The scholarship's application window reopens in June and families, if accepted, begin receiving funds starting in July.

The state student finance commission provides a list of educational services that can be paid for using the Promise Scholarship. The list includes in-state and out-of-state tutors, therapists, online schools and curriculum creators, according to the state's list last updated May 20.

Tutors must be state-certified teachers and therapists also must be licensed by the state.

Kelly Chester owns Sadie Reads, another tutoring service specializing in literacy approved under the Promise Scholarship.

Many people have reached out to her for tutoring through the Promise Scholarship, she said, but many of those families did not know the funds could only be used if their child withdrew from public school.

"I know how to teach people how to read," Chester said. "I want to make sure we are being good stewards of taxpayer money. I know what people need from all of my training."

Divis noted that her students opt for home schooling for a number of reasons, including greater flexibility, addressing neurodivergent needs and "support for faith or values."

Divis said the Promise Scholarship would "more than cover" homeschool tutoring expenses, as she charges between $600 and $900 for a year of weekly five-hour group classes.

"Sometimes people think they can't homeschool because they have to do it all themselves," she said. "That's not the case."

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

A colorful variety of produce, highlights by trays of bell peppers, sits on the shelf at the recently-opened Mike Supermarket in Macon. The store's fresh food will be a gamechanger for folks near Houston Avenue.

Mike, A1:

on to ask when it would officially open, according to Sam.

This is how the grocery store got its name: Mike, a community fixture, spread news of his new supermarket by word of mouth.

"Everyone knows him by name," Sam said. "It's Mike's store, that's why they're coming."

The supermarket has been up and running for four months and includes several walk-in coolers and two food preparation areas. Customers can purchase sliced fruit and ground meat packaged in the store.

Sam said they are still learning about their customers' needs and adjusting inventory accordingly.

The grocery store serves 150-270 customers daily, he said. Many folks still don't know about Mike's store, but it held a grand opening earlier this month.

Macon-Bibb County Mayor Lester Miller and County Commissioner Paul Bronson attended the ribbon cutting.

"It's kind of a little slow right now," Mike said, adding that he hopes business will pick up as time goes on. "People need to shop. (We) make sure they can shop locally, right here. We did this project for them."

In the future, Sam said they hope to obtain a lottery and tobacco license and offer pharmacy products. They're also considering hot food options.

Bronson, who serves District 2 including the neighborhoods on Houston Avenue, called Mike Supermarket the "perfect location" to serve the community.

He hopes to be able to provide grant funding to local businesses like Mike's which are helping improve accessibility to nutritious food options.

Addressing the food desert is just one part of revitalization efforts in the area, he said, noting recent improvements to Cliffview Park and the addition of security cameras to Houston Avenue.

"We are really cooking over in Houston Avenue and South Macon. I'm just excited for everything we're doing," Bronson said.

He talked with Mike about having locally sourced food and hiring locals, especially young folks, at Mike Supermarket. After conversations with Mike, Bronson is also looking to bolster security by working with the sheriff's office to have additional patrols on Houston Avenue.

The area has faced challenges for as long as he has lived in Macon, but Bronson said he hopes revitalization efforts can bridge the gap between Houston Avenue and downtown.

"A lot of times people don't support things. They see stuff start to happen, and I get it, it's years of being told, 'hey, we're working on it and then nothing happens," Bronson said. "Now we're in a good position to really bring Houston Avenue — the families there — to an equal playing field."

Experts in hearing doubt Georgia Power's predictions for demand

Grant Blankenship
GPB News

State-mandated negotiations over how Georgia Power will generate electricity in the future have begun. At stake is how the utility will manage its forecast for an explosive demand for power or keep carbon-emitting power generation for what might turn out to be an artificial intelligence bubble.

Georgia Power expects 25% more power demand by 2030 as compared with figures in the last Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) approved by Georgia's Public Service Commission two years ago. That's largely due to an expected growth of data centers.

The utility proposes to hedge against its predicted demand by postponing the end of coal generation and adding new fossil gas power plants. Environmental advocates warn that would add carbon emissions when climate change means we should instead be cutting them.

At the same time, the company says much of the projected growth is also based on so-called trade secrets — essentially the names, possible locations and theoretical power needs of upcoming data center projects which, for now, Georgia Power want to keep to itself.

In testimony to the Public Service Commission, the PSC's own staff experts said that even considering the known pipeline for data center and cryptocurrency growth and what they know about Georgia Power's "trade secret" pipeline, the Georgia Power predictions are off base.

"We conclude that the forecast produced by Georgia Power is likely skewed to show load realization sooner and in greater quantity than is likely to materialize," said Robert Trokey, director of the Public Service Commission's electric unit at the hearing Tuesday.

Trokey and others said Georgia Power should stop using different statistical models (one based on history, the other trying to predict the future) for estimating load growth for conventional industry versus tech companies. The variation they said, leads to a pattern of Georgia Power overestimating their future needs and adding too many generation resources.

PSC staff continues to recommend Georgia Power revise down its projections by 2,176 megawatts through 2044. That's a generation capacity over twice the potential of the remaining units online at the company's Plant Scherer in Monroe County, which, along with Plant Bowen in Bartow County, the company would like to keep running well past what most environmental advocates, including most of those in the public comment period of the Tuesday hearing, have said is acceptable.

But the coal-fired plants have their boosters, especially among next-door neighbors.

Monroe County Commissioner Eddie Rowland spoke earlier during public comment to remind the PSC just how important Plant Scherer is to the economic health of his community.

Rowland described $11 million in tax funds annually, some 40% of the entire county budget. Rowland said despite the environmental cost of operating the coal-fired power plant, losing Scherer tomorrow would be a massive wound to his community.

"We would love to have a completely clean community, and we work towards that in a variety of ways," Rowland said. "But we also have to pay our bills, so we're trying to kind of balance both."

Rowland pointed to a new fossil-fuel-driven generation plant expected to power a data center as a way his community is trying to wean itself from coal. Meanwhile, most of the other people who took part in public comment urged the PSC to move Georgia Power away from fossil fuels, as public commenters almost always do in such proceedings.

PSC member Tricia Pridemore aggressively questioned the staff's conclusions that Georgia Power wouldn't need to hold onto what amounted to one large plant's generation capacity, suggesting their findings were tantamount to being opposed to economic progress. Representing Georgia Power in cross examination of the PSC staff, attorney Brandon Marzo of the firm Troutman Pepper Locke took the same tack.

"If your recommendation is adopted, and the company doesn't have capacity enough to reliably serve load, you are all but assuring an economic slowdown for Georgia, correct?" Marzo asked.

Karan Pol, consulant from Daymark Energy Advisors, fielded that one for PSC staff.

"That seems — speculative," Pol answered.

Meanwhile, existing customers (including Walmart) and other environmental groups have already filed testimony, which each will present later in the IRP hearings, aimed at decreasing reliance on fossil fuels through an expansion of what's now a pilot program called Solar Plus. In it, Georgia Power buys electricity from privately owned solar generation and connected batteries. The company is already pursuing its own utility scale grid connected battery storage, called BESS, to better use its own solar generation.

The hearings, which run at least through May 31, also coincide with the start of voting in two Public Service Commission seats. Voting in those races began Tuesday and ends on June 17.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

School board member Henry Ficklin addresses the Bibb County Board of Education at its May 23 budget meeting. The board passed a tentative 2026 budget by a vote of 7-1 after much debate over new positions proposed by Superintendent Dan Sims.

Budget, from A1:

The board was locked in a 4-4 vote on both options A and B. The vote split along similar lines to the original budget vote earlier this month, with board members Myrtice Johnson, Kristin Hanlon, Lisa Garrett-Boyd and James Freeman voting in favor and Henry Ficklin, Daryl Morton, Sundra Woodford and Barney Hester voting against the budget.

The board chose option C by a vote of 7-1, with Garrett-Boyd as the lone dissenter.

Prior to the vote, Garrett-Boyd said while the district has an English language arts director for grades 6-12, no such position exists for kindergarten through fifth grade, when "the true battle to read begins."

"The addition of that curriculum director would handle that duty and should not be a new position," she said. "It should be a mandatory position."

Sims told board members the reductions being made by the district "far outweigh" the requests. The additions proposed by Sims that the board ultimately voted to forego amounted to $316,804.

Sims said the two positions are "modest but meaningful asks," and could help address two of the biggest issues of the district: absenteeism and low literacy rates.

Hanlon said the board should not tank the budget over $300,000.

"We are asking for less money, not new money," Sims said.

Morton said he did not think it was good fiscal policy to increase spending solely because of found savings.

Hester and Woodford said they wanted to see budget increases that were reflected in the classroom rather than in the central office.

"As a person who looks at the bottom line, even grandmama knows that she can't go to the store and buy what she don't have money (for)," Ficklin said.

Despite his reservations, Morton said he voted in favor of option C because it showed that the board and the district values its teachers and other employees.

"I worry about some of the financial implications moving forward because of additional fixed costs," he said. "But I've heard repeatedly from Dr. Sims and his staff that we need to be able to attract and retain teachers."

Discussions about a potential property tax increase will begin at future meetings when tax data becomes available to the board.

The board will hold the first of two public input meetings to discuss the budget on June 10.



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Opinion

Remembering summers ‘before the mouse’


Ed Grisamore

It was the summer of 1965, and we were on the road to a Holiday Inn ... somewhere.

Our suitcases were stacked on top of our Buick sport wagon. My father had a Texaco road map unfolded across the front seat. My mother was most likely changing a diaper. (She had five children in nine years, so she always had a diaper pin pressed between her fingers.)

The rest of our crew was rolling around — unrestrained — in the back seat. We entertained ourselves by keeping score of different license plates on the way to the beach. When we vacationed in the mountains, we counted the number of Coca-Cola signs on storefronts and gas stations.

Those were among the greatest adventures of our lives, even when we got car sick. Every few miles, one of us would repeat the first four words every child learns to say: “Are we there yet?”

We rode past “See Rock City” barns and the teal-colored cathedral roofs of Stuckey’s, where they sold those iconic pecan rolls and “Eat Here & Get Gas” T-shirts. Yes, the highways had Stuckey’s long before Buc-ees.

We even saw the infamous “Goat Man” a time or two, passing through a small town in South Georgia.

Most third-grade boys don’t bother keeping diaries, so I can’t always be sure of the sequence of those trips. I have had to rely on old photographs and vintage 8mm home movies to help thoughtfully organize those summer vacations of my youth.

Most importantly, my family was making memories... together. And my generation can appreciate those precious summers “before the mouse.” The year was 1965, B.D.... Before Disney.

I once read a book called “Dixie Before Disney.” I recently went back and reread it. It’s a tribute by author Tim Hollis to the tourist attractions, pit stops and natural wonders that defined the South before Walt Disney World opened in 1971.

The book took me down some happy trails. Life marched to a different rhythm back then. You didn't have to go to a Magic Kingdom to find magic. You could buy a rubber alligator at a souvenir stand or plop 25 cents into one of those “magic fingers” vibrating beds at the motel.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the opening of Disneyland in California, the granddaddy of theme parks. Growing up, we knew about Disney. We watched Disney cartoons and movies at the “picture show.” We tuned in our rabbit ears every Sunday night for the “Wonderful World of Disney.”

But when Walt Disney rounded up some swampland in central Florida to build Disney World, and SeaWorld and Universal Studios arrived in lockstep behind him, the tourism landscape changed forever.

Raise your hand if you remember planning entire trips around going to Marineland, home of the world's first trained porpoise show. Or rode the incline to the top of Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, where you could see seven states. Our ears also popped on the way up to Ghost Town in the Sky in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, where we got to see a couple of cowboys get into a gunfight outside a saloon.

One summer, we caught the gulf breezes down at the “Miracle Strip Amusement Park" in Panama City Beach, which boasted the fastest roller coaster in the country. My sister and I went into the haunted house on the last night of our vacation. She screamed and squeezed my arm the whole time, and we both came out of there with eyes as big as saucers.

My aunt and uncle took us on our first trip to Six Flags Over Georgia, not long after it opened in June 1967. An all-day adult pass cost $3.95. We marveled at the water ski shows at Cypress Gardens. We ate Smoky Mountain taffy logs in North Carolina and sat on a blanket under the stars to watch “Unto These Hills,” the Cherokee Native American drama. (This July marks the 75th anniversary of its debut in 1950.)

We looked for Pogo — and kept an eye out for alligators — in the Okefenokee Swamp. On a trip to Luray Caverns in Virginia, I learned the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite. Yes, summer holds its very own classroom.

My memories of Silver Springs are as clear as the water under those glass-bottom boats. It always made a huge impression on me that the old “Tarzan” movies and the television series “Sea Hunt” were filmed there.

Macon’s Sidney Lanier was one of the 19th century's most beloved poets. He was also a well-known travel writer. His essays from the exotic state of Florida provided Americans with some of their first glimpses of that vacation state.

But he visited there long before the Weeki Wachee mermaids, who inspired their own poetry.

In early 1965, a magazine called Travel USA listed the top 12 tourist attractions in the country. Seven of them were in the South. I consider myself lucky to have been to all of them – Colonial Williamsburg, Rock City, Marineland, Luray Caverns, Cypress Gardens, Mount Vernon and Silver Springs.

Old times are not forgotten.

I got to see many of those places through the lens of a child. And then they were gone.

Ed Grisamore has been a newspaper columnist in Macon for more than 45 years and is the author of nine books.

A bipartisan effort to downgrade our future


Marc Hyden

Imagine being a family sitting on over $260,000 of debt that hasn’t socked away a dime since 2001, regularly spends 27% or more than it earns and its members are upset that the credit bureaus have given them a less-than-stellar credit score. That’s essentially where the United States stands right now, and it needs to get its finances in order before it is too late.

The United States hasn’t balanced a budget since 2001, spends far beyond its means and has an astounding $36.8 trillion in debt and counting. The credit rating agencies have taken note too.

“Moody’s Ratings downgraded the U.S. government on Friday, citing large fiscal deficits and rising interest costs,” the Wall Street Journal reported on May 19.

Before this downgrade, the United States enjoyed a AAA credit rating — the best possible score — and now has an AA1 rating with Moody’s. Like personal credit scores, these ratings indicate how likely it is that a country will repay its debt. An AA1 rating isn’t a terrible score, but a lower rating increases the cost of taking out additional debt. However, it is a national embarrassment to lose the coveted AAA rating because of decades of mismanagement, and President Donald Trump apparently took offense to the downgrade.

“The Trump administration and Republicans are focused on fixing [former President Joe] Biden’s mess,” the White House said. “If Moody’s had any credibility, they would not have stayed silent as the fiscal disaster of the past four years unfolded.” I am not sure I agree with this assessment.

After decades of financial malfeasance, Moody’s downgrade shouldn’t have come as a major surprise to anyone. It was probably a long-time coming.

“The downgrade from Moody’s means that each of the three major credit rating agencies no longer gives the United States its best rating. Fitch downgraded the United States in 2023, citing fiscal concerns, and Standard & Poor’s downgraded the country in 2011,” The New York Times noted.

The prior two downgrades happened under Democratic administrations. So the White House’s complaint that this was some sort of a partisan attack rings hollow, but the downgrade does come at a moment when Republicans are debating Trump’s so-called “Big Beautiful Bill” that has serious financial implications and falls well short of “fixing [former President Joe] Biden’s mess.”

The bill represents much of Trump’s domestic agenda, but also includes the following, according to the White House: “It delivers PERMANENT tax cuts and bigger paychecks. This means an extra $5,000 in Americans’ pockets with a DOUBLE-DIGIT percent DECREASE to their tax bills. Americans earning between $30,000 and $80,000 will pay around 15% less in taxes.”

“It includes NO TAX ON TIPS and NO TAX ON OVERTIME. This makes good on two of President Trump’s cornerstone campaign promises and benefits hardworking Americans where they need it the most — their paychecks. It provides historic tax relief to Social Security recipients. It slashes taxes on seniors’ Social Security benefits.”

Like most Americans, I am no fan of taxes, but I understand they fund government programs. However, we cannot afford our current programs. So how can Republicans justify tax cuts without even bigger spending cuts? They can’t if they are attempting to be responsible stewards.

The “Big Beautiful Bill” would wreak further havoc on our national finances. “Our preliminary analysis finds the tax provisions included in the May 12 text would increase long-run GDP by 0.6% and reduce federal tax revenue by $4.1 trillion from 2025 through 2034 on a conventional basis before added interest costs,” the Tax Foundation found.

“On a dynamic basis, accounting for economic growth, the revenue reduction would fall by 19% to $3.3 trillion over 10 years before added interest costs.” That’s a terrible deal and shouldn’t generate excitement from anyone who wants America to thrive in the future.

The Moody’s downgrade should be a stark warning for American policymakers, but it will probably only serve as partisan fodder as Democrats criticize Trump and other Republicans. That’s partially fair, but too few people in both parties have taken the national debt seriously over the past couple decades. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Trump and Biden each added trillions to the national debt. Simply put, Republicans and Democrats both own this mess.

Just like the metaphorical family with roughly $260,000 in debt, spending problems and bad credit scores, government officials need to make some difficult choices to right the ship. If they don’t, our debt will mount further and credit rating will continue to worsen — making debt far more expensive to repay — and it is already crippling. In 2024, national debt interest repayments cost more than our defense, which is as terrifying as it is disgraceful.

Marc Hyden is the director of state government affairs at the R Street Institute. You can follow him on X at @marc_hyden.

The Macon Melody

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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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Spotting a scam and learning a life lesson


Kyle Dominy

I had already been warned to be wary of grifters on the streets of New Orleans, but I wasn’t prepared for the number of them I would encounter.

At almost every street corner and alleyway there were people offering wagers, shoe shines and who-knows-what-all else to rob tourists of their time, and more importantly, their money. My favorite, that someone tried to pull over on me and I later overheard, was the compliment-turned-bet of: I like those shoes, I bet I can tell you where you got them.

The answer, of course, is the name of the street you happen to be walking along. The answer is followed by a stern “You owe me $5.” I first set foot in the Crescent City over 20 years ago, so with inflation, it is probably more like $40 now.

The world is filled with methods of cheating others out of their valuables, and there is never a shortage of people willing to do it. From midway games at fairs and carnivals to telephone and email scams, a fool and his money are soon parted. It is a lesson we all must learn, and sometimes we learn it the hard way.

In the grocery store I visit frequently there is one of those coin-operated crane machines, which we all know are rigged, filled with toys. The machine is situated between the pharmacy and restrooms, surely perfectly scoped out to catch the attention of children, who will willingly feed it dollar bills in hopeful exchange for a stuffed animal. Guess whose attention this machine grabbed recently? That’s right, my children, more specifically, my 9-year-old daughter, my precious girl-child who still has the world by the collar, shaking it down for what she wants and often coming out on top.

She believes you can never have too many stuffed animals, and one called out to her. Three dollars later I was walking an angry little girl out of the grocery store. Her anger, though, was misplaced. At first, she blamed the store, then, the owner of the machine, who I explained was most likely renting space on the sales floor, for enticing people to spend money for a chance to win something they surely can’t.

A teaching moment ensued. She had no one to blame but herself, I explained. She fell for the scam. I warned her not to feed the machine, but she lacked the self-control to carefully assess the situation. I think she learned something about life that afternoon. But the joke was ultimately on me because it was my three dollars.

So, if you or someone you know are one of those gaming whizzes with a knack for those machines, give me a call. I have a plan for revenge that involves meeting at a certain grocery store and racking up on cheap stuffed animals.

It will make at least one little girl happy.

It's still a fish story for the ages: How George Perry made his catch of a lifetime in 1932



Ed Grisamore

Unless you are a fisherman, the name George Perry probably doesn't float your boat.

But if you've ever wet a hook at the river or landed a fat catfish at your favorite fishing hole, you probably know Perry's catch of the ages holds a special reverence among anglers.

For almost a century, his name has been associated with one of America's most remarkable fish stories.

He was a heavyweight, like Muhammad Ali. He was a legend, like Mickey Mantle and Tiger Woods.

If he were alive today, he would enjoy major endorsements and have sponsors lining up for a syndicated fishing show.

Folks would call him the G.O.A.T. (Greatest Of All Time.) In history's tackle box, he was the George Of All Time.

Ninety-three years ago next week – on June 2, 1932 – a 19-year-old country boy named George Perry reeled in a 22-pound, 4-ounce largemouth bass from an oxbow lake off the Ocmulgee River in Telfair County.

Needless to say, it was a keeper.

A half century later, a state historic marker was placed on Georgia Route 117, between Lumber City and Jacksonville, about 97 miles southeast of Macon. It commemorated the world record and hailed Perry for catching what was to become "America's most famous fish."

The revered record stood alone, untouched, for 77 years. It seemed as unbreakable and invincible as Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak. For more than a half century, no one came within a pound and a half of the mark.

Then, in 2009, Manabu Kurita, a 32-year-old Japanese fishing guide, tied the hallowed record with his catch on Japan's Lake Biwa.

Kurita had to take a polygraph test to prove it.

Perry? Well, nobody had reason to doubt him, even though he could be a bit of a practical joker. Besides, his full name was George Washington Perry. How could anyone named George Washington tell a lie?

Perry and his buddy, Jack Page, were fishing in Montgomery Lake, in what is now the Horse Creek Wildlife Management Area. It was raining that early summer morning. They weren't having much luck.

The two men were in a homemade boat built with scrap lumber. They certainly weren't looking to land a trophy bass. They were fishing to put supper on the table.

It was 1932, the height of the Great Depression. Perry worked odd jobs and kept his money in a tobacco can.

The fish was 32.6 inches long with a 28.5-inch girth. It was caught on a $1.33 worth of fishing gear, which included 19 cents worth of 24-pound test line made of silk and a store-bought, glass-eyed lure called a Creek Chub Fintail Shiner.

According to local lore, it was the only lure in his tackle box – except that he didn't have a tackle box.

An avid outdoorsman, Perry was about ready to give up for the day when he noticed a ripple next to a cypress log. He cast the lure and dropped the plug under a heavy cover. At first, he thought his line might be hung up. But the "log" started moving in the swampy backwaters.

Of course, Perry had no cell phone to snap a selfie, so there was no photo for posterity. There was no Wi-Fi to let the whole world know about his feat before he could get to his truck and drive back to town. What an amazing tweet that would have been.

World fishing records were not kept back in those days. Still, he was concerned folks might not believe him if he did not document the catch of the day in some way. He had it weighed at the post office in Helena, where the tale of the tape was dutifully recorded and documented by a notary public.

He then took it home to feed his family.

The six members of the Perry family were able to get two meals out of it. Imagine having that many leftovers from the same fish.

I never got to meet Perry, but I once met a barber who used to cut his hair. And I interviewed his sister, Cynthia Wilkes, who told me, of course, that fish went straight to the frying pan.

"What else do you do with a fish like that?" she asked me.

"My family ate it. They got several meals out of it. Those were hard times. We lived on a farm, and you could hardly sell what you raised, except for cotton."

It took two years for Perry's catch to be certified as a world record by Field & Stream magazine. He collected $75 in prize money from the magazine and bought a shotgun, some fishing equipment and outdoor clothes.

Because of Perry's long-standing record catch, the largemouth bass was designated as Georgia's official state fish in 1970. Four years later, he died in a plane crash near Birmingham, Alabama.

Artist Fran Hartley was commissioned to do an oil painting of him with the fish for the Telfair County Chamber of Commerce building.

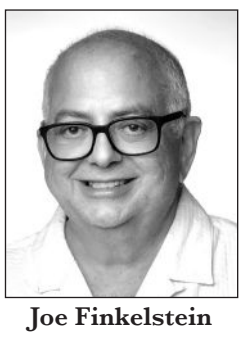
The fish tale has stood up to a depth finder of skepticism across the years, facing some of the same kind of scrutiny as Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster and Georgia's own Hogzilla.

But Wilkes, who remembered her brother as "exceptionally smart and lively" with Andy Griffith looks and charm, said he never would have dreamed he would be a household name anywhere besides in his own house.

"He didn't brag about it," she said. "He didn't know he had done anything. It was just a big fish."

Ed Grisamore caught his first fish with a cane pole at his grandfather's lake in Hawkinsville when he was 7 years old. He will never forget the tug on the line.

A new kind of vacation: How AI can bring summer to you



Joe Finkelstein

I used to think summer fun meant packing up the car, hitting the highway and trying not to argue over snacks before we reached Byron. But these days, vacation doesn't always need a suitcase. Thanks to artificial intelligence, you can explore world landmarks, create your own summer camp or even jam out to an AI-generated beach tune, all without leaving your home or melting in a parking lot somewhere off I-75.

This week, let's dive into how AI is creating new kinds of summer experiences. Whether you're grounded by budget, burned out from travel planning or just curious about tech, you might find your next adventure is just a few clicks away.

Virtual travel, real wonder

Let's start with the big one, travel. AI-powered platforms can now simulate trips in ways that go beyond watching a travel show on TV. Tools like VirtualVacation.us and AirPano offer immersive ways to explore the world from home. Whether you're virtually strolling through city streets or soaring above iconic landmarks in stunning 360° detail, these platforms use video and interactive visuals to bring global destinations to life — no passport required.

Google Earth and YouTube have also upped their game with AI enhancements that make it easier to discover hidden gems. Want to know where the locals really eat in Barcelona? Tools like Perplexity.ai can generate custom travel guides, factoring in your dietary needs, walking pace and budget — all instantly.

Some platforms go a step further by using AI to translate foreign languages in real time or help simulate immersive environments for those with virtual reality headsets. The Meta Quest, for instance, now offers AI-enhanced travel experiences where you can stroll through ancient ruins or scuba dive with digital dolphins.

This kind of tech doesn't replace the feeling of actual sand under your feet. But for seniors who don't travel easily, folks with mobility challenges or families trying to stretch their dollars, it offers a surprisingly rich and satisfying alternative. Plus, no waiting in line at TSA.

Summer camps and classes — minus the bug spray

If your idea of summer includes learning something new or keeping the kids occupied, AI's got your back. Campy.ai is a platform that helps parents find and organize summer camps based on their child's interests, schedule and location. It streamlines the planning process by recommending personalized options and simplifying registration and logistics.

Apps like Khan Academy Kids and ChatGPT (with a little help from a grown-up) can walk young learners through everything from storytelling to beginner coding. For older kids and teens, platforms like Skillshare and EdX use AI to tailor lessons and give instant feedback, helping them sharpen skills without the classroom pressure.

Best of all, these experiences are often on-demand, meaning they work around your schedule, not the other way around. You don't have to pack a lunch, drive across town or remember whether sunscreen is "optional" or "absolutely essential." The camp comes to you.

Creative play: Your own art studio or music lab

Summer is the season of creativity. Whether you're 8 or 80, there's something magical about turning imagination into something you can hear or see. AI can be a surprisingly fun co-creator in that space.

Let's say you want to make summer postcards. Tools like DALL·E (accessed through ChatGPT), Craiyon or Adobe Firefly can help you design scenes of a fantasy beach day, a futuristic water park or a relaxing mountain sunset.

Thinking music? Platforms like Suno.ai, Boomy and Loudly let you compose original songs by giving just a few prompts. Even storytelling gets a boost. Use ChatGPT, NovelAI or Storybird to spin up short stories set in magical summer forests or high-tech beach towns. You can then bring those stories to life using Play.ht or ElevenLabs, which convert text to lifelike voices, perfect for audio bedtime stories or dramatic podcast episodes starring your imagination.

A world of experience, not expense

What I love most about these virtual summer options is that they're more than just novelty, they're inclusive. Someone with limited income, restricted mobility or even just a tight work schedule can still find wonder, beauty and play in the world AI helps unlock.

Many of these apps offer free versions or trial periods and libraries are starting to host workshops to help people of all ages learn how to use them. Even in small towns, access to digital experiences is growing. It's one way technology is helping level the summer playing field.

Of course, I'm not saying AI is the answer to everything. It won't chase down a frisbee at the park or grill a perfect hot dog. (Yet.) But it can spark new kinds of joy, open doors to discovery and bring people together in ways that weren't possible even five years ago.

So whether you're hosting a virtual luau with AI-generated island tunes, designing your dream treehouse in a digital art app or sending your grandkids an AI-powered bedtime story from across the country, there's a little summer magic waiting for you.

Joe Finkelstein (AI Joe) has been a technology educator in Bibb County for more than 20 years. For questions and comments visit askaijoe.com

Local Knowledge: Round two of notable Macon graduates

Ed Grisamore
Meloldy Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

This week is the final round of a two-part "Local Knowledge" with trivia questions about some of the city's notable high school graduates over the years.

1. Singer Maggie Renfroe, who graduated from First Presbyterian Day School in 2017, appeared as a contestant on the 2016 season premiere of what popular NBC talent show with Blake Shelton, Miley Cyrus, Alicia Keys and Adam Levine as the judges?
(A) "America's Got Talent"
(B) "The Masked Singer"
(C) "The Voice"
(D) "American Idol"

2. Chris Hatcher, the head football coach at Samford, is a 1991 graduate of Mount de Sales. He played quarterback at Valdosta State and won the 1994 Harlon Hill Award, the Division II equivalent of the Heisman Trophy. He is the winningest head coach in Valdosta State history. What two future SEC head coaches were assistants on his staff when he coached there?
(A) Kirby Smart and Will Muschamp
(B) Nick Saban and Tommy Tuberville
(C) Lane Kiffin and Steve Spurrier
(D) Brian Kelly and Hugh Freeze

3. Macon-born actress Hannah Kasulka, known for her role as Casey Rance in the 2016 Fox television series, "The Exorcist," is a 2006 graduate of what Macon high school?
(A) Westside High School
(B) Howard High School
(C) Tattnall Square Academy
(D) Covenant Academy

4. The late Milton Askew Jr. went by the nickname "Doc" when he graduated from Macon's Lanier High School in 1950. After serving in the Air Force during the Korean War and attending law school at Mercer, he became an actor and started going by the name of Luke Askew. He appeared with Paul Newman in "Cool Hand Luke" and John Wayne in "The Green Berets." He gained fame as the hitchhiker in which 1969 counterculture classic starring Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper and Jack Nicholson?
(A) "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid"
(B) "Easy Rider"
(C) "Midnight Cowboy"
(D) "True Grit"

5. Jason Aldine Williams graduated in the Class of 1995 from Windsor Academy, where he was a standout baseball player. He has become one of the biggest country music superstars over the past 20 years. What is his stage name?
(A) Hank Williams Jr.
(B) Morgan Wallen
(C) Garth Brooks
(D) Jason Aldean

6. Another Windsor Academy graduate gained celebrity status as a legal commentator and television personality with CNN's Headline News, Court TV and as a contestant on "Dancing With the Stars." She graduated from the South Bibb County private school in 1977. What is her name?
(A) Judge Judy
(B) Janet Reno
(C) Nancy Grace
(D) Katy Perry Mason



Provided by Stratford Academy

A Stratford academy 2025 graduate donning a blue cap and gown embraces the head of preschool Kathy Larsen who is retiring. The school's graduation took place on Saturday, May 17.

7. Actor Grey Henson, a 2008 Stratford Academy graduate, had the lead role of Buddy this past Christmas in what Broadway production?
(A) "White Christmas"
(B) "Elf"
(C) "A Christmas Carol"
(D) "The Polar Express"

8. Maj. Gen. John Grinalds graduated 70 years ago this spring as a member of Lanier's Class of 1955. Grinalds went on to become the president of which military school?
(A) U.S. Air Force Academy
(B) U.S. Naval Academy
(C) U.S. Military Academy
(D) The Citadel

9. Macon native Norm Nixon, who graduated from Southwest High School in 1973, was a standout NBA player with the Los Angeles Lakers. He is married to actress Debbie Allen, who is the younger sister of another famous television actress. Who is Allen's sister?
(A) Phylicia Rashad (Clair Huxtable on "The Cosby Show")
(B) Isabel Sanford (Louise Jefferson on "The Jeffersons")
(C) Janet Hubert (Vivian Banks on "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air")
(D) Bern Nadette Stanis (Thelma on "Good Times")

10. Natalia Livingston is a 1994 graduate of Mount de Sales, where she was homecoming queen. Twenty years ago, in 2005, she won a Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in which soap opera?
(A) "The Young and the Restless"
(B) "All My Children"
(C) "General Hospital"
(D) "The Bold and the Beautiful"

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

REPORT CARD: (8-10) Valedictorian (5-7) Salutatorian (2-4) Remedial Studies (0-2) Detention Hall

Events

Sky Over Macon Planetarium Show
Friday, May 30
6 p.m.
4182 Forsyth Road
Explore space, the constellations and planets visible from Central Georgia in Sky Over Macon at the Museum of Arts and Sciences. The event includes sky viewing through museum telescopes and planetarium shows in the Mark Smith Planetarium. The planetarium seats 120, and seating is on a first-come, first served basis. This show is not recommended for children younger than 4 years old. Children 3 and under will not be admitted.

Opening of Angels in America at Theatre Macon
Friday, May 30
8 p.m.
438 Cherry St.
Set in 1980's New York City, a gay man is abandoned by his lover when he contracts the AIDS virus, and a closeted Mormon lawyer's marriage to his pill-popping wife stalls. Other characters include the infamous McCarthy-ite lawyer Roy Cohn, Ethel Rosenberg, a former drag queen who works as a nurse, and an angel. The show will run for two weekends.

Revelry at Grant's Lounge
Friday, May 30
9 p.m.
576 Poplar St.
Revelry is a hard hitting rock band out of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Thunderous rhythms, screaming guitar licks, and smokey southern vocals fill the air as soon as these five take the stage. Years of cutting their teeth in dark and dusty dive bars led them to sharing the stage with acts such as Jimmy Hall of Wet Willie, The Georgia Thunderbolts, and Damon Johnson. They have also played an opening slot at the famed Ryman Auditorium with Yelawolf and Shooter Jennings for their sold out crowd. Since then they've filled up plenty of their own shows at venues such as Whiskey Jam, The Eighth Room,Skydeck and Main Street Music in Nashville. This year the group released their highly anticipated debut EP,
"South of Nashville," recorded at Welcome to 1979 with acclaimed producer Warren Riker at the helm.

The Metropolitan Opera Presents: Il Barbiere Di Siviglia (Rossini)
Saturday, May 31
12:55 p.m.
355 MLK Jr. Blvd.
Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts his first Met performances of Strauss's white-hot one-act tragedy. Claus Guth, one of Europe's leading opera directors, gives the biblical story — already filtered through the beautiful and strange imagination of Oscar Wilde's play — a psychologically perceptive Victorian-era setting rich in symbolism and subtle shades of darkness and light. Headlining the new staging is soprano Elza van den Heever as the abused and unhinged antiheroine, who demands the head of Jochanaan, sung by celebrated baritone Peter Mattei. Tenor Gerhard Siegel is Salome's lecherous stepfather, King Herod, with mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung as his wife, Herodias, and tenor Piotr Buszewski as Narraboth. $25 General / $20 Seniors / $15 Students

Watercolor Travel Journaling Class
Tuesday, June 3
6 p.m.
456 First St.
Learn how to capture memories with watercolor in this 4-week class at The 567 Center for Renewal. Instructor Kari Waltz will guide you step-by-step to draw and paint images in your own small travel journal.
Urban Sketching is one form of this process, and if you have ever wanted to sketch while you are exploring a new destination, then this class is for you. Kari will show you a variety of methods to simplify the scene and different ways to start an entry. You'll learn about the essentials for making your own watercolor kit for traveling, brush up on the basics of painting in watercolor and refine drawing techniques to give you more confidence. The cost for the entire course is $205 for non-members, $175 for 567 members, and includes a small blank journal, your paint brush and all other travel kit supplies for you to keep. The class is limited to 8 people for more individual attention. It will meet Tuesdays, starting June 3. Ages 16 and up.Register online or call (478) 238-6051.

Macon Area Connections: Mingle with Singles at Macon Bacon
Tuesday, June 3
6 p.m.
Willie Smokie Glover Drive
Ages 21 – 45... Are you ready to play the field? Whether you're single, taken or just here to make friends, MAC (Macon Area Connections) is hosting a night you won't want to miss at Luther Williams Field. MAC will kick things off at the Beer Garden with a fun icebreaker activity, then head to the stands to cheer on the Macon Bacon together. You might even get to first base... in pickleball terms, of course.
Each guest gets a color-coded wristband to show relationship status and attractions, so things are clear from the start. $20 includes: Entry to the game, one drink ticket, Macon Bacon hat, all-you-can-eat food. This night is perfect for meeting new people, whether you're new to Macon or just looking to expand your circle.

Macon Film Guild Presents: "On Becoming a Guinea Fowl"
Sunday, June 8
2 p.m. and 5 p.m.
355 MLK Jr. Blvd.
On an empty road in the middle of the night, Shula stumbles across the body of her uncle. As funeral proceedings begin around them, she and her cousins bring to light the buried secrets of their middle-class Zambian family. Presented by Macon Film Guild at the Douglass Theatre. $5 general admission

Storytellers Macon Presents: Glow Up
Tuesday, June 10
6:30 p.m.
576 Poplar St.
This month's theme is Glow Up — a celebration of growth, transformation and the light we carry or discover along the way. Have you ever surprised yourself? Found strength in an unexpected place? Maybe your glow-up was loud and proud — like finally stepping into your power, switching careers or finding your voice on stage. Or maybe it was quiet and personal — setting boundaries for the first time, embracing a new identity, healing from something hard or learning to love your laugh. Whether your story is hilarious, heartfelt or somewhere in between, Storytellers Macon wants to hear it. We're proud to highlight the voices of people with disabilities this month — but the theme is open to everyone.
Join Storytellers Macon every second Tuesday of the month at Grant's Lounge.



Provided by Bibb County Master Gardner Extension Volunteers
A purple cornflower exhibiting fasciation. This physiological disorder can be caused by injury, to the plant, genetic mutation, infections or damage by severe weather, insects and chemicals.

Bibb master gardeners offer gardening advice

Bibb County Master Gardener Extension Volunteers are trained in horticulture by the University of Georgia. Below, they have answered two recent gardening questions for Macon and Central Georgia.

Q: I like boxwoods; however, I've heard they have problems. What could I use instead?

Boxwoods are understandably popular in southern gardens. They provide green all year and can be pruned into formal hedges or hide unattractive foundations. However, they can suffer from many diseases and pests in the humid heat and clay soils of middle Georgia.

Fortunately, there are alternatives that are worth considering. Dwarf yaupon holly (Ilex vomitoria 'Nana') is native to the southeast and reaches 3-5 feet tall and 3-6 feet wide. Soft touch holly (Ilex crenata 'Soft Touch') gets 2-3 feet tall and wide. Inkberry (Ilex glabra) reaches 5-8 feet tall and wide and prefers moist soil conditions. It has a looser texture more like English boxwoods, but it does not tolerate drought.

If evergreen is what you are looking for, but you are open to different shapes and textures, another alternative to consider is 'Vintage Jade' distylium. This would be a good option for partly shady areas. These plants grow 3-4 feet high and 4-5 feet wide. While it does not have the delicate texture of boxwoods, it is a great alternative to add interest to your landscape design. For more information, search for UGA's online publication: 'Think Outside the Boxwood: Alternative Plants for Gardens and Landscapes.'

Answered by Laurie F.

Q: Why does my flower look so strange?

While a misshaped flower could be cause for alarm, the ones in these pictures are not anything to be worried about. Instead, these flowers are displaying what is known as fasciation. This is a physiological disorder resulting from abnormal activity in the growing tip of the plant. It may be caused by genetic mutation, viral or bacterial infection, or damage to the plant from frost, insects, or chemicals, even mechanical injury, such as hoeing or forking around the plant's roots.

Fasciation usually presents itself on a single stem, with the rest of the flowers looking completely normal. Most commonly, one will see flattened stems, shoots that are composed of fused shoots, or, as in this case, flattened, elongated, or misshapen flowers. Ring fasciation, or "hen and chicks," is when a ring of flowerheads is produced around a normal, central flower. Some plants are more susceptible to fasciation, such as delphiniums, euphorbias, forsythia, foxgloves, lilies, primulas and Veronicastrum. Believe it or not, some fasciated plants are grown specifically for their oddly shaped forms! Certain varieties of ferns and cacti are particularly prized, with names like "Monstrosa" and "Tortulosa."

The bottom line is that this is nothing to worry about and likely will not reappear next year. It has little effect on the health of the plant, and you do not need to take any special action. Enjoy the oddity in your garden this summer!

Answered by Anne T.

Please send your gardening questions to bibb.extension@uga.edu or call us at 478-310-5350.

Georgia lawmakers plan to form committee to study chronic student absenteeism

Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA – More students have been skipping school since the COVID-19 pandemic, and Georgia lawmakers are looking into the problem.

A leading state Senate Republican announced Tuesday that he is forming a committee on the issue. Sen. John F. Kennedy, R-Macon, will also chair the new Study Committee on Combating Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.

Kennedy, the Senate's president pro tempore, credited the chamber's leader, Republican Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, with prioritizing the issue.

"Thanks to his support, this new study committee will help us dig deeper into the root causes of absenteeism," Kennedy said.

Kennedy was the chief co-sponsor of Senate Bill 123, which Gov. Brian Kemp signed last month. It amends Georgia's compulsory attendance law for students ages 6 through 15, with chronic absenteeism defined as missing 10% or more of the school year. That law already requires superior court judges to establish and oversee student attendance and school climate committees in each county.

When it takes effect in July, SB 123 will require attendance review teams in each school system where 10% or more of the students were chronically absent and in each school where at least 15% were chronically absent.

SB 123 also adds a requirement that the Georgia Department of Education publish biannual reports on compliance with the law and on attendance rates.

The education department already publishes attendance rates, and the percentage of students missing school has climbed sharply since before the pandemic, when 12% of students qualified as chronically absent.

The rate fell briefly to 8% in 2020, when Kemp ordered schools to close their doors.

But chronic absenteeism surged to 20.1% in 2021, when schools adapted to the pandemic, with some operating online while others returned in person.

The percentage of chronically absent students climbed to 23.9% in 2022 before settling to 21.3% last year.

That means more than 370,000 Georgia students missed at least 10% of the 2024 school year.

Rates varied by district though, from 43.0% chronically absent in Crisp County to 5.1% in Wilkinson County.

Draws, from A8:

home and business murals.

A: You know, murals are expensive, but if you're digging the things I make, there are ways to connect through those other things, hand-lettering classes I teach and things like that. You can still have a piece of Mama Hawk Draws if that's what you want. I've got a wide range from a $4 sticker or, if you've got more bank, you can have a beautiful mural in your home.

Q: What about your process?

A: Basically, everything I do starts out being designed on my computer or iPad. I draw on paper, too, but that goes through the computer eventually. Everything starts out crisp and clean, and my work usually finishes up with a crisp, clean look. From there, it's using whatever works best to get that idea out into the world on a wall, a street, a sticker — whatever the project calls for.

Q: In addition to owning your Mama Hawk Draws, on May 21, you opened Tanglewood Arts Studios at 1080 Third Street, Suite 500. Is it a private studio, a gallery or what?

A: It goes back to when I was a kid and dreamed of having a studio. It's mainly my studio, my office, a gathering space, plus a gallery. But not one with regular hours, purely because I have three kids and the hectic schedule that entails. It's more by appointment. Or if you see my car parked outside, come on in. It's still a work in progress and I'm open to a lot of possibilities. I will show different artists but it will be more quarterly than monthly. I want to create events there. I'd love for people to use it as a space to bring people together and use it as a safe, inclusive space for gatherings. I want to do things like have art classes or someone do a photography series, things like that. There'll be a wide price range so it's approachable for kids and adults.

Q: How did the names Mama Hawk Draws and Tanglewood come about?

A: Well, I have strong older daughter vibes — some might say bossy, I'll just call them strong leadership skills. Plus, motherly sensibilities. Even in the corporate world, I guess I showed a motherly instinct and started getting called Mama Hawk. When I was opening the business here, I wanted Mama Hawk-something and since I draw, hmmm, Mama Hawk Draws sounded right.

It's funny, I get introduced as Erin Hawkins and there's kind of a blank thing. Then someone says I'm Mama Hawk Draws and they're like, "Oh, yeah." It's like I have this secret identity thing as Erin.

Tanglewood's address is on Third Street, but it was going to be on Hawthorne. I was brainstorming and thought of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Tanglewood Tales," plus the neighborhood I grew up in was called Tanglewood. Diving into what Tanglewood means, I found it's things growing and working together and that speaks to its mission. I'm also proud of its logo because it has the birth flowers of two of my kids and one of our kiddos is nicknamed Bee, and there's a bee on it. It reflects back to them and building this business shows them how you can create a business and a safe space for others in your community. My husband, Spencer, and I think it's important to include our kids in the work we do and the community we're part of.

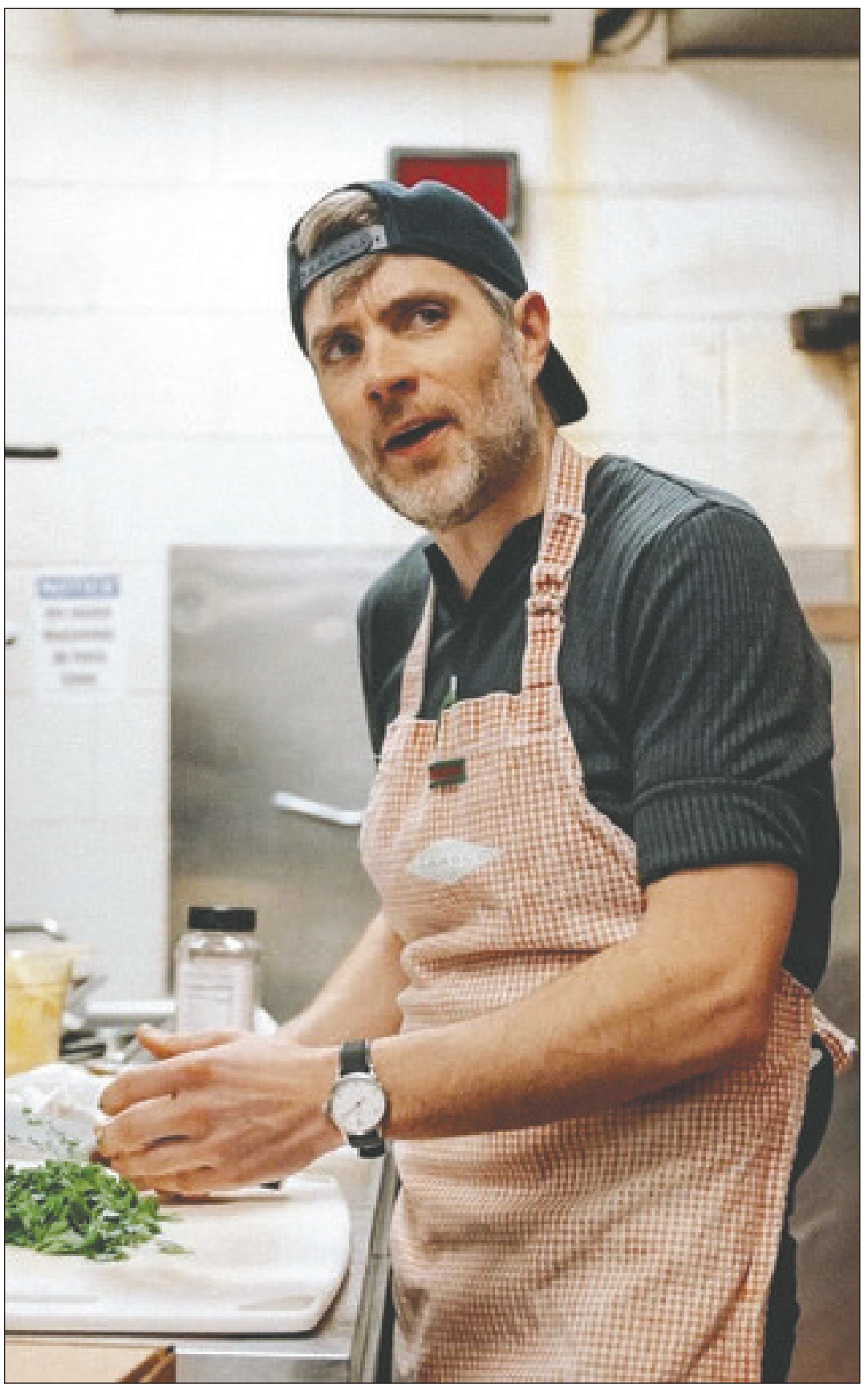
Q: Whether it's getting kids and other people to work with you on projects or inviting people into Tanglewood or your role in 478 Creatives, you seem to stress community.

A: It's important to me. When I first moved here, I had no "group." I started a book club and made some of the best friends. I put a call out for help painting a pool and that turned out to be the beginning of the 478 Creatives community. It's also how I met Kevin Lewis, who became one of my best artist friends, someone whose judgment I trust and who has leased space for a studio at Tanglewood. I think it's important for artists of all types, for creative people of every kind — and I have to say I think everyone has a measure of creativity in what they do — but I think it's important for them to be in community, get input and be encouraging and supportive of one another.

Note: Some answers may have been condensed and edited for space and readability.

Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at mwpannell@gmail.com. Find him on Instagram at @michael_w_pannell.

From Our Kitchens: **Express love through cooking: Reflections of a restaurant chef**



Courtesy of Brad Stevens

Brad Stevens, culinary director for the Moonhanger Group, in the kitchen at Natalia's. His first couple years with the Moonhanger Group were some of the most "influential" in his professional career, he said.

Brad Stevens
Special to The Melody

Recently, the realization that I am smack dab between college graduation and retirement hit me like a Jorge Soler home run in the 2021 World Series.

I began to reflect on my career as a chef, and consider what I look to accomplish in the next phase of my life. Entering the food service world and eventually fine dining initially seemed like nothing more than an act of convenience. But, over time, it became a clear calling.

Before it grew into the passion and purpose I carry today, I was an ambitious, yet confused college kid attempting to put the puzzle pieces together, like so many others. After trying multiple majors in various personal interests, a co-worker at the Greek restaurant we were working in suggested I try Hospitality Management. Once again, I had a new major, but this one stuck.

Boy, has it stuck.

It hasn't been an easy road, but those of us in the restaurant business know deep down that great comfort is gained by the act of subjecting oneself to the pressure of dinner service, and coming out the other side stronger, more capable.

This form of "masochism" has been a common talking point in the kitchens I've had the pleasure of working in. Surely, people in most fields experience this push and pull, but we can't help but think it's stronger in our industry.

That begs the question: "Why do I do this?" And better yet, how have I done this successfully?

After moving back to Macon in 2009, I met Wes Griffith, Chad Evans and company. They'd recently purchased The Rookery and were looking to improve and modernize the local downtown institution.

The first year with that crew was humbling and also amazing, sometimes simultaneously, but our collective capabilities proved to be a winning combination.

I can say without hesitation that those early years of constant challenges and adjustments were the most influential era of my professional life. The city reacted quite well to our efforts, though. We like to think we played a small role in the downtown renewal of the last 10-plus years.

I've had the opportunity to grow personally, in sync with independent operators of other restaurants, boutiques, record stores, hotels and various other shops. I've learned so much and have cultivated a deep respect for these operations and fellow businesses.

So, what makes a man dedicate himself to a cause greater than himself?

In my case, it's the people: the co-workers, farmers, guests and the community as a whole.

Secondly, it's the deep-seated need to prove myself, mainly to those listed above, which I aim to do every day. Thanks to all of you who have given me the opportunity. I hope to continue to show my love by cookin' for y'all.

Brad Stevens is the culinary director for the Moonhanger Group and oversees local restaurants Dovetail, Natalia's, The Rookery, H&H and Grant's Lounge. His days are spent pinching himself to see if he'll wake up from an amazing dream!

Dovetail Bacon Jam

Ingredients:

- 1 1/4 lbs crispy cooked applewood bacon
- 1 Vidalia onion, julienned, caramelized
- 1/4 cup strong black coffee
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 1/4 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

Directions

Cook the bacon (about 20 strips) until crispy, at the same time julienne and caramelize the onion, until a rich dark brown (add a dash of a high smoke point oil, such as grapeseed or avocado).

When the onions are ready, stir together the remaining ingredients and deglaze all the brown bits in the pan. Chop the crispy bacon and add to the pan. Reduce the heat to low, and simmer until a jammy consistency is achieved.

Yield: 2 cups
Store refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

7 TIPS FOR BUILDING COGNITIVE STAMINA AND MENTAL STRENGTH

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



Maintaining cognitive fitness as you age is just as important as maintaining physical strength — and even more critical, as your brain controls every part of your body. High-performance athletes and successful entrepreneurs understand this, and that's why they incorporate brain endurance training (BET) into their daily routines.

A study at the University of Birmingham in the UK also showed that BET can improve attention, cognitive function, physical endurance, and resistance exercise performance. Another study published in Psychology of Sport and Exercise showed that BET could make a positive impact on cognitive and physical performance in older adults.

But what exactly is cognitive stamina, and how can you build it?

What Is Cognitive Stamina?

The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines cognitive functioning as "the performance of the mental processes of perception, learning, memory, understanding, awareness, reasoning, judgment, intuition, and language."

Stamina is "the bodily or mental capacity to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity," according to Merriam-Webster.

Elite athletes and entrepreneurs build mental strength and endurance to maximize their performance and achieve professional success under pressure. Improving mental strength goes hand in hand with increasing mental stamina.

Benefits of BET and Improving Mental Strength

Research studies on brain endurance training for older adults define BET as combining cognitive tasks with physical exercise. Study participants who practiced BET in the UK Birmingham study outperformed participants who did not do BET and saw increased cognitive and physical performance in mental tasks and exercises.

Building emotional resilience also plays a key role in learning to manage stress while seeking to achieve goals. High-performance athletes know they must focus their minds to stay mentally strong under steep competitive pressure.

Tips for Building Cognitive (Mental) Stamina and Mental Strength

Building cognitive stamina and mental strength is a matter of staying focused on goals, working within your physical abilities, and realizing that mental training is just as essential as physical training for healthy aging. It also helps increase emotional resilience to process feelings, manage stress, and handle challenging circumstances. Follow these tips to get started.

Get Quality Sleep

When you sleep, your brain recharges. If you don't get enough sleep, you might wake up feeling tired and foggy. A good night's sleep (around seven to nine hours for older adults) can help you pay attention, be creative, solve problems, learn more efficiently, and make decisions, the National Institute on Aging explains.

To get good sleep, make the bedroom comfortable, follow a consistent sleep and wake schedule, have a bedtime routine to relax and unwind, don't have caffeine later in the day, and get regular exercise.

Eat a Plant-Based Diet

Eating a plant-based diet is good for your physical and cognitive health. A Harvard Medical Cognitive Fitness report suggests eating:

- Green leafy vegetables like kale, spinach, and collards
- Fatty fish like salmon, cod, and canned light tuna
- Berries, such as strawberries and blueberries
- Walnuts and almonds
- Tea and coffee
- Whole grains like oatmeal, quinoa, and barley

Also, avoid eating red meat, butter, cream, whole milk, added sugar, and refined flour in excess.

Exercise Regularly

Staying physically active helps promote brain health. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommends adults 65 and older do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week. You can break it down into 30-minute sessions five days a week. You should do aerobics, strengthening, and balance exercises.

Practice Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness means fully engaging and being aware of the present moment. Stop whatever you are doing to notice the sights, smells, sounds, and textures of your surroundings. Mindful activities like meditation, deep breathing, and conscious movement can sharpen your focus and reduce stress, according to Calm.com.

Practice Self-Care and Self-Compassion

Getting quality sleep and eating well are examples of self-care, which can boost your mental strength. Likewise, refraining from negative self-talk and not being too hard on yourself are examples of self-compassion. Treating yourself with the kindness and respect you give to a friend or family member, forgiving yourself for past mistakes, and realizing you don't have to be perfect can increase your emotional resiliency.

Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Stay Focused

Setting goals that are "specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and with a time frame in mind" can increase your mental stamina," VeryWellHealth notes.

Plus, staying focused builds mental stamina, which drives your ability to concentrate on a given task for a prolonged time. To achieve this, eliminate all distractions and focus only on the task or project at hand. You can even repeat a helpful phrase like "You've got this," if it helps you get the job done.

Stay Positive and Use Visualization

Staying positive through any task or challenge, especially during challenging situations, builds mental stamina, strength, and resiliency. Positivity promotes a strong mental attitude. Using visualization to see, feel, taste, hear, and smell your success in your mind can help you manifest a win and boost your mental strength, Forbes explains.

Following these tips can improve your cognitive stamina and increase your mental strength, which are essential parts of a healthy, active, aging lifestyle.



Mama Hawk Draws leaves her mark on Macon through murals, paintings, sketches and community organizing

I had a conversation this week with Erin Hawkins, also known as Mama Hawk Draws. Years ago, before I actually knew her, she was someone people in the art world kept mentioning to me, assuming I – and everyone else for that matter – would know of her because of her talent, her high-profile works and, significantly, her community involvement and work building community among area creatives.



Michael W. Pannell

This Q&A reflects the conversation we had while she was at Camp Hope, facilitating art therapy and mindfulness classes with the kids.

Q: Your work ranges from stickers to sketches to paintings to murals, as well as running a business to handle it all. Do you consider yourself an artist, a graphic designer or an entrepreneur/businesswoman?

A: Yes. All the above. Oh, and a community organizer.

Q: What drew you into art?

A: I've always been artistically inclined, even though in elementary school I tried out for a program they called Talent Art and didn't make it. They told me I wasn't good enough. But I didn't stop. I have amazing parents who supported me in doing art and an amazing teacher in high school who taught traditional art but then started teaching this new thing called computer art. I fell in love with it and knew I wanted to be a graphic designer. I went to James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, then into the corporate world in Washington, D.C.

Q: Where did you grow up, and how long have you been in Macon?

A: From Mandeville, La., and here in Macon for 10 years.

Q: You've done some high-profile projects while here. What are a few? What are the highlights?

A: I love the Atrium Health Amphitheater project where I create large works that look like cassettes for each concert. I do the lettering in different styles suited to the artist and create a small one for them to have. It's pretty cool that all these stars have my artwork. Right now, they're mainly backstage but they'll be in other areas as things progress.

Another would be the four crosswalks I've done with Bike Walk Macon, including the musical river one on Cherry Street with notes to Little Richard's song "Southern Man" on it. I like that the street murals use art to solve a very specific problem: increasing bike and pedestrian safety.

Another favorite is a mural for Visit Macon in memory of Steven Fulbright. There are song lyrics on it, too, but the sentiment is it's a celebration of music history and how amazing Fulbright was, how kind, and what an impact he had on Macon. It was such a treat and blessing to be part of that project and make it as vibrant as his personality.

Q: One more?

A: I'd have to say the mural I did with students at S.O.A.R. Academy, an alternative learning academy here in Macon-Bibb. Seven kids worked with me on it on Fridays for about six weeks. We went through the whole process from meetings with the "client" to coming up with ideas and sketches to getting the design up on the wall. Of course, there had to be communication and teamwork and a lot of soft skills that aren't part of a normal class. They were able to have a voice and bring their ideas and skills. What I love is how much they taught me and the impact they had on my life — I choke up now thinking about it. They got to see their value, got to do good work and realize if you make a mistake, you can correct it and move on.



Courtesy Erin Hawkins

Artist Erin Hawkins, known professionally as Mama Hawks Draws, makes finishing touches on a work for a concert at the Atrium Health Amphitheater. The cassettes she creates for each concert capture a moment in time and, for now, are hung in the backstage area.

Q: How did you get started here with murals?

A: I was fortunate to connect with 7th Street Salvage and one day just threw out, "Hey, I like your stuff. If you ever need a mural, I'd love to collaborate with you." And crazy enough, they said yes and gave me the opportunity to work with them to figure things out and get going.

Q: How about what I'll call your low-profile work? Stickers, prints, paintings, private

See DRAWS, Page A6



FPD seeks revenge in state championship

Michael A. Lough
For the Melody

The smile that creases Greg Moore's face on some topics is not one of great joy or enthusiasm, but one of appreciation and satisfaction.

When he talks about his team, he's going to smile.

It's not just because FPD's baseball team is good nor because it's playing in its second straight GIAA Class 4A championship series.

The smile comes when talking about the players. Teenagers as a whole can tend to inspire frowns and head-shaking more than smiles, but not this group.

The 31-3 Vikings have some star power you'd only know by stats and discussion, and, well, watching them play and do something that catches your eye.

But if Keon Johnson isn't going deep in the hole and nailing somebody at first or sending a pitch 400 feet, and if Conner Strandmark isn't throwing a no-hitter in one game and coming back 90 minutes later for a huge one-pitch rally-killing effort, you would not know they're capable of that.

"Listen, I know you think I'm crazy," Moore said. "These kids love each other, man. They are very tight, and it's created an extremely positive culture that is very unique, and I think they know it. I think they cherish it, they protect it and they're very careful to try not to mess it up."

The Vikings will need all hands on deck when they open the series against Brookstone at Synovus Park at — hopefully, after three games and with weather issues expected — 7 p.m. on Thursday.

Brookstone has handled city rival St. Anne-Pacelli, Bulloch and Tattnall in the postseason. The Cougars are 26-6, and a whopping 12-1 against opponents shared with FPD. The Vikings are 8-1 against that group of Pacelli, Bulloch, Heritage, Tiftarea, Westfield and Tattnall.

The Cougars were threatened in the second round when Bulloch won the second game 7-0. Brookstone responded well with a 10-0 win, its 10th shutout of the year and, to that point, 10th game of at least 10 runs.

They have a few GHSA wins under their belt: 14-2 and 13-0 over Marion County, 14-1 against Shaw and 7-0 over Columbus.

Brookstone is 9-1 since a two-game losing streak against Calvary Christian.

Catcher Gray Jones leads the Cougars with a .391 average (MaxPreps stats have not been updated since the Tattnall series), five points ahead of Brennan Neal. Mercer Hudson has the team lead with four homers.

Neal and Hudson have teamed for 51 stolen bases.

Chanwoo Kim is the staff ace, and improved to 12-3 after a 13-3

See FPD, Page B3

A REPEAT DENIED

Stratford's second-half surge comes up short in 2-1 championship game loss against St. Anne-Pacelli



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Stratford's Wes Flournoy (15) chases down a loose ball during the Eagles' 2-1 loss to St. Anne-Pacelli in the GIAA 4A State Championship game Wednesday night. Flournoy was one of the leading scorers for the Eagles, who finished the season 16-4 after the championship loss Wednesday.

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
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For the second time in their impressive playoff run this year, the Stratford Eagles seemed destined for a tie at the end of regulation.

In their semifinal showdown last week, that fate seemed inevitable because Stratford was stuck in a 0-0 slugfest until, quite literally, the last minute — then, with only 45 seconds left in the match, the Eagles struck for the crucial goal.

Stratford's championship match Wednesday night was eerily similar, with the exception of two key differences: the Eagles were down one score instead of tied, and the magical goal never arrived.

Despite a flurry of great chances in front of the net across the final 20 or so minutes of a bounce-back second half performance, No. 2 Stratford could not equalize against No. 4 St. Anne-Pacelli, as the Vikings claimed the GIAA Class 4A championship by a score of 2-1 at Stratford's Hays Field in Macon.

"Obviously we're disappointed. But you see the emotions on these guys, their faces. These guys mean a lot," said Stratford head coach Iain Jones, who was emotional after the game. "They're a good group of guys. It means a lot to them. Hats off to Pacelli, they had a good side."

The Eagles finished the year 16-4 and came up just a goal short of what would have been their second consecutive state title after they defeated St. Anne-Pacelli last season in the championship game.

"It's a rivalry. We've been playing them for a while now, and it was a rematch from last year. They had the revenge factor coming into today," Jones said. "They played well, but our guys fought in the second half. We just couldn't find that equalizer."

It was similar to last week's semifinal showdown with Bulloch — the one that was won on a last-minute goal by freshman Brady Flournoy — in that Stratford could not get its starters clicking completely in the opening half.

"Honestly, I felt like we would've been more composed (in the first half)," Jones said. "Pacelli showed a lot more composure than we did in the first half. I felt like we needed to settle down a little bit, and I feel think we did that, we settled down a bit in that second half.

"We put a lot of pressure on them in that last 20 minutes, but that's the

See STRATFORD, Page B2

NOTEPAD

Bears fall in final, Macon GIAA athletes honored

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The Mercer Bears lost in the Southern Conference tournament last weekend, falling to the loser's bracket after their first game of the tournament before eventually losing to Samford in the semifinal to end their season.

Mercer finished 35-25 on the year after placing fourth in the SoCon following the regular season. The Bears took a decent run of close games into the tournament, but things did not start off on a high note.

The Bears dropped their tournament opener 10-3 against Western Carolina on Thursday after getting a first-round bye. The Catamounts, hot off a win as the No. 5 seed in the opening round, scored four runs in the opening frame and were off to the races against Mercer.

The disheartening loss did not completely stymie the Bears' momentum, though, as they got off to a hot start in their next game before riding an all-time pitching performance to a win over Wofford.

The loser's bracket win started with seven runs in the first. Third baseman Brant Baughcum and outfielder Ely Brown each hit a home run in the contest, Brown's big fly coming as part of a 3-for-4 effort with 3 RBIs.

But the Terriers did not

See NOTEPAD, Page B2

Handshakes, rituals and pregame beauty



Micah Johnston

There's something enamoring about sports and their handshakes.

Virtually every sport — at least of the team variety — has its postgame handshake tradition.

As a Little League baseball player at Vine-Ingle here in Macon, I never wanted to shake hands with the opposing team. When we won, I was too excited to sit through the line and see the glum expressions on the other team's faces. When our team lost, I never wanted to face the other squad.

But the handshakes were an important part of the game. Even if us kids were only thinking about what color Gatorade we'd drink after the last out was made, I think the sportsmanship registered with us.

Postgame cordiality can also lead to the occasional skirmish in sports, though it rarely happens at the youth or high school levels. After a particularly heated showdown, handshakes can turn to snarls and side-eyes in a hurry. (For all the fascinating and occasionally foolish traditions that pundits focus on in the realm of college football, the onus placed on postgame meetings between coaches — especially ones that aren't the fondest of one another — might be one of the most intriguing trends.)

Then there's the daps, low-fives and what-have-yous that

See JOHNSTON, Page B2

CFCA girls take back-to-back state soccer championships

Kennon Paulk
For The Melody

Central Fellowship Christian Academy won its second straight state championship with their strong attack and solid defense in a 2-1 win against Westminster Christian Academy on Tuesday.

The Lady Lancers were led to victory by sophomore Lois Tanner and junior goalkeeper Emory Andrews.

When asked how it feels to win back-to-back championships, CFCA head coach Teddy Tanner had only four words.

"It feels pretty good," he said.

However, the win was not an easy one, with the Lady Lancers being tested by the Westminster Lions and their star striker Faith Lawhead.

"We have a lot of respect for her," Tanner said. His team had already faced the Lions once during the regular season.

Energy was high, with the sound of ringing cowbells and the cheers of the crowd shaking the stands as the players took the field.

The game started off with heavy possession by Westminster, keeping the ball in their final third of the pitch for most of the first half.

While the possession win went to Westminster, Central Fellowship returned with heavy counters throughout.

The Lancers almost collected the first goal of the game after a goal scored by junior Morgan Riley was called back after an offsides call.

Westminster kept their foot on the pedal as they continued to create shot attempts despite a tough Lancer backfield.

Lawhead attempted to gain an assist after a well-placed through ball to Riley, who missed the goal attempt just wide of the goalpost.

Westminster's midfield was proving to be a formidable opponent with senior Lion Ansley Hovater taking control of almost every ball hit her way.

Although Westminster was winning the defensive battle, their attack could not break the goal line with Andrews collecting three saves in the first.

Most of the first half occurred in the middle third of the pitch with no one wanting to give

See CFCA, Page B2



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

CFCA captain and lone senior Avery Queen (11) holds up the championship trophy while celebrating the Lancers' 2-1 win over Westminster Christian in the GIAA AA State Championship.

Stratford, from B1:

difference. The team that's going to be a little bit more composed is going to be the team that comes out on top."

The Vikings did not waste the first half opportunities, scoring truly bookend goals.

The first score of the night came just four minutes in when some precise passing got Pacelli in front of the net, opening the door for a cluster of players to whack at it. Joseph Calvert eventually converted the chance, giving the Vikings a 1-0 lead quite early.

From there, a contentious battle unfurled. The Eagles had some decent looks of their own but narrowly failed at getting the pieces to fully fall into place. Drew Sutherland had some nice throws near Pacelli's net that nearly ended with goals, but things just felt a bit off early for Stratford.

The Eagles did a good job denying the Vikings for almost the entire remainder of the half on the defensive side of things, but things took a brutal turn late in the first half.

The gut punch came with just 17 seconds left before the break, when a good Pacelli kick into the box from the right side skittered across the grass far to the left, allowing Jack Dalelio to get a foot on it sneak the ball past keeper Jude Robinson to give the Vikings a commanding 2-0 lead at halftime.

After coming so close to entering the half only down 1-0 despite not looking themselves, it felt deflating. Stratford players groaned and tossed water bottles to the ground in disgust as they left the pitch for the intermission.

"I mean, honestly I felt like we would've been more composed," Jones said of the surprising first half. "These are high school kids, and we're having to keep them focused for a month after their regular season has ended. That's a tough task for any coach, doesn't matter what sport you're playing. That's not an excuse by any stretch of the imagination, we've been trying to keep them focused and they have been focused.

"To play three games in a month, it's hard for any team to get a rhythm going. But that's not an excuse, Pacelli was in the same boat as us… at the end of the day, they won and we didn't."

Whatever rhythm the Eagles lacked in the first half, they found it with booming bravado in the second. With a 2-0 lead, the Vikings did not feel the need to apply offensive pressure and Stratford got better chances.

The best of those chances was the one that ended with a goal off the foot of freshman James Biesterfeld — who snagged his second score of the playoffs after scoring one in the quarterfinals — with about 23 minutes left.

When St. Anne-Pacelli did force its way through Stratford's midfield line, the Eagles defenders did their jobs. Back liners Adi Patel and George Dunn cut off some slashing Vikings attacks just in the nick of time to keep things at 2-1.

Then there was the final press, the 20-minute stretch at the end of the match that Jones mentioned. The Eagles pounded Pacelli in the final third, getting chance after chance and forcing the Vikings keeper to make a few saves.

The barrage of corner kicks and crossers simply could not be converted, however. The final spree had much of Stratford's sizable sideline — including reserve players, Jones and even some graduated players from last year's state championship squad — pacing, shouting and clutching their heads.

The onslaught was not enough, ending the Stratford career of several seniors including key men like Patel, Wes Flournoy, Drew Sutherland, Drew Pavlo and Stebin Horne. Other seniors on the roster included Eli Shaker, Brooks Garner and Malik McTyson.

"Lot of love and respect for those guys. Those guys have stuck with me, we've been together for a while now," Jones said of his seniors, his voice wavering a bit as he got more emotional. "I've played soccer with their dads, and that's a special bond. I just love 'em. I just love 'em."

While that group said their goodbyes, the Eagles have a litany of weapons returning next season. The game's lone goal-scorer, Biesterfeld, is only a freshman. So is Wes Flournoy's younger brother, Brady, who scored the semifinal game-winner. Peyton McCallum, a versatile player who sets up plenty of goals for Stratford, is only in ninth grade.

The defense will return plenty of impact players as well: one of its anchors, Dunn, is a sophomore, as is impact player Josh Dreher. Robinson, the rock-solid keeper, is a freshman.

"We'll regroup, we'll rebuild. Obviously we graduated a lot in the last two years, something like 17 or 18 players. We've got a lot of young talent, they're hungry, but we've got some players who've gotta put in some work in the offseason," Jones said. "Today's too early to figure out which players will play where and what, but I know which players will be good, and they know.

"We'll sit down and regroup, and I'm sure we'll be fine."



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Stratford's Brynn Yurgalavage (13, right) consoles teammate James Biesterfeld (left) after the Eagles' 2-1 loss to St. Anne-Pacelli in the GIAA 4A State Championship game Wednesday night. Biesterfeld scored Stratford's only goal.

Johnston, from B1:

players have with teammates during a game. These are not nearly as common or symbolic as those postgame greetings, but often memorable because they come after an athlete does something mind-boggling.

Whether it's the congratulatory fist bumps at home plate after a clutch long ball on the baseball diamond or the group chest bumps after an intense "and-one" bucket on the court, seeing the players gather around one teammate after a key play is fun to watch.

But these are not the athlete acknowledgements I wish to address here, no. What I've taken a special interest in are the pregame handshakes.

There's just nothing else like the feeling of getting ready, no matter what it is you're preparing for.

Now, I'm not referring to the exhausting, brain-wracking type of preparation — studying for exams, trying to get in the zone for a job interview or seeing if you can remember all of the slides in your presentation.

Those types of prep can drain you, and typically don't stick with you in any way after the fact — not any positive way, that is.

It is the preparation directly before the key moment begins, the steeling of oneself just a few ticks away from primetime, that is far more interesting.

To draw on those prior examples: this is sitting in your desk as the professor hands out the exams, one by one; this is straightening out your tie before getting up from your chair in the lobby before that interview; it's popping a mint and plugging your computer up to the projector before that presentation.

"Locking in," as the kids call it, fascinates me deeply. It's very present in the sports world.

In my favorite sport, baseball, pitchers have all sorts of routines before games that help them keep their nerves in check before they toe the slab every fifth day. Some of them don't shave their beards on days where they are slated to start. Satchel Paige, one of the most dominant pitchers who ever lived and a fixture of the fascinating Negro Leagues decades ago, was convinced rubbing his entire pitching arm with axel grease gave him an edge.

In basketball, take one of the most famous example of a pregame ritual, ever: LeBron James' chalk clap — or is it more of a toss? Whatever you call the dust-bomb of a celebration, it is an electric way to take the court for one of the greatest hoops players who has ever lived. The King also had a phase where he had complex, unique handshakes with each of his teammates pregame. Not as cool as the chalk, but still pretty fun.

Of course, these pregame rituals — handshakes or otherwise — are not limited to the individual. Entire teams often have greetings before game time in the dugout or on the field, though those can often be casual. At the high school level, the pregame meal or the bus ride to the field are moments of solace.

The most mood-setting and interest-piquing of them all for me, however, might just be the simplest thing: the introduction of a starting lineup.

Yes, this ties in with some of the other introductory happenings I've already mentioned. LeBron's chalk certainly was part of a starting lineup reading. Handshakes down the line are also often part of a lineup intro.

But something about hearing the names and numbers of those who will be first into the action feels different somehow. The intros are usually accompanied by music — "Sirius" by the Alan Parsons Project for those iconic '90s Chicago Bulls teams featuring Michael Jordan, for instance, or Nelly Furtado's "Maneater" if you're the ACE girls basketball team — that get the crowd more involved.

It really boils down to the psyche of it all. As someone who was never athletically gifted, the closest I ever had to a true "gearing up" moment was when the Sugarbear Band was about to take the field at halftime during Central's football games.

What must it be like to plunge one's nerves below zero and perform on the field as an athlete — especially at the Major League level, where tens of thousands are taking in your performance each day? The pressure only grows when you consider the fact that hundreds of thousands more can instantly replay your performance, should they have missed it.

As the playoffs finish up and the summer heat bears down on Macon, I have watched postseason games with great interest. These thoughts about the starting lineup struck me as I watched Stratford's boys soccer team take the field before their GIAA Class 4A semifinal match last week.

The Eagles had a massive roster — thanks, in part, to a large contingent of freshman and junior varsity players along for the playoff ride — which made the whole experience more cinematic.

The movie theater is where some of the greatest "gearing up" moments live. Think Neo and Trinity preparing to take down the agents in "The Matrix," or Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt strapping up for their final encounter with a twisted killer in David Fincher's thriller "Se7en."

It may seem a bit far-fetched, but that's how I feel when I watch the squads on the field run through the handshake line. I used to wish I could experience that as a kid, imitating it in my free time.

When those intros begin, you know you've made it. It's game time, and there's no turning back.

CFCA, from B1:

up any space. With both teams playing hard defense they ended the half tied at 0-0.

There would be less of a defensive struggle in the second half, as both teams started to heat up offensively.

The Lancers started the half with possession of the ball and made sure to take advantage of the opportunity — within the first five minutes of the second half they put up a shot attempt.

Lady Lancer Layla Wagner attempted the second shot of the half and while it got blocked, Tanner came around with the rebound. Tanner then lined up her shot and scored the first goal of the game in the bottom right of the net.

With no offside calls in sight, the score was now 1-0 Lancers.

It wasn't much longer until the Lancers caught a break to give them another advantage.

Westminster junior Josie Stanger committed a foul against the Lancers within the box, sending Tanner to the line for a penalty kick.

Tanner went right back to the bottom right corner to score the penalty kick and make the score 2-0.

The Lady Lancers took this quick start and used it to fuel the rest of the game as they controlled most of the possession in the second half, but Westminster was not going to go out without a fight.

The Lions shifted their formation into a 4-3-3 with a sweeper in the backfield.

This was to try and pull more offside calls and stop the runs the Lancers had been producing.

Westminster also had been playing Lawhead in a center back position throughout the game, however the tide seemed to turn when they put her into an attacking position.

Within a few minutes, the repositioning proved to be the right move.

Lawhead rocketed in the first goal for the Lions, making the score 2-1 Lancers.

Anxiety in the stands was high as the Lions continually led charge after charge into the final third of the pitch.

The Lancers began to adjust to this new formation and Andrews collected three more saves within the second half.

While the Lions efforts were valiant, they couldn't break through to a tying goal.

The final minute ran out and the crowd began to go wild as the Lady Lancers secured back-to-back championships.

Lancers head coach Teddy Tanner and his team's cheers could be heard around the entire stadium.

With this being the second time both teams had faced each other, the Lancers already knew the talent that the Lions had with Lawhead.

The Lancers had put in the work and it had finally paid off.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

CFCA's Avery Queen (11) kicks the ball away during the Lancers' 2-1 win over Westminster Christian in the GIAA 2A State Championship. CFCA also won the state championship last year.

Notepad, from B1:

go down easy. They scattered runs across several different innings, and by the time the eighth rolled around it was 8-6 in favor of Mercer. But ace pitcher Colton Cosper, an All-Conference selection and one of the Bears' key players all year, stepped up. The southpaw finished the complete game with a whopping 140 pitches, striking out seven Wofford batters en route to the win.

Mercer rode the momentum to a 4-2 win over The Citadel in the next game on Saturday. Jackson Gaspard, Terry Busse and Colin Ewaldsen all toed the slab and limited The Citadel to two runs, with Busse pitching 4 ⅓ innings and earning the win.

The real story of the tournament, unfortunately, came in the nightcap against Samford to determine who would play in the championship game on Sunday.

The showdown was a pitcher's duel at first, with Samford scoring two runs in the first before both sides settled in and went scoreless for a few innings. With the score at 3-1 going into the sixth, the Bulldogs broke things open with a huge home run from outfielder Michael Gupton gave them a commanding 5-1 lead over Mercer.

After Gupton not only hit the home run, he skipped his way around the bases in celebration, jawing with some of Mercer's players as he did. Upon rounding third, he strutted sideways toward the plate, facing Mercer's dugout and shouting in that direction.

The celebration infuriated the Bears. Mercer shortstop Bradley Frye got into it with Gupton between second and third, leading to his ejection. A Mercer pitching coach was ejected for interacting with Gupton near the end of the home run trot. Even Frye's mom was later ejected.

The rivalry got more heated when, on a tag play just a bit later in the game, the Bears' third baseman Baughcum tagged a Samford player at third and put a little extra weight on top of him, earning another ejection.

With a bitter taste in the Bears' mouth, the season came to a close as Mercer could not get its offense clicking. Samford would go on to lose the championship game against East Tennessee State on Sunday.

Busse and Cosper, two of Mercer's finest pitchers during the playoffs, earned Southern Conference All-Tournament honors for their efforts.

Stratford has 11 named to all-region track team

The Eagles had 11 girls players make the GIAA Class 4A/3A District 6 All-District team.

The key member of the team was Kelly Grace Perrin, who earned the highest honors and was selected to the GIAA Class 4A All-State team as one of the top performers in Georgia.

The students selected to the All-District team were Blair Christie, Eliza Culp, Annie Garner, Peyton Hitt, Tinsey Lloyd, Ellie McMahon, Valery Mitchell, Kelly Grace Perrin, Hatsy Russell, Hadley Stewart, Mary Marshall Swift.

Soccer teams earn awards

Multiple Macon private schools had players named to the GIAA All-District teams, according to their schools' athletics X.com accounts this week.

Stratford had Wes Flournoy win the GIAA Class 4A/3A District 6 Player of the Year Award. The Eagles' Campbell Mcintyre and FPD's Bowen Matthews were Co-Players of the Year for the region.

Both of Stratford's coaches, Kate Blankenship for the girls and Iain Jones for the boys, won District 6 Coach of the Year honors after stellar seasons.

Tattnall announced multiple players earning All-District honors. Carson Burnett, Ethan Davis, Tristan Loosier, Carson Scott and Christian Weeks for the boys. Addison Cook, Molly Kemp, Kennedy Walton and Addy White earned the honors for the girls.

Macon Bacon prepares for sold-out opening day crowd, cultivates exciting fan experience

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

For the eighth year, the Macon Bacon are sizzling into the summer and beginning their season — and this time they've got some special treats in store.

The Bacon, who play in the Coastal Plain League, a wooden-bat collegiate summer baseball league, are set for their home opener at Macon's historic Luther Williams Field on Saturday against the Florence Flamingos at 7 p.m. The game is already sold out, with more than 3,000 seats set to be filled for the first home game of the summer.

All the typical sights and sounds of the baseball diamond will be there to take in: the freshly-manicured infield, the crack of the (notably wooden) bat, and the game itself, of course.

In addition to Opening Night excitement, postgame fireworks will accentuate the normal gameday experience. It's a moment the team and its staff, including president Brandon Raphael, have been prepping for since the last season ended.

"It's the most exciting night because we've waited all offseason to put this together for people. It's the culmination of everything... It's interesting because we've got the longest offseason of any sport out there, pretty much. We've got 10 months of offseason, and the planning for the next season is already in motion the day the previous season ends," Raphael said. "All the different moving pieces, we get started early to help those all fall into place."

What's the most important piece of that puzzle? Making sure the logistics are right for fans.

"We couldn't do anything we do without fans, they are always going to be any sports team's first priority," Raphael said. "So we square away all that as best we can. Then we get together all the other planning, all the special events and the entertainment. All that implementation doesn't matter if the fans aren't comfortable and able to get out to the game."

Then there's stadium maintenance. As one of the oldest stadiums in the country with a rich history, Luther Williams Field does not often get updates, but the Bacon maintain the park with care in the offseason.

The team is made up of college players, which adds yet another layer to planning.

"They're all mostly coming in this week, we ought to have about ¾ of the team here by the first game and the rest will trickle in as they're available," Raphael said. "With a collegiate league like this over the summer, it's another unique trait. These guys have conference tournaments, they've got regionals for the NCAA tournament. They have to finish up their college seasons first."

Then there's the fan experience, for which the Bacon are known and have set a high bar. Music, skits and activities in between innings and special theme nights highlight a schedule packed with all types of gimmicks and fun for spectators.

"A lot of that depends on the team getting together and developing things. We also have a really great intern team that comes in, they all arrived this month," Raphael said. "If you look at any sports team, the busiest time is going to be that last month for everything before the season starts. It's definitely crunch time for us right now."

The theme nights tend to be highlights for Macon's fan experience. Tried and true classics scheduled for most seasons include Star Wars night, Bark in the Park and Hawaiian Night, but the Bacon have some new events on deck this season that should excite fans.

"We've always got some tricks up our sleeve. Fans always love the theme nights and we got some exciting new ones this year," Raphael said.

Some new theme nights include "Halloween Night" and "Pirates and Princesses" night, but Raphael thinks one of the most special evenings of the season will be Jackie Robinson night.

The special event honoring the legendary pro player who broke Major League Baseball's color barrier will take place June 20 and is a new spin on a retro-themed Decades Night that the Bacon have done in the past.

With retro entertainment and garb galore in tow, the Bacon will retire the number 42 worn by Robinson in what Raphael and the team believe is the first jersey retirement ever held at Luther Williams Field.

It's set to be a special night, especially given the fact that Robinson once played at Luther Williams Field, and that the Robinson biopic "42" was filmed at the field in Macon more than a decade ago.

"We always have a sort of throwback night, but we wanted to do something special," Raphael said of the new promotion and event honoring Robinson. "It'll really be the first jersey retirement we've had here. We've never worn the number 42 out of respect for it, but with the connections we have with Jackie Robinson's legacy, it feels right to retire it officially."

Robinson's legacy is a key one in Luther Williams Field's deep baseball lore — a feature that Raphael thinks is one of the crucial draws of Bacon games. He recommended that if fans are attending a Bacon game for the first time ever Saturday, or at any point this year, that taking in this history should be a priority.

"I think one of the first things you have to do is walk around and check the place out. It's a really great historic stadium, it makes us really special. You have to see everything, get a look at the historic spots around the stadium, see the list of people who've played here," Raphael said when asked to guide first-time visitors.

"Then you have to meet Kevin, our 7-foot-tall piece of bacon," he said. "Then after you get some of the unique food here, you just settle down and take it in."

Even with all the new theme nights, the Bacon's everyday history and other offerings will get a shot at a bigger audience when the CPL's annual All Star Game comes to town in July.

"We get a chance to represent Macon and show everybody how great the history is here," Raphael said of the chance to host the league's best players. "Plus, there's teams in the league that don't normally play here, and we get to host them here. It's a chance for a lot of talent to get a look at Macon too."

With July's All Star Game, the Robinson jersey retirement in June and plenty of other events scattered around the schedule, Saturday's fireworks-laden season opener should be only the beginning.

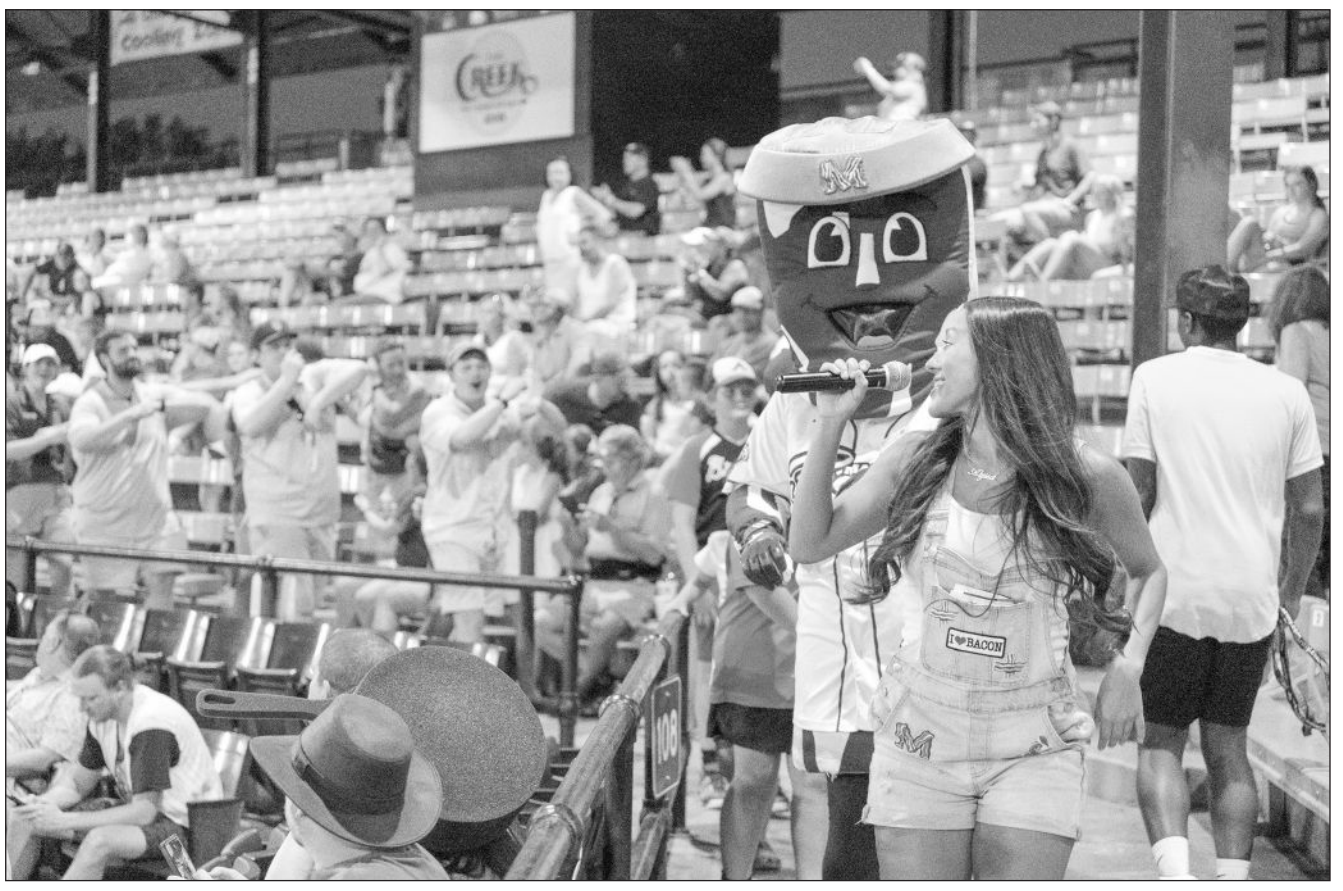


Photo Courtesy Macon Bacon

A Macon Bacon employee and 7-footer Bacon mascot Kevin lead a conga line around the stadium. This year is the Bacon's eighth season, and the team plans on hosting several theme nights throughout the season including "Halloween Night" and "Priates and Princesses"



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

FPD catcher Tinsley Lewis (10) throws to first to complete a 5-2-3 double play during the second game of the Vikings' GIAA semifinal series against Athens Christian earlier this month.

FPD, from B1:

win over Tattnall last week. He needed only 82 pitches in the 6-inning, complete-game win, with four strikeouts and three walks. Neal struck out 10 with two walks in the complete game 2-1 win over the Trojans in the clincher.

Kim and Neal both pitched in last year's championship-clinching 9-5 win over FPD, after taking the opener 7-3 at Luther Williams Field.

Many of the FPD names are the same from last year's state runner-up, but this is still a different team.

"We were different in terms of how we scored runs, and from a pitching standpoint, we were different last year than we are this year," Moore said. "We had a lot of guys that put a lot of innings in last year.

"We have a lot of guys who are certainly capable but we don't have a lot of guys with a ton of innings this year. So that's probably the biggest difference."

This year's offense may have an edge.

In the opener against Athens Christian in the semifinal, seven Vikings got hits. In the nightcap, eight. Different players had two-hit and multiple-RBI games in the doubleheader.

"It doesn't mean we don't miss some guys that were on that team," Moore said, "because we had some guys on that team that hit very well."

And there was a little more to that team, as with this one, than just hitting, pitching, and defense.

"Well, listen, our heart and soul for two years was Hayes Bryant," Moore said. "We had Gavin Spillers, who was a threat to leave the ballpark on any swing.

"And we had Cody Strandmark, older brother of Conner who waited until his senior year to bat like .340, and was just fantastic. He was awesome. A very, very, very strong, vocal, powerful, positive presence as a team leader. He and Hayes both were.

"And there were more."

This year's team doesn't quite have replacements for those guys, so to speak. For one, this is a younger team, with but three seniors, only one of whom is a regular.

Not a problem on a team where accepting roles is just part of the plan.

"We obviously play a bunch of juniors, and those juniors are a very close, very tight-knit group," Moore said. "And they kind of share the wealth when it comes to who's saying what and when and how. Some of them are leaders by example, some of them are vocal leaders."

The mood stays positive and focused because Moore and his staff tend to spread the praise around.

"We've kind of told the guys, 'Don't worry too terribly much about who's first or who's second or whatever," Moore said. "It's very situational and it could change in a heartbeat."

Take Conner Crosby, the busier senior.

"He's played in left, he's played in right, he's pitched a little bit for us," Moore said. "He may not get in, but he may, and he may not just get in, he may play a critical role. And it may not be until about the fifth inning. It's just crazy, it really is.

"We probably can play 14, 15 guys."

Knocking Brady McHugh from the lineup is quite a task. He makes plays on the field, on the mound, or at the plate, as he did against Stratford in the second-round series. He belted a sixth-inning home run that sparked the offense in the first win, then turned in a gutty relief effort in the 6-5 second-game win, in which he scored the game-winner.

Without seeing a number, Moore knows when McHugh's threads pass by en route to the washer.

"I can tell you it's his without question," Moore said. "That one needs an extra wash. There's no question. He's living in the dirt, man. He is a first-class team warrior, man."

Amid this run, of course, there are some eyes on Moore, and what his future holds. The 1984 FPD graduate is in his fifth year as head baseball coach, and is nearly three decades in as the athletics director.

He finished a 22-year career as head football coach after the 2022 season, and was the head boys basketball coach for a dozen years.

The past few years have been his least busy, and the past few baseball years may have been his most gratifying.

A championship this week would be FPD's first since 2010, and there's something to be said about timing and going out on top. On the other hand, Johnson – considered among the top 50 high school players in the country - and Strandmark are among the many underclassmen.

"I have so much respect for the kids," Moore said. "The greatest thing about what has evolved on our team over the course of the year - we've had a great season and it's obviously highly competitive in our own locker room - But they honor and respect each other, and they've done the greatest job maybe of any team I've ever coached of understanding roles and being okay with it."

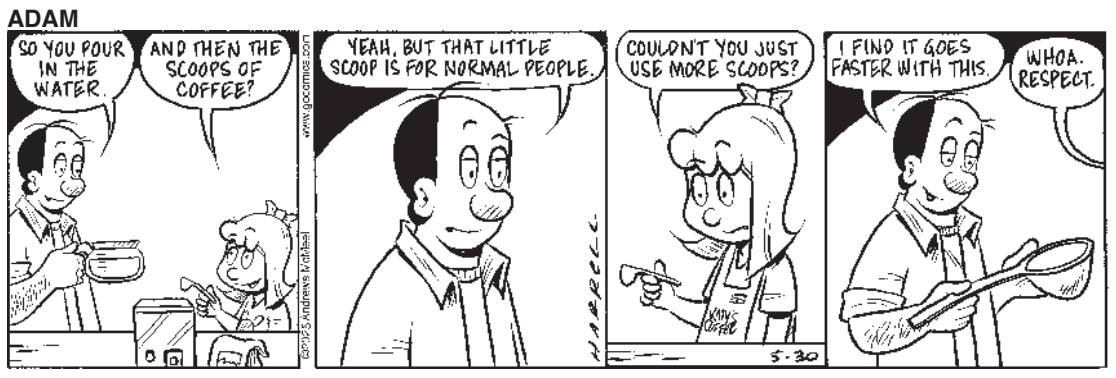
The draw of another year with a group like that — including those with whom Moore will travel to Nicaragua this July on a mission trip — may overwhelm any natural inclination to go out on top.

Like the story he told of a recent team gathering.

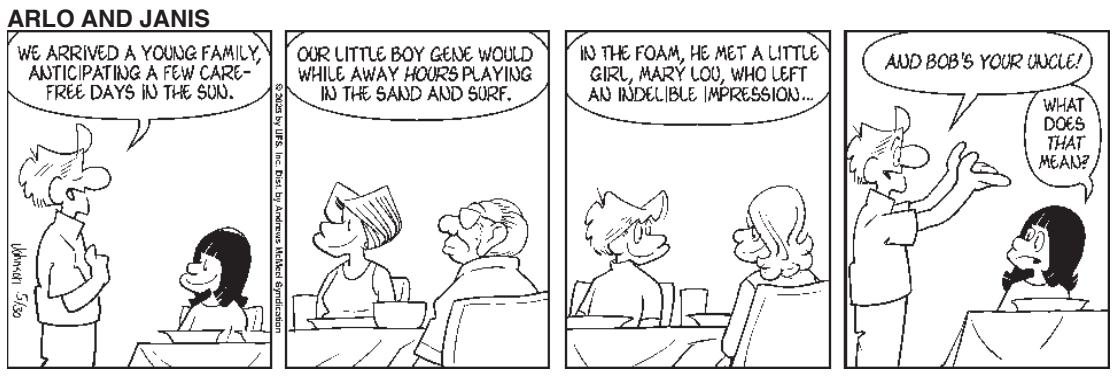
"We went out to dinner as a team, and I just sit there and marvel at it and it makes me so full and content," he said. "We're just covering the back corner of Sonny's barbecue restaurant and the kids, they're just dying laughing. They're just laughing, they're having fun, and, man, it's hard to get your hands around creating that and seeing it come to life like that.

"It is what is a rare thing, and it is, for lack of a better word, it's precious."

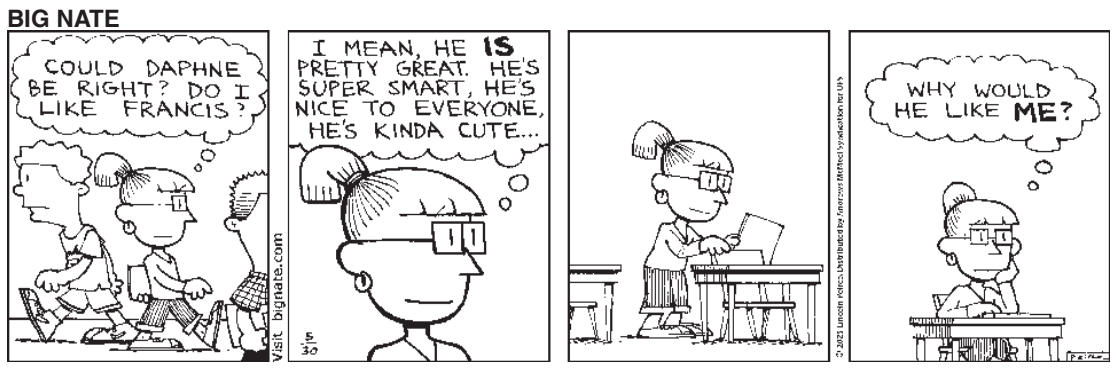
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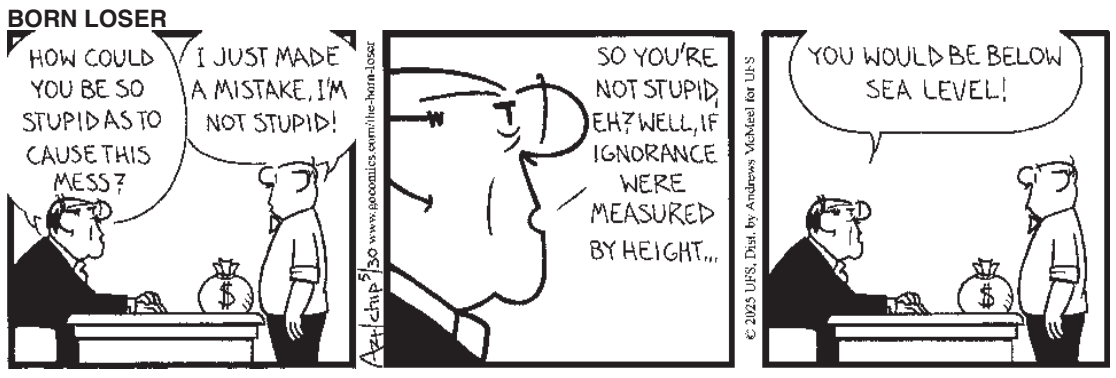
ARLO AND JANIS



BIG NATE



BORN LOSER



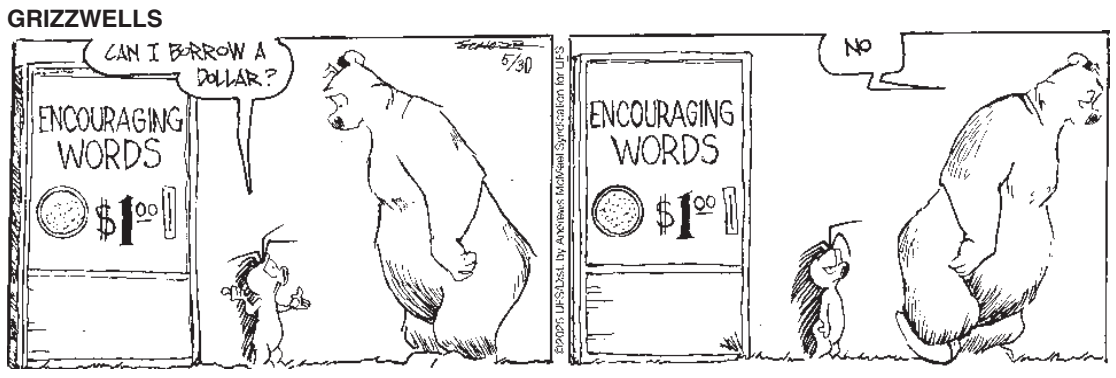
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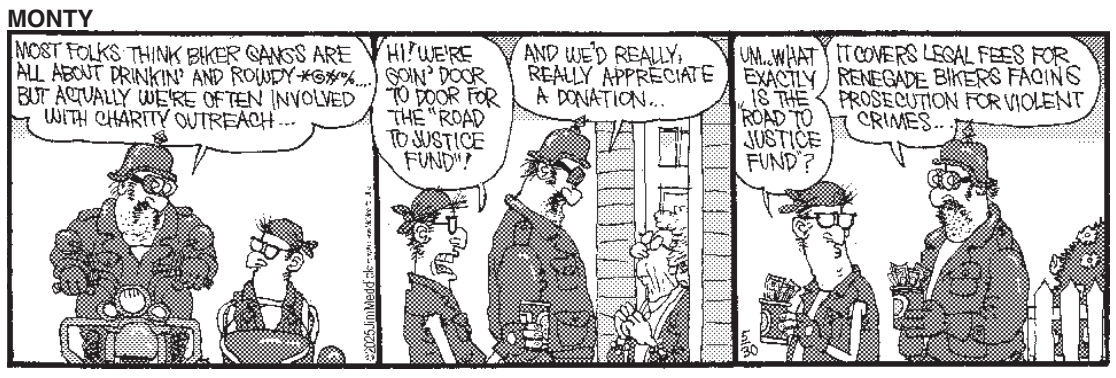
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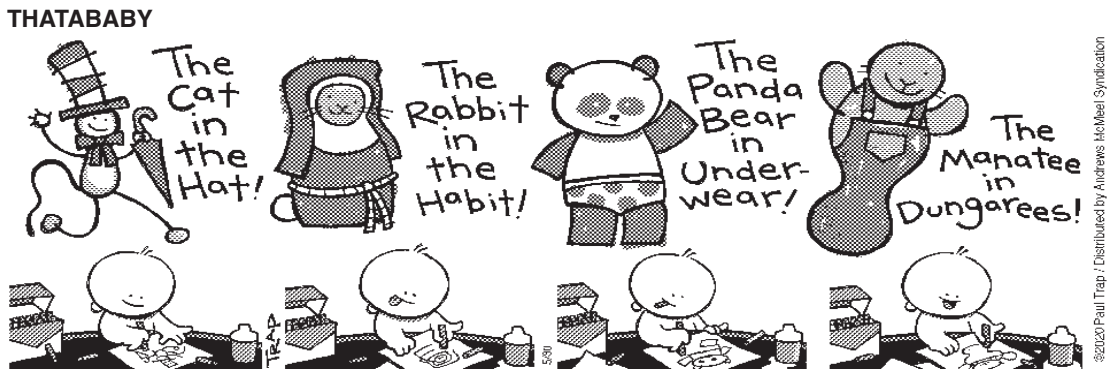
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

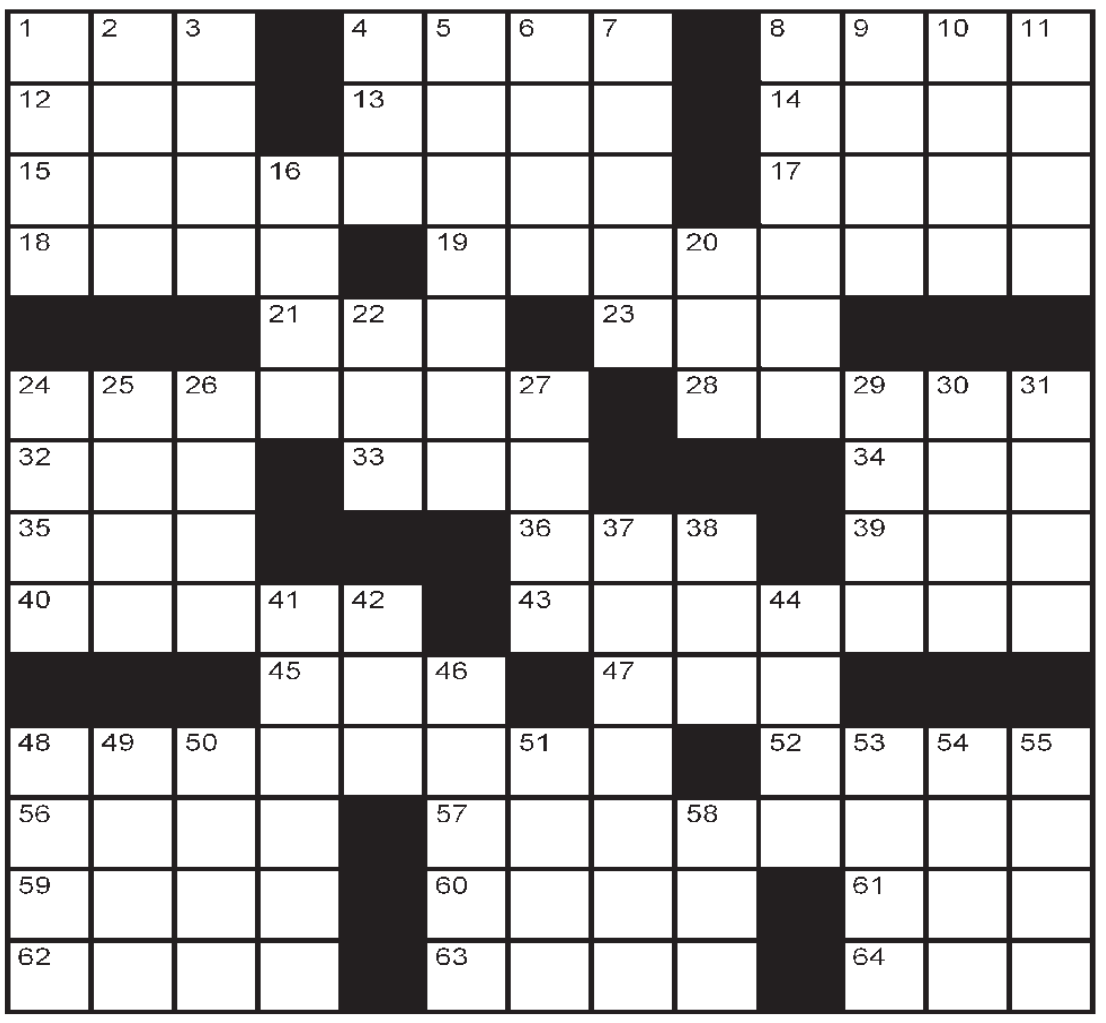
1 — Beta Kappa
4 "Mamma Mia" group
8 Part of MIT (Abbr.)
12 — Alamos, New Mexico
13 Edge
14 Toothed wheel
15 Set aside for some purpose
17 Alliance acronym
18 — -do-well
19 Was a counselor for
21 Male swan
23 — and feather
24 Blacktop
28 Fellows
32 Word in wedding notices
33 — and far between
34 Lubricate
35 "I — — Camera"
36 Snake
39 Pub beverage
40 Sir or madam
43 Calmed
45 "— in the Family"
47 Actress — Farrow
48 Lose
52 Flightless bird
56 Use a blue pencil
57 Conspirators
59 Detective — Wolfe
60 Trig function
61 Emissary (Abbr.)
62 Profound
63 Fencing sword
64 Also

DOWN

1 Blueprint
2 Perforation
3 — of Ely
4 The rudiments
5 Thorny shrub
6 Mouthful
7 Catkin
8 Cold-shoulder
9 Approach
10 Fill to the gills
11 Walked over
16 Theater sect.
20 The "it" game
22 Lummox
24 Morphology branch (Abbr.)
25 Big rig
26 — moss
27 "— the night before Christmas ..."
29 Actor — Wyle
30 Roofing piece
31 Sleigh
37 "— To Watch Over Me"
38 Luau fare
41 Portable PC
42 Annex
44 Sour
46 Minor failure
48 Darn
49 — fixe
50 Father
51 Cut
53 Word in a recipe
54 Therefore
55 About (2 wds.)
58 — -hee

Answer to Previous Puzzle

H	E	N	■	G	I	R	L	■	P	U	S	H
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5-30

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ☆☆☆☆☆

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Almanac

Today is the 150th day of 2025 and the 72nd day of spring.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1431, 19-year-old Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in Rouen, Normandy, for heresy.

In 1911, Ray Harroun, driving a Marmon Wasp equipped with the first rearview mirror, won the first Indianapolis 500.

In 1922, the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C.

In 1958, unidentified soldiers from World War II and the Korean War were interred in Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

In 2002, cleanup at the former World Trade Center site in New York City ended after eight months.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Peter Carl Faberge (1846-1920), goldsmith/jeweler; Mel Blanc (1908-1989), voice actor; Benny Goodman (1909-1986), bandleader; Joseph Stein (1912-2010), playwright; Gale Sayers (1943-2020), football player; Wynonna Judd (1964-), singer-songwriter; Tom Morello (1964-), singer-songwriter/musician.

TODAY'S FACT: Abraham Lincoln's only surviving son, Robert Todd Lincoln, then 79 years old, was present at the Lincoln Memorial dedication ceremony in 1922.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 2021, Helio Castroneves won the Indianapolis 500 with a record time of 2 hours, 37 minutes, 19 seconds.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "Music, I think, is best when it honestly explores personal demons, and it stirs around in the silt of the psyche to find out what's really there." — Tom Morello

TODAY'S NUMBER: 36 — Doric columns at the Lincoln Memorial, one for each state that had been admitted to the Union at the time of Lincoln's death, including those that had seceded.

TODAY'S MOON: Between new moon (May 26) and first quarter moon (June 2).

Community Briefs

Early voting begins for Georgia Public Service Commission seat

More than 80 people voted Tuesday in Macon as early voting began for the special primary election that will decide the District 2 seat on the Georgia Public Service Commission, a governing body that determines the state's electric and gas rates.

Republican incumbent Tim Echols, of Jackson County, is challenged by Republican candidate Lee Muns, a project manager from Columbia County, and Democrat Alicia Monique Johnson, a consultant from Chatham County.

Bibb County voters can cast their ballots for early voting up until June 13 at the main election's office in the Macon Mall, 3661 Eisenhower Parkway, suite MB 101, or at the Elaine Lucas Senior Center, 132 Willie Smokie Glover Drive. The poll at Thereon Ussery Park Community Center is closed for this election.

The last day to request an absentee ballot is June 6.

Saturday voting is set for May 31 and June 7 from 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.

Man slain on Key Street

A 62-year-old man died after being shot in the 800 block of Key Street about 6 a.m. on May 24, according to the Bibb County Sheriff's Office.

Coroner Leon Jones identified the decedent Wednesday as Isiah Macon.

Macon, who was found outside near the parking lot of Central Church of Christ, succumbed to his injury at a hospital.

Anyone with information about the incident is urged to call Macon Regional Crimestoppers at 1-877-68CRIME.

Bank robbed by woman holding a child, police say

A 37-year-old woman was arrested and charged with armed robbery, cruelty to children in the first degree and willful obstruction of a law enforcement officer Wednesday afternoon in connection with a bank robbery on Log Cabin Drive earlier in the day.

Surveillance footage from Robins Federal Credit Union about 9 a.m. showed a woman walking inside the bank, hand-in-hand with a small child dressed in a Spider-Man costume.

The sheriff's office says the woman passed a note to the bank teller that demanded money and warned that she was armed.

The woman and child left in white Nissan with an undisclosed amount of money.

Hours later, deputies arrested Sidney Leshay Bryant at a residence less than a mile from the bank on West Highland Drive. Bryant was booked in the Bibb County jail without bond.

Boy, 7, drowns at Lake Tobesofkee

A 7-year-old boy died and two other youngsters nearly drowned at a fishing area on Lake Tobesofkee on May 23.

Tristan Cornelius was in the water at Dewayne Jones Public Fishing Area with two other boys, ages 8 and 10, when all three of them "suddenly went under," the Bibb County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

When the boys were pulled from the lake, Cornelius was pronounced dead. The two other boys were taken to a hospital for treatment.

Atrium Health offers precautions against melanoma

May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month, and doctors at Atrium Health Navicent urge everyone to take steps to be sun-safe when planning summer activities.

Exposure to ultraviolet light, an invisible type of radiation that comes from the sun, tanning beds and sunlamps, can lead to skin cancer, as ultraviolet rays are especially damaging to skin cells.

People can reduce their risk by applying a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher before going outside.

Take the following preventative steps to protect your skin from too much ultraviolet exposure and lower your risk of skin cancer:

- Stay in the shade as much as possible.
- Use sunscreen and wear protective clothing when you're outside, even if you're in the shade.
- Full-spectrum sunscreen with a SPF of 30 or higher should be applied in a thick layer on all exposed skin.
- Wear a hat that has a brim that shades your face, ears and the back of your neck.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from ultraviolet rays and reduce the risk of cataracts.

County splash pads, pools open for the summer

The Macon-Bibb County Recreation Department opened up its splash pads and pools last Saturday.

The pools at South Bibb Recreation Center, 7035 Houston Road, and at the Booker T. Washington Recreation Center, 401 Monroe St., will be open from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturday and from 1 - p.m. Tuesday through Friday.

Pools at the Frank Johnson Community Center and at Memorial Park are currently undergoing renovations as part of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax-funded projects.

All pools are scheduled to open later this summer.

Splash pads at Daisy Park, 1021 Daisy Park, Freedom Park, 3301 Roff Avenue, and Rosa Jackson Recreation Center, 1211 Maynard St., also opened Saturday. Filmore Thomas Park is undergoing renovations, but the county says the splash pad there will open later this summer.

Macon Bacon's opening night sold out – again

Macon's collegiate wooden bat baseball team is set to kick off its eighth season with yet another sold out opening night on Saturday night.

The Macon Bacon has sold out the first game of each season since its inception in 2018. The Bacon will face off with the Florence Flamingos at 7 p.m. at Historic Luther Williams Field, which seats 3,193 fans.

The Bacon plays in the Coastal Plain League, which includes teams such as the Asheboro Zoo-Keepers, Boone Bigfoots, Martinsville Mustangs, Lexington County Blowfish and Forest City Owls.

'Pause, Sis – Lets Talk' perimenopause panel

A panel on menopause and perimenopause is set for June 7 at 11 a.m. at The Welcome Center Church, 5636 Wood Oak Drive. The event is hosted by the Alpha Rho chapter of Lambda Kappa Mu Sorority Inc.

The panel will feature medical professionals, wellness advocates and women with lived experiences. Insights offered include everything from hot flashes and hormonal shifts to mood changes, intimacy and self-care.

The event is free but registration is encouraged. To register, email khrobery@gmail.com.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch

FRIDAY

May 30, 2025

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



APPLE TV+

Your Friends & Neighbors

Apple TV+ ■ Season Finale

The first season of this hilarious and compelling crime drama series starring Jon Hamm as a recently divorced middle-aged dad who begins stealing from his wealthy neighbors will wrap up tonight. Will he end up in prison for a crime he did not commit, or will he, as always, find a way to finagle himself out of trouble?

NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series: Rackley Roofing 200

FS1, 8 p.m. Live

Craftsman Truck Series stars Corey Heim, Ty Majeski, Chandler Smith and others duke it out at Nashville Superspeedway for the Rackley Roofing 200 on FS1.

A Boyfriend to Die For

LMN, 8 p.m. ■ Original Film

Olivia (Brittany Underwood) never wanted to be known as just another product of nepotism, but as a rising star in her father's prestigious firm, that's exactly how people see her. Determined to prove herself, she crosses paths with Jonathan Rothfield (Alex Trumble), a sharp and ambitious heir to a renowned banking dynasty. Together, they find not only a shared drive to succeed but a powerful, intoxicating chemistry that draws them closer. As their careers and ambitions intertwine, Olivia realizes that their combined influence could take them to the very top of the financial world. But when her father finally backs their venture, a chilling secret begins to surface – one that threatens to unravel everything she's worked for. Will Olivia's thirst for success blind her to the dark truths that could destroy them all?

CATCH A CLASSIC

TCM Birthday Tribute: Howard Hawks

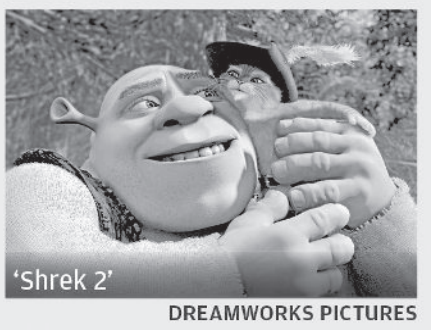
TCM, beginning at 6 a.m.

Legendary director/producer/writer Howard Hawks was born in Goshen, Indiana, on May 30, 1896; he passed away Dec. 26, 1977, in Palm Springs, California, at age 81. TCM remembers the filmmaker on the anniversary of his birth today with seven of the films he directed. Up first is 1930's **Flight Commander (pictured),** originally known as *The Dawn Patrol*, a drama set during World War I. Hawks, who had been a flight instructor during the war, flies a plane as a German pilot in an uncredited role in the film. After that is **Today We Live** (1933), a romantic drama led by Joan Crawford, Gary Cooper, Robert Young and Franchot Tone. Up next is another World War I-set drama: the Best Picture Oscar-nominated **Sergeant York** (1941), which won Gary Cooper the Best Actor Oscar and earned Hawks the only Best Director nomination of his career. The next film places its action in the Pacific theater of World War II and was made during that conflict: 1943's **Air Force**, featuring John Garfield, John Ridgely and Gig Young among its cast. Following that is **To Have and Have Not** (1944), Hawks' adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's novel that marked the first onscreen pairing of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. The Hawks birthday tribute wraps up in the later afternoon/early evening with **Tiger Shark** (1932), a romantic melodrama led by Edward G. Robinson, Richard Arlen and Zita Johann, and **Land of the Pharaohs** (1955), a historical epic starring Jack Hawkins and Joan Collins that dramatizes the building of the Great Pyramid of Giza.



FIRST NATIONAL PICTURES

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



DREAMWORKS PICTURES

Shrek 2 (2004, Children) Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy **Freeform, 7 p.m.**

Superbad (2007, Comedy) Jonah Hill, Michael Cera **VH1, 7 p.m.**

The Hitman's Bodyguard (2017, Action) Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson **IFC, 7 p.m.**

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3 (2023, Science fiction) Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldaña **FX, 8 p.m.**

The Karate Kid (1984, Drama) Ralph Macchio, Noriyuki "Pat" Morita **AMC, 8 p.m.**

White House Down (2013, Action) Channing Tatum, Jamie Foxx **TBS, 8 p.m.**

The Matrix Revolutions (2003, Science fiction) Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne **SYFY, 9 p.m.**

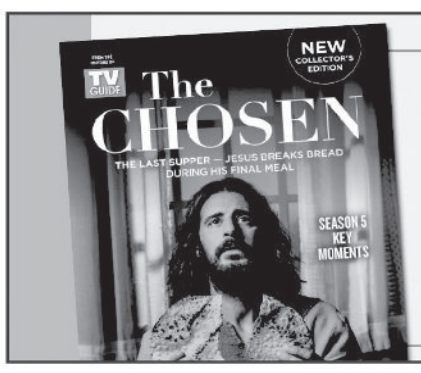
Vegas Vacation (1997, Comedy) Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo **E!, 9 p.m.**

Sins of the Bride (2024, Suspense) Kyle Kankonde, Charlie N. Townsend **LMN, 10 p.m.**

Caddyshack (1980, Comedy) Chevy Chase, Rodney Dangerfield **E!, 11 p.m.**

The Karate Kid Part II (1986, Drama) Ralph Macchio, Noriyuki "Pat" Morita **AMC, 11 p.m.**

From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com



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Photos by Jessica Gratigny

1: Firefighter Ryan Ramsdell auditions for the 2026 Middle Georgia Firefighter Calendar at Macon City Auditorium May 22. The calendar returns after 7 years and will raise funds for children's healthcare. **2:** Macon-Bibb Fire Chief Shane Edwards watches an audition for the 2026 Middle Georgia Firefighter Calendar at Macon City Auditorium.





Photos by Bibb County Schools

3: A Southwest High School graduate celebrates during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum. **4:** Rutland graduate Devin Patterson is escorted across the stage during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum. The entire audience gave an ASL applause for Patterson, who is sensory-sensitive. **5:** 2025 VIP Academy graduates flip their tassels at their graduation ceremony last week. **6:** Central High School graduates walk into the Macon Coliseum during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum. **7:** 2025 Westside High School graduates stand during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum. **8:** Northeast High School graduates celebrate after turning their tassels during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum. **9:** A Howard High School honors graduate shakes hands with school board member Lisa Garrett-Boyd while walking across the stage during the school's graduation ceremony last week at the Macon Coliseum.

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









