The Macon Melody

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MWA nonprofit under scrutiny

Laura E. Corley
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A public charity created by the Macon Water Authority to help low-income families pay their water bills spent money for other purposes, including an exclusive jazz festival and a Christmas lights display.

The Macon Water Alliance, a nonprofit registered with the IRS under the name "Macon Water Environmental Education," has banked $235,900 from donations made by the water authority's employees, customers and other givers since its creation in 2014, according to financial reports to the board.

At the nonprofit's regular quarterly meeting on Thursday, June 5, one item on the general ledger caught the attention of county commissioner and water authority board member Valerie Wynn: a $1,500 donation to the Tubman African American Museum for a fundraising event in January.

"This mission of the Macon Water Alliance from its inception has been to fund, maintain, operate and provide environmental enhancement, education and water resource-focused assistance organization to the residents of Middle Georgia," Wynn said. "I don't see where a $1,500 donation to the Tubman Museum for their 'All of that Jazz' exclusive party fits into the mission of the Macon Water Alliance and I'd like to know who asked for that, who requested that, who approved it and why."

Wynn went on to say board members were "not even notified" about the donation. The nonprofit's bylaws require board approval for transactions exceeding $100.

"That's not money to be given to functions like that, particularly exclusive functions that don't help the whole community," Wynn said. "I want to object to that being used."

Macon Water Authority

See MWA, Page A2

Mercer, River Edge team up on center for disability care

Casey Choung
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A new $23.7 million health center operated by Mercer University and River Edge Behavioral Health designed to bridge gaps in treatment for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities celebrated its opening Monday morning.

The 34,000-square-foot building off Hazel Street is the first of its kind in Georgia and can house up to 16 patients.

The center's construction is partially funded by a grant from the state department of behavioral health and developmental disabilities, and land for the project is owned by Macon-Bibb County.

Folks got a look inside the facility during an open house Monday morning, which proceeded despite the morning rain forcing attendees and speakers into the cafeteria.

Greta O'Dell, chief intellectual and developmental disabilities officer at River Edge, has been working on this project for the past five years. She said the new center will not only address the immediate needs of IDD individuals, but will also prepare providers to continue supporting those needs after patients leave the facility.

"There's 25 to 30 individuals stuck in emergency rooms around the state because they can't get appropriate care," O'Dell said. "This facility will allow for those individuals a place to come."

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Local business owner and Macon Pride cofounder Scott Mitchell speaks into the microphone during the Tubman Museum's ceremony for its "Pioneers and Trailblazers" photo history exhibit, which will be open for all of Pride Month in June and return in September for Macon's local pride week.

Honoring LGBTQ+ icons

Tubman Museum hosts photo history exhibit during Pride Month

Evelyn Davidson
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A photo exhibit by Macon Pride honoring the community's LGBTQ+ trailblazers is on display at the Tubman Museum for the entire month of June.

The annual Pioneers & Trailblazers Photo History Exhibit was previously part of Macon Pride week's one-night-only Broadway Does Pride cabaret event at the Piedmont Grand Opera House.

The exhibit officially opened June 5 and honors the contributions of more than 20 activists and community leaders in Middle Georgia who paved the way for the LGBTQ+ community, the arts, civil rights and community preservation.

"The story has to keep getting told: the story of these communities that the oppressors of power do not want us to tell," Tubman Museum education coordinator George Crowley said. "We need to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to educate themselves, empower themselves, to immerse themselves and to expose themselves to culture and to art and to humanity."

For the exhibit's fifth year, Macon Pride celebrated two new inductees, Marques Redd and Richard Frazier-Sostillio.

Frazier-Sostillio has worked at Theatre Macon for 14 years and served as artistic director for seven of those years.

"I look at the other individuals who have already been inducted and whose shoulders I get to stand on," he said. "I get to live the life that I live — not just in Macon, but in the world — because of the work that they did."

Theatre Macon's founder, Jim Crisp Jr., was also inducted into the exhibit in a past year.

"We're really lucky that we get to live in this 'small town' that has this big city ideals and culture," Frazier-Sostillio said.

He also shared his personal story with attendees at the opening exhibit as part of an event presented by Story-

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

From left: Thomas Bullington, McKinley Starks, Marques Redd and Richard Frazier-Sostillio pose for a photo after speaking at the Tubman Museum's photo history exhibit last week.

Periodical — Mail Label

Mayor announces jail expansion, ankle monitor program after riot and death at jail



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mayor Lester Miller stands at the lecturn and addresses a crowd of reporters and citizens at a press conference last week that announced new initiatives to help improve squalid conditions at the Bibb County Jail in Macon.

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter

Mayor Lester Miller announced plans Tuesday to reduce overcrowding by expanding the county jail and releasing nonviolent offenders through an ankle monitoring program.

The announcement comes on the heels of public outcry, protest and a riot in the county jail that left one inmate dead and several others injured.

"Sympathy alone is not enough," Miller said, acknowledging the death of Breele Jahiem Johnson, a 22-year-old who was killed when violence erupted at the jail last Wednesday.

The county will use Macon Violence Prevention program money to launch new initiatives aimed at improving conditions at the jail. The initiatives come about after months of research and planning, according to the mayor.

Miller introduced the Macon Justice and Wellness Task Force which will research, recommend, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of justice programs.

The task force will include the mayor, Sheriff David Davis, District Attorney Anita Howard, judges, a representative from River Edge Behavioral Health among others. Miller also noted an inmate representative — a formerly or currently incarcerated individual or family member of an inmate — will be appointed to the task force.

The task force has already begun working on an "inmate audit" to evaluate the status of each inmate, their needs, charges and probation eligibility. Miller said it is one of the most pressing priorities and will be completed in the

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MWA from A1:

CEO Ron Shipman told Wynn the board discussed the donation and it was agreed upon, but Wynn insisted that never happened.

The Melody reviewed the video recording of the December meeting during which the nonprofit was discussed, but some parts were inaudible due to issues with the microphones. Board approval of the expense for the Tubman fundraiser is not reflected in notes from meetings since September.

"We don't have many people here, but I think if we did have a full house as we've been having and they heard we spent money that should have been used to help people with their water bills on an exclusive party for just a few people in this community — they should be mad. They should be upset. I'm upset," Wynn said.

Shipman said the authority "may have gotten over our skis with this one" and the nonprofit water alliance is "what we've been working with since '15, so now it's time to go back and look and see exactly what the bylaws state."

Board member Elaine Lucas said she was "glad to see this discussion because there are a number of things, a number of items that need to be looked at and revamped. A lot of these documents were put in place some years ago."

Lucas said she was one of the board members who requested the authority look into supporting the museum in one of its major fundraising events because it "struggles and it has been struggling since it was built."

"I thought that since so many other organizations support the Tubman, and it is a community facility, that is just normal. The Macon commission has a table or two at 'All that Jazz,'" Lucas said. "I didn't know where the funding came from. ... and I agree with you, Commissioner Wynn, it doesn't seem like it's an appropriate place for it to come."

Lucas mentioned the authority also contributed $5,000 to the Cherry Blossom Festival last year and wanted to know where the money for that came from, but committee chairman Frank Patterson adjourned the meeting before the question was answered.

The Macon Water Alliance pays for the authority's annual kids' fishing derby, according to financial reports distributed at meetings. However, public information on what else it pays for is sparse because the IRS yearly reporting requirements are minimal for nonprofits with annual gross receipts of $50,000 or less. Not all of the notes from meetings in 2024 are available online.

Minutes from the September 2024 meeting show the board voted to approve a three-year partnership between the Macon Water Alliance and Rebuilding Macon in which the alliance would pay $10,000 yearly. The $30,000 commitment will help pay for home plumbing repairs for low-income residents, disabled individuals and seniors. Notes from the same meeting show the board voted to approve a $25,000 donation from the alliance to NewTown Macon for the annual downtown Christmas Lights display.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody
The Macon Water Authority's Albert Billingslea Building sits in Macon in this file photo. The MWA's nonprofit dedicated to helping locals pay water bills came under scrutiny recently for spending money on local events, including a jazz festival.

Dwight Jones, who has served on the water board off and on for the past decade or more, said it was his idea to create a nonprofit subsidiary of the water authority but, "I didn't have any ambitions it would get this size."

When the nonprofit was being organized in 2014, Jones said, the county didn't have diesel fuel for kids to go on a school trip to the water authority, which he thought was "outlandish."

"Well, we really didn't have a mechanism to say, 'Hey, Bibb County, we'll give you $500 for the fuel.' So standing something up like that can support that," he said.

Jones said he donates the salary he makes from the authority to the nonprofit, which he said did some work with Habitat for Humanity in the past. The authority has an optional payroll deduction for employees and includes an option on customer bills for donations to the alliance.

When asked how many people the nonprofit has helped with water bills, Jones said the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services would have that information.

Shipman said the authority transfers money to DFCS, which issues a voucher to the customer, "then they bring that voucher back to the Macon Water, so there's a tracking mechanism."

An inquiry to DFCS regarding funding from the Macon Water Alliance was not answered.

'Your rates are hurting people'

As the authority plans for a possible rate increase, many are struggling to pay the current rate.

"Your rates are hurting people," Chris Daddario, a mother of four, said during the Macon Water Authority board's regular monthly meeting.

Daddario said she asked customer service for help and was handed a piece of paper with contact information for five other entities unrelated to the authority: Salvation Army, the Macon-Bibb Economic Opportunity Council, Family Advancement Ministries, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and Holy Trinity House of God. At least one of the agencies listed included an old address.

"This didn't do anything for me — didn't do anything for my kids," Daddario said from the lectern after an attorney handed her a copy of the same list of agencies. "I've called around and I haven't received any help."

A Melody reporter called the Holy Trinity House of God and asked how to go about getting help with paying a water bill. A woman who answered the phone said there wasn't any money in the account, which is replenished through donations made to the church itself.

A call to Family Advancement Ministry reached an automated messaging system that said it is no longer taking applications for rent or utility assistance. To request help from Salvation Army, customers must apply in person.

The Macon-Bibb Economic Opportunity Council website says it offers assistance with water bills, "possibly through our Emergency Assistance Program," a federally funded program that helps low-income households with energy bills.

A reporter called the EOC Monday and reached an automated voice message that said its energy assistance funds have not yet been released "due to unforeseen circumstances" and it is unable to accept applications for help at this time.

Center, from A1:

River Edge's crisis stabilization center will treat individuals in crisis, taking care of them for 90-day periods. The center includes a sensory room, two padded calming rooms and a nurse's station.

The crisis stabilization center will staff 16 individuals including nurses, behavior analysts and a psychiatrist, O'Dell said.

On the outpatient side, Mercer offers several services including primary care, dental, physical, speech and occupational therapy, imaging and more. Both sides will share a pharmacy.

"We always tend to think of IDD patients as that one diagnosis, but in reality there is so much more to the medical part," said Dr. Jonathan Smith, director of Mercer's center for IDD care.

Dr. Jean Sumner, dean of Mercer's medical school, said the center was designed with the goal of making sure patients feel comfortable.

One major benefit of the center will be the ability for Mercer to train medical students and future healthcare professionals, Sumner noted. She said students can get hands-on, experiential learning required to be in the medical field.

"We want to be worth the trip," she said. "We want to be the people that provide that care and then work with local providers to enable them to get care at home."

River Edge and Mercer are still finalizing a network of specialists who have experience with IDD individuals.

Hospitals will go through the Georgia Crisis and Access Line, which goes to the state department, which will then refer patients to the crisis stabilization center.

The inpatient center will begin accepting patients next week, while the outpatient center will begin accepting clients in August.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Two attendeeds consider photographs on the wall at the Tubman Museum's "Pioneers and Trailblazers" photo history exhibit, which honors important figures in the Macon Pride/LGBTQ+ community during the month of June. The exhibit inducted two new members at an event last week.

Pride, from A1:

tellers Macon.

Frazier-Sostillio reflected on his move from California to Georgia at age 10 and recalled being asked, "what are you?" in regard to his race. He discussed how that question transformed into a more introspective question of, "who am I?"

The museum nominated the second inductee: Redd an artist, traditional African cosmologist Macon native who lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Redd attended Tubman's heritage camp in his youth and is now the co-founder and co-executive director of Rainbow Serpent, a nonprofit dedicated to Black LGBTQ+ culture.

The museum currently has an exhibit titled "Miracles: A Selection from the Redd Family Collection of Black Art," featuring African diaspora art from the Miracles Fine Art Gallery his parents once operated in Macon.

Redd defines a pioneer as someone who tries to "push boundaries," "create new spaces" and "elevate conversations about community, about acceptance and about forging what our new future will look like."

Macon Pride is working to dismantle stereotypes about the South, he said, noting that the organization didn't even exist when he grew up in Macon.

"People are coming together to stake a claim, to say that this is our culture and our history and our place as well," Redd said. "It really gives people permission to live louder."

The exhibit kicked off Pride Month and will return for Macon's pride week in September, according to Macon Pride co-founder DeMarcus Beckham. The inductees' stories will also be uploaded to the Macon Pride website.

Pride is seen as an opportunity to party and dance, but it's more than that, Beckham said.

"In years past Pride has only been focused on the festival," Beckham said. "Now that we're in these types of tumultuous times and visibility is so ever more important now, Pride has agreed as a board that we are now a 365 Pride."

For more information on Macon Pride's year-round offering of resources, events and meetups, visit its Facebook page.

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Macon sen. touts tort reform, eyes Lt. Gov. seat

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter

State Sen. John F. Kennedy stopped in Macon to tout his legislative victory in spearheading the passage of tort reform bills, which he says will lower insurance rates and protect small businesses.

Thirty or so business owners, including Macon-Bibb County Commissioner Valerie Wynn, congregated inside the Chamber of Commerce headquarters on Poplar Street early Wednesday to hear from Kennedy, R–Macon, just days after he announced his bid for lieutenant governor.

Tort reform — civil law changes aimed at limiting negligence claims in an effort to reduce frivolous lawsuits against companies — took center stage in the recent legislative session after Gov. Brian Kemp threatened to invoke a special session if certain measures, including tort reform, were not passed.

Kemp ultimately got tort reform through in April with the signage of Senate Bills 68 and 69. The bills were sponsored by Kennedy, who said he has worked on tort reform for the past eight years.

"People were, and do, care very much about us having a continued good economic environment here for job creators to also help stabilize insurance rates that people are paying and making sure that it's a fair system at the courthouse," Kennedy said.

The senator said he believes the bills will restabilize insurance costs by luring insurance companies back into Georgia and driving down prices through competition.

Kennedy pointed to tort reform measures in Florida adopted in 2023 as an example of the positive impact of those policies.

"Three of the largest insurance companies that insure people in Florida filed for rate decreases just this year," he said.

Senate Bill 68 changes trial procedures and limits damages for lawsuits involving cases where crimes by a third party occur on a business' property, which are called premises liability cases.

Opponents of the bill argued it would prevent victims of sex trafficking from seeking damages. The House ultimately added a provision to protect sex trafficking victims and their lawyers under premise liability law.

Kennedy said the new law does not make it more difficult for victims to sue.

Senate Bill 69 adds guardrails to third-party litigation, which Kennedy says is a matter of consumer protection and national security.

The new law requires plaintiffs to disclose the use of a third-party litigator and bans "foreign adversaries" from being a party to such lawsuits, according to a press release from the governor's office.

Kennedy said the bill spawned from a "cottage industry" of third-party litigators looking to profit from civil cases.

"Let's call it what it is, it's gambling on our civil justice," Kennedy told attendees.

The event was organized by Greater Georgia, an advocacy organization founded by former Georgia Republican U.S. Sen. Kelly Loeffler.

Carmen Bergman, senior policy advisor for Greater Georgia, said tort reform is a "hot topic" that has attracted a lot of interest. The organization will next stop in Gwinnett County on its statewide information tour.

George Emami, a Forsyth-based real estate investment broker and former Monroe County commissioner, said rising insurance costs have been "debilitating" for his business. He said those costs have forced him to raise prices, increasing costs for consumers.

"The biggest challenge is the general consumer doesn't fully realize that tort reform affects them," he said.

Kennedy announced his candidacy for lieutenant governor June 2. The Macon lawyer, who is partner at James-Bates-Brannan-Groover law firm, was first elected to the state senate in 2014. He currently serves as the president pro tempore of the senate.

With the primary 11 months away, Kennedy said he thinks it's a good idea to get his message out early. He noted his work on addressing chronic absenteeism in schools with Senate Bill 123, and said folks should expect legislation to come out of the study committee on absenteeism that he chairs.

"We need to keep Georgia growing, we need to keep Georgia learning, and we need to keep Georgia safe," Kennedy said.

Grocery, apartments approved in inaugural mixed-use project under new P&Z guidelines

Liz Fabian
The Macon Newsroom

The Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission cleared the way for a new South Bibb County mixed-use residential and commercial development under its new regulations approved in December.

Wright Family Developments plans to alleviate a "food desert" and build a nearly 64,000-square-foot grocery store with 16,800 square feet of shops, 5 additional outparcels and 72 residential units in a trio of three-story buildings near the corner of Houston and Sardis Church roads.

General Contractor Justin Wright told commissioners to envision a Publix-type development.

"That's the look we're going for," Wright said.

Johnny Patterson, whose Windmill Plantation neighborhood backs up to the proposed project, opposed the development for fear apartments would draw crime and could affect property values.

"We've got quite a bit of money tied into our homes," said Patterson, the only person to speak against the plan, although another neighbor sent a letter concerned about traffic.

Keith Wright, of Wright Family Developments, said he moved his family and commercial construction business from Muscogee County a few years ago and travels by the site nearly every day.

"It's a veritable ghost town in the morning and afternoons. There's not a tremendous amount of traffic," Wright said.

He also noted that other developments were proposed for this site over the years but did not come to fruition. Wright pledged that nothing would be low-grade or substandard.

"My wife and I put up just about all of our hard-earned money to guarantee this is going to be successful," he said.

The nearly 12-acre "garden style" apartment complex includes a 4,500-square-foot clubhouse, pool and dog park.

In Monday's hearing, P&Z rezoned the total 28.5-acre site to the new Planned Development Mixed-Use designation that outlines a number of permitted uses for properties instead of having developers return for approval on individual stores once tenants are secured.

"I like the mixed-use development. I think we need more of those everywhere," P&Z Commissioner Mindy Attaway said.

Justin Wright specified in his application that outparcel tenants would be limited to banks, barber shops, doctor or dentist offices, nail salons, oil and lube shops, retail clothing or home goods stores, and restaurants.

Wright Family Developments' plan shows the large grocery store and five outparcels along Houston and Sardis Church roads that would be built next to 74 apartment units.

P&Z Executive Director Jeff Ruggieri said they would include all types of restaurants in this application, which is sort of a test case for the recent changes.

"In the future we'll get better at this," Ruggieri said. "This is our first one."

Across from the Shoppes at River Crossing, commissioners also approved a new Raising Cane's chicken finger restaurant at 4951 Riverside Drive.

"This is the third application for a restaurant (there)," P&Z Vice Chair Tim Jones said. "Maybe the third time is the charm."

P&Z also approved exterior improvements to the Checkers at 91 Spring St. at the corner of Riverside Drive.

"They're basically just giving it a facelift," P&Z Assistant Executive Director Randi Doveton said.

Doctoring an amendment

After opposition from commercial realtor Stephanie Folsom, P&Z staff plans to revise its proposed amendment that would redefine clinics and laboratories and remove doctor's offices from the approved list of professional offices that don't require P&Z approval.

P&Z staff thought it was wise to review applications for modern physicians offices that house multiple doctors, operate more like clinics and draw much more traffic than in the mid-60s when the regulations were written.

Folsom said the suggested changes could complicate and delay leasing office space to lone doctors with a few staff members who seek a smaller professional office, so P&Z will present revisions July 14.

Folsom and her husband Miki also secured approval for "Georgia's first cannabis lab," SJ Labs and Analytics, to move from Spring Street into the old U.S. Renal dialysis center at 2525 Second St.

The laboratory analyzes agricultural samples, industrial minerals and evidence for law enforcement but could add medical lab testing with human specimens in the future.

During Monday's hearings, P&Z also approved a new wound care clinic at 100 Cattlemens Drive.

Middle Georgia Wound Solutions plans to operate Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. but its workers travel to patients homes or nursing facilities to provide a variety of care.

P&Z also approved a new urgent care medical facility at 4690 Forsyth Road in the former Regymen Fitness at the corner of Tucker Road. The clinic plans to be open seven days a week and employ up to six people.

The commission also approved a new location for Petamorphosis pet funeral home at 1023 Riverside Drive.

The company plans to expand their operation that uses aquamation or alkaline hydrolysis to speed up the natural decomposition process to just 18 hours.

The environmentally-friendly procedure uses heated water and alkali and leaves 20% more ashes than flame cremation, according to the company's website.

The remaining liquid from the process is safe to enter the sewer system and has been approved by the Macon Water Authority, according to the application.

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

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Jail, from A1:

next month.

The new justice and jail reform initiatives aim to dismantle the "two-tiered justice system," Miller explained, in which individuals who cannot afford bail remain incarcerated while others who can afford to pay are released.

The initiatives could save up to $2.5 million in tax dollars, according to Miller.

Nonviolent offenders will be released and required to wear electronic ankle monitors on the condition that the individual remains employed or participates in support programs.

Through Macon Justice Works, the county will cover the full costs of ankle monitors for nonviolent offenders through federal American Rescue Plan Act money earmarked for the MVP program. He said he hopes the ankle monitoring program will serve as an alternative to booking inmates behind bars.

Of the 1,018 individuals incarcerated in the county jail as of Tuesday, the mayor estimated 150 nonviolent offenders could be released and required to wear ankle monitors so they can continue working.

Macon Justice Works will begin this week, Miller said, and inmate releases will occur over the next 30 days.

Miller also announced the county is looking for companies qualified to expand and upgrade the jail. Current plans include closing a portion of Hawthorne Street and potentially tearing down a building at 645 Hazel St. to make room for the expansion.

"Having a new jail right now is not going to solve the problem," Miller said, adding that he is not closing the door on the possibility of a new facility in the future. The county already owns land on Seventh Street which could be a potential location for a new jail.

Miller said he believes expanding the jail is the most immediate remedy, as it would reduce overpopulation, allow for cleanup in certain sections of the jail and distance inmates with mental illnesses from violent offenders.

The Jail-Based Competency Restoration Program will offer extra assistance to inmates with behavioral health challenges who are deemed incompetent to stand trial. Modeled after programs in other counties, the program will reduce wait time for state hospital placement and bring mental health and legal education services to the jail.

The task force will also focus on the Macon InReach Program, an expansion and enhancement of the existing jail-based support system. It will provide case management, peer support and discharge planning, especially for those with behavioral health needs. The program will also help inmates in search of housing, employment and treatment, the mayor said.

The initiatives will mainly focus on non-violent offenders, Miller said, emphasizing the new measures are not "a get out of jail card."

"This is not being soft on crime," he said. "This is being smart on crime."

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Opinion

Et tu, DOGE and Elon Musk?


Marc Hyden

Elon Musk recently stepped down as head of the Department of Government Efficiency — better known as DOGE — in what was an inglorious end to his short tumultuous tenure. He only held the office for roughly four months, but upon taking the reins at the cost-cutting agency, some pundits braced themselves for Musk's whims.

After all, he once suggested that America needs a modern-day Lucius Cornelius Sulla — the ancient Roman dictator who murdered thousands of people and unilaterally reformed the government. Musk was (hopefully) only implying that we need a leader who can fix our dysfunctional government through sheer force of will. While Musk may have fancied himself a Sulla who can effectively cut through red tape, he proved himself to be more like another, more hapless Roman leader: Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus.

Before assuming DOGE's chief position, Musk announced his hope to reduce the federal deficit by a whopping $2 trillion. As I wrote not long ago, kudos to President Donald Trump and Musk for acknowledging the government's wasteful spending, but without Congress, their endeavors were doomed to fail. Now that failure is coming into focus.

After months of work, DOGE has allegedly cut around $160 billion. This is essentially pocket change to a government that spends nearly $7 trillion a year. What's more, in the same period that DOGE supposedly saved $160 billion, the federal government spent $200 billion more than it did in the prior year. In short, DOGE has thus far fallen well short of the $2 trillion goal and borders on being an abject failure.

A modern-day Sulla certainly would have fared better, but regardless of your thoughts on Musk and Trump, we thankfully don't live under a mass-murdering dictator's rule. Instead of being a paradigm-shifting reformer, like Sulla, Musk seems more like a modern-day Bibulus who had the misfortune of sharing power with Julius Caesar.

In the ancient Roman Republic, two elected executives — known as consuls — led the state, served concurrently and acted as a counter-balance to their colleague. This arrangement was intended to limit their power. In 59 BC, Caesar and Bibulus were elected and had high hopes, but they were diametrically opposed to one another. Caesar was a populist politician, while Bibulus was much more conservative.

They clashed with each other, and some of Caesar's men even attacked poor Bibulus who found little sympathy and had limited options for derailing Caesar's policy agenda. "Caesar's conduct drove him to such a pitch of desperation," wrote Suetonius, "that from that time until the end of his term he did not leave his house, but merely issued proclamations announcing adverse omens."

So Bibulus sequestered himself, and each day he probably poked his head out his window and claimed that he saw lightning or some other inauspicious sign. The reason being is that official business could not proceed on a day on which such ill-omens were witnessed.

Bibulus hoped this strategy would counter Caesar but badly misjudged the situation. Caesar had formed a powerful alliance known as the First Triumvirate, and the people clamored for his populist agenda. As such, Caesar plowed ahead without Bibulus who proved to be powerless against him. In fact, Bibulus was simply a cog — perhaps a relatively well-meaning cog — that could not surmount the realities facing him.

In a similar manner, Musk was probably well-intentioned in his efforts to curtail explosive government spending and waste. However, it was too much for Musk and thus far for DOGE. Without Congress' support, meaningful spending reform will not happen, even though it must, and Musk couldn't tackle the federal spending machine. Some things are just out of his control.

To return to Caesar briefly, he went on to become dictator, and a number of senators assassinated him. According to Shakespeare's play — "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar" — when Caesar shockingly saw Marcus Junius Brutus — a younger man he knew well — among the conspirators, he said, "Et tu, Brute?" which roughly translates to "You too, Brutus?" In reality, Caesar's last words to Brutus were "You too, my child?" according to Suetonius, but never mind that.

In the end, DOGE turned out to just be another government program that failed to live up to expectations as some of us predicted, but its inability to effectively alter the government's trajectory has surely left others dismayed. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "Et tu, DOGE and Elon Musk?"

Marc Hyden is the senior director of state government affairs at the R Street Institute and a Roman historian. His most recent book is "Emperor Titus: The Right Hand of Vespasian." You can follow him on X at @marc_hyden.

Friday the 13th is not a day to be trusted


Ed Grisamore

By my calculations, I have lived through 120 Friday the 13ths in my lifetime.

That's 112 more than my youngest grandson, who will turn 5 years old next month.

My first Friday the 13th showed up when I was four days old. I don't remember it. I was still in the hospital. Like every other baby of my generation, spending that first week in the maternity ward and riding home in an ambulance were standard procedure.

Times have certainly changed. Now, having a baby is like outpatient surgery. There's a drive-thru and DoorDash for everything.

No, I don't remember my first Friday the 13th or many of the others. For the most part, they have been non-eventful.

Oh, I'm sure there have been some dreadful days. I probably flunked a test in high school or struck out a couple of times in a Little League game. But I shrugged it off.

I feel certain some girl broke my heart when Friday fell on the 13th. Or I might have had a flat tire on the way to work. Que sera, sera.

Friday the 13th is not a national holiday like Thanksgiving or Memorial Day. It is not celebrated, like Valentine's Day, Christmas or the Fourth of July.

It jumps around on the calendar from year to year, a wildcard with no routine. This year, it is in June. Last year it fell in September and December. Next year is a mother lode year. There will be three of them – in February, March and November. You have been warned.

I have never understood why we should treat Friday the 13th any differently than, say, a Thursday the 12th or Saturday the 14th. Friday is typically one of the week's most popular days. It's the end of the school and work week, the on-ramp to the weekend.

But when Friday collides with the number 13, it's a day that cannot be trusted.

About one-fourth of Americans identify as superstitious. They don't get out of bed or travel on Friday the 13th. They don't walk under ladders, step on cracks or break mirrors. They have an anxiety attack if a black cat crosses their path.

There are a few unwritten rules when the 13th falls on a Friday. Don't get married. Don't schedule surgery or start a new project.

History has had a way of being unkind to Fridays. Bible scholars point out that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. Eve offered Adam a slice of apple pie on a Friday. Noah was forced to evacuate the high waters on a Friday.

Disasters have made the headlines and the top of the news on Fridays. Joan of Arc was toasted on a Fry-day. Napoleon was Waterlooed. Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy were assassinated. Andrew Johnson was impeached.

Thirteen started getting a bad rap when Judas showed up as the 13th guest at the Last Supper. There is another legend that Friday was named after the Norse goddess Frigga, who was banished as a witch when the Norsemen became Christians. Frigga held weekly meetings on Fridays — there were no Zoom calls back in those days — with 11 other witches and the devil.

And lest we forget Friday the 13th in 2020 when President Trump declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a national emergency, and the pandemic officially began.

We tend to magnify anything that goes wrong that day. We want to point the finger when there are plane crashes, bombings, cyclones, blizzards and the stock market goes down because people aren't out there spending money.

That's why No. 13 remains a curse. Many high-rise buildings skip the 13th floor. Some hotels don't have Room 13, and airlines don't have a 13th row.

Here is a head's up. On Friday the 13th in April 2029, an asteroid is projected to come within 18,000 miles of Earth.

It's not going to crash but go ahead and plan your day now.

Ed Grisamore is not superstitious but he has been doing a lot of overthinking since seeing a black cat last week.

Thoughts from the world's OKest dad


Kyle Dominy

Sometimes I think I've really blown it.

A recent day went something like this: After a long day at work, and yes, by work I mean slouched over the keyboard at my desk in my windowless dungeon, soon to be classified as a landmark that will offer all-access tours for the low, low price of $50 a head, I went home where my labors continued with a couple-hour grass cutting session in between the summer rain showers that have peppered the area for a couple of weeks.

Then it was rush back to town to pick up a little supper and my precious girl child, who had dance practice. My son treated himself to a drive-thru milkshake, but the restaurant failed to supply a straw. No problem, I concluded, we'll find one after retrieving his sibling. Well, way leads on to way, and ice cream, forgotten about in the car, turns to milk, as practice ran about 30 minutes late.

My daughter exited the classroom in a huff, visibly frustrated, and dumped a pair of tap shoes in my lap while complaining of inability to get them on in a timely fashion (apparently there is a mid-production shoe change). As calmly as I could I reminded her that she signed up for this and we pay for the privilege, so get it together and just try to do better next time.

Finally, back at the car, my son discovers his milkshake turned cup of milk and somehow spills half of it on the floorboard. I kept my cool, but tempers were flaring. It had been a tiring day for everyone, and we were hungry for the food getting cold in the Styrofoam take-out boxes in the back seat.

One of the kids, I can't remember who, offered up a sarcastic remark and that was all I could stand. I lost my temper. An overly-stern scolding was handed down and a dairy product-soaked floor mat was tossed in the trunk. The subsequent car ride was quiet and eventually apologies were given and amends made.

It's tough these days to be a parent, and it's not too easy to be a kid either. There's a lot of pressure, self-inflicted and society-imposed, to be all and have all. You have to have fun when you can, let kids be kids, but learn discipline and respect at the same time. The carefree days of youth are fleeting, but there is an expectation of racking up experiences with extracurricular activities and maintaining academic excellence, while also focusing on quality family time and spiritual development. Parents are expected to be career minded, successful people and somehow maintain a comfortable, clean home.

While all of those are good goals to have, the combined stress of each eventually comes to a head. In short, you make a mistake, get it together and try to do better next time.

I know I'll never be the world's greatest dad, because that title goes to my own father, who I very heavily rely on. So for now, I'll just have to settle with doing OK.

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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

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

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

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Al Hortman: 'Silent Messenger' a symbol for Shriners Hospital



Ed Grisamore

Every time Laura Little drives along the stretch of Interstate 75 south of Pio Nono Avenue, she knows her head is going to be on a swivel.

Her eyes will steal a glimpse of the statue in front of the Shrine Park on Becca Drive that is visible from the interstate.

"Any time I go that way, I'm always looking over there," she said. "Hopefully, there is no one pulling in front of me or else I might have a wreck."

The statue of a man carrying a little girl is more than 10 tons of metal, fiberglass and granite. It is 9 feet tall, rising 14.5 feet off the ground from its base.

The tale of the tape really doesn't matter, though.

That statue is larger than life to her.

It is her father.

Al Hortman died in December 2009 in Warner Robins. He was 80 years old. His death came 23 months after the statue was dedicated at the Al Sihah Temple in Macon, where he had been a member since 1972. It is slightly more than a football field from the interstate, flanked by American, Georgia state, Shriners and POW/MIA flags.

Not many people can claim their father has his own statue, one that has twin brothers scattered across the country.

Laura's dad was more than a local legend. He is everywhere.

That same statue is outside the International Shrine Headquarters building in Tampa, Florida, and others across the country, including Shrine temples in Atlanta, Savannah and Albany.

It stands guard at the entrances of the 22 Shriners hospitals in North America, from Greenville, South Carolina to Dallas, Texas, to Virginia Beach, Virginia, to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Chicago, Illinois.

His likeness can be found on letterheads, mosaics, tie tacks and stained-glass windows.

"Most everybody has seen that statue somewhere and knows what it is," Laura said. "But they have no idea the story behind it."

She knows the story. She was part of it on June 13, 1970. That was 55 years ago today.

When Laura was 5 months old, she could not sit up by herself. Doctors determined her hip joints were not formed properly and required medical attention. The Hortmans lived in Evansville, Indiana, and took her to the Shriners Hospital in St. Louis.

She spent two months in a cast. Her parents were only allowed to visit her on the weekends. She fully recovered and, later in life, became an avid runner.

Hortman was so impressed with the care and treatment his daughter received, he dedicated himself to becoming a Shriner and joined the Hadi Temple in Evansville in 1968.

Every summer, the temple rented a local amusement park and invited area children who had been patients at Shriners hospitals to attend the celebration. Laura usually went with him.

The summer she was 13, her father noticed a 5-year-old girl with cerebral palsy having difficulty walking with crutches on the gravel paths at the park. The girl's name was Bobbi Jo Wright. Hortman reached down and picked her up. With Laura at his side, he took Bobbi Jo with them.

"He didn't even know Bobbi," Laura said. "He just recognized she was struggling. And he made it a point that day that this was the child he was going to help."

Randy Dieter, a photographer for the local newspaper, spotted them on the midway. They were at too close of a range for him to focus his camera with his telephoto lens, so he rushed to get into a better position.

Unfortunately, his camera malfunctioned, and he was only able to snap two pictures as they walked by.

"We didn't even know he was taking our picture," Laura said.

The photo appeared on the front page of the Evansville Courier & Press the following day and broke a basic rule of photography.

It did not show their faces.

Laura laughed. She wasn't even in the photo. They cropped her out.

"The only way my dad knew it was him was the set of keys hanging off his belt," she said. "He owned a restaurant in Evansville, and he probably kept 15 keys on that key ring."

It's one thing to make the front page of a daily newspaper. It's quite another to become an international symbol.

The image became an icon for the nonprofit Shriners Hospitals for Children, which has been regarded as the "world's greatest philanthropy." Since 1922, medical services have been provided at no cost for more than 1.5 million children around the world.

The famous photo has been referred to as the "Editorial Without Words." The statue has become known as the "Silent Messenger." And the rallying cry for Shriners is "No Man Stands So Tall As When He Stoops To Help a Child."

Hortman used to laugh and tell people that the iconic image shown from behind made him the proud owner of "the most famous rear end in the world."

"I can remember us talking about it at the time," Laura said. "But, my gosh, we had no idea how much it would change his path. Every year, he was traveling somewhere."

Hortman lived for 20 years in Evansville, but his roots were in Georgia. He grew up on a farm in Crawford County and served in the Korean War.

He and his wife divorced in 1972, when Laura was 15 and her older sister, Julie, was 16.

"My mother was awarded custody. But, after a couple of weeks, she dropped us off at his house, and we never looked back," Laura said. "He wanted to move back to Georgia, where his family was, and he took us with him to visit for a month. He wanted to see if we liked it. It didn't take long. He asked us if we wanted to live down here, and we both said yes."

Laura said being a single-parent father raising two teenage daughters should have earned her dad a special place in heaven.

On this Father's Day weekend, she remembers him as funny and fun-loving.

"He was a very caring person," she said. "He was never overbearing. We just all got along."

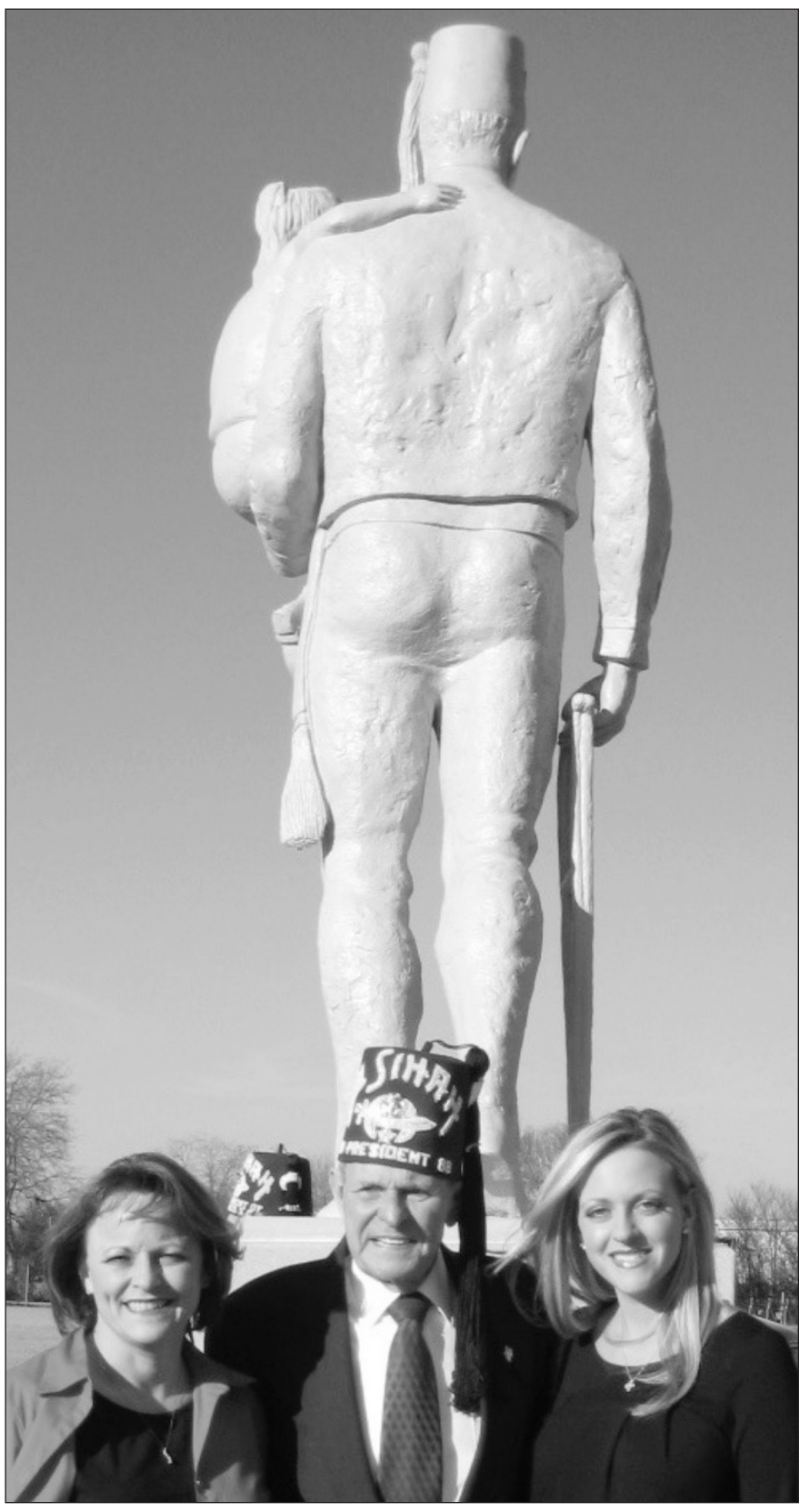
Hortman worked in the swimming pool business. He often took second jobs to provide for his family, including delivering newspapers.

He later remarried and had two step-daughters. The youngest, Donna Cline, is a local educator who will be the new principal at Alexander II Magnet School in Macon this fall.

Laura, who lives in Cochran, doesn't need a statue to remind her of her father.

But it is a nice way to remember how much he loved and helped others. He was always lifting them up.

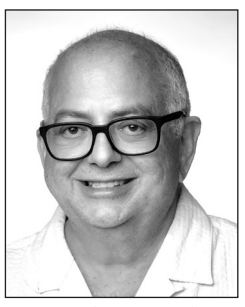
Ed Grisamore was the recipient of the 2012 Will Rogers Humanitarian Award, presented by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists.



Courtesy of Laura Little

The late Al Hortman is pictured with his daughter, Laura Little, left, and granddaughter, Heather Federico, at the Shriners statue dedication in 2009.

How smart tools can help keep you safe



Joe Finkelstein

A few days ago, I got two texts that made my scam radar start pinging. You know the kind — official-sounding language, odd urgency, and a suspicious link at the bottom. One message claimed to be from the Georgia DMV, threatening license suspension if I didn't pay an alleged traffic ticket by a specific date. The other was dressed up like a package delivery notice, asking me to "click to confirm delivery." Neither was legit.

We've all been there: a message pops up that feels off. Maybe the spelling is strange, the tone is too aggressive or the link just looks wrong. In the past, I'd either delete these messages or call a friend to double-check. But now I do something else first: I copy and paste the message directly into ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot and let AI help sort it out.

Here's the good news: artificial intelligence is quickly becoming one of the best tools we have for scam detection and protection. Whether you're getting shady texts, emails or even questionable voicemails, AI can help you figure out what's real and what's a trap.

How AI can spot a scam

Scams are designed to manipulate your emotions. They try to scare you, tempt you with too-good-to-be-true deals or rush you into clicking before you can think things through. AI, on the other hand, isn't scared or tempted, it's trained on billions of examples and can recognize red flags in seconds.

When you paste a suspicious message into a tool like ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot, the AI analyzes the language, tone and structure of the message. It can tell you things like:

- Whether similar messages have been flagged in the past
- If the sender's language mimics known phishing scams
- Whether a link is spoofed or points to a fake domain
- How the message compares to legitimate communications from that organization

For example, when I asked ChatGPT to analyze the fake DMV text I received, it quickly pointed out that the website link didn't match any official Georgia government domain. It also explained that the legal code cited didn't exist. In about ten seconds, I had peace of mind and didn't have to Google obscure traffic laws.

Try this at home: paste and ask

If you get an email from your "bank" asking you to verify your account, or a text from UPS telling you to click to schedule delivery, don't panic. Just copy the text, open your AI assistant and ask something like:

"Is this a scam?"

"Can you check this message and tell me if it looks suspicious?"

"Does this link look legit?"

These prompts work well in ChatGPT, Copilot or even voice assistants connected to an AI back end. You'll usually get a quick, clear breakdown of what's wrong and how to proceed.

One word of caution: don't click links first, even if you're pasting them into AI tools. If you're unsure, just ask the AI to evaluate the message without opening anything. AI can check the structure and known scam patterns of the link without following it.

AI tools that can help

In addition to general AI assistants, there are more specialized tools designed specifically for scam prevention:

- Google's Gmail AI filters now automatically flag many phishing attempts before they hit your inbox
- Microsoft Defender SmartScreen offers scam link detection in real-time when browsing
- ChatGPT and Copilot provide natural language support to help evaluate emails or texts
- Trend Micro Check is a browser extension that uses AI to verify websites, texts and links for legitimacy
- Avast and Norton's security suites offer scam alerts powered by AI pattern recognition

Teaching AI to protect us

What makes AI so effective here is its ability to learn from thousands, even millions of scam messages. It doesn't rely on just blacklists or preset rules. It uses natural language processing (NLP) to analyze tone, urgency cues, unusual spellings, mismatched logos or grammatical oddities — things humans may overlook.

Even if a new scam appears tomorrow using slightly different wording or targeting a different audience, the AI can often detect the pattern and flag it.

Helpful habits to stay safe

While AI is powerful, it works best when paired with a few smart habits:

- Don't click before checking. If anything feels even a little "off," take a second to paste it into your AI assistant first
- Verify links yourself. Hover over a link to see the real destination or better yet, type in the official site yourself
- Avoid replying to unknown numbers. Even a simple "Stop" response confirms your number is active
- Be cautious of any request for immediate action, gift cards or personal info. These are scammer favorites

A word to the wise and our elders

Many scams target older adults, often impersonating government agencies, banks or Medicare. If you've got parents or grandparents with smartphones, show them how to use an AI assistant — or better yet, set it up for them. Just knowing they can copy and paste a message to "their AI buddy" for a second opinion could save them from trouble.

AI isn't just about writing poems, creating playlists or beating you at chess. It's also becoming an essential digital bodyguard — on call 24/7, ready to examine any message that makes your gut say, "Hmm…"

So the next time your phone buzzes with a shady message, don't guess. Paste it into your AI assistant, hit "analyze," and let the tech do the worrying 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

Gris List: Behind the names, 10 Father's Day gifts in 1975

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

The Name Behind It

- The I-16 interchange at Ocmulgee East Boulevard (Georgia Highway 87) was named the Fred Black Memorial Interchange in July 2013. Black, of Macon, was the first Georgia State Patrol trooper killed in the line of duty on December 20, 1940. He was fatally shot after pulling over an escaped convict near Ringgold after a traffic violation.
- The Tom Fontaine Sports Complex on Anthony Road was named after the late Tom Fontaine, who was instrumental in bringing Little League baseball to Macon in 1952.
- Richard Gammage Memorial Way on Maynard Street, in Fort Hill between Emory Highway and Shurling Drive, is named after the late Rev. Richard Gammage, a civic leader and pastor of the New Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church for 37 years.
- The Patrolman Donald J. Mander Memorial Underpass was named after Mander, a Macon police officer who died from injuries while trying to apprehend a suspect in 1986. The underpass was dedicated in 2012 and is located at the railroad trestle at Forsyth Road and Napier Avenue.
- Neva Langley Fickling Hall in Mercer University's McCorkle Music Building is a 200-seat performing arts venue. It is named after the late Neva Langley Fickling, of Macon, who was an accomplished pianist and Miss America 1953.
- L.H. Williams Elementary was named for Lewis H. Williams, a turn-of-the-century educator who taught at Pleasant Hill School from 1888-1901 and Green Street School from 1901-1918. Williams purchased land in Pleasant Hill and gave it to the board of education to build a school.
- Bowden Golf Course, which opened on Millerfield Road in September 1940, is named after Charles L. Bowden, who served as Macon's mayor from 1938-1947. It was the first public facility in the city to be racially integrated in 1961 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2015.
- Huguenin Heights, the first neighborhood revitalization project by Macon Heritage Foundation in 1994, is named after Edward Huguenin, a successful cotton broker and pecan farmer who developed the neighborhood.
- The Peyton Anderson Community Services Center, at the corner of Mulberry Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, is named after the late Peyton Anderson. Anderson was the former owner and publisher of The Macon Telegraph and News and one of the city's most well-known philanthropists.
- Pio Nono Avenue is named after Pope Pius IX, whose

See LIST, Page A6

List, from A5:

reign of 32 years from 1846-1878 is the longest of any pope in the Catholic Church.

Ten things you could get Dad for Father's Day in Macon 50 years ago (June 1975)

- An Izod Classic LaCoste shirt for $15.50 from the Squire Shop at Jos. N Neel on Cherry Street
- A striped hammock for $12.88 from Key Catalog Showroom on Eisenhower Parkway
- A saddle-brown vinyl recliner for $78.88 at Bert Maxwell Home Furnishings on Second Street
- Gold Toe dress socks for $1.50 to $3 at the Burden-Smith department store on Third Street
- A 4-ounce bottle of Musk Oil cologne and aftershave for $6 from Eckerd's Drugs at Northeast Plaza on Shurling Drive
- A 12-inch RCA black-and-white television for $84 from the Hunt-Ragan appliance store on Poplar Street
- A Kawasaki K2-4005 motorcycle for $998 from Kawasaki of Macon on Columbus Road
- A Norelco VIP adjustable razor with pop-up trimmer, floating heads and self-sharpening rotary blades for $21.88 at KMart on Pio Nono Avenue
- A necktie (what else?) for $6.50 from Stephen's Men's Shop on Cherry Street
- A Mitchell Model 300 spinning reel with tungsten carbide line guide and adjustable drag system for $14.88 from JC Penney at Napier Square

Events

Real Talk Concert: 20 Year Anniversary Edition
Friday, June 13
7 p.m.
355 MLK Jr. Blvd.
Putting words into action and celebrating 20 years dedicated to the preservation of hip hop culture and the promotion of entrepreneurship.Presented by Douglass Theatre and featuring, ALäZ, Sabir, Blacc Mel, Slim Pikins, TRiBE and Jah Born. $20 admission.

'Frozen Junior' presented by Macon Little Theatre Family
Friday-Sunday, June 13-15
2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
4220 Forsyth Road.
Explore the enchanting tale of sisterhood, magic and self-discovery, where we follow Elsa and Anna as they journey through icy landscapes and warm hearts to discover the true meaning of love and acceptance.

'STAINED GLASS'
Saturday, June 14
1 p.m. and 6 p.m.
120 Walker Road.
STAINED GLASS 2025 is a vibrant celebration of heritage and artistry through contemporary, liturgical and traditional West African dance. Featuring Hayiya Dance Theatre's core ensemble, special guest artists, community orators and a live choir, this year's production continues to honor the poetic sermons of James Weldon Johnson. Under the artistic direction of G. Pilar Lowden and musical direction of Christopher Graddick and Reese Kitchens, the performance offers a moving blend of storytelling, rhythm and cultural expression. This encore presentation follows a sold-out show, and proceeds will benefit the Ronnie "RJ" Anderson Memorial Scholarship Fund, supporting college-bound seniors, and Hayiya's Arts Education Programming, which provides arts access to over 3,500 students annually. Tickets can be purchased in advance online or at the door. $30, with a $25 rate available for seniors (60+) and groups of 10 or more.

The Great Art Hunt
Saturday and Sunday, June 14-15.
9:30 a.m.
456 First St.
Discover art treasures in the Great Art Hunt! You'll get a map and a list of clues to help you find all the stops in this scavenger hunt of murals and sculptures in downtown Macon. The event will kick off at The 567 Center. Stop by between 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. to pick up your tote bag, map and clues. Hunt for the art Saturday, Sunday, or both — most people can complete the hunt in 4 hours. If you find all 30 locations, all of your team members will be entered into a drawing to win a week on St. George Island/ Second place will get a $100 gift card for art classes at The 567 Center. Along the way, you might also find small pieces of art to keep as mini-prizes (Saturday only). Registration includes a Great Art Hunt tote bag to carry your map, clues and any mini art you find. To be entered into the drawing for the grand prize, you must complete the hunt and e-mail your photos for proof by Sunday, June 15 at 7 pm.Tickets: Individual: $40, team of 2: $65, team of 3: $85, team of 4: $105, team of 5: $125, team of 6: $145, and children 10 and under are free!

'The Rainbow Show' opening reception
Friday, June 20
4 p.m.
2378 Ingleside Ave.
Join ArtSpace Macon and Mama Hawk Draws for The Rainbow Show and celebrate Pride. This colorful exhibition features monochromatic artwork — each piece inspired by a single color or by the spirit of Pride. Together, the works form a vibrant rainbow installation that honors identity, love and creative expression from Middle Georgia LGBTQIA+ artists and allies. 10% of all art sales will go to Macon Pride to support a future community art project.

Make Music Day Worldwide Celebration 'Boots on the Ground' Trendy Line Dance & Live Music!
Saturday, June 21
10 a.m.
595 New St.
Celebrate the first day of summer with Make Music Day Worldwide Celebration in Macon on streets, sidewalks, parks and in department stores with live music. Make Music Macon exists to support and uplift the city's vibrant music community, focusing on opportunities for connection within the music community. Make Music Day is a signature event that is a part of a global initiative held each year on June 21. This year's theme is Make Music Day Macon "Boots on the Ground." Make Music Day Macon welcomes all musicians, singers, rappers and instrumentalists who want to demonstrate their talent, young and old, amateur and professional. The event is free and family friendly.



Provided by UGA
A Japanese beetle sits on a partially eaten leaf. These beetles are often unwelcome garden critters who can be found in roses, zinnias, crape myrtles and many other plants. Japanse beetles' life cycle begins in the summertime and they can be detected using mechanical traps.

Japanese beetles arrive for summer feast



Kathy Hensley

Some of my most unwelcome garden "guests" arrived last week. These invaders find my landscape to be a delectable smorgasbord. How I would prefer for them to "bite the dust" instead of my plants!

I am referring to Japanese beetles, which have a particular fondness for roses, beans, zinnias, crape myrtles, fruit trees and more. In fact, they feast on over 300 plant species, consuming the tissue between the leaf veins, creating a lace-like or skeletonized appearance to the leaves. They also dine on flowers and fruit.

Lawns are not immune to this insect's culinary preferences. The beetle grubs munch on grass roots, resulting in dead patches of turfgrass. Upon observation, it becomes clear that the grass probably died because its roots were nibbled off. Further damage can be caused when armadillos dig holes in turfgrass, seeking grubs to eat.

Mercifully, Japanese beetles produce only one generation each year. Their life cycle begins in the summertime when the females lay eggs in the soil, usually in grassy areas. These eggs hatch into larval grubs and grow for months as they feed on plant roots. Then the grubs pupate in the soil, finally emerging this time of year as adult beetles to eat, mate, and begin the life cycle over again.

Japanese beetles are attractive insects. They are about a half inch long with metallic green bodies that are partially covered by iridescent bronze wings. An important identifying characteristic distinguishing them from look-alike beetles is the six small tufts of white hair along the sides of the abdomen under the edges of the wings.

Mechanical traps can be an effective way to monitor when the beetles arrive in the landscape. In the spring, place traps far away from susceptible plants. Remove them after beetle emergence is detected. The traps utilize floral scents and insect pheromones as bait to attract the beetles. While they are effective in attracting beetles, research indicates that they tend to attract more beetles than they capture. This has the potential for increasing plant damage.

When it comes to control, homeowners have limited options. If the beetle population is small and the insects are feeding at an accessible height on the plants, the best option may be to simply drown them in a bowl of soapy water. This is an effective method I use with my roses. Japanese beetles are clumsy fliers, and I can easily knock them into the suds as I hold the bowl underneath their feeding area. I devote a few minutes every morning, and sometimes evening, during "beetle season" to this task. In some cases, using a fine net can also serve as a physical barrier. These approaches provide damage control without the use of insecticides, which may harm beneficial insects at work in my landscape.

However, sometimes insecticides can be warranted. As with all pesticides, prevention is generally more effective than cure. Therefore, the best chemical control may be to treat the grubs when they are small in mid-summer. Short residual insecticides can be sprayed on foliage and flowers to help manage adult beetles.

For specific insecticide recommendations, please contact your local UGA Extension office. Bibb County Extension can be reached at bibb.extension@uga.edu or (478)310-5350.

Dublin
Cooking Show & Expo 2025
A Courier Herald event



It's back!
August 21 at 6:00 PM
DuBose Porter Center
Oconee Fall Line Technical College
560 Pinehill Rd, Dublin, Georgia
For more information, contact
Lori Kovarovic at (478) 987-1823 Ext 200
or lorikhhjads@gmail.com

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From Our Kitchens: **Cast iron skillets, the wisdom of the ages**



Provided by Kathryn Dennis

Attorney Brown Dennis with some of his collection of cast iron cookware in the kitchen of his Macon home. Dennis collects vintage cast iron skillets on eBay and at estate sales.

Brown Dennis
Special to The Melody

Seven stairs confronted her. She had never climbed them before. Dressed in her Sunday best, sporting a jaunty hat, she climbed the stairs to the front door that she had never entered and went into the familiar house.

Its contents were prepared for the estate sale that was going on that day. She was the first. She had wanted to be the first because there was one item in the kitchen that she wanted to buy.

One has to wonder why she had to buy it as opposed to being gifted it by the children of the previous occupants, who had been raised there. But dressed in her best clothing, she was there to purchase a bowl that, as the maid, she had probably used countless times for various recipes and lessons.

One wonders about the lessons, the wisdom was imparted as things were mixed, stories told and the children grew up and moved away.

I arrived later that day with the estate sale in full progress and my friend telling me the story of the first and most interesting visitor of the day.

I, too, went to the kitchen and found a cast iron skillet unlike any that I had ever seen, manufactured by the Favorite Stove Company in Piqua, Ohio. Its exterior looked like it had been wrapped in alligator skin, but the interior was like glass.

It was Model Number 8E and weighed about half the weight of a similar Lodge skillet. This began a year-long inquiry into why cast-iron skillets are no longer manufactured like this.

The forgotten names of the past: Favorite Stove Co., Birmingham Stove, Wagner, Griswold, Puritan, Erie and countless other manufacturers of cast iron that fit on wood-burning stoves. The number on the bottom of the skillet corresponds to a stove opening by the same company.

I now look for vintage cast iron skillets on eBay and at estate sales and give them regularly as wedding gifts to couples with the advice that the skillet that they are receiving is over 100 years old and provides the same utility as it did when it first went into service but probably only better.

I write them a note that says if they will take care of it, not drop it because iron is fragile and oil it regularly and work at it, that it will be successful and that, at the end of the day, they can pass this skillet along to another couple, and it will serve the same function as it did for them.

Cast iron is the original non-stick skillet. Bring it up to medium heat and add a little oil to it, and eggs will slide along especially if it was produced before 1930. It is great for croutons, cornbread and brussel sprouts.

But one of my favorite things to do is to buy an inch and a half thick steak, season it with Cajun seasoning on both sides or any seasoning for that matter. Cook it with a little oil and butter on both sides for no more than two minutes per side and then place it in a 350-degree oven for approximately six to eight minutes. Let the steak rest and then carve it up. This works equally well with chicken breasts and pork chops.

Ed Grisamore tells me that the chicken tenders he makes in his cast iron skillet for his grandchildren taste so much better than those in aluminum or stainless steel. I suspect that is why my Favorite 8E had an alligator skin on the outside from so many chicken dinners being prepared.

If you are going to cook steak, you might as well have mashed potatoes, which require two peeled, large Russet potatoes sliced in half and then cut into half-inch 1/4 rounds and boiled in salted water for 20 minutes. Drain the water, add butter and use a potato masher or ricer, add salt and pepper. After the butter is incorporated, add sour cream and mash again, followed by the addition of milk, half and half or heavy cream or whatever milk product you have and whisk to a fluffy consistency. Serve on a plate with steak and a dollop of butter on top and you are good to go.

I should point out that this can be done in any pot, particularly a cast-iron kettle if you have one. Mine is an old Number 9 Griswold Tite-Top Baster that my grandmother received as a wedding present back in 1929.

The house where I found my Favorite 8E in 2017 had a story to tell. I often wonder why she had to buy the bowl, but I went through the house that estate sale day, and found the most pristine white toilet sticking up from the dried middle Georgia clay in the garage next to an immaculate white sink.

It reminds me that, for as far as most have come, there are others who have not come far enough in loving one another. I'm pretty sure that love was dispensed from that bowl and certainly from my Favorite 8E with the Smiley Face logo.

Brussel Sprouts

- Soak Brussels sprouts in water and add a tablespoon each of vinegar and lemon juice for 20 to 30 minutes.
- This step can be omitted if you have fresh sprouts.
- Preheat oven to 400 degrees
- Cut sprouts into halves or quarters depending on size.
- Place in a cast iron skillet
- Drizzle with a good amount of olive oil and sprinkle with kosher salt and fresh pepper
- Cut 2 or 3 strips of bacon crosswise into ½ inch strips and layer on top
- Cook for 20 minutes and stir
- Grate Parmigiano Reggiano cheese about ½ cup to sprinkle on top.
- At 35 minutes pull the skillet from the oven (sprouts should be crisp and if not put it for a few more minutes) before sprinkling the cheese.
- Return to the oven for 5 more minutes.
- Remove from the oven and drizzle with honey and at least Silver quality balsamic vinegar. Enjoy!

Brown Dennis is an attorney with Chambless, Higdon, Richardson, Katz & Griggs LLP in Macon.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

PROBIOTICS AND PREBIOTICS:
DIFFERENCES, BENEFITS, AND POPULAR FOODS



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You may not realize that trillions of microorganisms live inside your intestines in your own unique gut microbiome. These include thousands of species of bacteria that can coexist with viruses, parasites, and fungi.

A healthy gut microbiome helps you digest food. However, things like antibiotics, surgery, medicine, sleep deprivation, and stress can upset the intricate intestinal ecosystem and cause issues in your digestive tract, Dr. Christine Lee, M.D. at Cleveland Clinic explains.

Fortunately, probiotics and prebiotics can help keep your gut healthy and correct imbalances in your gut microbiome. This guide discusses the difference between probiotics and prebiotics, lists their benefits, and features a list of prebiotic and probiotic foods to add to your diet.

What Is the Difference Between Probiotics and Prebiotics?

You have probably heard of prebiotics and probiotics but might wonder what the difference is between them. They both support healthy bacteria that live in your digestive tract, but each has a different function.

Probiotics are friendly bacteria and yeasts that help break down the food you eat, help stave off inflammation, and communicate with your immune system. They are food and health products (like supplements) that introduce live microbes into your gut microbiome to keep it in balance and help fight germs, Cleveland Clinic advises.

Prebiotics, on the other hand, are not living organisms. They are carbohydrates the human body can't digest. They feed the good bacteria in your gut to help them grow and improve their efficiency.

Prebiotics and Probiotics Have Multiple Health Benefits

Medical research is ongoing about the positive effects of prebiotics and probiotics on the body and its gut microbiome. Brown University notes several prebiotics benefits:

- Improve calcium absorption and increase bone density
- Improve digestion and metabolism
- Help regulate bowel movements
- Regulate blood sugar and insulin resistance
- Decrease inflammation in the body
- Strengthen the immune system
- Stimulate hormone production that suppresses appetite
- Lower risk of heart disease and colon cancer
- Lower cholesterol levels

This list is not exhaustive. Probiotics also have multiple health benefits. They include:

- Can prevent or aid recovery from atopic dermatitis and acne
- Help prevent cavities and gum disease
- Help prevent vaginal and urinary tract infections (UTIs), and antibiotic-induced diarrhea
- Help break down and absorb certain nutrients and medications
- Help train your immune system to recognize and eliminate harmful microbes
- Break down and recycle bile after digestion

What Foods Contain Probiotics?

Fortunately, many fermented foods and drinks contain probiotics that you can enjoy and help your gut health. Yogurt is a popular probiotic food with many varieties. Harvard Health recommends looking for brands that feature a Live & Active Cultures (LAC) seal from the International Dairy Foods Association. If you don't care for yogurt or just want some additional probiotics food and beverage options, try the following:

- Kefir – A tart yogurt-like drink
- Kombucha – A fermented tea drink with a tangy-tart taste that also contains caffeine
- Kimchi – A spicy fermented cabbage dish
- Miso – A popular paste in Japanese cuisine made from soybeans fermented with brown rice
- Pickles – Those brined in water and sea salt — not vinegar
- Sauerkraut – Fermented cabbage often used as a hot dog topper or mix it in salads
- Tempeh – A cake made from fermented soybeans, firmer than tofu

What Foods Contain Prebiotics?

You can add prebiotics to your diet with the following foods:

- High-fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Bananas – Green and less ripe varieties
- Potatoes – Preferably boiled and cooled
- Legumes, beans, and peas
- Jerusalem artichokes

Do Supplements Help?

Prebiotics and probiotics do come in supplement form. However, if your gut is already healthy or you eat foods that contain the friendly bacteria your gut needs, you don't need a supplement. Getting probiotics through a healthy diet is best, Cleveland Clinic dietitian and microbiome expert Gail Cresci, PhD, RD, advises.

Ultimately, you should always discuss any nutritional or dietary concerns with your physician or a registered dietician. They can guide you on whether you need probiotics and prebiotics and what type. Overall, probiotics and prebiotics can provide many health benefits and help your gut microbiome to thrive.



Macon celebrates community, culture on Juneteenth with Freedom Festival, parade, history tours, more

Evelyn Davidson
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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Kids at last year's Juneteenth celebration, Freedom Festival at Tattnall Square Park, do a drum performance for attendees. This year marks the 33rd annual Freedom Festival and Juneteenth Macon is hosting a variety of other events to celebrate African culture and community throughout Macon.

Macon is celebrating the 33rd Annual Juneteenth Freedom Festival, among other Juneteenth events this week.

Recognized as a national holiday under the Biden administration, Juneteenth on June 19 recognizes "freedom's arrival," — when enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas, were emancipated in 1865 by Union troops.

Juneteenth Macon, a collaboration between Kwanzaa Cultural Access Center and Torchlight Academy, kicked off the festivities June 6 with a debutante ball by Macon Black Culture at the Douglass Theatre.

This week's series of events began with the 20th Annual Real Talk Hip Hop Summit and Pleasant Hill Neighborhood Reunion Banquet, celebrating the historic Black neighborhood and its community Friday.

There will be more events Saturday through Sunday, honoring community and culture in Macon:

- Saturday, June, 14 — 19th Annual Pleasant Hill Neighborhood Reunion
- Saturday, June, 14 — 33rd Annual Juneteenth Freedom Festival
- Sunday, June, 15 — Fathers and Family Juneteenth Celebration
- Monday, June, 16 — Macon Black History Van Tours

The Freedom Festival at Tattnall Square Park will feature live drumming, the Otis Redding Foundation Youth Performer Showcase and Black Union soldier reenactors.

"Our approach to culture and exposing, giving opportunities for our youth and the families to be exposed to new horizons in these realms of expression — that is a big goal of what we do," said program coordinator of Torchlight and co-founder of the Kwanzaa center Fadil Muhammad.

The Tubman Museum will also celebrate Juneteenth and Black Music Month on June 19 from 5-8 p.m. with its "Rock My Soul" event at the museum, which will also feature a ceremony for the Legacy of Arts and Music Award recipients from throughout Middle Georgia.

On the Sunday following Juneteenth Day, Macon Black Culture in collaboration with Juneteenth Macon, will host the 3rd Annual Juneteenth Parade from 4-8 p.m. downtown.

For more information visit the Juneteenth Macon website.



Henley looks to bounce back at U.S. Open

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

The 2025 season has not been a good one for Russell Henley when it comes to the majors.

About a month after winning the Arnold Palmer Invitational for his first tour trophy in three years, Henley roughed up Augusta with a first-round 79 en route to missing the Masters cut.

Almost a month after tying for eighth in the RBC Heritage, Henley turned in his worst consecutive rounds of the year and missed the cut at the PGA Championship.

In his two tournaments directly preceding the Masters and PGA, Henley finished tied for 30th and tied for 46th.

The Macon native and Stratford grad is not exactly storming into the big events with momentum.

Up next is the U.S. Open, at frisky Oakmont Country Club northeast of Pittsburgh on the banks of the Allegheny River.

Henley, ranked seventh and sixth in the two major rankings, teed off Thursday at 1:03 p.m. with Christiaan Bezuidenhout and Nick Taylor.

Henley's visits to the U.S. Open have been all over the place. He missed cuts in 2013, 2015 and 2022 along with two finishes outside the top 40, and had three finishes in the top 14 in the last four trips.

He tied for seventh last year at Pinehurst No. 2, closing with a 67 after two 70s and a 72.

Henley wasn't in the field the last time the Open was at Oakmont in 2016, when Dustin Johnson's 4-over gave him the win by

See HENLEY, Page B2

The rare special athletes to come out of Bibb County


Micah Johnston

When you know, you just know.

This is the sentiment when it comes to athletic ability. The players and competitors we talk about most are the transcendent ones, the ones who thrive regardless of troublesome circumstances, rough upbringings and the like.

This is why ESPN focuses intently on — and is sometimes mocked for — its stories of college football players "beating the odds" during the NFL Draft. Whether it is a dead relative or something else, the draft's flagship network is fond of emotional stories that showcase how a player's otherworldly skills on the gridiron helped them overcome challenging personal hurdles.

Often accompanying tales of these athletic exploits are sound bites from coaches, teammates and family espousing that talent. They say it in a variety of ways — "he was a man among boys," "you had to see it to believe it," "I've never seen another athlete like him" and more — but it always boils down to the same thing: this kid is special.

So, allegedly, when you see one of these special players, you just "know."

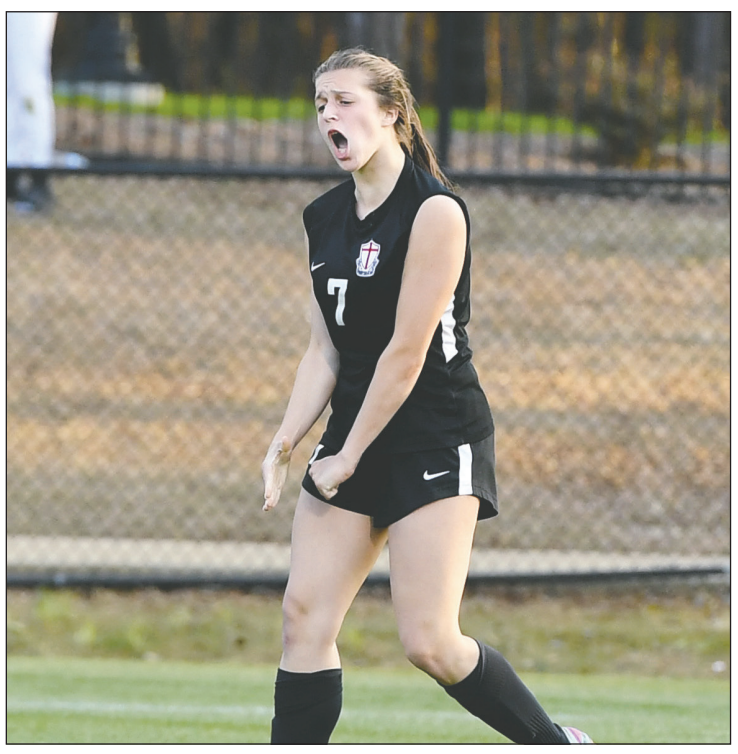
This begs the question: how many folks in Bibb County have "known?"

I'm sure people "knew" when they watched Jeff Malone dominate on the basketball court back in the day that the Southwest star would one day star in the NBA. Perhaps some in the 1960s "knew" when they watched Macon's own Blue Moon Odom pitch lights-out games in high school that he would eventually play in the World Series.

Heck, the metaphor can even go beyond sports — I'm sure Bibb County locals caught on to the greatness of musicians like Otis Redding and the Allman Brothers far before the masses were wise to their talents.

There are a few Macon athletes I've observed who ap-

See JOHNSTON, Page B3


Jason Vorhees / The Melody
FPD's Bowen Matthews, a star sophomore, celebrates a second half goal during the Vikings' 3-1 win over Stratford this season.


Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Westside High School football coach Spoon Risper breaks it down in the huddle. Risper started as the wide receiver coach at Westside in 1998 before taking on the head coaching role years later, succeeding legendary coach Robert Davis and continuing the team's winning trend.

Westside coach reflects on career ahead of final season

Micah Johnston
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It was almost fitting that the Westside field house was abnormally quiet.

When longtime Seminoles head football coach Spoon Risper sat down in the building's meeting room, the usual shouts, music and chatter that would come from the adjacent locker room were absent. With the first day of summer practices done, all the Westside players had already gone.

It was the beginning of the end of his tenure at Westside. Risper will coach the Seminoles for the final time in the 2025 season.

Though his voice wavered with emotion occasionally as he reflected on nearly 30 years spent at Westside and its "feeder" school, Weaver Middle, the veteran coach felt phenomenal.

"God's been whispering in my ear," Risper said of his decision to leave Westside, where he has been head coach since 2009. "I know his voice, and it was just time to change and get ready for the finale, for the end of my 'season' at Westside."

Risper has become a fixture at the school since coming on as the wide receiver coach in 1998. He moved to become head coach at Weaver after a few seasons before he succeeded legendary Seminoles coach Robert Davis, who became a mentor for him.

"It's a history I've been proud to be a part of," Risper said. "I think one of the things I'll miss the most is the way they play here and all the players that have played for me. They never quit, there's just a different way of playing at Westside."

That history has consisted of Westside becoming Bibb County's winningest program, as the Seminoles have not had a losing season since the school began playing in 1997 with Davis as the head coach.

Risper became the all-time winningest coach in Bibb County School District history last season when he passed Davis with a 116-64 record, passing Central High School football architect Tom Simonton. He accrued many of those wins at the 4A and 3A levels before Westside was reassigned to Class 2A in 2024.

"I couldn't do that without the kids, I can't take the credit for all the success," he said. "Those kids have gone out and laid it on the line for me, year after year."

See RISPER, Page B3

Notepad

Local track icon Frame loses battle with ALS, MU baseball players on move

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Local track coaching legend Dick Frame lost his courageous battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) on May 29, one month after his 85th birthday.

Frame was diagnosed with the fatal neurodegenerative disease, better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, in 2009. The average life expectancy for someone with ALS is two to five years.

The disease is named after the New York Yankee hall-of-famer, who died with ALS in 1941. Frame's death came four days before Major League Baseball held its annual "Lou Gehrig Day" on June 2 to raise awareness about ALS.

Frame was a volunteer track coach for more than 40 years at First Presbyterian Day School, where the track was named after him in 2014. The school hosts the Dick Frame Track Invitational every spring.

He served as the official starter at the GISA state track meet from 1983 to 2010, and was inducted into the Macon Sports Hall of Fame in 2018.

Frame was known for his positivity. He would send handwritten notes and inspirational quotes to members

See NOTEPAD, Page B2


Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Ty Dalley rounds the bases. The rising senior announced his commitment to Clemson on X.com earlier this week. In his time with the Bears, Dalley has recorded 58 home runs to become the program's all-time leader in long balls, passing Kyle Lewis.

Notepad, From B1:

of the track team, lauding them for their accomplishments and extending words of encouragement.

Two Mercer baseball players on the move

The Atlanta Braves called up Macon native and former Mercer player Austin Cox last week, though the left-hander did not get to pitch in a game before being optioned back to Triple-A Gwinnett.

Cox, an FPD grad and standout pitcher at Mercer, signed with the Braves about a month ago and has been pitching for the Gwinnett Stripers since then. He threw 11 ⅔ innings with the Stripers through May and the beginning of June after starting the season with Omaha in the Kansas City Royals' system.

Cox was called up Saturday during Atlanta's series against the San Francisco Giants as part of a flurry of bullpen moves — he was the player that replaced Craig Kimbrel, the Braves' former standout closer, when Atlanta sent the veteran down after just one appearance on the road.

Cox himself was sent down just a day later without setting foot on the mound. In his place Atlanta selected the contract of reliever Jose Ruiz, who has accrued a 7.63 ERA this season thus far after struggling with the Philadelphia Phillies.

Cox saw some success in Kansas City, beginning his career with a scoreless streak of 12 ⅓ scoreless innings.

A current Mercer Bear will also be on the move at the collegiate level.

Outfielder Ty Dalley, a perennial All-Southern Conference player and leader for the Bears, announced on X.com that he will transfer to Clemson for next season.

"I'm beyond thankful for the coaching staff and my teammates for pushing me to be where I am today," Dalley wrote in a screenshot posted on his account.

The rising senior had a slash line of .280/.357/.592 last season with Mercer and also broke the program's career home run record, amassing 58 long balls in his three seasons as a Bear. He is still eligible for the MLB Draft later this June.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

FPD shortstop Keon Johnson (6) celebrates after a great defensive play during game one of the Vikings' playoff series against Stratford on May 16. Johnson earned Georgia player of the Year honors from Gatorade last week after slamming 10 home runs and 47 RBIs during the 2026 season.

FPD's Keon Johnson earns POTY award

Star FPD Vikings shortstop Keon Johnson, a top prospect in the class of 2026 and a key player in FPD's back-to-back championship appearances in 2024 and 2025, was named the Gatorade Player of the Year in Georgia last week.

Johnson hit .524 and notched 10 home runs and 47 RBIs, according to the Gatorade Player of the Year press release. He also struck out just six times in 142 plate appearances and secured the GIAA Class 4A/3A District 6 Player of the Year award.

Johnson also earned the award thanks to his 3.4 GPA and more than 120 hours of community service, the release read. He is the No. 6 prospect in the country for the Class of 2026, according to Prep Baseball.

According to his Perfect Game profile, Johnson is committed to Vanderbilt. The middle infielder last participated in a Perfect Game event with the San Diego Padres Scout team.

Mercer hires softball coach

Mercer University named Chris Kuhlmeyer as its new head softball coach last week following the departure of skipper Lindsay Fico after the end of the 2025 season.

Kuhlmeyer comes to Mercer from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, where he began coaching in 2018 and had a 158-128 record. He led the UMBC Retrievers to the America East Tournament championship two seasons in a row. The Retrievers also won the regular season title in his second season.

Kuhlmeyer was the coach at Belmont University from 2010 to 2016, where he won 96 games. He is an LSU alumnus, where he spent time as a student manager before volunteering as a head coach. He has also been an assistant at a variety of schools including Samford, Wichita State and Miami-Ohio.

"Chris Kuhlmeyer possesses all of the characteristics that we were searching for in a new leader for our softball program," Mercer athletics director Jim Cole said in a press release. "He has a deep and expansive knowledge of the game, a proven ability to build winning cultures both on the field and in the classroom and a strong commitment to player development. I am thrilled to welcome him to Mercer and am looking forward to the development and growth of our softball program under his watch."

Henley, from B1:

three shots.

So scouting reports on how he'll do are a little tentative — most have him ranked in the 15-25 range — but it appears his strengths fit fairly well with Oakmont.

"Henley is built for Oakmont and will always be a model darling when looking at approach play," wrote Golf Digest. "His iron play is elite. No matter how you sort it, he's going to be around the top 10 in most metrics that measure second shots. He's got a win this year and has a few nice finishes in majors so far in his career.

"It's been an inconsistent past few months with missed cuts at the Masters and PGA Championship, but I'm fine buying low on his skill set. Oakmont rewards players who hit greens, and Henley's GIR percentage ranks sixth in the field over the past six months. Maybe not a threat to get his second win of the year here, but Henley is certainly a nice dark horse to compete and bolster your U.S. Open picks."

Despite his top 10 ranking, Henley is somewhat back to the "under the radar" level: a contender, but not necessarily a favorite. He has dropped to 46th on the tour in putting and is 1534d in putts from 15-20 feet and 139th in putts inside 10 feet, but is in the top 15 in greens in regulation, shots gained total and around the green, driving accuracy percentage, and putting from 20-25 feet.

Also at stake: the largest payout of the majors. Bryson DeChambeau took home $4.3 million for last year's win from a $21.5 million purse, so this year's survivor of the 156-player field could easily have a $5 million paycheck.



Woody Marshall / Greensboro News and Record

Russell Henley waits his turn to putt on No. 9 during the final round of the 2023 Wyndham Championship at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Sunday, August 6, 2023.



Risper, From B1

Risper had already passed his own predecessor. Davis, the only other coach in Westside's history, went 101-33 with the Seminoles. The trio are the only coaches in Bibb County since 1970 to have winning career records with at least five seasons coached, according to records from the Georgia High School Football Historians Association.

It's an impressive legacy, one Risper thinks the school will be able to continue.

"They'll pick the right person," he said. "The way this program is run is incredible. It's really a reflection of the way the game is played in Middle Georgia. Football is so big here. I love this area and the football here."

And for that reason, Risper's coaching career is not likely to end. He's feeling great physically, he said, and still has plenty of passion for the game. He intends to stay in the Middle Georgia area.

The one thing that has eluded Risper and the Seminoles, despite running such a winning program, has been a state title. Risper has twice reached the state quarterfinals as a head coach, once right after he took over in 2009 and again in 2015.

"The career has been everything I could have asked for, except for the state championship," he said. "You always strive for that, and you really want the kids to experience that."

But Risper's legacy at Westside is not quite finished with the 2025 season still in store. The program is coming off one of its better playoff performances in recent years, taking the No. 1 seed in the GHSA Class 2A bracket, Rockmart, down to the wire in a back-and-forth affair.

Though the second-round showdown ended in a 37-30 loss for the Seminoles, they showed guts, exemplifying the traits Risper praised so fervently when he espoused the program's values.

"That game is the perfect example. I'm kind of a fiery coach, I try to inspire the kids. That trip was really good for them — they went up there and played well and fought against a really good team, and a team with a great crowd at home," Risper said. "We were down 14 points with probably two minutes left, and we took it down to the last play as time ran out. That's how we play, that's our brand of football."

Such a game has given the returning players lots to build on — and lots to learn from.

"That last play, we just couldn't get the touchdown. We've actually watched that play a lot over the offseason, just to get that hunger in our minds," he said. "They're ready to go. It's already feeling a little different, because the kids are ready to fight for me.

"I really want them to go the extra mile, but I want them to do it for them. I do think we're going to have a good season."

It won't be easy. The Seminoles will be tasked with replacing star running Kadiphious Iverson, who broke the program's single-season rushing touchdown record last year with 31 scores and paced the offense throughout the season.

"He's a bell cow. That's tough to replace. He's one of the most talented guys I've had come through here. That's something that only comes around once every many years," Risper said. "But we have guys with talent and fire. They'll be ready to help this team."

There will also be the matter of Westside's region in Class 2A, a talented group featuring regular powerhouse Morgan County and other talented programs like Callaway and Jackson.

But the group is motivated. Many of them had siblings that played at Westside, even fathers that were part of the school's earliest graduating classes. They know it's Risper's last season with the program — after all, there will be a documentary series shot during the year keeping track of the coach's Westside swan song.

Regardless of how the final season plays out one thing is certain: it will be a bit of a strange feeling when things wrap up — and Spoon will surely have to revamp his wardrobe.

"It will feel weird not to wear that garnett and gold, I don't know what in the world I'll do," the head coach said, smiling. "I've got Westside shirts I've had for five years that I've only worn twice, that's how much of it I got. But I'll always love the colors.

"I get choked up just thinking about it — everyone I've met here, everything the school has accomplished. The students have become police, firemen, doctors, lawyers, teachers and coaches. They come back and tell me about everything they've accomplished, and I feel that my coaching's not in vain. I feel like I made a difference."



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Westside coach Spoon Risper shouts from the sideline during the Seminoles' 57-18 win over Rutland in Macon Friday night. Risper tied the record for most wins by a coach while at a Bibb County school with the victory.

Johnston, From B1:

pear, at least for the moment, to possess this athletic aura.

Nick Woodford, the running back who recently graduated from Northeast as a salutatorian, was probably the first.

While I attended every Central football game for four years when I was in the Sugarbear Band and rooted hard for the Chargers, I never did much research or reading about the other local teams. It was only when I did a tiny bit of football coverage for The Telegraph in 2022 — my first professional experience covering any sport — that I began to research and understand which teams in Macon had it and which did not.

The Raiders were just blossoming into their current dynasty, if you could call their recent success that, when I covered a handful of games across the 2022 season. If I recall correctly, I only watched Woodford play in one game, but it was more than enough.

Woodford had an incredible season that year. Even knowing little about the competition in Macon or about Bibb County football history, I was in awe when I watched him tear through opposing defenses for the first time.

The running back finished with an eye-popping 2,728 yards that year. I remember being sort of disappointed when, during the 2022 Player of the Year poll for The Telegraph, he lost the fan vote for the award.

Now he's off to play at Morehouse, where I suspect he will thrive.

There's also Bowen Matthews, who I watched score a pair of goals at will on the soccer field for the FPD Vikings in the playoffs last year. That was when The Melody was in its infancy — it was just "the new Macon paper" then, in fact, a nameless news outlet in March 2024 — and I had nowhere to publish the yarn I eventually spun about her heroics that almost single-handedly won the game for FPD.

Matthews has since broken the program record for goals as a sophomore and been a prolific scorer for the basketball team. I suspect that I'll write about her plenty more at The Melody.

There's plenty of other examples, though maybe none so clearly above their competition.

Ty Dalley has been a phenom for Mercer baseball and will almost certainly be an MLB Draft pick — he broke records set by Kyle Lewis, an MLB Rookie of the Year winner, after all. Southwest's Rinaldo Callaway will be an incredible athlete in college, though I can't decide whether I'm more impressed by his football accomplishments or his basketball career thus far.

Only with Woodford and Matthews have I known, in person at the game, that I was witnessing something very special.

But will they succeed at the next level? What about a journey into professional sports?

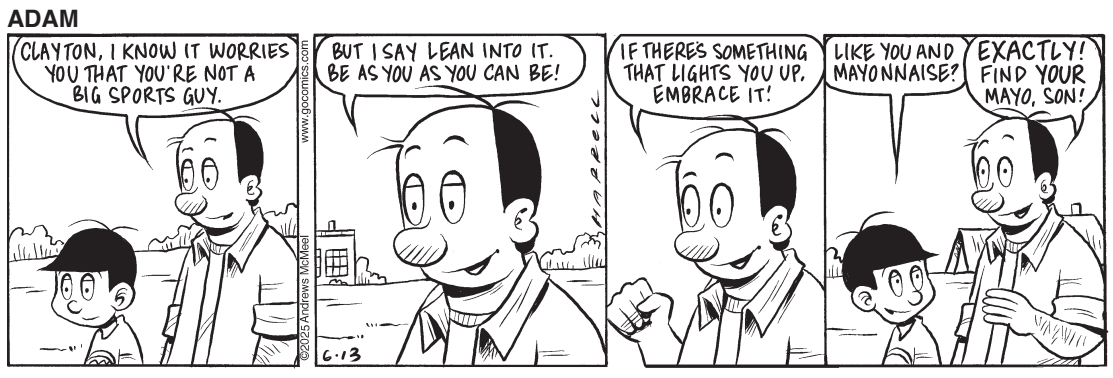
That may be a conversation for another edition of The Melody, but one thing is certain: these athletes have made their mark on Macon's rich sports history.



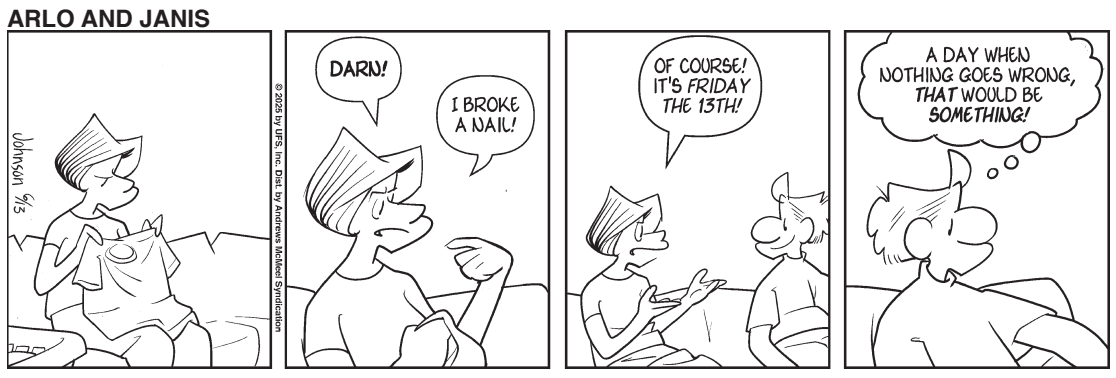
Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Nick Woodford runs past two defenders in the GHSA Championship Game. Woodford committed to play football at Morehouse College earlier this year. The Southwest running back finished with an eye-popping 2,728 yards in his sophomore season, then tore his ACL in 2023 before bouncing back last year with another 2,000-yard season to help the Raiders reach the championship game against Toombs County in Atlanta.

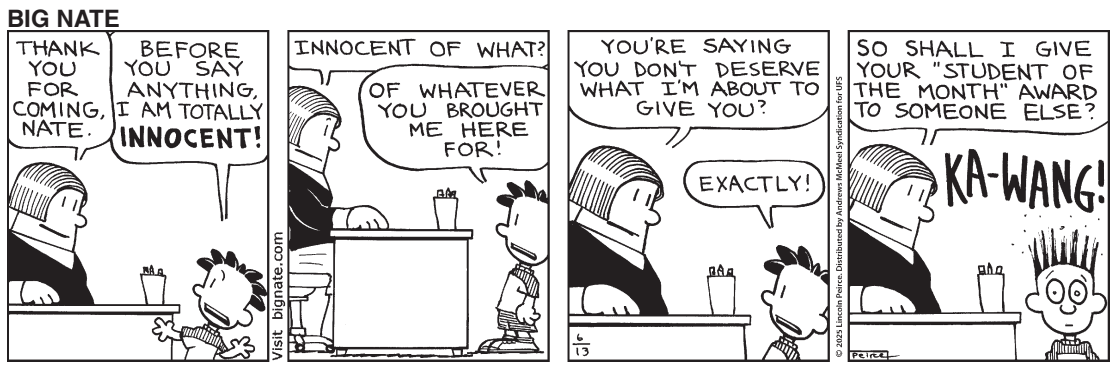
ADAM



ARLO AND JANIS



BIG NATE



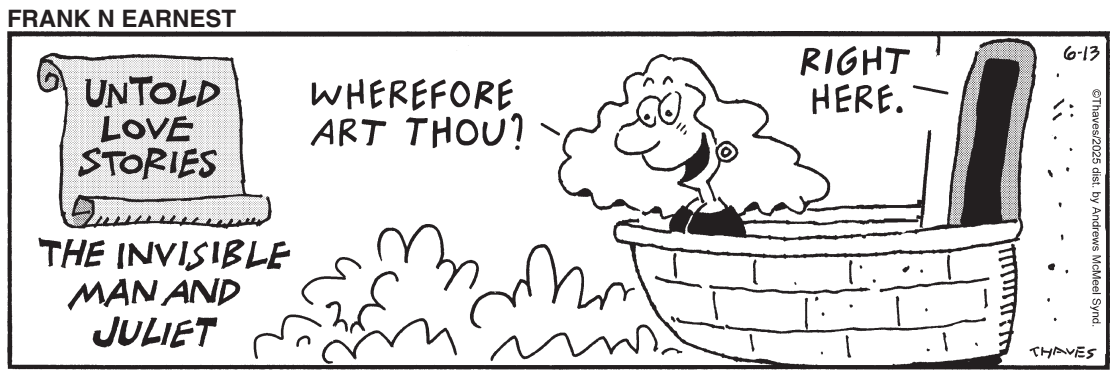
BORN LOSER



DEFLOCKED



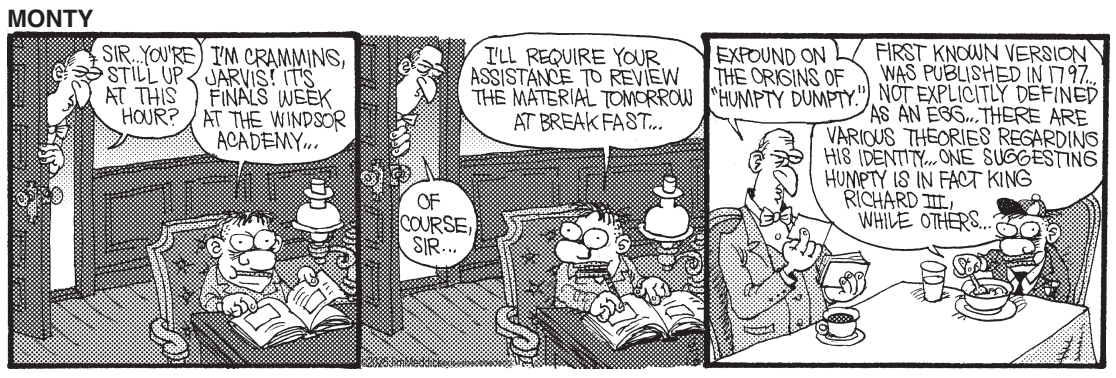
FRANK N EARNEST



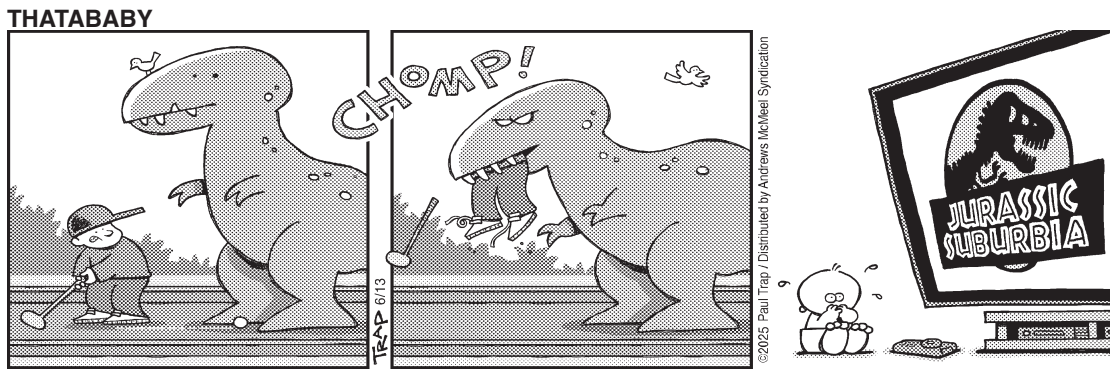
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



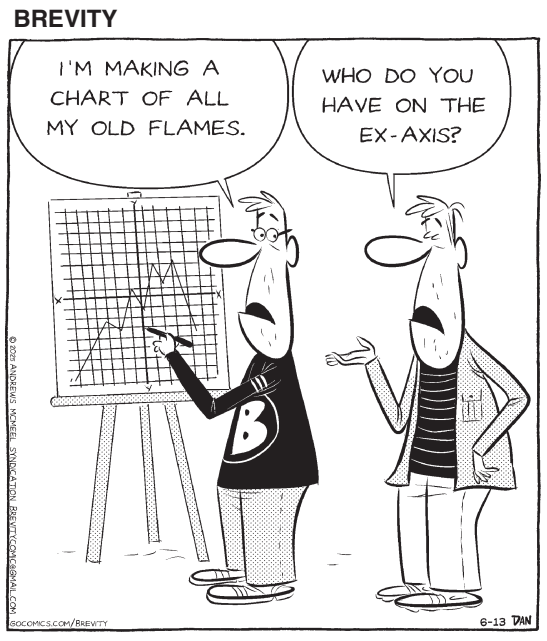
THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

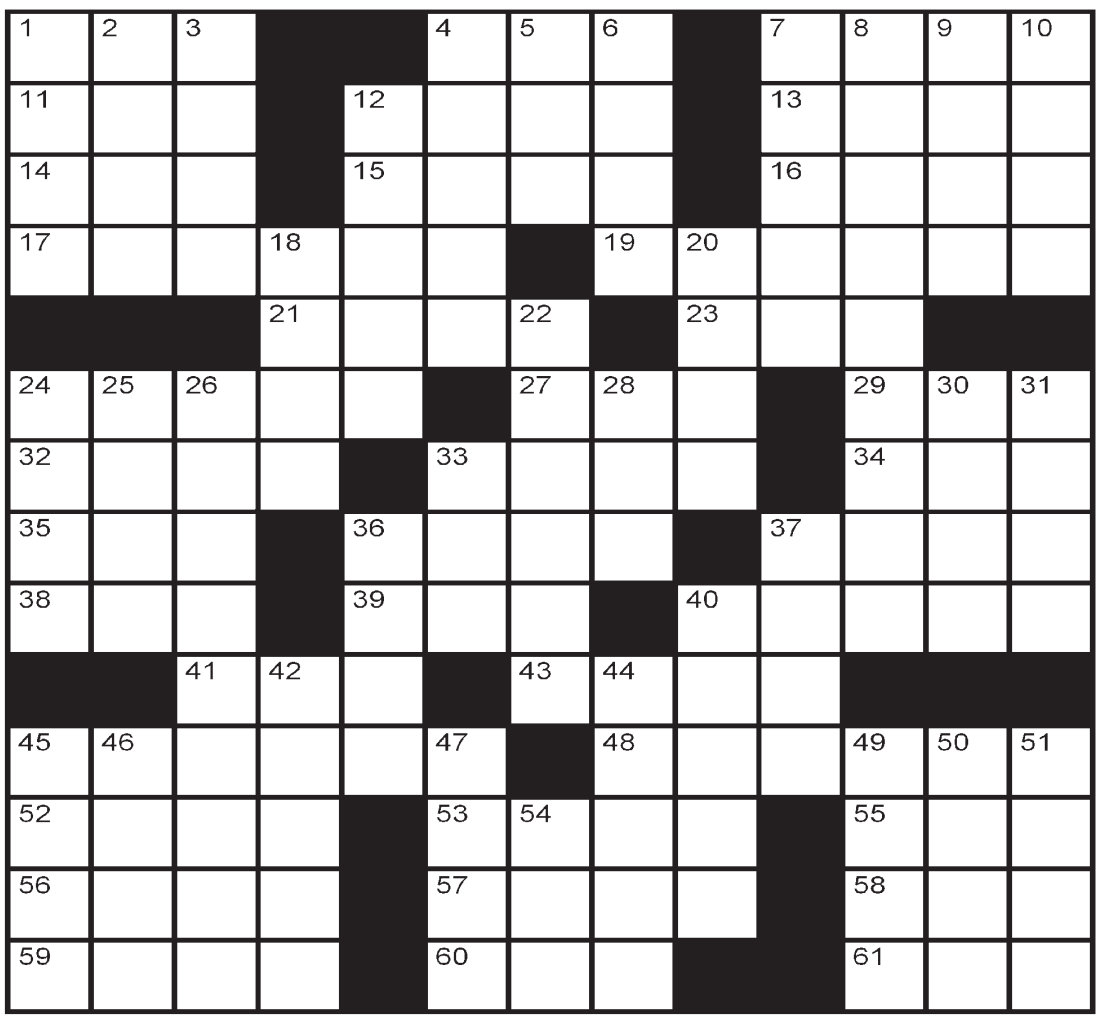
1 State of matter
4 Sailor
7 Aid and —
11 Rocks in a tumbler
12 Apple remnant
13 Ancient Greek instrument
14 Monk's title
15 Gigantic
16 "— — Small World"
17 Grew stressed
19 Wealth
21 Durable wood
23 Singer Jerry — Lewis
24 Propose
27 Absolutely nothing
29 Flying creature
32 — of the tongue
33 Some children
34 Kimono sash
35 Title for Gawain
36 Covenant
37 Man from Warsaw
38 Simian
39 Writing fluid
40 Kidded around
41 Wok
43 Term in bridge
45 Game periods
48 Brunch fare
52 Jai —
53 Delicate fabric
55 "I — — Camera"
56 Drug plant
57 "Oh, woe!"
58 Thickness measure
59 Sharp
60 — canto
61 Much-used abbr.

DOWN

1 "The — of the Magi"
2 Land measure
3 Actor — Connery
4 Cheese type
5 Assn.
6 Lager
7 Wonderland girl
8 According to the rules (3 wds.)
9 Gaelic
10 Light meals
12 Gladden
18 Dance movement
20 Troubles
22 Raps
24 Greek peak
25 Somersault
26 Open hearth
28 Loan charge (Abbr.)
30 Competent
31 Made the same score
33 — Jose, California
36 Evergreen tree
37 Apple or pear
40 Outlaw Jesse —
42 Of birds
44 Making all stops
45 Chop
46 — vera
47 Thick slice
49 Metallic fabric
50 Exude
51 Baby powder
54 Cakes and —

Answer to Previous Puzzle

F	U	R	■	■	H	O	G	■	S	P	E	C
A	N	I	■	V	I	A	L	■	N	E	M	O
S	A	G	■	A	R	T	E	■	A	R	I	D
T	U	S	S	L	E	■	E	M	P	I	R	E
■	■	■	R	U	D	E	■	A	S	P	■	■
G	I	J	O	E	■	X	Y	Z	■	H	A	M
L	O	U	■	■	R	I	D	E	■	E	G	O
I	T	S	■	P	A	L	S	■	■	R	I	O
B	A	T	■	E	Y	E	■	R	A	Y	O	N
■	■	A	P	E	■	D	R	U	G	■	■	■
R	E	B	U	K	E	■	A	N	T	L	E	R
O	D	O	R	■	L	O	I	N	■	I	V	E
O	N	U	S	■	M	A	N	Y	■	M	E	T
F	A	T	E	■	S	K	Y	■	■	O	N	E



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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ☆☆☆☆☆

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

Almanac

Today is the 164th day of 2025 and the 86th day of spring.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1966, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Miranda v. Arizona that police must inform suspects of their rights before questioning them.

In 1967, Thurgood Marshall became the first African American to be nominated as a Supreme Court justice.

In 1971, The New York Times began publishing excerpts from the Pentagon Papers.

In 1996, the Montana Freemen surrendered after an 81-day standoff with federal agents outside Brusett, Montana.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), poet/dramatist; John Forbes Nash Jr. (1928-2015), mathematician; Malcolm McDowell (1943-), actor; Stellan Skarsgard (1951-), actor; Tim Allen (1953-), actor; Chris Evans (1981-), actor; Kat Dennings (1986-), actress; Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen (1986-), actresses.

TODAY'S FACT: Eight spellers were crowned as co-champions of the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2019, the first time a group shared the title in the event's history.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1948, Babe Ruth appeared at Yankee Stadium for the last time, on the occasion of the New York Yankees' Silver Anniversary Day, during which his No. 3 jersey was ceremonially retired.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "I pray — for word is out /And prayer comes round again — / That I may seem, though I die old, / A foolish, passionate man." — William Butler Yeats, "A Prayer for Old Age"

TODAY'S NUMBER: 1,722 — depth (in feet) of the now-inactive Mirny mine in Eastern Siberia, Russia, the 4th-deepest mine in the world. Diamond-bearing deposits were first discovered at the site on this day in 1955.

TODAY'S MOON: Between full moon (June 11) and last quarter moon (June 18).

Community Briefs

Nature walk for PTSD awareness month

The Veterans Art Society is set to host a nature walk in recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Month on Saturday, June 28, at Amerson River Park.

Veterans, families, caregivers and supporters are invited to walk together in a peaceful and empowering environment that promotes healing, awareness and connection. Participants are encouraged to wear comfortable walking shoes and bring water. The walk is family-friendly and will include opportunities for reflection, community engagement and resource sharing.

The event is supported by a grant from the Griffin Family Foundation.

"This walk is not just about raising awareness — it's about creating space for understanding, support and healing," says Khaia Gibson, organizer of the event. "We want every participant to know that they are not alone and that our community cares."

GHSA tightens rules on transfers

The Georgia High School Sports Association is proposing a rule that would require student athletes who transfer schools more than once after ninth grade to be ineligible to play sports for one year.

The proposed bylaw amendment was first reported by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The amendment also would require transferring athletes to prove they are truly relocating to another district by showing documentation including proof of residency, drivers licenses and utility bills.

The amended bylaw is set for approval at next month's GHSA board meeting. The transfer rules could most have an impact on Macon schools in the realm of football, as 14 different schools field teams on the gridiron each season in one of the most crowded areas in the state.

Macon schools also must compete with Houston and Peach County schools to retain athletes, as schools like Warner Robins and Perry boast larger programs. Last season, Northeast lost star wide receiver Kavon Conciauro only a few days before the season began in 2024 when he transferred to Houston County High School on short notice.

Bibb Schools' final budget hearing

The Bibb County Board of Education is set to hold its second and final public hearing on the fiscal year 2026 budget on Tuesday, June 17, at 5 p.m. at the Professional Learning Center, located at 2003 Riverside Drive. The budget was tentatively adopted on May 23 and final adoption is set for June 18.

Doctors graduate from Piedmont residency

A graduation ceremony for Piedmont Macon Medical Center's residency program is set for 6 p.m. Friday at Fall Line Station, 567 Plum St.

The medical education program at Piedmont began eight years ago with 10 internal medicine residents and four psychiatry residents. It now has the capacity for 63 residents including transitional year opportunities.

Residency programs are between one and four years. Transitional one-year programs are meant to provide a foundation for medical students to prepare for advanced residency in specialties such as dermatology, anesthesiology and radiology.

Piedmont Macon Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Bernstein said one of the goals of the residency program is for doctors to stay in the community after their residency ends.

Five graduates are staying to work in Macon, including two at Piedmont Macon Medical Center.

Road work in South Bibb

Construction crews began repaving Goodall Mill Road in South Bibb this week as part of the Paving the Way program, Macon-Bibb County announced in a news release.

The road work began Tuesday and was expected to finish by Friday, weather permitting. Goodall Mill Road is between Sardis Church and Houston roads, just east of Interstate 75.

The project is funded through the Special Local Option Sales Tax that Macon voters approved in 2018, not the most recent SPLOST voters approved in March.

"For too many years, there were never enough funds made available to care for our aging infrastructure, leading to potholes, sinkholes, collapses along the sides and failing pavement," Mayor Lester Miller said in the news release. "Now, thanks to the voter-approved SPLOST, we are putting a historic amount toward correcting that mistake."

Drive-thru food distribution set for Saturday

The Girls Dig Deeper Initiative, a program funded by the Macon Violence Prevention Program, is set to host a drive-thru food distribution event at the Bloomfield Community Center in South Bibb on Saturday.

The event runs from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday at the community center at 1931 Rocky Creek Road in Macon.

"This is our first food distribution because we heard from families about children not having enough to eat in the summer, as well as the challenges they face from rising food costs," the nonprofit's executive director, Najiva Timothee, said in a Bibb County news release. "Food insecurity and lack of access to meals can significantly contribute to increased crime in communities, especially during the summer months."

The Girls Dig Deeper Initiative will provide canned fruit, vegetables, beans, soup and crackers to the first 100 families who arrive at the event, the press release said. The program intends to offer mentorship to teen girls with classes and seminars on money management, teen mental health, community wellness and more.

The organization received $30,000 from MVP between 2022 and 2024, according to the release.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch

FRIDAY

June 13, 2025

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



'Echo Valley'

ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA

Echo Valley

Apple TV+ ■ Original Film

When her troubled daughter Claire (Sydney Sweeney) shows up at her doorstep hysterical and covered in someone else's blood, Kate (Julianne Moore) must piece together the truth of what happened while learning just how far she will go to try to save her child.

NCAA Men's College World Series

ESPN, beginning at 2 p.m. Live

ESPN airs two games from the College World Series baseball tournament at Nebraska's Charles Schwab Field Omaha.

The Never Ever Mets

OWN, 8 p.m. ■ Season Finale

In "So Many Different Plot Twists," Charlie is left confused, as Jared continues to give her mixed signals about his true feelings. Brandon is challenged to move past the news of Keke's ex, while Chris and Alexis have issues with a planned trip to the Intimacy Suite.

Couples Therapy

Showtime, 9 p.m. ■ Season Finale

Season 4 of this series following Dr. Orna Guralnik as she guides couples through the minefield of honest confrontation wraps up with two episodes tonight.

The Proof Is Out There

History, 10 p.m. ■ Season Premiere

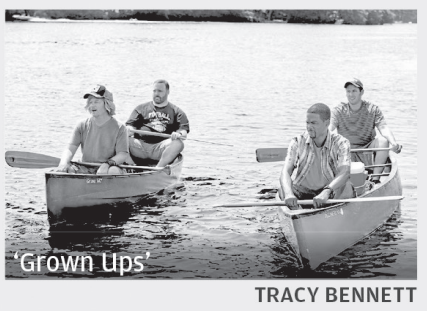
Veteran TV journalist Tony Harris is back to host a fifth season of this series that looks at some of the most incredible and thought-provoking videos of unexplained phenomena and mysterious moments, looking to determine their validity. The footage in tonight's season premiere episode raises these questions: Did ocean scientists discover an unknown life form? Is blurry video of a mysterious creature in the snow the best yeti footage out there? Did a Las Vegas family have a close encounter with 10-foot-tall aliens in their backyard? And how did a man of average build effortlessly carry a huge boulder on his back?

Resident Alien

Syfy & USA Network, 11 p.m.

In the new episode "The Lonely Man," Harry (Alan Tudyk) and Asta (Sara Tomko) work together to get something Harry desperately needs.

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



'Grown Ups'

TRACY BENNETT

Taken 3 (2014, Action) Liam Neeson, Forest Whitaker **TNT, 6 p.m.**

Takers (2010, Action) Matt Dillon, Paul Walker **BET, 6 p.m.**

Walking Tall (2004, Action) Johnny Knoxville **SYFY, 6:30 p.m.**

Jurassic World Dominion (2022, Action) Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard **Bravo, 7 p.m.**

Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby (2006, Comedy) Will Ferrell, John C. Reilly **AMC, 7 p.m.**

Venom (2018, Action) Tom Hardy, Michelle Williams **FX, 7 p.m.**

Bride or Die (2025, Suspense) Kelley Jakle, Rachele Schank **LMN, 8 p.m.**

We're the Millers (2013, Comedy) Jennifer Aniston, Jason Sudeikis **TBS, 8 p.m.**

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (2021, Action) Simu Liu **FX, 9 p.m.**

Grown Ups (2010, Comedy) Adam Sandler, Kevin James **AMC, 9:30 p.m.**

Snakes on a Plane (2006, Suspense) Samuel L. Jackson, Kenan Thompson **VH1, 9:30 p.m.**

Independence Day (1996, Science fiction) Will Smith, Bill Pullman **Bravo, 10 p.m.**

CATCH A CLASSIC

The Music Man

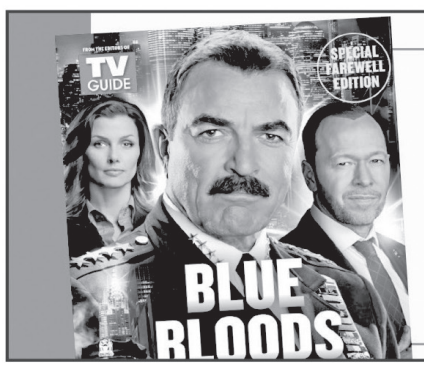
TCM, 12 a.m. (late night)

In this delightful Academy Award-winning 1962 film adaptation of the Broadway musical of the same name, a charismatic con man (Robert Preston) masquerades as a band instructor to swindle the locals into paying him to create a boys' marching band. Shirley Jones costars as the town librarian and piano instructor who wins his heart and eventually convinces the townspeople to forgive him, after he is outed by a disgruntled salesman from an earlier con. Additional costars include Buddy Hackett, Hermione Gingold, Paul Ford and Ron Howard. This film airs about midway into tonight's TCM "The Art of the Con" spotlight, which begins earlier in the evening with the road comedy/drama *Paper Moon* (1973), led by Ryan O'Neal and his daughter, Tatum O'Neal, who at age 10 became the youngest winner of an Oscar when she won for Best Supporting Actress, and the 1967 comedy *The Flim-Flam Man*, led by George C. Scott. "Con" movies following *The Music Man* later tonight are the Western comedy *Skin Game* (1971), starring James Garner and Louis Gossett Jr., and *The Swindle* (1955; aka *Il bidone*), an Italian drama directed by Federico Fellini.



WARNER BROS.

From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com



SPECIAL FAREWELL ISSUE

BLUE BLOODS: SPECIAL FAREWELL ISSUE

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WHILE SUPPLIES LAST



Photos by Jessica Gratigny

Thirty-six firefighters chosen for the 2026 Middle Georgia Firefighter Calendar participated in a photoshoot June 4 at the Guardian Centers of Georgia in Perry.

1: Firefighters Michael White, Roberto Julkes and Steven Harden pose for a photo during the photo shoot.

2: Firefighter Roberto Julkes poses for the media before his photoshoot. Proceeds from the calendar will benefit children's healthcare in Middle Georgia.

3: Firefighters Thomas Adkisson, Roberto Julkes, Steven Harden, Charles Shelton and Michael White lift weights before the photo shoot in Perry June 4.









Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody and courtesy Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce and Piedmont Macon

4-6: The Macon-Bibb County Fire Department held a promotional ceremony January 6. Three firefighters were promoted to captain, six to lieutenant, and nineteen to sergeant. **7:** Piedmont Macon hosted a three-day Summer Nurse Camp, welcoming high school juniors and seniors from across Middle Georgia. Students gained hands-on experience in infection control, shadowed seasoned nurses, and engaged in insightful panel discussions with nursing professionals. **8:** The Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce hosted a Macon & Eggs military roundtable June 5 at Central Georgia Technical College's Aerospace Training and Sustainment Center.

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

