The Macon Melody

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Commission approves new arena contract

Laura E. Corley
Senior Accountability Reporter
laura@maconmelody.com

The Macon-Bibb County Commission voted to approve a contract with an out-of-state company to plan for a new sports and event arena and oversee its construction.

After meeting behind closed doors, commissioners voted unanimously to approve a contract with MFA Program Management based in Memphis, Tennessee.

The company will be paid no more than 3.25% of the total cost of the project, according to county documents.

A sports and event arena is among items on the mayor's wish list for projects to build with $450 million to be collected through the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax voters approved in March. At least $50 million has already been earmarked for repaving roads.

Collection of the recently-approved penny-on-the-dollar tax won't begin until after the 2018 SPLOST collection reaches the $280 million cap, which is expected later this year.

Miller said earlier this year that the county would seek additional public and private funding to pay for the new arena.

The county also gave the green light for attorney Blake Sharpton to start obtaining financing for the mayor's $50 million road improvement project. Financing will allow the county to get money to begin work before the 2025 SPLOST money will be collected. However, the county will have to pay interest.

The 2026 budget was presented and is set for adoption at a meeting on June 17.

ACE tax dispute settled

In other business, commissioners voted to settle a long-brewing dispute over property taxes owed by the Academy of Classical Education, a state charter school on the northern edge of the county. The litigation dates back to 2017.

ACE Macon One, a limited liability company created by True North Construction Group, bought the property in 2014 and built the school. ACE Macon One owned the property until the academy bought it in Summer 2017.

The school alleged it should have been exempt from property taxes in 2017 but the county board of tax assessors denied the exemption because ACE Macon One owned the property on Jan. 1, 2017.

Court records from January show a judge found the academy was not entitled to a property tax exemption for 2017. However, the academy appealed in February.

The dispute ended Tuesday when commissioners unanimous-

See COMMISSION, Page A3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Bibb County Sheriff David Davis speaks with protesters outside of the county lockup in downtown Macon on Wednesday before the protest made its way to City Hall. Arden Latham stands beside him. Latham talked last week about her experience in the county lockup in December of 2023.

Maconites protest Bibb jail conditions, march to City Hall

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Macon citizens demanded changes to the Bibb County Jail at a protest Wednesday in front of the county lockup in downtown Macon. The "Inmates Lives Matter" rally followed a wave of recent outcries against the inhumane treatment of inmates, the release of images exposing the jail's squalid conditions and concerns with overpopulation.

Participants stood outside the county jail, chanting "no justice, no peace." Many also wore "incarcerated lives matter" T-shirts.

Protesters knocked on the glass doors of the sheriff's office, prompting Bibb County Sheriff David Davis to come outside and listen to their concerns.

Davis agreed with protesters, calling the conditions within the county jail "deplorable" and "antiquated."

"That's the only place I have to put them," he said of the inmates.

If he had permission from the courts, he would release every inmate today, Davis told the crowd, but where the incarcerated individuals end up is ulti-

See JAIL, Page A2

Students pitch in at Macon's summer free meal programs

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter

As Bibb County students set their notebooks aside and hang their backpacks up for the summer, many will forgo free breakfasts and lunches provided during the school year.

"Often, people don't realize that 5 or 7 or 10 miles away from where they live, there are children that might go hungry this summer," said June O'Neal, former executive director of The Mentors Project.

Although she recently retired from the Macon nonprofit, O'Neal — known by some as the "Mother Teresa" of Macon — is still finding ways to give back and will continue working with the organization through at least the end of the year.

"I'm all about feeding chil-

See MEALS, Page A2



Photo provided

Stratford students Sheefa Sodagar, Uma Pagadala and Trina Goorah take a picture outside of a home as they donate food for a summer meal program.

Periodical — Mail Label

'Untold Stories' exhibit highlights history of several Black individuals and their contributions at Hay House

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter

"Untold Stories," a new exhibit at Macon's historic Hay House, will shed light on the Black individuals who helped construct and operate the home.

The seven-story mansion is an architectural time capsule, offering visitors a glimpse into the lives of the three families that lived in the historic home from 1860 to 1962 before it was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1974.

The permanent exhibit will be installed in the home's original kitchen and chronicle the lives of the Black people who contributed to Hay House from enslavement to emancipation, the Jim Crow era, segregation and the Civil Rights Movement.

"It's very important to me that we begin telling those stories in a bigger way," Hay House Executive Director Aubrey Newby said.

Before becoming director last May, Newby formerly served on the Hay House board and the board for the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, which has owned the home since 1977.

Black historians compiled a timeline out of historical documents, newspapers and letters from the original families, said Newby, who noted that some research into the archives occurred in the early 2000s for an 'Invisible Hands' tour, but the new exhibit will be the first installation to take a close look at this previously untold side of history.

The "Untold Stories" exhibit reveals details about five of the nine enslaved people owned by the original house's inhabitants, the Johnson family. The images and documents displayed include the original bill of

See HAY HOUSE, Page A2



Evelyn Davidson / The Melody

Aubrey Newby, the executive director of the Hay House and a former board member with the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, takes a photo with pieces of the house's new "Untold Stories" exhibit, which is now open.

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Meals, from A1:

dren all the time," she said. "It doesn't matter if someone asks me to help do a feeding, I'm glad to do it."

O'Neal recently helped three Stratford Academy students, Sheefa Sodagar, Uma Pagadala and Trina Goorah, with a service project for their rhetoric and argumentation class.

The trio of students had volunteered with O'Neal in the past but wanted to find a way to provide groceries to children in underserved communities during school break.

"Giving them a little bit of relief, they really appreciated it," Pagadala said. "It was something small that we could do that made a big difference."

Sodagar, Pagadala and Goorah raised about $720 by hosting a "dress down day" at Stratford, where students could dress for St. Patrick's Day instead of wearing uniforms. Students and teachers paid $3 to participate.

They delivered groceries — items like taco ingredients, bread milk and ice cream — to the homes of 15 families.

"I think the fact that these girls wanted to step into neighborhoods that they might not be well acquainted with was just wonderful," O'Neal said.

The Summer Feeding Program is an annual initiative by The Mentor's Project to feed children during the summer when they're out of school and meals aren't guaranteed.

There will be several packing and distribution days throughout the month of June and July. For information about volunteering for the Mentors Project Summer Feeding Program call 478-954-4346.

Summer Feeding Program schedule:

- Pack and distribute bags on July 7 at 8 a.m.
- Pack bag days: June 26, July 10 and July 17 at 8 a.m.
- Distribute bags days: June 30, July 14 and July 21 at 8 a.m.

The Bibb County School District will also provide free breakfasts, from 8-8:30 a.m., and free lunches, from 12:30-1 p.m., Monday through Thursday until June 26 to children at Weaver Middle School, Southwest High School and SOAR Academy.

Breakfast will be available at John R. Lewis, Veterans and Martin Luther King Jr. elementary schools from 9-9:30 a.m. on the same dates. Lunch will be available at all sites.



Photo provided

Stratford students pack a grocery cart as they prepare to help with a summer meal program. The students worked with June O'Neal, the former executive director of the Mentors Project, to feed families in need.

Jail, from A1:

mately the court's decision.

He noted that many people violate probation and end up back in the county jail before seeing a judge. Davis also pointed to the number of incarcerated individuals with mental health challenges.

"We have got to get better treatment, better facilities and better medicine and better care for our individuals who have mental health challenges, so they won't wind up in my jail." he said.

The Bibb County Jail houses more than 1,000 people and a third of them have diagnosed mental health challenges, according to Davis, who said this is a problem faced throughout Georgia. The capacity of the jail is 966 people.

"That is my legal obligation to make sure that these individuals are taken care of," Davis told the protesters.

Seeking justice for Stephen Fossett

The conversation between Davis and the protesters intensified when people began asking about Stephen Fossett, whose death at the Bibb County Jail on May 25, 2024 sparked public dissent.

"Justice is served through the courts," Davis said in response.

Fossett's mother, Paula Platt, came forward to ask for accountability and address Davis directly for the first time in nearly a year.

"He didn't deserve to be treated like trash," Platt said.

"On a personal level I cannot even think about losing a child," Davis said.

"All he was doing was trying to (expletive) live and they killed my baby," Platt said, before stepping away from the confrontation.

"I'm so sorry," Davis told her. "We have to let the legal situation work its way out."

Platt said she wants to see real change occur and said the issues with the county jail's conditions and treatment of inmates is "systemic." She is still seeking justice for her son's death nearly a year later and calls the situation an indescribable pain, noting a lack of transparency and accountability.

"I'm thankful for the changes that are seeming to come about since my son has passed — that his life is making a difference in Bibb County," Platt told The Melody. "It's bittersweet because I feel like my son still didn't get his real justice."

She explained that her son had schizophrenia for more than two decades and lived in her home intermittently.

"Regardless of what anybody else thought about him, or what the officers thought about him, Stephen was my baby," Platt said. "He was loved."

Protest at city hall

The dialogue between Davis and those gathered outside the jail continued with protesters pressing the sheriff for answers.

"I know we're all standing around here because we see that some basic needs are not met, and I won't argue with you, but they're getting fed, they have medical care," Davis told the protesters before several shouts from the crowd cut him off.

Davis acknowledged issues with maintenance and cleanup, but said inmates throw food and destroy things.

Arden Latham shared with Davis and the other protesters her experience being held in the county lockup. Latham said she spent 24 hours in jail in December 2023 after she was arrested for allegedly growing marijuana, a charge Latham said was false.

She recounted seeing women sleeping on floors and tables in the common area. The toilet in her cell was broken and there was no running water or electricity, according to Latham, who said she had to negotiate with other inmates for drinking water.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Paula Platt, the mother of Stephen Fossett who died in Bibb County Jail custody last year, holds a Justice for Stephen Fossett sign. Platt asked Sheriff David Davis for accountability and justice in the wake of her son's death.

"That will live with me forever, not because of what I saw happen to me, but because of what I saw happen to all those other girls who were not lucky," Latham said of her brief experience.

Other protesters suggested a citizen advisory board and expressed interest in having Davis meet with people regularly, to which he agreed.

County commissioner Stanley Stewart also attended the protest and encouraged folks to take their concerns about the jail's physical conditions to the mayor.

"The ultimate decision rests with the mayor and the commission as to what type of facility is going to get built and how much money is going to be available to build it," Davis told The Melody.

The protesters invited Davis to continue the conversation at city hall and asked for more involvement in the discussions between him and the mayor.

"We're asking for you to walk two blocks with us," Arden said.

Davis agreed to join them and the rally relocated to the steps of city hall, but the mayor was not there.

Hay House, A1:

sale for Adeline Hall, an enslaved woman who became a fixture in the Johnson household and stayed with the family even after emancipation.

Visitors to Hay House will be able to hear recordings of Chester Davis, the Hay family's butler and chauffeur who later guided tour groups through the historic home when it first became a museum.



Evelyn Davidson / The Melody

A pair of photos depict Black former residents of Macon's historic Hay House at the home's new exhibit, title 'Untold Stories'.

Primus Moore, an enslaved brick mason and plasterer, is recognized in the exhibit for contributing to the home's intricate and lavish designs, like the decorative ceilings. He later went on to become the first minority contractor in Macon and worked on the City Hall building.

None of the house's advanced innovations — indoor bathrooms, running water, ventilation system and gas lighting — would have been possible without the work of Black individuals running the Hay House's day-to-day operations, according to Newby.

The home is an "architectural marvel" and an "asset to this community," he said. He hopes students who visit the historic landmark will see some of their own history reflected in the "Untold Stories" exhibit.

"It needs to be relevant to all of our community," Newby said. "Everyone has a part of the story here and we have to tell that part of the story."

The permanent exhibit is open to the public, with new installations being added over time.

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Recent drownings add to history of death at Lake Tobesofkee

Laura E. Corley
Senior Accountability Reporter



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The Michael Dewayne Jones Public Fishing Area was cordoned off by yellow crime scene tape on May 23 after three young boys went under the water at Lake Tobesofkee. Two of the boys died, one the same day and the other nearly a week later. The two deaths are the latest of several drownings at the lake over the past decade.

Nearly a week after a child drowned in Lake Tobesofkee, a second child who was pulled from the water died Saturday.

Kiheen Johnson Jeffrey, 8, was pronounced dead in the pediatric intensive care unit at The Medical Center about 3:30 a.m., Macon-Bibb County Coroner Leon Jones said.

Jeffrey was in the water at the Michael Dewayne Jones Public Fishing Area along with 7-year-old Tristan Cornelius and a 10-year-old boy on the afternoon of May 23 when "they suddenly went under," according to a news release from the Bibb County Sheriff's Office.

Cornelius was unresponsive when emergency responders pulled him from the water. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

"They weren't swimming. They were looking at the ducks and fell in the water," Jones said. "The person that was supposed to have been watching them walked away or turned around."

The pair of drownings are not the first tragic losses of human life to occur on the lake, according to Jones and Telegraph archives.

In fact, the fishing area where the children were recovered is named in honor of Michael Dewayne Jones, a firefighter who died while saving three children from drowning in the lake on May 21, 2011. Jones was 24 years old.

A year before Jones died, a pair of anglers perished after their boat sank. The bodies of Willie Buckles, 52, and his uncle, 62-year-old Frank Roquemore, were recovered near Claystone Park on Tuesday, March 10, 2010, roughly three days after the two took a boat out on the water to catch fish Saturday night.

In August 2015, a 3-year-old boy drowned beneath the dock at the lakeside restaurant Fish N' Pig, less than a half mile from the public fishing area where the three youngsters went under.

More recently, on June 26, 2022, a 2-year-old boy drowned on the eastern side of Claystone Beach near the sea wall. The boy was reported missing by family members who said he had drifted out of their sight. Minutes later, a park ranger pulled the boy from water about four feet deep. The child was taken to an Atlanta hospital and pronounced dead that afternoon.

Weeks before that, on July 10, 2022, a 31-year-old drowned while in an inner tube float that was being pulled by a boat. The body of Tyler Raye Renard Moss was pulled from the water near Claystone Park the next day.

Jones said he believes everyone ought to wear a life jacket on the water.

"Everybody needs a life jacket," Jones said. "If you're going to be in the water you need to wear a life jacket."

Jones said the county put life jackets at Amerson River Park, a hot spot for drowning deaths, but the effort was short-lived because many people who borrowed them did not return them for others to use.

19-year-old North Ga. student who was in immigration detention after dropped traffic charges gets bond

Grant Blankenship and Sofi Gratas
GPB News

Ximena Arias-Cristobal, the 19-year-old North Georgia college student who had been in immigration detention for over two weeks, has been granted bond and will go home.

Arias-Cristobal was detained by Immigration Customs and Enforcement after she landed in the Whitfield County Jail but before the Dalton Police Department dropped the traffic charge against her for driving without a license.

She will be released by ICE on $1,500 bond.

"It was a very quick hearing; we were called fifth in the group," attorney Dustin Baxter said. "I did explain to the judge that her dad had been given a bond and that she wanted bragging rights in the family and to get a lower bond than he did."

Baxter said attorneys for the government said little in the hearing and offered no explanation for why it took 16 days to set what is the minimum bond allowed in immigration proceedings.

"So now it's a matter of how quickly the family can pay the bond, and get Ximena out and breathing fresh air again," Baxter said.

Hannah Jones said posting bond won't be a problem.

"Ximena actually called me a few minutes after we got the news that she was granted bond and we both were jumping up and down," Jones said.

The Gofundme that Jones set up for Arias-Cristobal, whose younger sister is a friend of Jones' daughter and who babysits for the Jones family, is sitting at around $90,000. Jones, a Dalton native, said the money came first from home, Whitfield County.

"It started in our community, but it has reached out all over the world," Jones said. "Her story is so compelling because everybody recognizes the humanity in this story and that this was a child. She'd never had any say when she immigrated to the U.S. There's no pathway to citizenship for her. So it's just it was so obviously wrong to most of the world to lock up this 19-year-old girl."

Ximena's father, Jose Arias-Tovar, was detained a few weeks before she was and spent about a month in ICE detention before being released about a week ago. He was arrested and detained in April for driving over the speed limit.

On Wednesday, he said the family was planning to have someone drive to the ICE office in Atlanta to deliver a check for Ximena's bail — he said lawyers told the family that's the quickest way to get payment processed. They hoped to have Ximena home by Thursday morning.

"Now we need to schedule a meeting with her lawyer to see what path we take," Arias-Tovar said.

Before her detention, Arias-Cristobal had no path to legal immigration status at all. Family attorney Dustin Baxter said that, ironically, her father's detention may have changed that.

"In the absence of any meaningful legislative action on the DREAM Act or anything that would give her status through DACA, she's going to be attaching her case to her dad," Baxter said.

Baxter said Arias-Tovar will apply for something called "Cancelation of Removal."

"If he can prove to a judge that he's been here for more than 10 years, he's a person of good moral character, and he's got U.S. citizen children, who would suffer exceptional and extremely unusual hardship if he was removed, then he could be granted permanent resident status," Baxter said.

And then, his eldest daughter would, too.

After living in the U.S. for 15 years without legal status, Arias-Tovar said he had never had an interaction with law enforcement until his arrest and detainment by ICE in April.

Upon his release, Arias-Tovar said his lawyer is aiming to get him a work permit that will allow him to stay in the country for five years.

"For me, it was a miracle, because now the law is very strict with the new administration — they're practically not forgiving anything," he said. "The words of the judge were that I did not pose a danger to the United States, and that I could get out on bail."

He is hopeful that his daughter will have a similar chance, and wishes for her to have a "brilliant future, which is what we came here for."

But first there will be a party to welcome his daughter home.

Commission, from A1:

ly approved to settle the matter and accept $297,362 from the academy, the full value of unpaid taxes plus penalties.

Next, the commission voted to direct $96,595 to the academy from the county's school speed zone camera fund. The money will pay for panic alarms, mapping software and fencing for the perimeter of the more than 40-acre campus on New Forsyth Road.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the board voted to approve:

- A contract with Tuff Dogg Lawn Care LLC for landscaping at dozens of county parks at a cost of $396,000 using recreation department money.
- An agreement with Sheridan Construction to buy concrete, masonry and electrical equipment for the relocation of the airfield electrical vault from Sheridan Construction for $805,561 using airport fund money.
- Acceptance of $2.3 million in Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant money from the state for repaving roads plus the appropriation of the required 30% match of $715,515 to be paid for with 2018 SPLOST money.

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Opinion

My dad's country music – glad I finally listened


Ed Grisamore

My father was never to the left of anything, politically or otherwise, except on the radio dial.

When I was with him in the car, the buttons and knobs were always permanently fixed on 590. WPLO-AM in Atlanta was about as far to the left as you could go without dropping off the dashboard.

It was cringeworthy country music. Johnny Cash singing about prison. Gene Autry trying to climb back in the saddle. Tammy Wynette standing by her man.

I swore if I had to listen to "Harper Valley P.T.A." again on the way to school, I would jump out of the car.

It's not that I didn't want to be seen with my dad. I loved the man. I just didn't want to be "heard" with him.

It was embarrassing to be within an earshot of Patsy Cline. I requested the car windows be rolled up when Merle Haggard wailed about being proud to be an Okie from Muskogee.

My dad's roots were in the rural Midwest. His music was three chords with the usual themes – trucks, trains, prison, drinking, cheating and love gone wrong.

His life wasn't defined by any of those. But this was his music. As an urban teenager, I certainly didn't speak that language. Looking back now, "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" was more my tune than 17 subliminal minutes of "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." I just didn't know it at the time.

My father never tried to convert me to the land of twang. He simply kept company on the western end of the radio dial, where the Rhinestone Cowboy and Coal Miner's Daughter hung out.

The only time I can remember him ever requesting anything specific for Father's Day was when he asked for a collection of Chet Atkins' greatest hits. I got him both volumes on cassette.

Then I switched teams.

No, I didn't wake up one morning and trade in my Bruce Springsteen albums for The Oak Ridge Boys. There were no snap judgments or moments of epiphany. Change was neither sudden nor swift, instant or immediate. It wasn't sweeping or emotional, like being baptized or sprinkled with pixie dust.

It was more like having an aversion to eating turnips as a child, then acquiring a taste for them.

It took a long dirt road for me to crawl under the big tent. I taught myself to play the guitar. I bought a 10-gallon cowboy hat. I even tried chewing tobacco. (It was not pleasant. If you swallow Red Man, it will make you turn green.) When Junior Samples, of "Hee Haw" fame, walked into the store where I was working in high school, he was like a rock star in overalls. I wish I had gotten his autograph.

I began sticking my toe in the water with John Denver, Jim Croce, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt. I discovered John Prine, Jackson Browne, Dave Loggins, Dan Fogelberg and Jimmy Buffett.

Those artists weren't purebred country. But they were advocates who helped me make the transition. The 1970s and '80s were the decades of the crossovers. Country rock came around with The Eagles, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Pure Prairie League. Southern rockers like Charlie Daniels, Marshall Tucker, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers and Wet Willie all had country influences.

In my last two years of college, my circle of friends all knew the words to "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" We went to see Waylon and Willie in concert in Atlanta. On Thursday nights, we would listen to country cover bands at the Frog Pond Lounge — a bar at the Ramada Inn in Athens.

My senior year, I got to interview Dolly Parton for the campus newspaper. As a sophomore, I had an art professor who indoctrinated me with Jerry Jeff Walker and David Alan Coe songs as background music for his slideshows of Van Gogh and Monet.

When I moved to Macon to start my newspaper career, I met a young lady for the first time at her office. It was a professional visit, but she made my heart pitter-patter.

I was trying to summon the courage to ask her for a date. In the parking lot, she glanced in my car window and noticed 8-track tapes scattered across the back seat.

"I love country music," she said.

"Would you like to go to lunch?" I asked.

In July, we will celebrate our 43rd anniversary.

We named our first puppy (the product of the blended marriage of our dogs) "Glory" from the Kenny Rogers song "Blaze of Glory." When our oldest son, Ed, was a baby, he had one of those swing rockers, and I would sing to him – "Swingin' " by John Anderson.

Over the years, we went to see George Strait at the Macon Coliseum and Don Williams at the former amphitheater at Lake Sinclair. We have been to the Grand Old Opry in Nashville. I was a big fan of Ricky Skaggs, and I have evidence that she listens to Alan Jackson's "Precious Memories" every single time she is in the car.

I once sat in the living room where Trisha Yearwood grew up in Monticello. Her mother, Gwen, had me autograph a book I wrote for a guy that Trisha was dating named Garth Brooks. I was able to go backstage at a concert at Theatre Dublin to meet 12-time national fiddle champion Randy Howard in 1999. Five weeks later, he died of cancer.

I have interviewed Ronnie Milsap and Patti Loveless. I wrote a story about June Forester McCormick. She taught Braille at the Georgia Academy for the Blind when her daughter was a student there. She was one of the Forester Sisters, the first act in Billboard history to have their first 15 singles all reach the Top 10 on the country charts.

I also met a man named Don McClain, when he was a sergeant with the Bibb County's Sheriff's Office. He played the dobro on the hit song "Desperado" by The Eagles. But his biggest 10 minutes of fame came in 1982 when he pulled over country legend George Jones for driving his lawn mower down the middle of a busy Tennessee highway.

Laura Starling, Macon's queen of country music at WDEN-FM, has become a dear friend. Our three oldest grandchildren attended the Jason Aldean concert at Macon's Atrium Amphitheatre in October and are making plans for the Morgan Wallen concert in Miami this summer. Our youngest grandson has been singing the chorus to Luke Combs' cover of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" since he was 3 years old.

It's hard to believe this will be my 19th Father's Day without my father. He truly was country when country wasn't cool. Glad I finally listened.

Ed Grisamore is not a country music star, but he was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2006 in the "Spoken Word" category.

Georgia receives a 'D' for electricity competition


Marc Hyden

Georgians are bracing themselves for above average summer temperatures and corresponding high electric bills, but the Atlanta City Council believes it has the solution. In an effort to curtail energy costs, "Legislation being considered by the City Council would create new stipulations around the materials used for building and replacing roofs to steer construction away from darker, sun-attracting colors to lighter, reflective colors," the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. "These new 'reflective roofing standards' would apply to all new construction — including roof replacements."

Kudos to the City Council for looking to solve a widespread issue, but it ought to tread carefully. If passed, this kind of proposal could spread to other Peach State cities, and I am not convinced that it is a particularly great idea. For starters, I am generally not a big fan of costly government mandates, and with housing affordability remaining a nagging issue, adding additional regulations that may drive up housing costs further seems problematic. Instead, if the City Council wants to lower energy rates, it should challenge the Georgia General Assembly to foster more competition.

Georgia's electricity market is an aberration that stands in stark contrast to free market capitalism, and as a result, it harms consumers. In fact, some of my R Street Institute colleagues published an in-depth study on all 50 states' electricity markets and graded them based on how well they promote electricity competition. Georgia received an embarrassing "D" grade. So much for being a national leader on energy.

The reason for this nearly-failing grade is that Georgia maintains an archaic system that virtually grants electric providers monopolies over vast geographical regions in exchange for increased government regulation from the Public Service Commission. "Georgia offers limited opportunities for competitive choice," the study reads. "Large customers… have the option to choose an alternative electricity supplier if they are a new customer and if either their site is already served by an alternative supplier or if the customer makes significant changes to the location that affect usage." Residential customers — like you and I — are given zero choice whatsoever and are captive to the local electric monopoly.

"Although Georgia Power is required to utilize competitive solicitations to meet future resource needs," the report continued, "it has recently sought waivers from such requirements, citing 'urgency' of resource needs." What's more, Georgia has not joined what's known as a regional transmission organization, which creates interstate partnerships that provide access to reduced cost electricity.

Meanwhile, more than a dozen states permit consumers to choose their electric provider, and the competition drives prices down. "Since competition was fully implemented, the 14 jurisdictions with retail electricity competition saw prices decline 0.3% between 2008 and 2020 compared to a 20.7% price increase in the states lacking retail competition," Pacific Research Institute found.

You can see this at play in Georgia too. Just since 2023, the Public Service Commission has approved six rate increases for metro Atlanta's Georgia Power customers. Yet they cannot shop around because of Georgia's monopoly system. If they want electricity, they have only one choice, and if they don't like the prices or the manner of generation (nuclear, coal, wind, etc.), then tough luck.

There is a much better system than this. Georgia should instead allow consumers to have a choice and let electricity providers compete for their business. This will keep prices lower and let market forces — rather than the Public Service Commission — reward companies. Moreover, Georgia ought to join a regional transmission organization. Studies have shown that joining one can save many billions of dollars. Smaller steps, like enabling the sharing of customer usage information collected by smart meters installed across Georgia Power's territory, would allow consumers to figure out ways to save money through energy efficiency measures.

Despite this, a majority of Georgia's policymakers have yet to show serious interest in electricity competition. Even modest proposals have been met with derision. Earlier this year, Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, R-Rome, introduced a measure to protect residential ratepayers from having to pay for energy costs created by electricity guzzling data centers. The bill stalled to the dismay of ratepayers. Another proposal by Sen. Hufstetler would have re-instituted a consumer advocate to participate in proceedings at the Public Service Commission, but it also stalled.

These are not the only means of reducing electricity costs. Certainly, if you want to install a "cool roof," then by all means please do. "Individual homes with lighter-colored roofs would see an average of up to 5% savings in energy bills annually," according to the Journal-Constitution. However, if you want consumer choice and more serious savings, then electricity competition must be a priority.

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

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

1675 Montpelier Ave., Macon, Georgia 31201
478-200-7403 | news@maconmelody.com

Executive Director — DuBose Porter | dubose@maconmelody.com
Sports Editor — Micah Johnston | micah@maconmelody.com | 478-200-7893

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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If you find a penny, pick it up — it might be the last one


Kyle Dominy

Back in my school days, which are getting further and further behind me, you could get a decent lunch for $2.

Every day my mother would give me two green portraits of President George Washington to make sure I had sustenance for the day. Without fail, without reminder, on my way out the door, she would hand over dollar bills. Until one day she didn't.

This may come as a shock to you, but I was once a stupid teenager. One day this stupid teenager was sent into the store with his older brother to buy a few things. After running our errand and returning to the car, my brother dropped a penny from the change given to him during the transaction. Mind you, this money was not ours, but belonged to our parents who charged us with the task.

He stopped to find the lost coin, while I urged him to get a move on. We had better things to do than look for a measly one cent piece.

The slimy rat, as brothers can be sometimes, recalled the story to our mother, who was waiting for our return. On the next school day what did I receive as lunch money? $1.99. No twisted mind on earth could come up with better creative punishments than my mother.

The first half of the day was not spent focused on my education but surveying my surroundings for an errant penny. Thankfully most people feel the same as I used to about the small, seemingly insignificant copper coin, and I found sufficient funds to eat that day.

But I learned a valuable lesson that day. Money is money, and it comes with responsibility, especially if it is not yours. A penny saved is a penny earned, they say. A penny found may make the difference between food in the belly and going hungry.

Finding a penny is supposedly a sign of good luck. I'm a firm believer in that now. But the days of finding such lucky coins may be coming to an end. The U.S. will be phasing out production of the little disc of metal stamped with the likeness of Abraham Lincoln, as a cost-saving measure. Manufacturing the one-cent coin now costs well over that, and it just doesn't make financial cents (see what I did there?) to continue making them.

The decision comes with major financial implications. Sure, ceasing production will save money, but then, as the coins disappear, retailers are most certainly not likely to round their prices down.

I'm more interested in the other changes that might come in a world with no pennies. What will we toss into fountains to make a wish? What will we find for good luck? What will get lost in sofa cushions and rattle around in the washing machine, forgotten in a pair of pants? Or teach my kids the importance of financial responsibility?

It just doesn't sound as good using a nickel.

Postcards from a summer day



Ed Grisamore

I have a tradition at the beginning of every summer. I pick a random day, with a random itinerary and embark on a writing adventure of random acts of "findness."

I call it "Postcards from a Summer Day."

Earlier this week, I saddled my pony and traversed the city. I was a front-line journalist on a mission to collect slices of life in familiar and unfamiliar places. I watched the day wake up and wind down across 109 miles and almost nine hours in the driver's seat of a Toyota RAV4.

It brought out the wanderlust in me. I played the proverbial fly on the wall and gnat on the front bumper. I meandered through parking lots, skirted the edges of ballfields, orbited downtown avenues and discovered roads less traveled.

I was on so many roundabouts, I'm still dizzy. I bounced from College Hill to Breezy Hill to Pleasant Hill to Coleman Hill to Forest Hill to Beall's Hill. I snatched views from Summit Avenue to Vista Circle. I even saw a boat in a yard on Easy Street.

My hometown excursion included an unscripted cast of backyard gardeners, dog walkers, bench sitters and front porch enthusiasts. I lost count of the number of satellite dishes I observed. (I used to think they were the unofficial state flower.)

I'm not sure if I've ever seen so many American flags. They were everywhere – hanging from porches, fences, carports and trees. There were miniature flags placed along curbs. I don't think it's just because Flag Day is next week and the Fourth of July is approaching. There is plenty of patriotism on display in this town.

On Magnolia Street, I waved to a woman on the steps of a front porch. It was a day when everybody waved back. ... At Northeast Plaza on Shurling Drive, I met a man from Cordele named David who was selling a bounty of summer fruits and vegetables out of the back of his yellow Dodge truck. (I left with a watermelon rolling around on the floorboard of my back seat.)

As I topped the bridge on Little Richard Penniman Boulevard, I paused to appreciate the splendid view of downtown from that lofty perch on Second Street. ... The colorful digital sign in front of John R. Lewis Elementary on Greenbriar Road announced "School's Out For Summer!" But a block away on Edna Place, class had not been dismissed for the school zone cameras. (Might want to remember to slow down in the mornings and afternoons.)

At the Wellness Center on Northside Drive, I noticed a man wearing a red baseball cap going in for his morning exercise. ... I watched a woman from Tennessee checking out of a hotel on River Place Drive. There was a cigarette dangling from her lips as she packed the back of her Jeep, so my guess is she wasn't in a hurry to join that man on the track at the Wellness Center.

I witnessed various modes of transportation. I was surprised to see a man in an electric wheelchair take off down Boulevard, then turn down North Avenue like a dog who had jumped the fence. Near the corner of Roff Avenue and Clisby Place, a fellow with locs was pedaling a bicycle. After supper, I saw a young lady wearing a backpack maneuver her electric scooter along the sidewalk on Forest Avenue. ...

At the International House of Pancakes on Tom Hill Sr. Boulevard, I observed two tiny birds scampering between parked cars for their breakfast buffet — a piece of toast someone had dropped in the parking lot.

At a house on Vacation Drive in East Macon, a young girl wrapped herself in a beach towel after she got out of an inflatable pool in the front yard. ... I saw folks chilling out in the Adirondack chairs under the umbrellas on the plaza at the foot of Cotton Avenue.

I drove along the bumpy bricks on Orange Terrace, then looped back to "Orange Barrels Boulevard," better known as all the construction work around Interstate 75 and Interstate 16. (There are also orange-and-white striped barrels on stretches of Vineville Avenue's "Torpedo Alley" where the reversible lane lights are not functioning.)

The day brought its share of chores to check off the list. A man was cutting his lawn on Northwoods Drive, and a yard crew was trimming the shrubbery at a home on Callaway Drive. ... At the Ocmulgee Mounds, I watched a weary older couple from Minnesota retreat to their car after walking out to the Great Temple Mound and Earth Lodge.

I chuckled as I passed the sign at Sid's Sandwich Shop on Forsyth Street. The marquee read: "122 Years Ago Two Brothers Said They Could Fly. They Were Wright." ... At Amerson Park, a mother pushed her child in a stroller along the riverwalk near the stone pavilion and overlook. ... In the late afternoon, I watched a young boy in bright red shorts hurry up the hill at Henry Burns Park.

On Corbin Avenue, I glanced over to see the aluminum chairs hanging from the hackberry tree behind Ingleside Village Pizza. Or, as I like to call it, Macon's other "chairy" tree. ... When I saw an oscillating sprinkler watering the grass in a front yard in Riverside Park, I looked up at the street sign and laughed. I was on Misty Valley Drive. ... At dusk, I came upon a woman out for a walk in Wesleyan Woods. She had AirPods plugged in her ears, and I almost stopped to ask whether she was listening to music or a podcast.

I watched youngsters getting tennis lessons at the John Drew Smith Tennis Center and teenagers shooting hoops at Daisy Park and North Highlands Park. ... I was a bit emotional when I stopped at the Mulberry Community Garden on New Street and looked over at the familiar cluster of banana trees growing near the fence. They are offshoots of the banana tree my dad got at a nursery in Florida when we were returning from a family beach vacation more than 60 years ago.

At Carolyn Crayton Park, I

See POSTCARDS, Page A7



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Bill Snow tosses a treat to Evelyn Shimek's 5 year old chocolate lab, Cooper, at Amerson River Park Tuesday morning. Snow's dog Tish, a 12 year old mix-breed sits in the background. Shimek and Snow met two years ago and walk their dogs together.

Local Knowledge: Feeling smart today? You're going to need it

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

Today's round of trivia is the merging traffic of an actor, two baseball players, a veterinarian, a TV personality, a pilot, a soldier, a singer and a senator.

Good luck. You're going to need it.

1. The late Dr. Mack Butler owned Butler's Pet Hospital in Macon, where he practiced veterinary medicine for 56 years. He had several celebrity animals come through his office over the years, including "Silver" from "The Lone Ranger" television series. What did he treat the famous horse for?

(A) Fleas
(B) Sunburn
(C) Hoof in Mouth disease
(D) Whiplash

2. "Trody Tro" was the signature signoff for which WMAZ-TV personality, who died in 2021 at the age of 94?

(A) Doris Martin
(B) Bill Powell
(C) George Jobin
(D) Del Ward

3. Along with Pete Rose, "Shoeless" Joe Jackson's lifetime banishment from Major League Baseball was recently reinstated, and both are now eligible for the Hall of Fame. Rose had ties to Macon, having played for the minor league Macon Peaches in 1962, the year before he was National League Rookie of the Year with the Cincinnati Reds. Four years after being implicated in the Chicago Black Sox Scandal of 1919, Jackson surfaced in Americus, Georgia, doing what?

(A) Working as a bellhop at the Windsor Hotel
(B) Opening a shoe store on South Lee Street
(C) Playing for the semi-pro Americus team in the independent South Georgia League
(D) Serving as youth minister at First Baptist of Americus

4. Which song does NOT make a reference to U.S. 41, the highway that once served as the main route through Georgia to Florida before Interstate 75 was built?

(A) "Jesus, Take the Wheel" by Carrie Underwood
(B) "Ramblin' Man" by The Allman Brothers Band
(C) "I Don't Even Know Your Name" by Alan Jackson
(D) "Nothing But the Wheel" by Patty Loveless

5. In 1979, William A. Connelly became the only Georgian – and only the sixth person in history – to serve as sergeant major, the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. Where in Middle Georgia was Connelly born?

(A) Warner Robins
(B) Forsyth
(C) Dry Branch
(D) Monticello

6. Which of the following is NOT true about the late actor Sam Edwards, who was born in Macon on May 26, 1915?

(A) He appeared in more than 60 different television series, including "Gunsmoke" and "Dragnet," and was the banker on "Little House on the Prairie."
(B) He was the voice of Thumper in Walt Disney's animated classic "Bambi" in 1942.
(C) He opened Sam's Club, a chain of member-only retail outlets owned by Walmart.
(D) He entertained the Army troops of Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and Gen. George Patton during World War II.

7. Macon's Miller Field operated as the only airfield in Georgia outside of Atlanta in 1926. Five years later, which famous pilot landed there and spent the night in Macon?

(A) Charles Lindbergh
(B) Chuck Yeager
(C) Amelia Earhart
(D) Wilbur Wright

8. Actor Felix Knight, who was born in Macon, was on his deathbed at Calvary Hospital in New York in 1998, when he said: "For a country boy from a cotton patch in Macon, Georgia, I think I did pretty good." He was best known for having the romantic lead as Tom-Tom in the holiday musical "Babes in Toyland" starring which famous comedy duo?

(A) Laurel and Hardy
(B) Cheech and Chong

See KNOWLEDGE, Page A6

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Knowledge, from A5:

(C) Abbott and Costello
(D) Smothers Brothers

9. When Macon's main post office opened on College Street in November 1964, among the distinguished guests was Rep. Carl Vinson, of Milledgeville. Vinson served in the U.S. Congress 25 consecutive terms, longer than anyone in history, and was considered the "father of the two-ocean Navy." His nephew became a U.S. senator and was also known as a champion of a strong national defense. What is his name?
(A) Newt Gingrich
(B) Sam Nunn
(C) Sonny Perdue
(D) Larry Walker

10. Former Lanier High athlete Louie Wanninger was the son of Pee Wee Wanninger, a teammate of Babe Ruth on the 1925 New York Yankees. Why is Pee Wee Wanninger the answer to a trivia question?
(A) He had a candy bar named after him to rival the Baby Ruth.
(B) At 5-foot-7, he became a famous horse jockey who raced for the Triple Crown.
(C) He was the only guy named Pee Wee to win a Gold Glove.
(D) As a rookie in 1925, he ended one consecutive game streak and started another. He replaced Everett Scott at shortstop on May 5, snapping Scott's then-major league record of 1,307 consecutive games. On June 1, Lou Gehrig pinch-hit for Wanninger in the eighth inning against the Washington Senators. Gehrig then replaced Wally Pipp at first base to start his famous record streak of 2,130 consecutive games. (Later broken by Cal Ripken Jr.)

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

REPORT CARD: (8-10) Express Lane (6-7) Interstate Highway (3-5) Two-Lane Blacktop (0-2) Dirt Road.

Friday, from A8:

to love and adore. I guess our vibe is all about creativity, beauty, community and homecoming."

Van Gunten made one other striking comment in relation to the place. She said she believed every gift given should be thoughtful and meaningful but that it shouldn't be hard to find.

She said she wanted to make The Rabbit Hole a welcoming, inclusive place that's easy to come to where meaningful items and gifts are easy to find.

***

Bear's Books
835 Forsyth St.
thebearsbooks.com.

"I definitely enjoy seeing the people who are out and looking for things to do with their family or friends on First Fridays," said Margaret Harrington, owner and operator of Bear's Books. Harrington's nickname since childhood has been Bear, and that's how the shop got its name – not from the Mercer University Bears, though she has taught introductory creative writing, essay writing and fiction workshops there.

Harrington opened Bear's Books in 2023 and started staying open until 7:30 p.m. on First Fridays not long after.

"We're here to let people enjoy the shop, browse the books and other literature and writing items," she said. "It's just a matter of being here, enjoying one another's company and maybe getting a book discussion going here or there. It's a nice, relaxed atmosphere with lots of books.

"Last First Friday, we had the nicest group of people who brought their friends who were visiting from Greenville, S.C. They were very complimentary of the store and we were very happy to be ambassadors for Macon."

Harrington described Bear's Books as an inclusive place for people who love to read and want to connect with other readers, from children to adults.

"Community is very important to us and we want to have a welcoming space for people to come in and find something they like," she said. "And there's no judgment about what it is, whether it's romance, horror, literary fiction or whatever. We believe reading elevates every one of us personally and all of us as a community."

What are her favorite reads?

It's a nearly impossible task for a book lover like Harrington to narrow favorites down to a manageable list, but I coaxed examples of three she truly loved out of her.

"These are really special," she said. "The first is the book that let me know I could write about people and things I knew: 'Rainey,' by Clyde Edgerton. The second one I love because I love books in which places function as characters. It's 'Empire Falls' by Richard Russo.

"And then there's 'Pride and Prejudice' because I'm absolutely obsessed with Jane Austen. It's not the book's romance; it's her being so socially acute and the banter between characters."

There's almost always something going on at Bear's Books whether it's First Friday or not, and that's especially true in summer. A summer adult reading program just launched on May 30 so there's plenty of time to get in on that. There's an ongoing monthly book club.

There's a cookbook club meeting on June 17. There's a summer bingo game where reading and community activities give chances to win prizes. And there's a 9-10 a.m. Thursday morning mystery book club for third through fifth graders.

There's more, no doubt, but you should just contact Bear's Books for the lowdown on what's up and how it all works.

Harrington and those in the shop clearly love reading, and for Harrington, reading is closely tied to her late mother, Margaret Anne Carswell, and to her mother's University of Georgia doctoral dissertation, "How Kids Crack the Code of Reading."

"I was the Guinea pig for it," she said. "I learned to read at three and read to my parents and their friends and my kindergarten class. I was a reading circus monkey.

"I can't remember a time I didn't love books. It was my mother's gift to me. She suffered from dementia, and, as it progressed, she couldn't read really involved things. In the last few weeks of her life, we read her favorite book together, the children's book 'Heidi.'

"A highlight for me at the store is when someone tells me they enjoyed a book I recommended, but the greatest highlight was that my mother got to come see Bear's Books before she died. It was like, 'See what your love of reading has done.'"

Unfortunately, a third option on Forsyth Street won't be open for First Friday this month. In fact, it'll be closing at the end of June to become a fully online shopping venture with some market pop-ups now and then. MD Exchange, a delightfully quirky vintage and antique treasures shop, used to be a First Friday spot, but no longer. But I understand they have a great moving-out sale going on.

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

Homeowners do not dig armadillos


Karol Kelly

As I was scaling a hillside controlling invasive trees in my family's woods last weekend, I stumbled across what appeared to be invasive wildlife as well. I found three 'dens' with dug out piles of fresh soil. They were approximately 100 ft apart and nestled beneath stumps or fallen branches. The openings were eight to nine inches in diameter. Since it was likely that I was seeing signs of armadillos, I figured it was time to do a little research.

There is only one species of armadillo that lives in Georgia, the nine banded armadillo. It is the only mammal in Georgia that has a "shell." However, it is a myth that they can curl up into a ball to protect themselves. They live near streams but avoid places that are excessively wet or dry. Armadillos are common in south and central Georgia and are continuing their pilgrimage northward. However, because armadillos do not tolerate cold temperatures, their migration is likely limited. They also do not tolerate excessively warm temperatures, preferring 85°F or less. Since armadillos are temperature sensitive, they are most active in the daytime during the winter months and most active at night during summertime. They spend the remainder of the time in their burrows.

One armadillo can have five to 10 burrows and their home territory can range up to 22 acres. Much of the time outside of their burrows is spent foraging. They "hunt" using smell and sound. Their diet consists mostly of insects, but studies have shown they also consume fruit, seeds, and a variety of other protein sources and plant matter. Although their diet can be beneficial to homeowners because they feed on white grubs and fire ants, their digging is much more of a nuisance. Armadillos cause damage to lawns by digging holes that are a few inches deep and wide while they are foraging. They can also uproot desirable landscape plants as they hunt. While the damage is not considered to be a great economic loss, it is a problem for those striving for the perfect lawn.

As with many other landscape nuisances, armadillo control is not easy or simple. There are no repellents or pesticides registered for use on armadillos. Insecticides, however, can be used to reduce the insect population, thus reducing the amount of food available for their foraging. Live trapping is another option for armadillo control. Wire cages are placed along natural barriers or at burrow entrances. Boards are placed in a V-shape funneling the animal into the trap. There is not any specific bait that has been shown to increase the success of capture, but overripe fruit is something that is easily accessible to put in your traps. However, before setting out traps, be sure to have a plan to humanely dispatch of any wildlife you capture.

Since armadillos are not a protected species, they can be hunted year around. Remember to check with city and county ordinances before firing a weapon. Handle your weapon safely to not put yourself or your neighbors at risk.

As for my newly discovered armadillo, I'm going to share the forest with it for the time being. I'm much more worried about the privet, Tree of Heaven, and chinaberries encroaching on us!

For more information, search for "armadillo" on the UGA Extension publication page: https://extension.uga.edu/publications.html

For questions about gardening and landscaping, call Bibb County Extension at 478-310-5350 or email us at bibb.extension@uga.edu.

Events

"Angels in America" at Theatre Macon
Friday-Sunday, June 6-8
8 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.
438 Cherry St.
Set in 1980's New York City, a gay man is abandoned by his lover when he contracts the AIDS virus, and a closeted Mormon lawyer's marriage to his pill-popping wife stalls. Other characters include the infamous McCarthy-ite lawyer Roy Cohn, Ethel Rosenberg, a former drag queen who works as a nurse, and an angel. The show will run for two weekends.

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

Storytellers Macon presents: Glow Up
Tuesday, June 10
6:30 p.m.
576 Poplar St.
This month's theme is Glow Up — a celebration of growth, transformation and the light we carry or discover along the way. Have you ever surprised yourself? Found strength in an unexpected place? Whether your story is hilarious, heartfelt or somewhere in between, Storytellers Macon wants to hear it. We're proud to highlight the voices of people with disabilities this month — but the theme is open to everyone.
Join Storytellers Macon every second Tuesday of the month at Grant's Lounge.

"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.

First Friday Folk Blues Art Show at Gallery West
Friday, June 6
5 p.m.
447 Third St.
The Folk Blues Art Show returns and joins hands with a Robert Lee Coleman 80th birthday celebration. Gallery West is hosting this long running show that was always held upstairs at Grant's Lounge. The show features works by a dozen local folk artists (a couple who have strayed to other parts of Georgia), and as always, Robert Lee Coleman provides the live music. Mr. Coleman turned 80 on May 15 and Gallery West is celebrating this milestone with live music that will go later than usual on a first Friday. The band features players from the Coleman band of old and guest appearances. Join us for art, drinks and food and good times. Free admission.

Dublin
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A Courier Herald event



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From Our Kitchens:
Dad did it his way

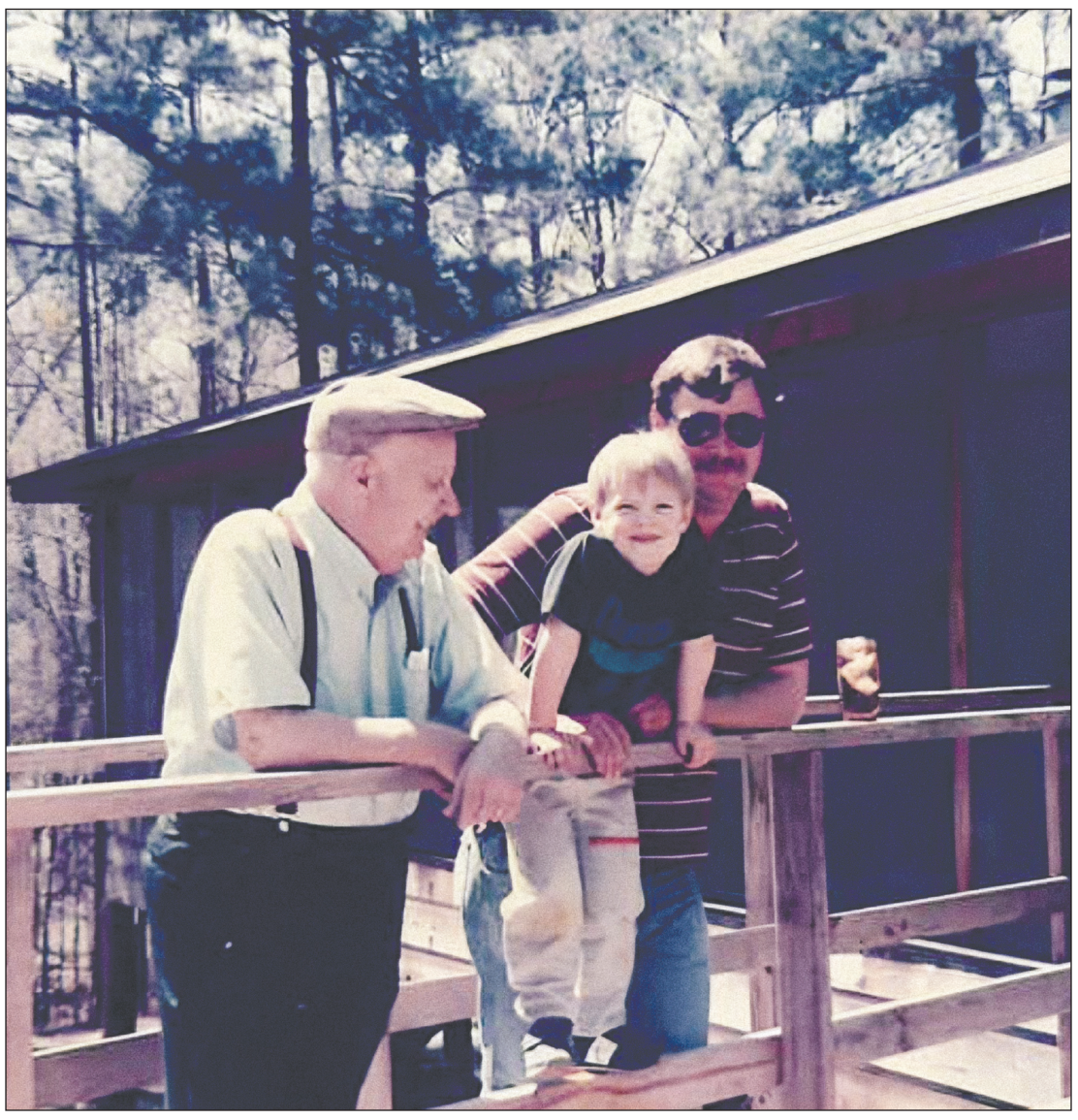


Photo courtesy Brad Stevens

Brad Stevens, at age 6, with his grandfather Frank "Pops" Stevens, left, and father Andrew Stevens. Stevens remembers his father's unique culinary creations and reflects on how cooking is a form of showing love.

Brad Stevens
Special to the Melody

My father was a blue-collar, baby boomin' family man. He was tough on me, but probably not as tough as his Pops was on him.

The man taught me in many different ways. Some advice was straightforward and intentional. "Make sure to have a spare tire, a jack and lug wrench."

While some advice was arbitrary – we'll look past that – it's the things he taught me as a byproduct of his actions that have had a lasting impact.

That brings me to the culinary exploits of Andrew Stevens, the patriarch of our family.

I grew up in a fairly traditional American household. We lived in Jones County. For my family, it was work and school, participating in sports, scouts and various other extracurricular activities. Dinner was at 7 p.m., and you were not allowed to speak with your mouth full.

Most dinners were my amazing mother's responsibility. But, every now and then, Dad had something wild up his sleeve.

Two signature dad dishes from my childhood impacted me later in life when I became a professional chef.

The most outrageous creation of my Dad's culinary adventures was hammerhead shark spaghetti. Yep, shark meat cooked like beef in a traditional Ragu style.

My father died two years ago, and I have to assume he was forced to answer for this dish on Day One of the Afterlife. My terrestrial apologies to whomever, on whatever it is they write it on up there.

Y'all, shark meat is tough ... even if cooked perfectly. If you braise it for a couple of hours in an herbaceous, acidic tomato sauce, the meat then becomes the texture of a dog chew toy.

Unfortunately, my sister, Mandy, and I grew up in a "waste not, want not" household. Let's say no one had dessert that night, for no meals were finished, not even Dad's.

This specific dinner was my informal introduction to food science, and I'll forever be grateful. Thanks, Drew.

Shark spaghetti aside, the man was a good cook. He was very instinctive about ingredient ratios, cook times and flavor profiles.

These are the pillars of sound home cooking. Dad's signature dish was overnight crock pot red beans and rice. It's important to note that he was born in Slidell, Louisiana, and lived briefly as a child in New Orleans.

The leftover Christmas or Easter ham bone was the foundation for this one-pot masterpiece. I fondly remember waking to the smell of pork, peppers, onions and spices.

As an adult, I've realized that cooking was the easiest way for Dad to express his love for the family, a trait that his son has inherited, apparently.

It is my sincere hope that you have similar experiences to mine as we approach Father's Day.

Make good memories and let the great ones simmer with gratitude. I know that's what I'll be doing.

Andrew's Red Beans and Rice

Ingredients

- 1 pound kidney beans (soaked in tap water over night)
- 1 roasted ham bone (Dad used the leftover Christmas or Easter ham)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 3 to 4 stalks of celery, diced
- Few cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 2 teaspoons thyme
- Salt and pepper to taste
- A few dashes of your favorite Louisiana hot sauce
- 8 cups of water or chicken broth

Directions

Throw all of that in a crock pot and let it go overnight. (8 or so hours)

Shred the ham off the bone, toss it back in the beans, and serve over your favorite rice with even more of that Louisiana hot sauce.

Postcards, from A5:

watched a young woman use her phone to take a video of four children practicing their dance moves in front of the gazebo. ... At the end of Florida Avenue, I saw a sign congratulating a young lady on her high school graduation. ... I paused to watch a concrete truck cross the wide stretch of tracks at Brosnan Yards on Seventh Street. ... When I saw two men wetting a hook from the shady shores of the lake at Freedom Park, I decided that must be a delightful way to spend a lazy summer afternoon.

In front of the Terminal Station, people waited for their buses on benches beneath a colorful mural. ... At Tattnall Square Park, the competition on the pickleball courts was heating up as the sun was going down. In the park's grassy area, I watched four boys playing soccer and a young family trying to launch two kites in the air with hardly a wisp of a summer breeze.

I traveled out to patches where kudzu is king — green castles beside the railroad tracks along Rivoli Drive and tumbling across the front of the Museum of Arts & Sciences on Forsyth Road. ... In the shade of Shed "D" at the Georgia State Farmer's Market, I stood next to a lady making change for a customer who bought some tomatoes. ... At a home on Winchester Circle, I took note of a trampoline, a swing set and an inflatable pool in the same yard. My guess is that they have children. ...

On Marlowe Drive, I noticed a marvelous replica of a small house on a pole, filled with books and billed as the "Free Little Library." ... I approached a line of cars stopped for a funeral procession at the intersection of Pine and Second streets. ... At lunchtime, I stood on a hill to watch a guy walking laps on the track at Middle Georgia State University. ... I saw a man carrying a wreath coming out of Davis Wholesale Florist on Holt Avenue.

As I neared the end of my "postcards" journey, I dropped by the main post office on College Street to ask how much it costs to mail a postcard these days.

"Fifty-six cents," the postal clerk told me.

He nearly had to pick me up off the floor.

I'm old enough to remember when a gallon of gas was cheaper than a stamp.

Oh, well. It was a nice day for my annual postcard to readers.

I wish you could have been there.

Maybe you were.

Columnist Ed Grisamore is a long-time journalist in Macon and the author of nine books.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

THE WELLNESS BENEFITS OF DAILY WALKS

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



Walking might seem simple, and you may even wonder if it's enough by itself, but it's actually very beneficial when it comes to improving your health. Especially for seniors and retirees, walking is one of the easiest ways to stay active, boost your mood, and improve your overall well-being — and you can do it without a gym membership or expensive equipment. Whether you're already taking daily walks for your health and mental well-being or have just been thinking about where to start, this guide will help you understand the benefits of walking and how to make it an enjoyable part of your daily routine.

1. Walking Can Help Boost Your Heart Health

Walking is one of the finest exercises to ensure a healthier heart and better health in general. It lowers your blood pressure, improves circulation, and can even reduce your risk of heart disease and strokes if you can manage a brisk, easy walk for just 20 to 30 minutes each day. It's like giving your heart a little tune-up by just putting on your sneakers, stepping out the door, and doing it daily.

Tip: To improve digestion, consider taking a walk after you eat. Don't worry, you won't have to go too far — even just a walk around the block can help.

2. Walking Is Gentle on Your Joints

Unlike other vigorous exercises, walking is gentle on joints, making it a perfect activity for older adults who may have conditions like arthritis or inflammation. It will keep you flexible and strengthen your muscles.

Tip: Walk on softer surfaces like grass or dirt when possible since it's easier on your knees and hips.

3. Clear Your Mind and Boost Your Mood

Walking is not just good for your body; it is also a great way to reduce stress and get you out of your head. If you're feeling down, take a quick walk. Walking (and exercise in general) has been shown to release endorphins, which reduce anxiety and symptoms of depression.

Tip: Consider leaving your phone at home to really enjoy the sights and sounds of nature. Take in the sunshine and listen to the birds chirp. If you're feeling social, ask a friend to join you!

4. Improve Your Balance and Mobility

As you get older, it's harder to maintain your balance, but walking can help with that. It strengthens your core and leg muscles and enables you to improve and maintain your coordination. Not only does this help with mobility, but it also helps to prevent falls and other injuries.

Tip: Try to be really mindful of your posture when you walk. Stand tall, engage your core, and take slow and steady steps.

5. Make It an Enjoyable Part of Your Routine

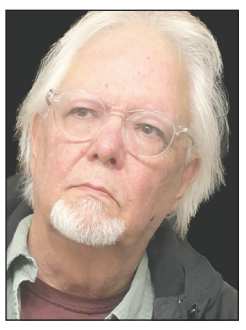
It's easy to say that you'll start walking more, but the key to making it a consistent part of your routine is to make it enjoyable instead of something that seems like a chore. There are a lot of things you can do to make your daily walks something to look forward to: Listen to music, look for new and interesting paths, or take a walk to your favorite coffee shop and enjoy a little treat afterward. Find something that excites you!

Tip: Take photos of interesting things you see around the neighborhood or out in nature while on your walk. This way, you'll start to appreciate the beauty in the little everyday things around you and will have some fond memories to look back at.

While walking may be one of the more basic forms of exercise, it's an excellent wellness boost for seniors and retirees who are worried about maintaining their health. It supports your body, improves your mental well-being, and can be a great source of routine and joy. So grab your shoes, step outside, and walk your way to wellness, one step at a time.



First Friday on Forsyth Street brings books, boutiques



Michael W. Pannell

Take a few steps further west on First Fridays and you'll find more of the evening's magic than you might have been aware of.

For the last couple of years, a few locations on the 800 block of Forsyth Street, next to the H&H Restaurant, have been keeping late hours, expanding options for those out enjoying First Friday culture and shopping.

It's just another indication of the value that a burgeoning downtown and First Friday bring to individuals and the community.

And you'd probably have never guessed it, but the walk to Forsyth Street from First Street's cluster of art galleries is shorter than the walk from there to Theatre Macon, where "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches" is on stage through Sunday, directed by founding artistic director Jim Crisp.

Of course, you can drive to Forsyth Street, too, and parking is free there.

Here's a sketch of places and people that will make it worthwhile.

***

The Rabbit Hole
811 Forsyth St.
rabbitholemacon.com.

Proprietors Autumn Van Gunten and Cedric Smith said The Rabbit Hole is an eclectic, highly curated lifestyle boutique whose name reflects going down a rabbit hole only to find everything from charming home goods, plants, candles, fine art and all manner of other furnishings and treasures.

Opening in late 2023, The Rabbit Hole soon started staying open late for First Fridays.

"We were adamant to do that and be known as part of downtown, that's important to us," Van Gunten said. "Our location is not as walkable, but hey, there's free parking. We're open until 8 p.m. on First Fridays and have a few nibbles, some wine or champagne and a good place to come hang out, listen to records places and meet up with friendly faces from the community. We consider The Rabbit Hole not just a place to shop and buy amazing things, but a place to come, have a seat on our couch and enjoy being here a while. We don't just allow that, we encourage it."

Van Gunten said the shop's offerings generally come from smaller-scale makers locally and from coast to coast, Spain, France and other spots. She said items are often from people she has known and admired for years, long before coming to Macon from Savannah and starting the shop just before COVID-19 hit.

"Cedric and I found we were going to Atlanta or back to Savannah to shop for some of the things we really loved and missed, so over coffee one day, we decided to open a boutique and bring those things and other products here," she said. "I do a deep dive into our suppliers as far as products, but also whether they align with our values. As much as we can, we buy from women-owned businesses and people of color. I develop a relationship with most of our maker-suppliers and know things like they're having a baby or there's some other event in their lives. It's the kind of business we want to run where there's community in all directions."

Before coming to Macon, Van Gunten began and still operates Socially Yours, which manages social media for creative companies around the country. She said it, too, is built upon the idea of community and making connections as she merges storytelling with social media for clients, turning followers into friends.

Most know Smith as a self-taught, popular, internationally known painter and photographer best known for his observations of African American life with works rooted in themes of identity, representation and historical reclamation.

Many of those observations stem from having grown up without seeing any, or any positive, representations of African Americans in advertising or product branding.

While his major works are sold in major galleries across the U.S. and Europe, you'll find prints and figurines, his experimental abstract works, for sale at more moderate prices at The Rabbit Hole.

You'll also often find him taking care of plants and other physical aspects of the store.

"Cedric is the more creative one," Van Gunten said. "I do all the sourcing and ordering and Cedric curates and decides how things are displayed. And by far, he's the plant person. If I look at a plant the wrong way, it dies."

Summing up, I asked Van Gunten what she considered The Rabbit Hole's vibe to be and what a highlight of owning it was.

"People," she said. "The highlight would have to be the people we've gotten to know and who've become part of The Rabbit Hole family. I've not had a bad customer here and there are so many we've come

See FRIDAY, Page A6



Michael W. Pannell / The Melody

There's a universe of entertainment between the pages of a book, and Bear's Books on Forsyth Street has plenty to offer, including on First Fridays after normal hours. Those who love to read can browse the books and there are often special activities for kids and adults.







Micah Johnston / The Melody

TOP: FPD head baseball coach and athletic director Greg Moore looks on as the Brookstone Cougars celebrate their win over the Vikings in the GIAA Class 4A State Championship in Columbus last week. It was the second straight championship for the Cougars, who swept FPD in the title last year as well.

BOTTOM: FPD shortstop Keon Johnson slides into second base with a cloud of dust as Brookstone shortstop Brennan Neal tries to corral a high throw during the GIAA Class 4A championship in Columbus. The high throw epitomized Game 2 of the championship series, which featured plenty of fielding miscues from both teams.

Fielding woes doom FPD in another title game loss

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

It seemed that fate — or luck, or destiny, or perhaps even the baseball gods — threw FPD a curveball in Columbus on Friday night.

The Vikings were vying for the GIAA Class 4A state baseball championship for the second straight year against the Brookstone Cougars, the same opponent that swept them in a best-of-three series last season in Macon.

But despite a sparkling outing from starter Wyatt Waters and a boatload of baserunners on offense, two dropped fly balls in the third inning cost FPD (30-6) dearly in a 3-2 loss that gave Brookstone (28-6) its second consecutive championship and sent the Vikings packing at Synovus Park.

"Baseball's just so weird," Moore said about 20 minutes later, after accepting the runner-up trophy and doling out hugs to his players following the postgame breakdown. "A couple of balls fall that probably ought to be outs, and a guy gets a hit. It's like, what in the world is going on?"

The two drops — the second of which resulted in an inside-the-park home run for Brookstone — gave the Cougars their only three runs of the game. Waters was otherwise effective, routinely stranding runners and recording clutch outs.

The junior escaped a bases-loaded jam in the sixth inning to give FPD one more shot at scoring the tying run in the seventh, but one walk from pinch hitter Sam Bryant was not enough to spark a Vikings rally.

"He was great, and Wyatt's been like that all year. He more than gave us a chance to win, and he probably deserved to win, to be honest with you," Moore said of his starter. "When I went out there to visit the mound, it was just to reinforce that he was doing everything really well."

Waters pitched all six innings and — though the three runs were listed as earned because the dropped fly balls were technically recorded as hits instead of errors — struck out five while only allowing four other hits and four walks. He finished with 105 pitches, 62 of them strikes.

The Cougars had trouble fielding the ball themselves. Brookstone shortstop Brennan Neal made several throwing errors that gave FPD baserunners, but most of them never came home to roost.

The heartbreaking elimination game loss came less than a day after the Vikings lost the series opener to the Cougars in extra innings. After a lengthy weather delay Thursday, FPD and Brookstone went to extras in a 3-3 tie before the Cougars scored six runs in the ninth inning to shock the Vikings and win 9-3 at about 1:30 a.m.

"Last night was tough, man," Moore said after Friday night's game. "The hotel this morning was difficult. We

See FPD, Page B2

NOTEPAD

Local players transfer, MU set for kickoff

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

Two key Macon basketball players transferred to new schools recently, according to a report from Georgia high school basketball outlet Sandy's Spiel.

The first key transfer came in the GHSA boys Class 2A field, and it could have major ramifications on Bibb County basketball next season. Alex Butts, a sophomore for Westside during the 2024-25 season who became a solid contributor by season's end, will transfer to Southwest for the 2025-26 season.

Butts blossomed this year with Westside. Seminoles head coach Josh Grube complemented Butts on his "solid minutes" after the team's first-round playoff victory this year. Now he will join the Patriots, who had a resurgent, landmark season last year when they reached the Class A-Division I state championship game.

Butts will be yet another weapon on a Southwest team filled with them. Only a handful of contributors include star scorers like CJ Howard, Chase Dupree and big man Rinaldo Callaway. Howard scored 31 points in the state title game against B.E.S.T. Academy.

It will be the second time in recent years that the Patriots stand to benefit from a Macon transfer, as Brandon Ashley transferred to Southwest from Central two seasons back. Ashley had already been a prolific scorer with the Chargers and continued that trend as a Patriot, helping guide them to the championship game in his senior season.

A girls program in Macon coming off a state championship win will also lose a key contributor, as Central Fellowship Christian Academy's star guard Kennedy Bradshaw elected to transfer to Warner Robins.

Bradshaw, a strong three-point shooter and well-rounded player, helped the Lancers win the GIAA Class 2A girls state championship this season after a dominant year. She will make a big jump, moving all the way up to the

See NOTEPAD, Page B3

Somtimes, sports can just get weird



Micah Johnston

The road to Columbus can be an unexpectedly eerie one.

Not by the light of day, mind you — in the bright afternoon sun, the route to the city that straddles the Georgia-Alabama line which my old Toyota puttered along last weekend was quite normal, even at times picturesque.

A massive field of solar panels sprawled out across the grass at one point. The panels covered a hill that undulated next to the highway, peaking perfectly at the horizon at one point in such a way that the solar farm seemed infinite. It was almost reminiscent of a Philip K. Dick novel, though you could tell the array of panels ended at the bottom of the other side of the slope if you looked hard enough.

At other points more natural features took similar hold of the landscape. Trees blotted out the sun for lengthy stretches before giving way to flower fields that flared out over surprisingly flat plains.

In reality, the scenery was mostly run-of-the-mill rural Georgia stuff. I probably over-romanticized some of the nature in an effort to make the trip more amusing.

Perhaps that was because I was slightly wary of what I anticipated would be a late night. After all, the reason I was trekking to Columbus was to cover the GIAA baseball championships, specifically the Class 4A finale between No. 1 FPD and

See JOHNSTON, Page B2

Mercer to host Los Angeles FC for FIFA Club World Cup practice

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

Mercer University will serve as the practice facility for Los Angeles Football Club ahead of the FIFA Club World Cup in Atlanta this month and could host a FIFA World Cup team in 2026, the university announced at a press conference Tuesday.

After an introduction from Mercer athletic director Jim Cole, Mayor Lester Miller unfurled an LAFC jersey emblazoned with Olivier Giroud's name and number while he announced that the team would practice in Macon ahead of its Club World Cup appearance.

"Join me in standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Los Angeles Football Club," Miller said as he showed off the kit. "Macon and Mercer University have been picked to host them as their official practice facility in the community. This is our team, this is their time."

The California squad is set to arrive June 13 to use Mercer's newly-renovated soccer field and facilities, which Cole said the university spent "seven figures" renovating to get up to FIFA standards. The team will stay for about two weeks.

The hosting was organized by Mercer in partnership with Macon-Bibb County, Visit Macon and the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Should the gig go well this month, Mercer will be in the running to host a country's national team during the regular World Cup in 2026.

Fans will not be able to watch the team practice over the course of the two weeks they train in Macon, Cole said, emphasizing the scale of the Club World Cup's operation.

"It'd be like the Dallas Cowboys coming to town," he said. "It's like the Atlanta Falcons coming here to do their summer camp."

The team could bring around 75 people to town, Cole said, including dieticians, trainers, massage therapists and other team employees besides the players. The organization will stay at a Macon hotel secured with the help of Visit Macon and use Mercer's

See WORLD CUP, Page B3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody
From left: Mercer athletic director Jim Cole, Visit Macon CEO Gary Wheat, Georgia Department of Economic Development tourism director Jay Markwalter and Mayor Lester Miller pose with LAFC gear at Mercer.





Micah Johnston / The Melody

LEFT: FPD's Sam Bryant, who entered the game as a pinch hitter and drew a walk in the top of the seventh, gets a hug from Wyatt Waters (9) after the Vikings made the last out in the GIAA Class 4A State Championship in Columbus last weekend. FPD kept it competitive, but two fielding errors doomed the Vikings to a loss against the Brookstone Cougars in the title game for the second consecutive year.

RIGHT: FPD pitcher Wyatt Waters hurls a pitch towards home during his outing in the GIAA Class 4A championship last weekend. Waters pitched all six innings and allowed three runs after some fly balls dropped for hits early on.

FPD, from B1:

had a team meeting this morning, and I think they came in today ready to fight, even after that late one last night. They did everything they could to win the ballgame, it just didn't go our way."

Moore said the message for his players was all about encouragement, given the circumstances.

"We didn't have a great two days — but really, honestly, we didn't have a great two innings in Columbus," Moore said. "We played super for eight innings (Thursday), then we didn't play well in the ninth. Then we played good baseball today except for one inning.

"So you take 16 total innings, we played really well for 14 of the 16, but that cost us the series. It's really hard."

FPD's two runs came in the fifth when the Vikings followed up a throwing error by Neal with a walk and a single to load the bases. The Cougars then put Neal on the bump, and things looked bleak when the sophomore promptly blew the ball right past the next two FPD hitters for a pair of strikeouts.

But nine-hole hitter Harrison Keenan would not let the rally go by the wayside. The outfielder sliced a single inside the left-field line to drive in two, putting FPD right back in the game.

"Obviously I'm disappointed, but I'm really proud of our boys," Moore said. "Lotta fight in that dugout, and against some pretty stacked odds, to be honest with you."

Keenan's contribution epitomized one of FPD's keys to success over the course of the season: contributions came from everywhere. The Vikings had only three seniors, none of them key starters.

"It's really kind of the way they've done this thing all year long. Different guys all the time doing they're part, everybody being unselfish, and our seniors really led the charge on that," he said.

Moore said FPD doesn't think of its baseball program in terms of a different team each year. He pointed to a green wristband he wore emblazoned with the word "FAMILY."

"You see this thing on my wrist, they all wear one. That's what it's about. We go to church together on Sundays. We have dinner at my house," the head coach said of his team. "It's really not like 'this team,' or 'the next team' or whatever. This isn't really a 'say goodbye' moment for us. It really has become a family."

Nonetheless, crucial stars like Waters, Keon Johnson, Connor Strandmark, Brady McHugh and football talent Major Simmons will all be back next season.

Even if luck was not on the Vikings' side in Columbus, the future looks bright.

"Some crazy things happened tonight, and it's unexplainable, honestly. I don't know if there is a hump to get over, to be honest with you," Moore said. "We have a really good baseball team, and we've won a lot of baseball games the last two or three years.

"Everybody wants a trophy. But that doesn't mean you're not doing things right... Maybe we'll get one, but even if we don't, I'd rather be in that dugout with them."

Johnston, from B1:

No. 2 Brookstone.

There's always some nerves before a championship game, whether you're a journalist or an athlete. In this case, the feeling was exacerbated. The weather was on the fritz last week, so much so that the Vikings had their first game of the championship series on Thursday delayed until after 9 p.m.

That contest did not wrap up until about 1:30 a.m. Needless to say I was less than optimistic as cloudy shadows from the overcast skies rolled in when I arrived at Synovus Park, home of the Braves' Double-A team the Columbus Clingstones, at about 5:30 p.m.

Luckily, a short spot of bad weather from an earlier game was the only hurdle the Vikings faced in terms of delays. The game started at 8 p.m., only an hour late.

The problem was on the field for FPD, not in the sky — they played well but simply could not string together enough hits to win despite consistently having baserunners.

By the time everything was said and done, the Vikings lost to Brookstone 3-2 to end the season, just as they did last season. It was an unfortunate climax for a spirited FPD team that was one of the best and most fun squads to watch in Middle Georgia all year long.

After editing photos — yes, I did indeed take pictures in the absence of our wonderful photographer Jason Vorhees; my work pales in comparison — and finishing my story, I published everything and left the stadium, now eerily empty, at about 12:15 a.m. After grabbing some grub, I was on the road back to Macon close to 1 a.m.

It was a different drive altogether.

The lack of cars, the ever-expansive rural Georgia night sky and the silence outside changed the atmosphere entirely. What was a pleasant ride over was still pleasant, but this time because of how transformed the ride felt.

Those same throngs of solar panels that had seemed magnificent to look at were now nearly invisible in the night. Knowing they were there after gazing at them on the drive in, I somehow noticed them when I drove past them in the dark. The same went for some of the more eye-catching fields I'd passed on the way over.

Then there were the machines.

In stark contrast to the gradual pickup of urban structure I'd traveled through when entering Columbus, the emptier outskirt roads were dotted with what I believe were asphalt paving trucks, though I couldn't be sure.

The hulking vehicles clinked and clanked their way past my car in the opposite lane — loud, slow and hardly discernible in the wee hours of that Saturday morning except for the aforementioned noise and the twinkling safety lights they were stippled with.

All these things, when combined with some songs in my playlist laden with swirling synthesizers and ambient soundscapes, made for a memorable ride home, if a weird one.

It made me think a lot about the strange events that unfolded on the field for FPD that night.

I mentioned that the Vikings played well despite the loss in the title game, and they did. Pitcher Wyatt Waters had a nice night, putting a few opposing hitters on but almost always wriggling out of it. He eventually finished all six innings for FPD.

But it only took two plays for the showdown to go awry for the Vikings. A pair of third-inning fly balls that likely should have been outs, the first in left field and the second in right field, got lost in the lights and fell in for hits. The two knocks, the second of which ended up being an inside-the-park home run for Brookstone, helped give the Cougars a 3-0 lead.

FPD's defense had been one of its strongest assets all year, but alas, the fluke hits were the difference.

"Baseball's just so weird," FPD head coach Greg Moore said after the game ended. "A couple of balls fall that probably ought to be outs, and a guy gets a hit. It's like, what in the world is going on?

"Some crazy things happened tonight, and it's unexplainable, honestly."

Much like how the ordinary night sky and the late hour changed my drive back to Macon from Columbus, it only took a couple factors for a championship game to be flipped on its head.

Sometimes that's just how it goes: things get weird.



World Cup, B1:

football field house and weight room for workouts.

With the team should come plenty of fans to boost Macon tourism, Visit Macon CEO Gary Wheat said. Macon's sports tourism industry has grown from roughly $2 million in 2017 to $12.5 million in 2024. Wheat said the city has already seen about $11 million of sports tourism revenue this year.

"It's what, June 3? That's pretty good," Mayor Miller said after Wheat listed the statistics.

LAFC earned its spot in Group D, the set of teams playing in Atlanta, after defeating the Mexican squad Club America in a thrilling extra time game May 31. Los Angeles will face Chelsea, a storied team in England's world-renowned Premier League, in Atlanta on June 16.

The arrival date of June 13 for LAFC could change, Cole and other officials said, but the team will depart once its Club World Cup run ends.

Trusting the process

Wheat knew as soon as he saw Atlanta selected as a World Cup site that Macon could be a part of something special.

"It's kind of like the Olympics, it's one of those opportunities that only comes along once every so often, and in Atlanta it's once in a lifetime," he said. "When Atlanta was announced as a host site, we wanted to make sure that we had a seat at the table."

Along with Mercer deputy athletic director Daniel Tate, Wheat took the lead on bringing the global soccer phenomenon to Macon.

"We knew we could do it with the leaders we have here, and we knew it would be an excellent opportunity to showcase our great community," Wheat said. "It's also a great economic impact ... They'll eat here, they'll stay here and their fans and administrators and all that will descend upon Macon."

It took about a year for Mercer, Macon-Bibb County and Visit Macon to get the city in as a potential practice site, Wheat said, noting the long application process.

FIFA's requirements for Mercer's site were not to be taken lightly.

"I was very proud of our field before we started this process. But after their site visits and visiting other sites that had World Cup-type facilities, I quickly realized that our pitch was not up to World Cup standards," Cole said.

A key donation made the pricey field renovation possible, Cole said, and now FIFA officials are rigorously inspecting the pitch on a regular basis to make sure it's up to snuff for World Cup competition, practice field or not.

"I'll tell you, a World Cup representative is here three times a week measuring the grass, taking temperatures, that's how intense it is," Cole said. "We've learned a lot, and we're really proud of it."

The security measures will be tight as well.

"We have the fence around the soccer field, we've had to install a secondary fence as sort of a staging area where the buses come in where they can sort of unload," Cole said. "They'll have security with them at all times... It's just the way they do things in World Cup soccer."

While the team practices will not be open to fans, Wheat said the city will be working with LAFC on community engagement possibilities. There could also be prize packages raffled or auctioned off, as Maconites were encouraged by Miller and others to root for LAFC as Macon's "hometown team" in the tournament.

After the tentative Macon arrival date June 13, LAFC will face Chelsea on June 16 at 3 p.m. in Atlanta to begin Group D play.





Jason Vorhees / The Melody

TOP: Macon Mayor Lester Miller reveals an LAFC jersey as he announces that the club will practice at Mercer this month for the Club World Cup.

BOTTOM: Mercer athletic director Jim Cole speaks to a large crowd of fans, employees and media in Mercer's Heritage Hall at University Center.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mercer safety Myles Redding (2) evades Rhode Island defenders as he scores a touchdown following an interception during the Bears' 17-10 win against URI in the first round of the FCS playoffs last season. After a program-best campaign in 2024, Mercer will begin its 2025 season against UC Davis in the FCS Classic in Montgomery.

Notepad, from B1:

GHSA Class 4A level to play with the Demonettes.

The Demonettes, though they fell short of a championship, did not have too bad a season themselves last year — the Warner Robins girls did not lose a single game until their region championship game, then fell in the second round of the 4A playoffs to finish with only two losses.

GHSA holds reclassification meeting

The GHSA's Reclassification Committee met in Thomaston on Wednesday to discuss a range of issues including submitted proposals for changes and narrowing down the options for modifying the power rankings system.

While the meeting's minutes have not yet been released, the committee published its agenda Tuesday. The agenda only listed a few items of business but showed that the committee largely focused on agreeing to changes ahead of the October meeting, which will require finalized recommendations on rule changes.

Commenters on the GHSA's Facebook post called for everything from new rules on players transferring to a complete shake-up of classification. One fan pitched the idea that the GHSA should make one division of schools that have yet to win a state championship, guaranteeing one school a trophy for the first time ever.

Mercer football kickoff set for primetime slot on ESPN

The Bears will start their football season with a bang later this season when they face UC Davis on August 23 in primetime on ESPN, according to an announcement made last week.

Mercer, which won the Southern Conference for the first time ever last year in a program-best season, finished the 2024-25 season 11-3 and ranked No. 7 in the FCS StatsPerform Top 25. The UC Davis Aggies finished an identical 11-3 and finished No. 5.

It should be a slugfest at 7 p.m. on August 23, the primetime slot on ESPN to open the college football season. The game is part of the FCS Kickoff game in Montgomery, Alabama, in which the Bears have participated before. They defeated North Alabama 17-7 in the 2023 edition of the special kickoff game.

"We're thrilled to help launch another season of college football in Montgomery, Alabama, in back-to-back weekend games," FCS executive director Clay Norrell said in a Mercer Athletics article. "We are excited to have both Mercer and Tuskegee return to the historic Cramton Bowl and look forward to welcoming new opponents to these matchups."

Pickleball events on the horizon

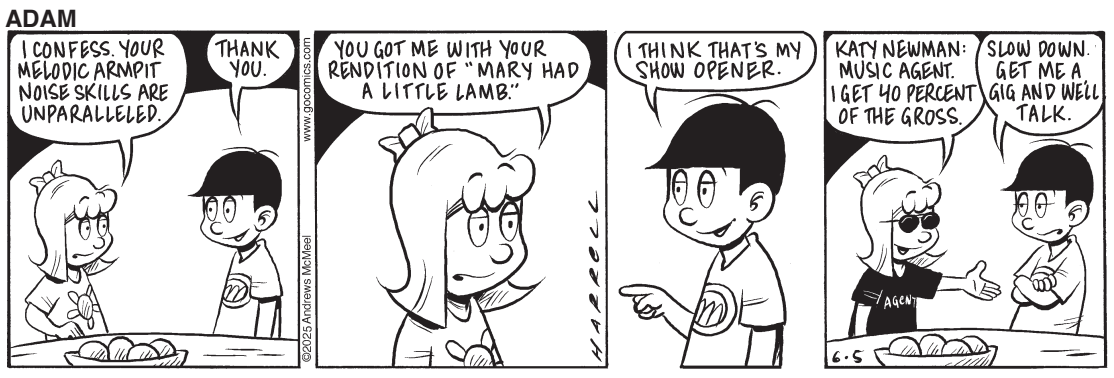
Macon's industry-leading indoor pickleball complex has some fun events planned for the beginning of summer.

Rhythm and Rally at the Macon Mall will host regular events for pickleball enthusiasts during June, including singles events scheduled for Friday and a "Courts and Coffee" event Monday. The courts also host an Industry Night each Wednesday. Educators are the industry focus the second week of June followed by first responders and members of the military the third week and service industry members the last week of June.

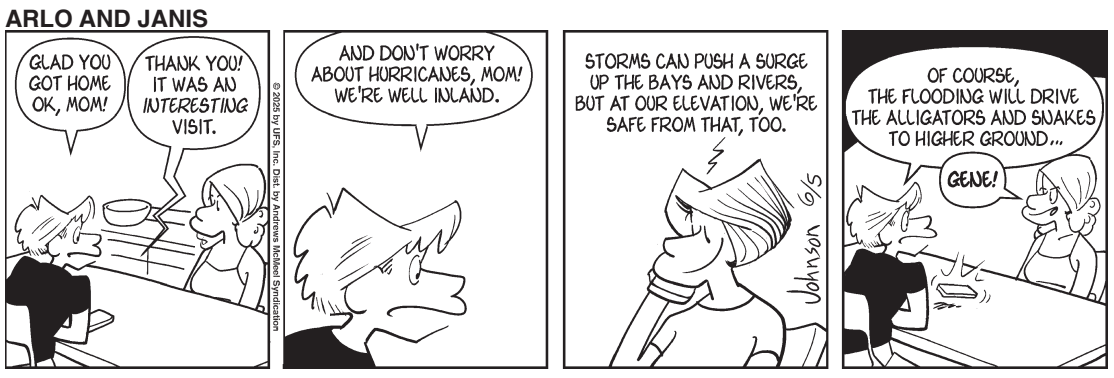
Other fun events down the road include a 1970s "Retro Beach DJ Pickleball night," which will feature a DJ playing '70s tunes while players match up across the court. There will be a prize for the best '70s attire, so the event page encouraged players to "think tie dye shirts, bell bottoms, flower crowns!" The event is set for June 19.

The last event is the most serious: the "Cream of the Crop" tournament intended to find some of the best players in Middle Georgia. The winner of the tournament, which begins June 21, will qualify for the championship that takes place in October and earn Rhythm and Rally "Powered Player" status.

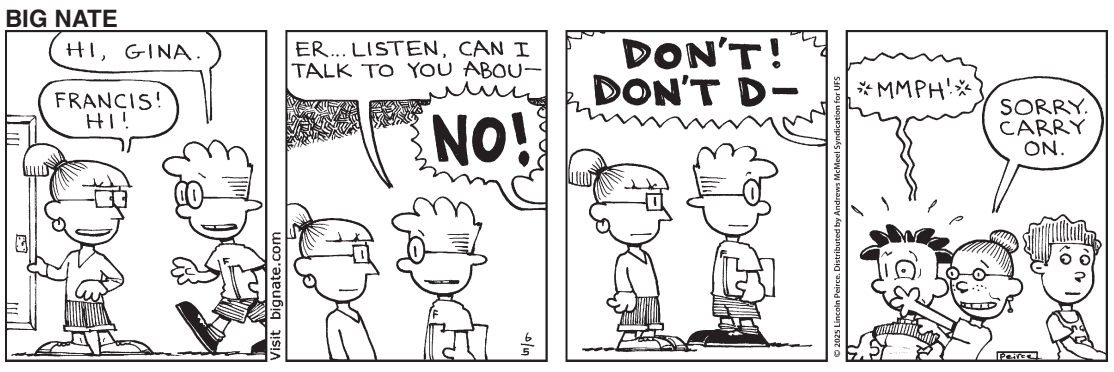
ADAM



ARLO AND JANIS



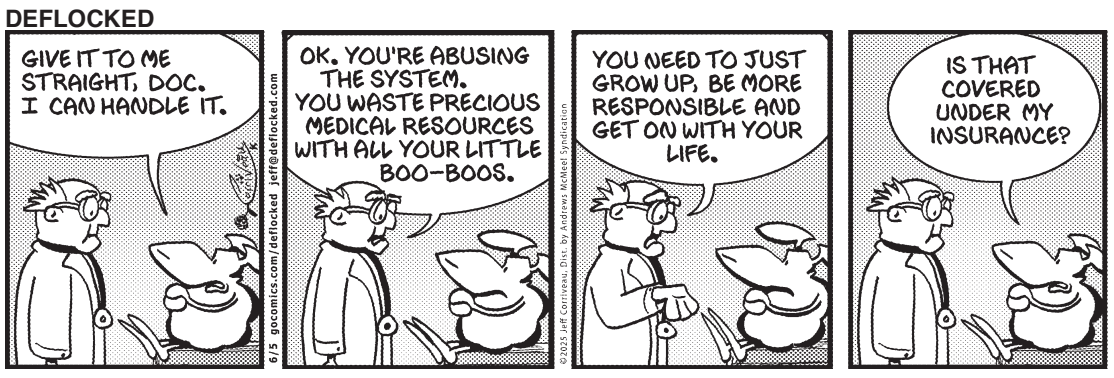
BIG NATE



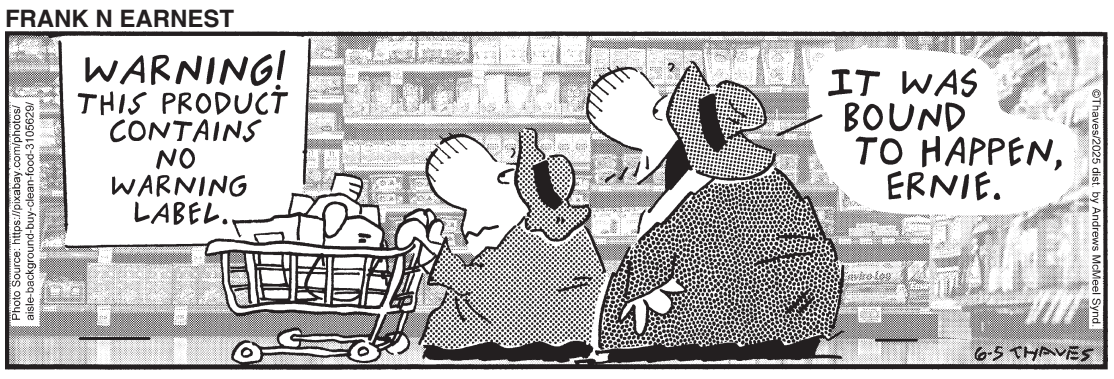
BORN LOSER



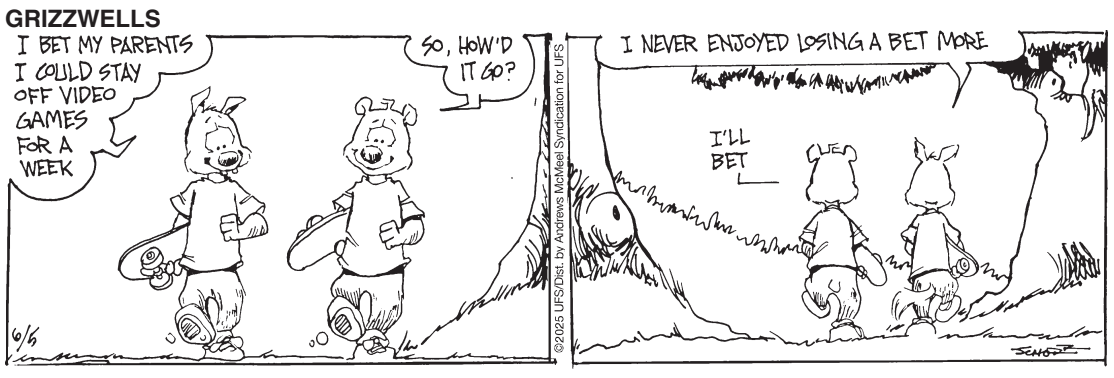
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FRANK N EARNEST



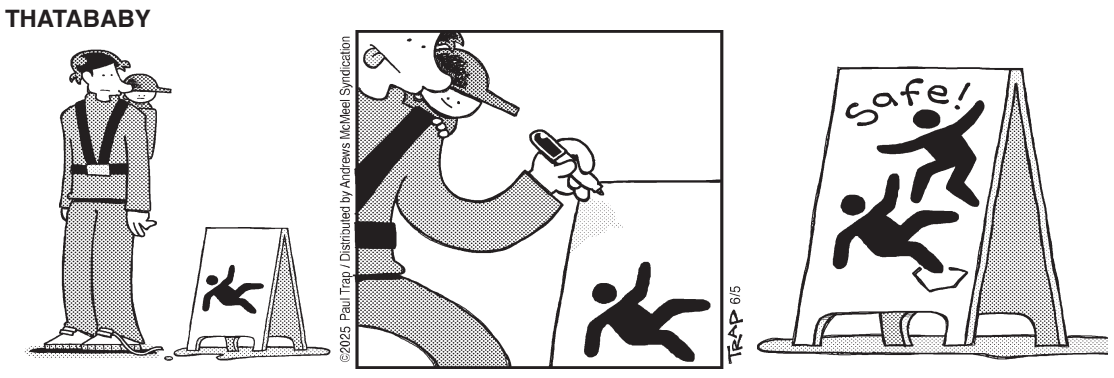
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



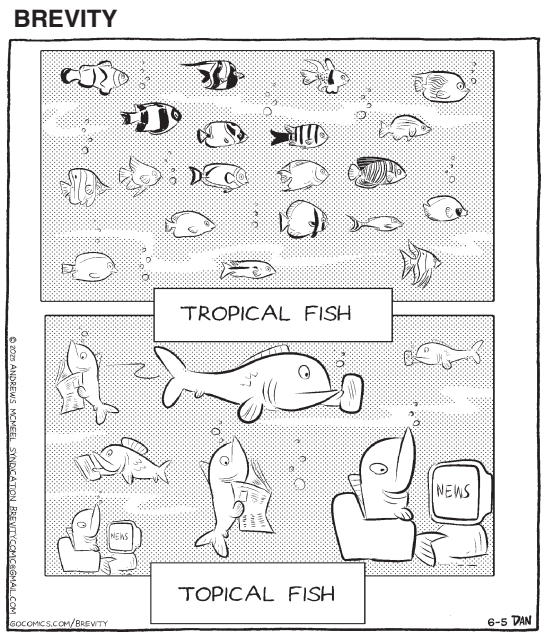
THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

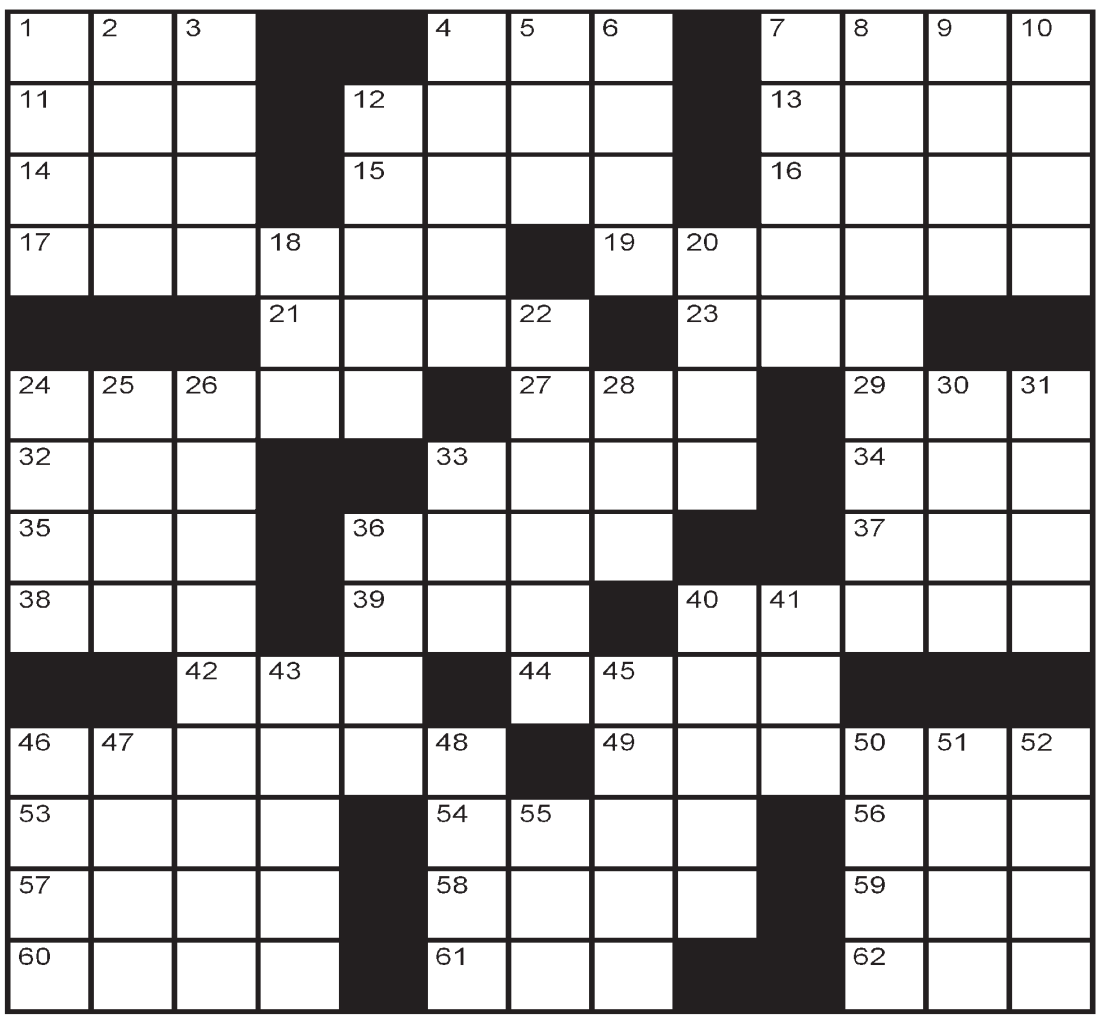
1 Bear hair
4 Wild boar
7 Design detail, for short
11 Singer — DiFranco
12 Test tube
13 "Finding —"
14 Sink
15 Comedian — Johnson
16 Like the Sahara
17 Struggle
19 Holy Roman —
21 Discourteous
23 Venomous creature
24 Army action figure (2 wds.)
27 Alphabet ender
29 Deli meat
32 Body-builder — Ferrigno
33 Fun fair attraction
34 Conceit
35 "— a Wonderful Life"
36 Buddies
37 — Grande
38 Cudgel
39 Storm center
40 Synthetic fiber
42 Mimic
44 Pharmaceutical
46 Criticize harshly
49 Deer horn
53 Reputation
54 Cut of beef
56 "— had the time of my life ..."
57 Obligation
58 Countless
59 Came into contact with
60 Destiny
61 Firmament
62 Undivided

DOWN

1 Speedy
2 Two-toed sloth
3 Fixes fraudulently
4 Chartered
5 Cereal plant
6 Merriment
7 Breaks
8 Outside boundary
9 Mideast ruler
10 Cipher
12 Prize
18 B'way sell-out sign
20 Labyrinth
22 Banished
24 Smooth-talking
25 Greek letter
26 Very nearly (2 wds.)
28 Distance measures (Abbr.)
30 Exchange premium
31 Orbiting body
33 Sunbeam
36 Look furtively
40 Too liquid
41 Literary rep.
43 Pucker
45 Like monsoon season
46 Raise the —
47 Writer — Ferber
48 Trees
50 Stretched car
51 Regular
52 Nerve network
55 Deciduous tree

Answer to Previous Puzzle

P	H	I	■	A	B	B	A	■	I	N	S	T
L	O	S	■	B	R	I	M	■	G	E	A	R
A	L	L	O	C	A	T	E	■	N	A	T	O
N	E	E	R	■	M	E	N	T	O	R	E	D
■	■	■	C	O	B	■	T	A	R	■	■	■
A	S	P	H	A	L	T	■	G	E	N	T	S
N	E	E	■	F	E	W	■	■	■	O	I	L
A	M	A	■	■	■	A	S	P	■	A	L	E
T	I	T	L	E	■	S	O	O	T	H	E	D
■	■	■	A	L	L	■	M	I	A	■	■	■
M	I	S	P	L	A	C	E	■	R	H	E	A
E	D	I	T	■	P	L	O	T	T	E	R	S
N	E	R	O	■	S	I	N	E	■	A	G	T
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6-5

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

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

Almanac

Today is the 156th day of 2025 and the 78th day of spring.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed the Marshall Plan for economic aid to war-torn Europe.

In 1968, U.S. presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was fatally shot by Sirhan Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

In 1981, the Centers for Disease Control reported the first recognized cases of what later became known as AIDS.

In 2004, former President Ronald Reagan died of pneumonia complicated by Alzheimer's disease at age 93.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Adam Smith (1723-1790), economist/philosopher; John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), economist; Richard Scarry (1919-1994), children's author; Bill Moyers (1934-), TV journalist/author; Spalding Gray (1941-2004), actor/writer; Ken Follett (1949-), author; Kathleen Kennedy (1953-), film producer; Kenny G (1956-), musician; Jeff Garlin (1962-), actor/comedian; Rick Riordan (1964-), author; Mark Wahlberg (1971-), actor; Nick Kroll (1978-), actor/comedian; Pete Wentz (1979-), singer-songwriter/musician.

TODAY'S FACT: According to the Alzheimer's Association, an estimated 7.2 million Americans ages 65 or older have Alzheimer's disease in 2025.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1993, Julie Krone rode Colonial Affair to victory in the Belmont Stakes, becoming the first female jockey ever to win a Triple Crown race.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "You never get cheered for telling people the situation is not as simple as they think." — Ken Follett, "Fall of Giants"

TODAY'S NUMBER: 21 — approximate percentage of the Israeli population that is Arab.

TODAY'S MOON: Between first quarter moon (June 2) and full moon (June 11).

Community Brief

Macon's Rick Devens returns to 'Survivor'

Rick Devens, former WGXA Macon news anchor and spokesperson for Middle Georgia State University, is headed back to the island for "Survivor" Season 50, according to CBS News.

Devens is among two dozen returning cast members for the show's milestone season titled "In the Hands of the Fans."

Devens became a fan favorite in the show's 38th season titled "Edge of Extinction" in 2019 after he was eliminated early on but returned in a twist that allowed eliminated contestants a chance to get back in the game. Devens finished fourth after being eliminated in a fire-making challenge and won five immunity idols on the show.

The 50th season is expected to air in Spring 2026 on CBS and streaming on Paramount+.

Regional healthcare high school planned in Houston County

A regional high school aimed at preparing students to work in the healthcare field is being planned in Houston County through a grant-funded effort and partnership between Central Georgia Technical College, Houston Healthcare, the Houston County School District and the 21st Century Partnership.

A $250 million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies will pay for staff and programming needs for the school, which is among 10 others across the country in places including Boston, Massachusetts; Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas, Texas; Durham, North Carolina; Houston, Texas; Nashville, Tennessee; Demopolis, Alabama and northeast Tennessee.

The regional approach will allow students from multiple school districts to explore healthcare education throughout high school. After enrolling, students will be able to work paid internships that count toward their college credentials in programs such as ultrasound technology, respiratory technology, hemodialysis, cardiovascular technology and radiologic technology. The goal is to prepare students to work in high-skill, high-wage positions within healthcare organizations in Middle Georgia.

"We're excited to receive this support to advance the allied health workforce throughout our region," Ivan H. Allen, CGTC's president, said. "Our community is honored that Bloomberg Philanthropies has made this investment in our state. We are committed to doing the necessary hard work to facilitate new opportunities for secondary students that positively affect the workforce and our local communities for generations."

Houston Healthcare, Emory to integrate

The Georgia Attorney General's Office gave the green light to Houston Healthcare and Emory Healthcare to join forces.

The agreement designates Emory as the sole controlling member of Houston Healthcare and commits Emory to making significant capital investments and providing charity and indigent care under Emory's current policies. Emory also agreed to provide emergency services to Houston County contingent on supplemental funds from local, state or county governments to offset losses up to $750,000 per year for at least seven years.

The commitments will be enforced by a newly formed nonprofit called the HHC Foundation. The state approved the integration on May 12.

In 2019, the state approved a merger agreement between The Medical Center of Central Georgia Navicent Health and Houston Healthcare. However, the merger fell through in 2021 upon a Federal Trade Commission investigation and ruling that found it "was likely to cause significant harm to central Georgia patients and businesses in the form of higher healthcare costs. Staff also uncovered evidence that competition to improve quality of patient care, invest in facilities and technologies, and expand access to healthcare services would be harmed by the merger."

Grants to reduce litter, beautify Macon parks

Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful recently received two grants from Keep America Beautiful totaling $7,500. The Greatest American Cleanup Grant of $2,500 will be used towards litter reduction and beautification projects in the Fort Hill Community Park on Eastview Avenue. The other grant, an MLK Community Improvement Grant, is for $5,000 and will be used for beautification initiatives and an after-school gardening program at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School on Shurling Drive in East Macon.

Macon senator announces bid for lieutenant governor

Sen. John F. Kennedy, R-Macon, announced his bid for lieutenant governor on Monday. Kennedy is a partner at the downtown law firm James Bates Brannan Groover LP and was first elected to the state senate in 2015.

"As a lifelong Georgian born and raised in Adrian, Georgia, I learned small-town values at a young age," Kennedy wrote in a Facebook post announcing his candidacy. "In 2015, I took those same rural values to Atlanta as a state senator to fight – and win – for Georgia families. I'm running to serve as your next Lt. Governor because we need leaders who will work hard every day to make sure Georgia's best days are ahead."

In the most recent session under the Gold Dome, Kennedy, who was president pro tempore of the senate, championed a tort reform bill and backed legislation including the Georgia Promise Scholarship, which provides state vouchers for students in failing public schools to pay tuition and enroll at private school.

New center transforms care for adults with intellectual, developmental disabilities

Ground was broken downtown Thursday morning on a new facility designed to transform care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The 34,000 square-foot building on Hazel Street will house River Edge's short-term behavioral and crisis service and Mercer School of Medicine's outpatient care, making it the first facility of its kind in Georgia.

Outpatient care it will provide includes primary care, dental care, audiology, imaging, speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and an on-site pharmacy.

An open house at the facility is set for Monday, June 9, at 750 Hazel St.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch

FRIDAY

June 6, 2025

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

Straw

Netflix ■ Original Film

Taraji P. Henson leads producer/writer/director Tyler Perry's thriller as a single mother who faces a series of unfortunate events that lead her down an unexpected path. Struggling against circumstances beyond her control and fueled by desperation, she becomes entangled in a harrowing situation and at the center of suspicion in a world that seems indifferent to her existence. Sherri Shepherd, Teyana Taylor, Glynn Turman, Sinbad and Rockmond Dunbar costar.

Wylde Pak

Nickelodeon, 7:30 p.m. ■ New Series

Exploring the dynamics of a multigenerational and multicultural blended family, this animated series follows half siblings Lily (voice of Nikki Castillo) and Jack (voice of Benjamin Plessala) as they learn to navigate new family dynamics under the same roof for the first time.



'Secrets Declassified With David Duchovny'

RAMONA ROSALES, A+E NETWORKS

BMF

Starz, 9 p.m. ■ Season Premiere

In Season 4, Meech and Terry (Demetrius Flenory Jr. and Da'Vinchi) fight to keep their dream alive, but staying ahead of their rivals and law enforcement takes a toll on their relationship.

Secrets Declassified With David Duchovny

History, 10 p.m. ■ Season Finale

The first season concludes with "Unholy Alliances," which looks at how, when governments strike dark deals with cults, mobs and even sworn enemies, frosty relationships and mounting tensions are tested head on. From the CIA's attempt to enlist the Chicago mob to assassinate Castro, to a World War II battle where U.S. troops fought alongside the German army, to Vladimir Putin's recruitment of a convicted murderer as his personal assassin, which sacrifices are worth the bigger picture?

Resident Alien

Syfy & USA Network, 11 p.m. ■ Season Premiere

The fourth season starts with Harry (Alan Tudyk) and his baby Bridget stuck in prison on the Grey Moonbase, while a shape-shifting Alien called a Mantid (also Tudyk) is trying to pass himself off as the real Harry. Harry manages to escape and arrives back on Earth for a showdown, but is no longer able to access his alien side (he's gone and become human?!). Enter the real fun as Asta (Sara Tomko) and D'Arcy (Alice Wetterlund) struggle to keep his alien status a secret, while Sheriff Mike (Corey Reynolds) attempts to solve some mysterious deaths in Patience that he is beginning to think aren't caused by anything human.

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



'National Treasure'

DISNEY ENTERPRISES, INC.

Goodfellas (1990, Crime drama) Robert De Niro, Ray Liotta **AMC, 7 p.m.**

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005, Fantasy) Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert **Grint E!, 7 p.m.**

The Big Wedding (2013, Romance-comedy) Robert De Niro, Diane Keaton **VH1, 7 p.m.**

Doctor Strange (2016, Action) Benedict Cumberbatch, Chiwetel Ejiofor **FX, 8 p.m.**

Independence Day (1996, Science fiction) Will Smith, Bill Pullman **SYFY, 8 p.m.**

The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie (2004, Children) Tom Kenny, Bill Fagerbakke **NICK, 8 p.m.**

The Lion King (1994, Children) Matthew Broderick, Jeremy Irons **Freeform, 9 p.m.**

I Thought My Husband's Wife Was Dead (2024, Suspense) LeToya Luckett, Sherilyn Allen **LMN, 10 p.m.**

The Departed (2006, Crime drama) Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon **AMC, 10 p.m.**

National Treasure (2004, Adventure) Nicolas Cage, Diane Kruger **TNT, 10:30 p.m.**

CATCH A CLASSIC

A Face in the Crowd

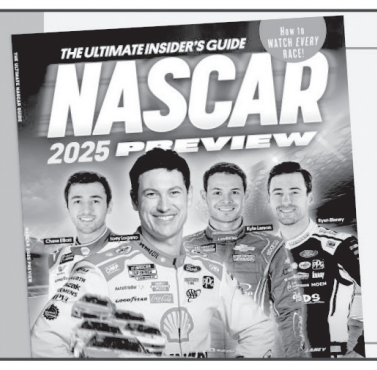
TCM, 8 p.m.

Andy Griffith gives an extraordinary performance as Larry "Lonesome" Rhodes, the lead character of this 1957 Elia Kazan-directed drama that marked Griffith's screen debut. Although Rhodes is a Southern character like Griffith's kindly and beloved Sheriff Andy Taylor from the actor's later classic sitcom *The Andy Griffith Show*, this man's charming accent and folksy "aw-shucks" persona is not the genuine article, and instead hides a cruel, ambitious and egomaniacal personality that only grows as the one-time drunken drifter finds himself — thanks to the radio journalist (Patricia Neal) who discovers him (and later regrets the monster she created) — rising as a nationally renowned media personality and political demagogue. If you only know Griffith from his sitcom, check out his dynamic acting range here as Rhodes, a role that helped the actor become a star and really should have earned him an Oscar nomination. Besides being ignored by the Academy, *A Face in the Crowd* also had mixed reviews on its original release, and wasn't overly successful at the box office. But time has looked kindly on the film, thanks not only to Griffith's performance but also the story's look at the volatile intersection of media, celebrity and politics that appears ever more prescient with each passing year.



WARNER BROS.

From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com



NASCAR 2025 PREVIEW MAGAZINE

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Photos by Atrium Health Navicent and Jason Vorhees

1: Atrium Health Navicent cancer patients form a human ribbon to raise awareness for cancer on June 3, in celebration of National Cancer Survivors Month. **2:** Cancer survivors and hospital teammates wave to the sky for a photo out front of the Atrium Health Navicent heart tower.

Photos by Macon-Bibb Recreation Department, Macon-Bibb EMA, Macon Mental Health Matters Isabel Adams-Webb and Jason Vorhees

3: Piedmont Macon hosted a cancer survivor celebration Wednesday inside the hospitals cancer center classroom. The celebration for cancer survivors included a drum circle experience with Dr. Gloria Cisse and Rodney Mason from The Southern Center for Choice Theory in Macon. **4:** The Macon-Bibb Emergency Management Agency hosted an Emergency Preparedness Fair at Wesleyan College May 31. Visitors who attended learned how to stay safe in the event of a disaster, participated in hands-on activities, and received free preparedness kits. **5:** Macon Mental Health Matters hosted its first-ever symposium May 23-24 at the South Bibb Recreation Center. **6:** Members of the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department assisted the Bibb County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement Unit with the safe removal of a 12-foot alligator from a business on Joe Tamplin Industrial Boulevard. **7:** Sandra Stone, a fitness instructor at the Wellness Center, reacts as Henry Ficklin, Macon-Bibb County executive director of community affairs, reads a proclamation in her honor Wednesday. Stone was recognized by the Mayor's office after being named a finalist for the 2025 national SilverSneakers Instructor of the Year award.

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











Photos by Richard Frazier

8-10: The cast of Theatre Macon's production "Angels in America Part 1" rehearses scenes for the show. The production runs May 30-June 8 and tickets can be purchased at theatremacon.com.



