The Macon Melody

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Commission nixes state's lease, passes budget

Commissioners approve FY'26 budget and hears plea from former mayor for high-speed rail

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

The Macon-Bibb County Commission approved the mayor's budget, ended a leasing agreement with the state and heard a plea from the former mayor, who is pushing for the city to be included on a high-speed passenger rail line proposed between Savannah and Atlanta.

The commission voted unanimously to end its leasing agreement with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office, which has housed the state's licensing and examining boards at a county-owned building on Coliseum Drive since 1999. The decision was made with no discussion after nearly an hour behind closed doors.

County spokesperson Chris Floore said the state may have found another property in town and ending the agreement makes way for the mayor's East Bank development project.

Records show the property at 305 Coliseum Drive, owned by the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, was listed as a possible future address of a newly proposed sports and events arena in county documents seeking qualified developers.

The commission also unanimously approved the mayor's $219.8 million budget, which calls for more spending without a tax increase.

The commission approved the denial of an alcohol license renewal for the Corner Store, a hole-in-the-wall convenience store on Walnut Street near Forest Avenue in the Pleasant Hill neighborhood.

Macon-Bibb County code inspectors made at least three visits to the store over several months last year and found it consistently lacked the required inventory

See COMMISSION, Page A3

Jail audit confirms conditions; Platt still seeks justice

Mother of slain inmate reacts to new reforms

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter

More than a year has passed since Paula Platt's son died in police custody in Macon. Mayor Lester Miller launched a series of new jail reforms on June 10, but Platt continues to seek justice for her son.

Stephen Fossett had a long history of mental health challenges before he died in custody at the Bibb County jail on May 25, 2024, after an altercation with deputies who tased him several times.

Platt called the mayor's jail reforms — which included mental health resources, jail expansion and an ankle monitor program — a step in the right direction. But she also said she feels the initiatives are just "damage control."

"If more changes were made earlier, then a lot of this still could've been pos-

See JUSTICE, Page A2

Recent jail audit shows long-standing issues persist

Laura E. Corley
Accountablity Reporter

A little more than a week before Breele Johnson was killed in a brawl between inmates in the Bibb County jail, grand jurors who had inspected the lockup noted problems including cell block doors in need of repair, people sleeping on mats and cots in the common area due to overcrowding, broken windows, the permeating stench of urine and "disgusting and inhumane conditions."

The grand jury's findings, which were filed in Bibb Superior court on June 11 after the jail inspection on May 27, echo the findings of grand juries in annual inspections since 2021.

The jail was poorly lit, "making it difficult to see the inmates from the control room causing safety concerns," according to the grand jury presentation. The grand jury also noted drainage issues, "unknown

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Dsto Moore / For The Melody

Phil Sullivan, who DJ'd the last three Pleasant Hill reunions and has attended nearly every single reunion over the years, works the turntables at this year's reunion in Macon at Mattie Hubbard Jones Park near L.H. Williams. He remembered his years growing up in Pleasant Hill fondly, he said.

It takes a village: Pleasant Hill reunites for 19th year

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Dreary weather kept attendance unusually low for the 19th Annual Pleasant Hill neighborhood reunion on Saturday, but the rain didn't stop some longtime neighbors from reconnecting with one another.

Folks pitched tents, grilled meat and reminisced at Mattie Hubbard Jones Park near L.H. Williams Elementary School in Pleasant Hill last weekend — a once thriving Black community of doctors, educators, businessmen and ministers founded in the 1870s.

At one time, everyone in Macon's Black community knew somebody from Pleasant Hill, former neighbor Debra Hall May said. Her uncle, Ulysses Bias, was the first Black school superintendent in the southeast.

True to its name, "Pleasant" Hill was "nothing but family," May said, remembering how women would sit out on their front porches and everyone knew each other's names.

"Pleasant Hill was a village for us," she said. "You ask anybody out there, and they'll tell you — we had a village."

The reunion at the park gave her the opportunity to catch up with old friends, including one she hadn't seen in person since 1963.

Most of her neighbors eventually

See REUNION, Page A3

Periodical — Mail Label

The life and times of Satch the wonderdog

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

When the grandchildren moved away, and the nest was empty again, George Fisher didn't know what to do with himself.

"We need to get a dog for your daddy," his wife, Susan, told their three children.

The Fisher family had grown up with dogs. Spanky. Scotty. Dolly. They were all family dogs. They belonged to the tribe.

George never had one he could call his own.



Photo courtesy Susan Fisher

George Fisher and his dog, Satch, share a moment on the sofa in a recent photo. The Fisher family adopted the dog — "rescued" him, George says — from a pet shop at the Macon Mall.

His youngest daughter, Lyndsay, found a basset hound at the pet store at the Macon Mall. He wagged his tail and looked at her with irresistible brown eyes. It was love at first sight.

George would later dub him the "doggie in the window" and laugh about the "rescue" dog they "rescued" from a pet store at the mall.

The puppy was born on Oct. 18, 2016. He was six weeks old when Lyndsay snuck him over to the house at Christmas. Susan summoned George from his "man cave" to help Lyndsay with something in her car trunk.

And there was the dog. It was a surprise.

They were kindred spirits from the beginning, joined at the hip and tail.

"He ate what I ate. He went where I went," George said.

He was tempted to name him after a character in a John Wayne movie. Or someone from the cast of "The Andy Griffith Show."

But his first choice was a baseball player.

He rolled the dice on Satchel Paige, whose blazing fastball and showmanship made him a baseball legend. (In 1965, he became the oldest player to put on a big-league uniform. He was 59.)

George was in the stands at Luther Williams Field on the night of April 23, 1980, when Paige threw out the ceremonial first pitch before a Macon Peaches game.

George found a picture of one of Paige's baseball card mug shots, then looked at his dog. Yes, there was a resemblance.

He would call him "Satch."

When folks assumed "Satch" was short for "Satchmo," the great Louis Armstrong, George would correct them. And when Satch had more swivel than swag in his step, George would chuckle and switch to "Sashay."

On his birth registration papers, there was no mention of Satch being bred to be a baseball fan. But George was not about to sit next to him on the brown leather recliner and watch figure skating on TV. He was determined to get him ready before spring training to watch every one of the Atlanta Braves' 162 games.

Thus, Satch learned to second-guess third-base coaches and threaten to cover his big floppy ears whenever George started swearing.

See SATCH, Page A3

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Cirrus Academy grapples with budget shortfalls

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

Despite afternoon thunderstorms causing board members and school employees to occasionally lose their Wi-Fi connections, Cirrus Academy held its second budget hearing with plans to approve the 2026 budget.

However, concerns about state funding and enrollment estimates prompted the board to table the matter until its next meeting.

The Cirrus Academy governing board met virtually Tuesday afternoon to approve the 2026 budget, organizational structure and salaries. The budget also included earmarks for a concrete basketball court, a sensory room and equipment for a morning podcast.

The board also reviewed a contract with the Georgia Charter School Association for consulting services, pertaining to leadership coaching and board proceedings.

"One of the things that was a focus in our budget... was, outside of the facilities, investing back in our property," Head of School Barry Williams said. "We also invested more in student experiences."

The academy's budget has the school expenses at $9.23 million and income at $9.24 million. The school's cash reserve is $150,000.

The school booked a net loss of $28,730.09 this past school year and is still waiting on several federal grants to fulfill projects that were originally budgeted.

Gregg Stevens, the former executive director of Cirrus and a current board liaison, cautioned the school against its state funding assumption.

Although Cirrus Academy budgeted $7.56 million in funding, an April state allotment sheet states that the charter school is set to receive only $6.7 million.

CFO Arleen Samuels told board members the figure used in the budget accounts for an increase in enrollment from the 472 students administrators currently projected.

The April allotment sheet notes only 425 students were enrolled in its count. State funding is determined by enrollment count, which will be updated when another count takes place later in the year.

"This $7.5 million revenue number lines up to be about $2000 more per pupil than most estimates I've seen," Stevens said.

The budget also includes a 2.5% raise for a number of positions, as well as the hiring of a special education teacher, two culture paraprofessionals and an associate technology director.

The board ultimately voted to table the discussion until its next meeting Sunday. The board has until June 30 to adopt a budget.

Cirrus Academy had its contract renewed by the State Charter School Commission in April 2024, even after failing to meet tate standards.

The charter school did not meet this year's state fiscal management standards, scoring a zero in its duty to follow GAAP standards, or generally accepted accounting principles.

The state's annual assessment also noted Cirrus Academy's debt. The school issued a $11.8 million bond package in 2020 and allocated $900,000 in its 2026 budget toward paying off that debt.

Williams and board chairperson Latrell Taylor did not respond to requests for comment on the budget or Cirrus' debt.



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 during a recent protest at the jail.. Platt asked Sheriff David Davis for accountability and justice in the wake of her son's death.

Justice, from A1:

sibly prevented," she said.

In the wake of a recent protest against inhumane and squalid conditions in the jail, as well as a riot that resulted in the death of Breele Jahiem Johnson on June, 4, Platt views the county's efforts as a "patchwork" to the issues.

She says she hopes to see the initiatives move forward, noting an inmate advocate on the newly formed Macon Justice and Wellness Task Force is an "amazing idea." Platt said she would be open to serving on the task force if asked.

Among the mayor's other initiatives is a plan to expand the existing jail on Oglethorpe Street. Platt said she believes inmates should have a voice in whatever changes are being planned.

"They're human beings," she said. "Talk to them."

The new jail reforms still don't address how her son's case was "swept up under the rug," Platt said.

Footage of the incident leading up to Fossett's death was released, but Platt said she wants all other evidence to be made public as well.

Although the Georgia Bureau of Investigation ruled her son's death a homicide, Macon Judicial Circuit District Attorney Anita Howard did not pursue criminal charges against the deputies involved in the tasing.

Platt and her family have filed a civil suit against the Bibb County Sheriff's Office but want the deputies involved to be placed on administrative leave while a grand jury determines whether they're liable for Fossett's death.

"If they're accused of committing a crime, let's see if they're liable for that crime," Platt said. "The same as we are. They shouldn't just work everyday, like nothing has happened."

She said she believes that the ankle monitor program, which allows non-violent offenders to be released but requires they remain employed, would have made a difference in her son's case.

"I'm quite sure my son isn't the first person that this happened to," she said. "But I want it to be the last."

One initiative Platt hopes will be implemented is the requirement of an immediate GBI investigation for every death involving a deputy. In Fossett's case, the sheriff's office did not call the GBI until later.

Grief weighs heavy on Platt, who says she doesn't feel like she's doing enough, but will continue to fight for justice for Fossett and others.

"I feel like I'm just being a mother," Platt said. "A mother that loves her child and lost her child."

Audit, from A1:

liquid substances on the ground," cleaning supplies left unattended, broken windows, inmates without mats or blankets and a loose stair on a stairway connecting two cell blocks.

The grand jury recommended the county prioritize building a new annex to replace the older part of the jail built in 1979. The newest part of the jail was built in 2007.

Three days after the grand jury inspection, but before it became public record, dozens of people rallied outside the lockup between Oglethorpe and Hazel streets on May 30 to protest the inhumane and squalid conditions inside.

Sheriff David Davis, who is responsible for managing and maintaining the jail, told protestors he agreed the jail was "deplorable" and "antiquated." Davis marched with the crowd to Macon City Hall but the mayor was not there.

On June 4, eight days after the grand jury inspection, 22-year-old Johnson was fatally stabbed in the chest after inmates in the C block jimmied open the cell door to the D block where he was being housed. Four other inmates were injured in the outbreak of violence. The grand jury noted the locks on cell doors in the C200 block were in need of repair.

The next week, on June 10, Mayor Lester Miller announced plans for the county to expand the jail at its current site and condemn part of Hawthorne Street to make room for it. He also said the sheriff plans to release roughly 150 nonviolent inmates in the coming month and enroll them in an ankle monitoring program to help relieve overcrowding at the jail.

The ankle monitors and software are estimated to cost the county about $2.5 million, which will be paid for using federal America Rescue Plan Act money the mayor earmarked for the Macon Violence Prevention program.

The mayor also introduced a new group, the Macon Justice and Wellness Task Force, which he has charged with researching and evaluating justice programs including the jail-based support system for inmates.

On Saturday, June 14, a 36-year-old was found unresponsive in a jail cell. Mario Marquiz Clark was pronounced dead at a local hospital. Clark was being held in the jail on charges including violation of probation, a state court bench warrant, enticing a child for indecent purposes and public indecency.

For a link to read grand jury jail inspection presentments from 2021-25, visit maconmelody.com.

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Reunion, from A1:

moved out of the community, but May still remembers her peers from school and the kids with whom she played outside.

"I just don't forget the people I was raised with," she said.

Mattie Hubbard Jones, the park's namesake, ran the playground for all the young folks in the neighborhood.

She made the park a "safe haven" for them, according to May, who said when the street lights went on, she knew she better head home for the day.

Phil Sullivan attended L.H. Williams, like many other folks at the reunion, and also spoke fondly of the community-driven woman behind the park's name.

"She taught us 'please,' 'thank you,' 'no ma'am,'" he said.

Sullivan DJ'd the last three reunion events and has attended nearly every single reunion over the years.

He still has family living in Pleasant Hill and recalled skating through the streets as a young boy, as well as the neighborhood's "immaculate" lawns and fruit trees.

"I know that they're getting some of the same ingredients that I had to make me a better person," Sullivan said of the younger generations growing up in the historic neighborhood.

Now 70 years old, May said she wishes she'd never left Pleasant Hill and that she could have brought her grandchildren up in the same neighborhood, but she recognizes things have changed.

"When I ride through Pleasant Hill, my son says, 'I don't know why you wanna do this,'" May said. "'You ain't gonna do nothing but walk through there with your head hung down and just shake your head cause you don't like what you see.'"

May said she believes the first step to changing the narrative surrounding Pleasant Hill's decline is to give kids something to do, such as a summer program.

When she was a kid, there was a neighborhood center that taught kids how to sew and the boys were able to learn woodworking skills. The building once sat on the corner of Jeff Davis and Madison streets, but has since been torn down.

"It really ain't the same Pleasant Hill like it was when I was growing up," Benjamin Hunt said, echoing May's sentiments.

Hunt grew up in Pleasant Hill and still lives there, attending the reunion every year.

He raised four kids in the neighborhood and said it's not bad, but it's not what it used to be; nowadays you have to watch your back and keep the kids inside the house, but Hunt said he never felt that way growing up.

Although May doesn't like what her neighborhood has become, she still appreciates how she was raised and made a point of teaching her kids about its history.

She was only 4 or 5 years old during the Civil Rights movement, but vividly recalls the Klu Klux Klan burning a cross in the front lawn of a Pleasant Hill resident who was running for public office.

She still remembers urine being thrown at her mother on Forest Avenue.

Sullivan expressed what many longtime residents feel for Pleasant Hill — a neighborhood rich with history and memories kept alive by those who come together once a year to honor their village.

"I love Pleasant Hill," Sullivan said. "This is my neighborhood. I never stopped loving Pleasant Hill."



Dsto Moore / For The Melody

Neighbors from the 19th annual Pleasant Hill reunion embrace in a hug at Mattie Hubbard Jones Park in Macon last weekend. Many of the folks in attendance have known each other since they were kids in the neighborhood.

Satch, from A1:

That was usually when the Braves brought in Raisel Iglesias from the bullpen.

When he needed to go outside to water the bushes, he would scratch at the door with feet the size of hubcaps. He was left-handed, a true southpaw. (Legend has it he might have even done the tomahawk chop whenever George dozed off or left the room.)

On the night of Nov. 2, 2021, two weeks after his 5th birthday, he was at George's side when the Braves won the World Series.

Satch chased squirrels and bicycles. He drank out of the toilet. He hogged the covers and was king of the queen-sized bed. He was territorial with his recliner, too. He kept one eye on the TV and the other on the front door.

He never attended obedience school. He howled at the moon. He chewed up a pair of reading glasses and tore up two pairs of house shoes. His infield defense was superb. Nothing got past him.

He could run like the wind, but he was not fond of fetching. George called him "Macon's most incorrigible hound dog."

"His nose knew no bounds," George said. "He went where that nose took him."

Conniving and smart, he was unlike the other basset hounds the Fishers had owned. He had enough sense to come inside to get out of the rain. Among his superpowers was that he could hear the UPS trucks almost as soon as they pulled into the neighborhood. He would never bark for a FedEx delivery, only the brown-uniformed guys.

He was a lover of hot dogs, ginger snaps, pop tarts and doggie treats. His favorite meal was a Wendy's Baconator – hold the bun – and a Frosty.

It was his last meal before he died on June 2.

George will be 63 years old on October 10. It saddens him that Satch would have turned 63 – in dog years – on October 18. That's six days before the opening game of the World Series, even though it's looking like the Braves won't be playing in it this year.

Satch was cremated. His ashes were placed in a small box. George has requested that, at his own funeral, he wants those ashes to be buried with him.

When Satch died, George wrote an obituary and published it on Facebook. He has posted more photos of that dog over the past eight years than his grandchildren.

He will never forget the life and times of Satch, the wonderdog.

"I'm no different from anyone who has ever loved dogs, but this cut me to the quick," he said. "I buried my parents and my grandparents. I have spoken at the funerals of some of my good friends. ... But, in terms of shooting me in the heart and breaking it into a jillion pieces..."

His voice trailed off.

"Satch was like a member of the family. He had a window to my soul."

George was still wiping away an afternoon's worth of tears when I left his driveway the other day. He tells me he is insufferable.

Satch was never one to quote Alfred Lord Tennyson, but better to have loved and lost than never loved at all.

Ed Grisamore was the recipient of the 2024 John Holliman Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

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Commission, from A1:

to meet the definition of a "food mart." Food marts must carry a minimum of: four or five pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables, four pounds of fresh, raw beef, chicken or pork, four dozen fresh chicken eggs, four pounds of bread and four gallons of cow milk.

The county's lawyers found the store met the definition of a "vice mart" and not a food mart. The commission unanimously approved the denial.

"It was a long time coming," County Commissioner Seth Clark said to the county's legal team about the store in his district. "Thank you for being diligent about it."

'We can bring the world to Macon'

The county's video livestream of the meeting was ended before final public comments during which former Mayor Robert Reichert used his allotted five minutes to plea for the county to focus its efforts on ensuring the city is included in a proposed high-speed passenger rail line between Savannah and Atlanta.

The former mayor came to the meeting toting several large poster boards showing five routes under consideration for the passenger rail line. Only one of those routes included Macon as a possible stop.

"Nothing's for sure," Reichert said. "We need a resolution of support from this commission to say, 'Please take a look at why it makes more sense to come from Atlanta to Macon to Savannah.'"

Reichert asked Mayor Lester Miller to make a pitch to the Federal Railroad Administration in which the county would make a contingent offer to retrofit the historic Terminal Station and get it back online as a rail stop.

Miller gave the former mayor a warning that his five minute comment period would expire in one minute.

"One minute?!" Reichert said with surprise, scrambling to present each of the five poster boards.

"We can bring the nation to Macon," Reichert said, prompting cheers from the audience. "In fact, because they're also looking at a station at Hartsfield Jackson Airport, we can bring the world to Macon. Come on, y'all, get on board."

Miller said, "Thank you for being here Mayor Reichert, you owe me a few minutes."

Several in the audience chuckled.

A few people who spoke in public comment expressed concerns regarding the jail, which has been under increased public scrutiny amid recent inmate deaths, squalid and unsafe conditions.

County Commissioner Donice Bryant said she worked for the sheriff's office for 26 years and 12 or 13 of them were spent at the jail. She said she hopes in the next budget she sees allocated funds for the jail. Bryant noted the county bought property on Fulton Mill Road years ago for a jail expansion but instead built an animal shelter.

In other business, the county commission approved:

- Purchasing furniture for the airport's "sterile area" from Albany-based Arcadia Chair Company — $106,413 — Airport Fund
- An agreement for promotion of Contour Airline's new route to Dulles Airport by New York-based Advanced Magazine Publishers Inc. — $30,000 — Airport Fund
- An agreement with Williams Communications for radio equipment and installation of communication towers for — $214,298 — 2018 SPLOST funds
- An amended agreement with Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates for additional architectural engineering and design services at the Macon City Auditorium — $77,500 — 2018 SPLOST funds
- Upgrades to four communication towers by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation–based International Towers, LLC — $744,039 — 2018 SPLOST funds
- Changing a purchasing order to Family Counseling Center of Central Georgia Inc. for the Macon Judicial Circuit District Attorney's R.I.S.E. initiative — $20,000 — grant funds
- Changing additional federal Emergency Solutions Grant program money for homelessness prevention to Family Advancement Ministries Inc. — $42,198 — Emergency Solution Grant funds
- Awarding additional federal Emergency Solutions Grant program money for homelessness prevention to the Macon-Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council Inc. — $25,523 — Emergency Solution Grant funds
- An extension to the county's agreement with Colorado-based SAFEbuilt Georgia LLC for building inspection services — $130,00 to $150,000 — contractual services line item

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Opinion

‘Beach Girls’ remember man behind ‘Boys’



Ed Grisamore

Miki Fluker first heard the song “Surf City” when she was 11 years old in the summer of 1963.

No, she wasn’t hanging 10 catching a wave on a surfboard in landlocked Macon. Her toes were clinging to the edge of the pool at Baconsfield Park.

Jan and Dean were singing about a beach where there were “two girls for every boy.” It would become the first “surfing” song to reach the top of the national charts.

“Surf City” was co-written by Brian Wilson, founder of The Beach Boys and musical visionary of a generation. The Beach Boys gave the world some of the most fun-loving, sun-soaked music on the planet for more than 60 years. The group sold over 100 million records worldwide and had three dozen Top 40 hits, more than any American band in history.

Wilson, 82, died on June 11 in Los Angeles. The New York Times called him “rock’s poet laureate of surf-and-sun innocence.” Wilson had such perfect pitch that the iconic Bob Dylan once suggested he donate his ears to the Smithsonian.

To Miki, he was the “heart and soul” of The Beach Boys.

She was at her home in Macon’s North Highlands neighborhood last Wednesday when a neighbor texted her, asking if she had heard the sad news. It wasn’t long before her phone was filled with texts from others saying they were “sorry for her loss” … as if the R.I.P. was a dear family member.

She dreaded having to tell her 38-year-old daughter, Elizabeth Causey, who lives with her. Elizabeth has grown up listening to the music of her mom’s generation.

The mother and daughter’s love of The Beach Boys has created a special bond. Over the past 21 years, they have attended 30 Beach Boys concerts in five states.

So help them, Rhonda, they get around.

Miki and Elizabeth are self-proclaimed “G-rated groupies.” They have had backstage passes and front-row seats. Elizabeth has been invited to appear on stage with the band numerous times.

She was asked to join the group on stage during their show at the Macon City Auditorium in 2014. She knew every word to every song when the group last appeared here two years ago.

But even though Elizabeth has heard the band play “Good Vibrations” in Florida, “Wouldn’t It Be Nice?” in South Carolina, “Get Around” in North Carolina and “California Girls” in Tennessee, she has never seen them in concert.

She is blind.

She was born 14 weeks premature on Sept. 22, 1986, and has been visually impaired since she was an infant.

Her introduction to beach music came as a child, “listening” to an episode of “Sesame Street” in front of the TV. The Muppets broke into a Beach Boys tune, and Elizabeth was mesmerized with the words and melodies.

She soon traded in “Mary Had a Little Lamb” for “Little Deuce Coupe.” As she got older, she learned to play the fiddle, joined the choir at the Georgia Academy for the Blind and worshiped the ‘Boys’ on a local “oldies” radio station.

“When she was young, she was puzzled why they were playing Sesame Street songs on 99 WAYS,” Miki said, laughing. “That’s a testament to the universality of Brian Wilson. She grew up listening to 1960s beach music, and it wasn’t because I said, ‘Here, listen to this.’ Her peers were listening to rap music. She didn’t like that compared to the harmonies of The Beach Boys.”

Miki attended her first Beach Boys concert in 1972, when she was a student at the University of Georgia. She didn’t see them again until she took Elizabeth and two of her daughter’s friends from the Academy for the Blind to a concert at Chastain Park in Atlanta in July 2004.

The ushers looked at her like she was crazy when she asked if they could meet the band. The charm worked, and they were escorted backstage. They met Mike Love, one of the group’s founding members, and Bruce Johnston, who joined the band in 1965, replacing Glen Campbell. They were introduced to Randell Kirsch, who played guitar and bass. It was the beginning of a long and special friendship.

The following year, Miki and Elizabeth braved the landfall of Hurricane Wilma in Florida to attend a concert at the Epcot Center in Orlando. From the stage, Kirsch recognized Elizabeth in the crowd. She was dancing to almost every song, and he gave her one of his guitar picks.

They were also befriended by drummer John Cowsill, originally with The Cowsills, the 1960s group that inspired the TV series “The Partridge Family.” Elizabeth has a pair of drumsticks that he gave her, as well as a pair gifted from longtime drummer Mike Kowalski.

The more Macon’s “Beach Girls” followed the band, the more the “Boys” got to know them as super fans. Miki said they might not always recognize her in the audience, but they never forgot Elizabeth. She has always appreciated the kindness that band members showed her daughter over the years.

“Throughout her life, I have tried to make things happen for her,” Miki said.

Although neither of them got to meet Wilson in person, Elizabeth once talked to him on the phone. On the day after Christmas in 2004, a tsunami in the Indian Ocean killed more than 225,000 people in 14 countries. Among those who died in Thailand was Markus Sandlund, a cellist from Sweden who had appeared with Wilson on tour and in the recording studio.

When Wilson pledged to personally call anyone who contributed $100 or more to a tsunami relief fund, Miki sent in a donation. A few months later, Wilson called Elizabeth and talked to her for about five minutes. Among the questions she asked the head Beach Boy was why he was not fond of surfing.

Some have referred to Wilson’s death as “the day the music died.”

“Each day I think about the music he wrote,” Miki said. “Each day that goes by is a realization that it's over. Brian being gone kind of dims the light.”

Ed Grisamore doesn’t have to go to the beach to have Beach Boys and Jimmy Buffett songs on his playlist.

Georgia Senate braces for mass exodus



Marc Hyden

One of the immutable truths in politics is that just about every position — except the presidency — can be viewed as a possible stepping stone to higher office. This sounds like a particularly cynical hot take, but it’s the truth for a variety of reasons. Burnout in our hyper-political environment, low lawmaker pay and vacancies higher up the electoral food chain can influence officials to seek different roles.

An open seat can be a tempting opportunity for greener — but highly ambitious — politicians who have been diligently amassing the experience to serve the public in a larger capacity. Most of them shouldn’t be criticized for seeking higher office either. After all, would you want to vote for someone with no experience? Of course not, but this attrition can take a detrimental toll on our institutions.

Some public officials are serial candidates for different positions and don’t remain at their posts long. Meanwhile, others are seasoned veterans of the General Assembly, and when they vacate their post, they leave large shoes to fill. That’s where matters stand in the Georgia Senate where the august body is hemorrhaging senators and risks a degree of brain drain.

The domino effect contributing to this exodus starts at the top of Georgia politics: Gov. Brian Kemp is term-limited. Among those with a role in the Senate, Sen. Jason Esteves, D-Atlanta, announced his intention to run for governor and Lt. Gov. Burt Jones is assumed to be running as well. This is creating a mad dash to fill Jones’ soon-to-be open seat.

Sens. John F. Kennedy, R-Macon, Steve Gooch, R-Dahlonega, Blake Tillery, R-Vidalia, and Josh McLaurin, D-Sandy Springs, are all vying to replace Jones, and Sen. Greg Dolezal, R-Cumming, is rumored to be mulling a run too. Sens. Bill Coswert and Brian Strickland are seeking to succeed Attorney General Chris Carr, who is also running for governor. Sen. Emmanuel Jones, D-Decatur, is pursuing a seat in Congress, Sonya Halpern, D-Atlanta, may as well, and Sen. Brandon Beach, R-Alpharetta, vacated his seat earlier this year to join the Trump administration.

Every so often there is a massive amount of turnover in the Georgia General Assembly, but this year feels different. If all of these 11 potential candidates ultimately depart the Senate, along with Beach who makes 12, it could prove a serious blow. The Georgia Senate has only 56 members, and these soon-to-be former senators aren’t exactly all junior lawmakers.

They include the Lieutenant Governor, Senate President Pro Tempore, Senate Majority Leader and the committee chairmen of Appropriations, Judiciary, Regulated Industries, Transportation, and Economic Development and Tourism. By the end of their upcoming term, they will have well over a century of combined senatorial experience.

The turnover rate could reach much higher, too. U.S. Rep. Buddy Carter and Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John King are running for U.S. Senate seats, and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has long been rumored to be considering a run for something else. If they follow through, then more state senators might seek to replace them, which will deplete the ranks even further.

This could drastically change the Senate’s makeup and political bent — for better or for worse — which happens from time to time. However, one of the bigger problems with such an exodus is that the Senate loses continuity and critical institutional knowledge, but there is some solace. It’s not as if the Senate has no other experienced politicians or has an empty bench.

There are still numerous deeply qualified senators on both sides of the aisle who can guide the Senate and mentor a new generation of senators, but the reality is that while serving in the Georgia General Assembly is a critically important job, I fear that some view it as a stepping stone to greater things.

As we are currently witnessing, it only takes one domino to fall to lead to incredibly high turnover in the legislature, and it feels particularly acute this term. There is probably little that can be done to retain more incumbents short of vastly increasing lawmaker pay and power, which doesn’t seem to be in the cards, especially since legislators recently received a pay bump.

Nevertheless, this is a good lesson for voters: Come election season, you’re not necessarily voting for the candidate for the job they’re running for, but the job they eventually want.

Marc Hyden is the senior 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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Things that go bump in the night, disrupting a peaceful slumber



Kyle Dominy

The sound came from the attic around 4 a.m. It is hard to describe it exactly, but there were bumps, and thumps, and scrapes, culminating to what sounded like hipsters fighting over small batch, artisanal, organic vape juice, if such a thing exists.

Of course, this dead-of-night cacophony woke me up from an otherwise peaceful slumber. My wife and dog, too quickly looked to me, the fearless leader of the household, to investigate. I was none too pleased to be awake and forced to confront whatever was having an early morning rave in my house, but there are certain responsibilities a man takes on when he has a family.

Everything is exaggerated in the darkness and fear easily beats rational thinking. I guess we can thank television shows and movies for leading us to believe that only danger and certain demise resides in the unseen.

With the commotion coming from the attic, I knew the intruder was of the varmint variety. Only a wily critter could get up there from outside. There was no danger, thankfully, because children slept through the whole thing.

Armed with a heavy duty flashlight, with the only plan of temporarily blinding and beating to death whatever I found, I made my way to the attic access. What was I to encounter? A raccoon? A possum? A wild cat that had gone feral living in the woods? Whatever it was, it sounded big, and I was beginning to doubt my choice of weapons.

Upstairs, I could still hear the intruder beating around the rafters and ceiling joists. I slowly cracked open the attic access door. The noise stopped briefly, the monster suspicious of the change of air flow allowed by the opening. After a few moments, it continued moving. I pointed the harsh beam of the LED light. The bright cylinder pierced the dark space, illuminating ductwork and the boxes of items stashed away, casting long shadows in the already eerie recesses of my home.

Something dashed along a board taking refuge behind a box. It was large and dark colored. It moved rapidly, like a puddle of sentient ooze. I went inside the attic, the wife and dog behind me, no help at all, urging me to shut the door so the beast couldn’t get inside the house proper.

I did so, and prepared to face my foe dutifully.

I heard the thing make a move again and begin the climb to a higher part of the attic. It fell and stayed where it landed. I carefully made my way toward the location, carefully stepping over wires, ducts and exposed sheetrock. The last thing I wanted was to fall through the ceiling. At the spot, I peered over a stack of boxes, and there was the thing that violated the sanctity of my home.

It was a rat, and thankfully not a hipster. In its hasty retreat it had landed in one of the traps I keep up there for just such an occasion. Mystery solved, crisis over. With hopes for more sleep abandoned, additional traps were placed just in case the animal invited any friends over.

They don’t warn you about those kinds of things when you buy a house, but for a few days, I sure missed my old apartments in the city.

Preserving the past with artificial intelligence: How technology is breathing new life into history



Joe Finkelstein

In a world racing toward the future, artificial intelligence is also helping us look back. Across the globe, historians, researchers, educators and museums are tapping into AI to rediscover, preserve and even reimagine the past. While AI is often seen as a futuristic tool used in robotics or self-driving cars, its quiet contributions to cultural preservation are equally groundbreaking. From helping repair ancient artifacts to breathing life into forgotten languages, AI is becoming an unexpected champion of historical memory.

Fixing the unfixable

Let's start with damaged artifacts. Imagine an ancient mosaic or Renaissance painting that's been worn down by centuries of weather, war or neglect. Traditional restoration methods require painstaking manual work, deep historical knowledge, and sometimes a bit of guesswork. AI can assist by analyzing thousands of similar artworks from the same period or region. By identifying recurring styles, color palettes and patterns, the AI can offer well-informed suggestions on how a damaged section might have originally looked.

Researchers in Italy are using AI and robotics to reconstruct ancient frescoes from Pompeii. The project, called RePAIR (Reconstructing the Past: Artificial Intelligence and Robotics meet Cultural Heritage), is working to digitally piece together thousands of fragmented fresco shards. The AI software analyzes the shape, size and illustrations on the fragments to determine how they fit together, while robotic arms physically reassemble them. This groundbreaking technology could revolutionize archaeological restoration efforts worldwide.

In other cases, museums are using neural networks to reconstruct sculptures that have lost limbs or faces. Importantly, these tools don't replace human judgment, they enhance it, providing curators and artists with a starting point to discuss restoration options more thoroughly.

Cracking ancient codes

AI is also helping us understand ancient languages. Old scripts, lost dialects and incomplete writings can be hard to figure out. But large language models trained on lots of text can spot patterns and suggest meanings. For example, AI has been used to study ancient writing like cuneiform and hieroglyphics. It can compare symbols, match them with known translations and even tell if two people wrote the same scroll. In one intriguing case, AI showed that two scribes worked on a single Dead Sea Scroll, something experts hadn't noticed for years.

Stepping into the past

Museums and schools are using AI and virtual reality to bring history to life. With a headset, you can now walk through ancient Rome, explore the Great Wall of China or see landmarks as they looked hundreds of years ago. On a recent visit to Impact XR, a cool business here in Macon, run by Sammy Coons, I entered virtual historic worlds where I had a conversation with Harriet Tubman and watched Martin Luther King Jr. give his "I Have a Dream" speech. These experiences make learning more real and help us feel more connected to the past.

Saving stories and voices

There's also exciting work happening with oral histories, family archives and community storytelling. AI can clean up grainy video footage, sharpen blurred photographs and restore old audio recordings that were once thought unusable. New advances even allow for the creation of AI-generated voice models, where, with permission and respect for ethical boundaries, someone's voice can be preserved and simulated. For example, survivors of historical events like the Holocaust have collaborated with technologists to record their testimonies in ways that allow future generations to ask questions and receive AI-generated answers based on their life stories. In a more personal context, families are using AI to restore wedding footage from the 1940s, enhance voice recordings from cassette tapes and preserve traditions by generating interactive digital memoirs for grandparents.

Asking the right questions

Of course, these powerful tools raise important questions. Who decides what a restored artifact or building should look like when the original is unknown? How do we avoid rewriting or romanticizing history based on biased or limited data? And what safeguards are in place to ensure these technologies aren't used to distort or fabricate history for political or commercial gain? For example, a perfectly reconstructed voice or image could easily cross the line into deepfake territory if not clearly labeled and responsibly handled. That's why many institutions working with AI emphasize transparency, collaboration with human experts and clear communication with the public about what is real, what is simulated and what is speculative.

A bridge to the past

Still, when used thoughtfully, AI is proving to be more than a tech trend. It's becoming a bridge between generations, a magnifying glass on the details of time and a way to hold onto stories we might otherwise lose. Whether it's a student in Georgia walking through a virtual Mayan temple, or a grandmother hearing her father's restored voice from a long-lost tape, AI is enriching the past while opening up new futures. It reminds us that history isn't just something behind us,it's something we're still building. With the help of AI, we have new tools to explore, remember and celebrate it like never before.

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

Macon, Georgia: A city with a history of wonderful 'Ones'



Ed Grisamore

We're No. 1. Macon is a city with a long list of "firsts" next to its name.

No brag. Just facts.

In celebration of next week's one-year anniversary of The Macon Melody, this is the beginning of a three-week series of "One-ders."

Enjoy your summer reading.

***

Of the six cities and towns in the U.S. named after North Carolina statesman Nathaniel Macon — Missouri, Mississippi, Michigan, Illinois and North Carolina are the others — we are No. 1 in seniority (established in 1823) and size (population 156,512).

***

Wesleyan College in Macon was the first university in the world to grant degrees to women. It opened its doors in 1839 as Georgia Female College.

Among its most famous students have been Soong May-ling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) and former Miss America Neva Langley Fickling. The late Fickling, who died in 2012, shared another "first." When she was crowned on September 6, 1952, she became the first Miss Georgia to win the title and served her reign as Miss America in 1953.

***

Macon hosts the annual International Cherry Blossom Festival and touts itself as No. 1 in the world in Yoshino cherry trees, with more than 350,000 showing off their beautiful blossoms in the spring.

***

The Macon Mall, which opened 50 years ago in the summer of 1975, boasted nearly 1.1 million square feet and a whopping 13 acres under one roof. At one time, it was the largest enclosed mall in the state.

***

Macon's YKK plant, which opened in 1973, was Georgia's first Japanese-owned factory, and is the No. 1 zipper manufacturer in the world.

***

Oprah Winfrey, whose award-winning talk show was the highest-rated program of its kind in television history, broadcast two shows from Macon in November 2007. A survey revealed that 45 percent of local TV viewers watched her show every afternoon at 4 p.m. — more than any city in the country.

***

The Georgia Sports Hall of Fame opened in Macon in 1999. It boasts 43,000 square feet, making it the largest state sports museum in the country.

***

The 10-story American Federal Building was considered the first "skyscraper" in the South. Designed by the famous Macon architect Neel Reid, it was the tallest concrete building south of New York City when it was built in 1906.

***

Macon singer Otis Redding's "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay" was released posthumously after Redding died in a plane crash in 1967. The song became the first-ever single to reach No. 1 on the Billboard charts after a musician's death. Ironically, it was his only No. 1 hit.

***

Nu-Way Weiners, the second-oldest (1916) hot dog restaurant in America, had its slaw dogs rated No. 1 in the nation by the New York Times food section in July 2002.

***

Macon was the birthplace of what became the first shortening made entirely of vegetable oil in the world. Macon cotton entrepreneur Wallace McCaw developed the formula, which was sold to Procter & Gamble in 1909. The company then introduced the familiar red, white and blue cans to American kitchens as Crisco Oil.

***

When Macon's Bobby Hendley was a pitcher with the Chicago Cubs, he threw a one-hitter against the Los Angeles Dodgers on September 9, 1965. Hendley lost the game 1-0 on an unearned run after Dodger pitcher Sandy Koufax pitched a perfect game.

It is commemorated in a display at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

***

Although there was no formally appointed "poet laureate" in the 19th century, Macon's Sidney Lanier was the first poet from Georgia to rise to national prominence. The state's largest lake (Lake Lanier) and tallest bridge (Sidney Lanier Bridge in Brunswick) are named in his honor.

***

The American Water Works Association awarded Macon first place nationally in the "Best of the Best Drinking Water Taste Test" at its annual conference in San Diego in 2009.

***

Macon's Viola Ross Napier was the first female to take Georgia's bar exam, the first woman to argue cases before the state's highest courts and the first woman to be elected to the Georgia Legislature. Her portrait hangs in the state capitol in Atlanta.

***

Alexander II Elementary, which opened in 1902, is the oldest schoolhouse in continuous operation in Georgia.

***

The roof of the Macon City Auditorium, which is celebrating its centennial this year, spans 152 feet in diameter, making it the largest true copper dome in the world.

***

The world's first crop dusting company, Huff-Daland Dusters, was founded in Macon a century ago in 1925 and formed the foundation for a company that would later become Delta Airlines.

***

Macon is home to the largest indoor pickleball facility in the world. In a 150,000 square-foot section of the old Macon Mall, the Rhythm & Rally Sports & Events opened in December 2023 and has 32 courts.

***

The three Healy brothers — James, Patrick and Michael — were at the front of the line in almost everything they did. They grew up on a Macon plantation in the 19th century on what is now Healy Point and River North.

James became the first Black person to be ordained as a bishop in the U.S. in the Roman Catholic Church. Patrick was the nation's first Black college student to earn a doctorate (he later became president of Georgetown University). Michael became the first Black man assigned to command a U.S. government ship and served in law enforcement in the territory of Alaska.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The Georgia Sports Hall of Fame is located in downtown Macon on Cherry Street. It boasts 43,000 square feet, making it the largest state sports museum in the country.

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Events

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

Prints + Poses: A Solstice Workshop
Saturday, June 21
9 a.m.
1080 Third St., Suite 500
Presented by Mama Hawk Draws, come to Tanglewood Art Studios and create your own cyanotype sun print — a beautiful art form that uses sunlight to expose natural objects on paper. Enjoy a rejuvenating outdoor yoga flow led by the joyful Jenni Saddler. All levels of experience are welcome and materials and light snacks are provided. Attendees only need to bring a yoga mat, water and a small object that holds meaning for you (like a flower, feather, or leaf) to use in the print. $50 per person.

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

Kristina Murray and The Pink Stones at Grant's Lounge
Saturday, June 21
9 p.m.
576 Poplar St.
A spirit of perseverance forms the bedrock of Murray's stunning new album, Little Blue. Recorded with producers Misa Arriaga and Rachael Moore, the collection grapples with loneliness, desperation and existential crises through a series of cinematic snapshots of small-town burnouts and last call lovers. Murray is a country artist in the truest sense, a genuine craftswoman with a keen eye and ear for the little details that bring her working-class characters to life, and her delivery is timeless, blurring the lines between the old school honky-tonk, swampy Americana, and R&B-infused southern rock she grew up on in her home state of Georgia.

Jazz In The Courtyard
Sunday, June 22
7 p.m.
355 MLK Jr. Blvd.
Join Douglass Theatre once again for Macon's coolest outdoor music series: Jazz In the Courtyard, with featured saxophonist Tracie Washington Scott! Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy this free performance.

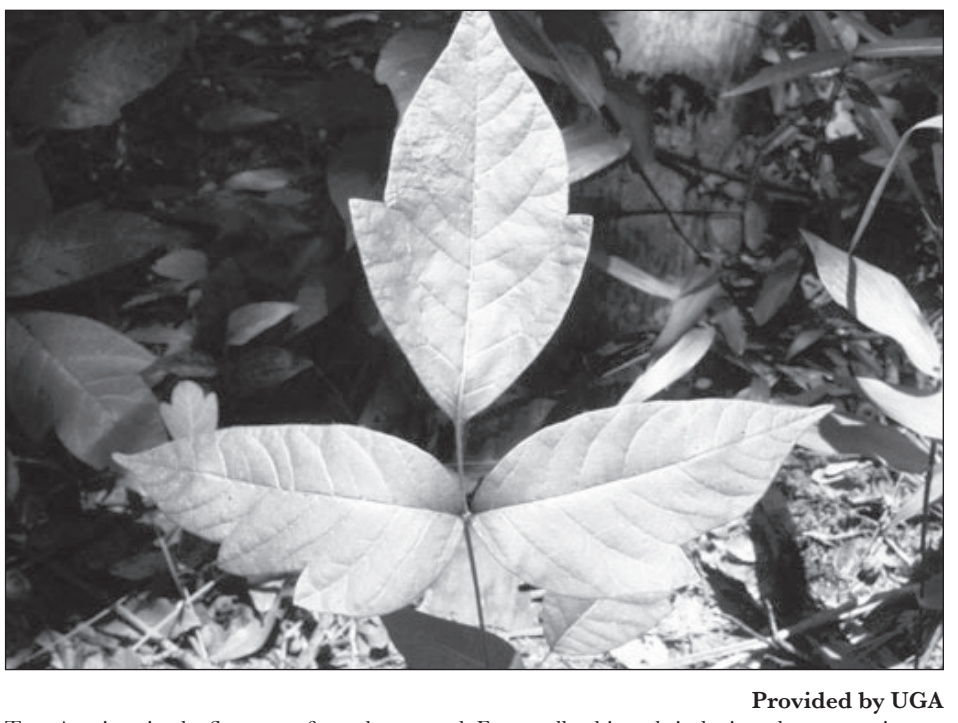
Parker McCollum performs at the Amphitheater
Saturday, June 28
7:30 p.m.
3657 Eisenhower Parkway
Country star, Parker McCollum, is headed to the Atrium Health Amphitheater, with special guests Corey Smith and Vincent Mason.

Sudoku answers

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

Caution, respect: Practical approach to poison ivy

Maryann F.
Bibb County Master
Gardener Volunteer



Provided by UGA

Top: A poison ivy leaflet grows from the ground. Eventually, this rash-inducing plant grows into a hairy vine that climbs around trees. Bottom: A poison ivy vine wraps itself up and around a tree.

Many of us who love the outdoors have learned to fear poison ivy due to the intensely itchy rash that can result from touching it. No one wants it to grow in areas where family and friends like to work and play outside. However, this common native plant, Rhus radicans, plays an important role in the web of life.

We notice it at ground level, where it grows until it finds a tree. There, it climbs and develops into a thick, hairy vine. In the fall, it produces white berries high in the tree. Birds eat these berries and spread the seeds, a vital food source for them each fall. Because of its role in the ecosystem, we need to be smart enough to co-exist with this plant. We can judge when to remove poison ivy and when to leave it alone.

Proper identification is the first priority. This can be challenging, as the vine varies quite a bit in appearance — its shades of green differ, and leaves range from shiny to dull. Poison ivy is characterized by sets of three leaflets which have inconsistent, jagged margins. Some red is usually noticeable where the leaflets join, sometimes on the stalk. The vines often have "hairs" to grip the trees as they climb.

There are several other plants that look similar. Compare pictures to Virginia creeper, box elder and blackberry, common harmless look-alikes in our area. Virginia creeper has sets of three to seven leaves, usually five; box elder grows into a tree form and blackberry has thorns. Each of these look-alikes has regular serrated leaf edges. Despite these differences, it is easy to overlook a single poison ivy plant within a crowded patch of weeds.

As a defense, poison ivy produces urushiol. This oil causes an allergic dermatitis reaction in many people — ranging from minor itching to weeks of intense itching and blistering. Upon contact, the oil transfers undetectably from any surface of the plant, alive or dead, to your skin or clothing. From there, you can spread it around your body even further. It can also transfer from a surface (like pet fur or the outside of shoes) to your skin. If poison ivy is burned, the smoke can carry oil into your lungs, where severe allergic reactions can result.

Your first line of defense is proper outerwear: gloves, long sleeves, pants, socks and shoes. If you suspect exposure, rinse with cold water within five minutes. If this is not possible, wash with soap and water within 30 minutes. Beyond that, apply a commercial product which may help prevent an allergic reaction, such as Tecnu, Ivy-Block, or Ivy-X. Symptoms usually occur 12-48 hours after exposure, sometimes longer.

To remove poison ivy, there are mechanical and chemical options. Mowing, tilling or clipping over time will control and eventually kill individual plants. String trimmers are another option. Beware of clippings blowing back onto exposed skin. Clean any tools that come into contact with the plant. The safest (and slowest) option is hand-pulling, with the added benefit that the entire root system will often come out as well. Walter Reeves, a Georgia horticultural celebrity, recommends covering your gloved hand with a long plastic bag, grasp and pull the ivy, carefully turning the bag inside out so that the ivy is enclosed. Tie the bag off and toss it in the trash.This method works well when we are only removing a few plants.

Finally, repeat applications of herbicides are warranted under certain circumstances.

Search online for the article "Controlling Poison Ivy in the Landscape" from UGA for more information. You can also contact the Bibb County Extension office at bibb.extension@uga.edu or (478)310-5350.

Written by Bibb County Master Gardener Volunteer, Maryann F. These volunteers are trained in horticulture by the University of Georgia.



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From Our Kitchens:
With strawberry cake, Gris knows the drill



Photo by Joel Edward Grisamore

Melody Columnist Ed Grisamore holds his drill-powered mixing tool. A missing electric cord for a mixer sparked the creation of Grisamore's baking hack, which he used to make strawberry cake.

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

This is not an epic recipe.

It has not been passed down for generations. It contains no secret ingredients. The directions on how to prepare it are not locked away in a vault.

It is an epic story, though, a cautionary tale about the time I made strawberry cake.

If YouTube had been around back then, it might have gone viral.

A disclaimer here. I have not made this recipe in years.

But I love to tell folks how I managed to combine a cooking assignment and power tools after being asked to contribute a recipe for a local newspaper's food section in July 1990.

I chose a recipe for strawberry cake. I had never made it before. After my cooking misadventure, Betty Crocker herself should have issued a restraining order to keep me out of the kitchen.

I gathered all the ingredients — from the cake mix to the confectioners' sugar. But when I began to round up the various kitchen appliances, the electric cord to the mixer was nowhere to be found. (As it turned out, my mother-in-law had borrowed it.)

I put on my thinking cap, which fortunately comes in adjustable sizes. I retrieved my toolbox in the basement and returned with my Black & Decker drill.

I convinced myself it would work. Same design. Same law of physics.

What I failed to take into account was that power drills come with one speed — HIGH.

And a redneck's last words are "Watch this!!!"

The result was a mixed marriage of Home Depot and The Food Network. At 2,800 rotations per minute, strawberry icing will travel where no strawberry icing has gone before.

I sugar-coated the oven hood and kitchen wall. I splattered icing on the side of the refrigerator. My wife was still finding traces of my recipe for weeks. A significant amount ended up in my hair. (I always wanted to be a strawberry blonde.)

Now that the statute of limitations has run out, I just may try this recipe again one day.

With apologies to The Beatles, my theme song could be "Strawberry Drills Forever."

Strawberry Cake

Ingredients

- 1 box white cake mix
- 1 (3-ounce) package strawberry gelatin
- ½ cup oil
- ½ cup water
- 4 eggs
- 1 (5-ounce) package frozen strawberries

Icing

- ½ cup butter
- 1 (5-ounce) package frozen strawberries, thawed
- 1 (16-ounce) box confectioners' sugar

Directions

Blend cake mix, gelatin, oil and water in a large mixer bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, and beat two minutes at medium speed. Add strawberries and blend in well with a spoon.

Bake in three greased and floured 8-inch pans for 30-35 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool in pans for 10 minutes. Cream icing ingredients well and use to frost cake.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The Otis Redding Center for the Arts celebrated its opening with a ribbon cutting ceremony in March. The center took almost five years to complete and is located at the intersection of Cotton Avenue and Cherry Street.

OTIS, from A8:

selves into the creative process every day. Saturday's performance is not just a concert – it's a celebration of everything Otis Redding stood for: soul, dedication and the power of music to uplift and unite.

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Though Otis Music Camp is the original and some might say the premier event at ORCA, the facility is also home to an expanding slate of opportunities such as Camp Dream, a summer program for students ages 5-11, music lessons, workshops and more.

ORCA is located at 436 Cotton Ave. More information on Saturday's grand finale and the work of ORCA and the Otis Redding Foundation can be found at orcamacon.org and otisreddingfoundation.org.

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Also this weekend, catch the opening reception of "The Rainbow Show" at ArtSpace Macon, 2378 Ingleside Ave., on Friday from 4-7 p.m., featuring work from more than 120 LGBTQ+ artists and allies from across Middle Georgia.

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

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

PROBIOTICS AND PREBIOTICS:
DIFFERENCES, BENEFITS, AND POPULAR FOODS



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

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

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

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

What Is the Difference Between Probiotics and Prebiotics?

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

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

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

Prebiotics and Probiotics Have Multiple Health Benefits

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

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

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

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

What Foods Contain Probiotics?

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

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

What Foods Contain Prebiotics?

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

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

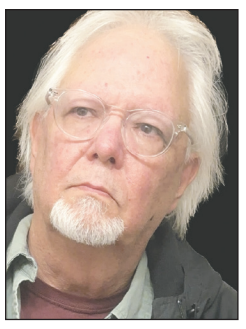
Do Supplements Help?

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

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



Otis Music Camp plans to host finale concert at Grand Opera House



Michael W. Pannell

The 2025 Otis Music Camp is winding down its very first year in the brand new, multi-million-dollar Otis Redding Center for the Arts with a grand finale concert Saturday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House, 651 Mulberry St.

Doors open at 6 p.m. and curtains rise at 7 p.m. for campers who've spent the last three weeks at the center — or ORCA, as it's been nicknamed — getting hands-on with all manner of music and music business matters.

Saturday's program is free, but organizers recommend a $10 donation at the door to help further the center's mission. They also suggest sending an RSVP through the center's website or social media.

Otis Music Camp is designed for students ages 12-18 and aims to help them grow as musicians, expose them to various aspects of the music business and teach them how to navigate the music industry. They write original music, record on-site at the state-of-the-art O3 Recording Studio and get to perform at Saturday's grand finale.

They are led at camps by guest music industry leaders, an impressive list of well-known performers and by the nine-member ORCA staff, plus some 35 coaches — now known as "Orcastrators" — who are mostly Otis Music Camp alumni.

Though the camp's roots go back to gatherings Otis Redding conducted in the 1960s, modern camps began in 2008 as a one-week offering for seven campers at what once was the Georgia Music Hall of Fame.

Sponsored by the Otis Redding Foundation, started by Redding's widow, Zelma Redding, in 2007 to continue his charitable and educational work, the camp grew to two weeks at various borrowed locations around Macon.

With the new, long-dreamed-of facility, the camp immediately expanded to three weeks with plans to eventually make it a month-long affair. And it's grown from seven to 50 or so participants with hopes of increasing that figure. As you might imagine, there's a waiting list to participate, so it's not too early to start thinking about next year's camp.

Saturday, you can expect to hear a spectrum of music as diverse as the community itself, ranging from rock to rap to pop to gospel to jazz to classical and R&B, showcasing the talents of campers through original songs written and arranged by them.

There will be group performances, solos and special tributes with Redding's presence and legacy felt in full force.

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Redding's daughter, Karla Redding-Andrews, is at the helm of the foundation and center as its vice president and executive director. I managed to pose a few questions to her in the whirlwind of putting on the expanded camp in the new center, which, as you'd expect, was both a dream come true and a challenge.



Provided by the Otis Redding Center for the Arts

Karla Redding-Andrews, vice president and executive director of the Otis Redding Foundation (right), with a group of Otis Music Camp participants in the new Otis Redding Center for the Arts' state-of-the-art O3 Recording Studio.

Q: How has camp been? Has ORCA injected a new spirit or atmosphere among campers?

A: The energy at Otis Music Camp this year has been absolutely electric. Having our first-ever three-week camp in the new Otis Redding Center for the Arts has brought a renewed sense of pride, purpose and inspiration for both the students and staff. The space was designed with creativity in mind, and you can feel that spirit in every corner – it's truly elevated the entire camp experience.

Q: What comments and reactions are you getting from returning campers?

A: Returning campers are in awe of the new facility. Many have said it feels like a second home now – bigger, brighter and even more full of possibility. They're especially excited about the new rehearsal spaces and the sense of professionalism and belonging the center provides.

Q: Will the community be impressed by what they see on Saturday at the grand finale?

A: Absolutely! Saturday's grand finale performance will be a true showcase of the hard work, growth and passion of our campers. The talent and heart these students are bringing to the stage is remarkable. We're confident the community will be moved and inspired by what they see.

Q: After all the work to make ORCA a reality, what's your heart telling you about this camp?

A: It's been deeply emotional and incredibly fulfilling. Seeing students thrive in a space that was built for them – and because of them – is humbling. It's a powerful reminder of why this work matters and why we continue to invest in the next generation of musicians, leaders and changemakers.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share about the camp, show or staff?

A: We are so proud of our team – our coaches, volunteers and staff who pour their hearts into making this experience unforgettable. And of course, the campers themselves who bring their full

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Langston Hall stands on the court inside Hawkins Arena. Eleven years after helping the Mercer Bears beat the Duke Blue Devils in the NCAA tournament, Hall now joins the coaching staff of the team he once played for.

In a homecoming for the ages, Langston Hall returns to Mercer

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

A few months ago, likely unbeknownst to even the biggest Macon sports buffs, a Bibb County homecoming of epic proportions was in the works.

It all started back in January, when former Mercer basketball star Langston Hall was in Greece.

The point guard, who sits atop multiple categories in the Mercer record books and near the top in almost all of them, was considering his career. He'd become a Mercer legend when he helped the Bears topple the Duke Blue Devils in the NCAA in 2014, then played several solid seasons across Europe in Italy, Germany, Croatia and other countries.

Hall knew the next step was coaching, now that his playing days were wrapping up — and he knew the perfect place to start.

"I called (Mercer head coach Ryan) Ridder, let him know I was interested," the former Bears point guard said. "Then in March it picked up, it started looking like this was possible, and then it happened here in June. I'm just so glad I got to come back. I'm lucky to be here."

Hall will join Mercer as an assistant coach just a year after Ridder took over for former coach Greg Gary, who took over for all-time Mercer great Bob Hoffman, to help with Ridder's new regime — although for Hall, almost everything about Mercer will be unfamiliar, thanks in part to changes Ridder helped bring about.

The Bears are in the Southern Conference instead of the A-Sun, for starters. The university itself also has grown since Hall departed, as its student body has increased by about 1,000 since the Chamblee native became a Bear in 2010, according to Mercer census counts.

The city of Macon has grown by leaps and bounds, too.

"That is crazy. I told my wife that. The way it's changed since 2014, when I left, to now? There's so much more downtown like restaurants, there's so much more at Mercer, too," Hall said. "All that stuff where Amici was, I think that used to be a storage facility or something. It's really incredible and I think it shows how connected Macon and Mercer are, too, both growing at the same time this way."

The Bears had just gotten a football team when Hall was leaving in 2014. The squad has since played Alabama, made the FCS playoffs twice and won a Southern Conference championship.

"I think that is a huge deal, because people see that and it puts you more on the map. Like, when people saw us beat Duke, I remember applications (for Mercer) jumped like crazy," Hall said. "So people see the football team, too, and they say, 'Oh you're playing Alabama? Who's this?' It really helps you grow."

As impressive as Mercer's growth has been, though, the coach will be focused on hoops — and not just teaching the players, either.

"I have to learn how to coach, since I've been a player my whole life," Hall said, smiling. "Everyone says it's like a family, but it really is. They're helping me a lot with stuff that doesn't come as naturally, breaking down video, this and that. They're helping me grow really fast, and it's been a lot of fun."

Mercer went 14-19 last season with a 6-12 conference record, but there were signs of hope throughout an up-and-down campaign to start Ridder's tenure. Several transfer players performed well, and while the Bears will now have to replace some of those spots, Mercer has signed plenty of players over the summer in an attempt to retool.

The transfer portal era is another change Hall will need to get accustomed to, but it's not one he anticipates being a problem.

"It might be different, but you tell them the same things as a coach: you have to be a team. Individual statistics are great, but that's not how you get the job done," Hall said. "We have to have a really close-knit relationship, you have to be brothers, because things are going to get bad during the season. That's just how it goes.

See HALL, Page B2

NOTEPAD

Mercer grad on the mound, MGA names new head coach

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

Mercer grad Sawyer Gipson-Long returned to the majors this month and appears to be embracing a long relief role with the Detroit Tigers.

The right-hander had a long, winding road back to the big leagues, as he was initially drafted by Minnesota out of Mercer in 2019 before getting traded to Detroit in 2022 and eventually debuting in the majors there in 2023. Gipson-Long struck out 23 batters in a September cup of coffee that season while maintaining a 2.70 ERA and a 1.10 WHIP.

Then injuries struck in 2024. Gipson-Long initially hit the IL with a groin strain, but went down again after just one rehab start in April and needed Tommy John surgery. Thus began the long wait en route to recovery.

Gipson-Long returned in a game against the Chicago White Sox on June 5, getting the start and pitching three innings while allowing three runs on five hits and striking out three.

"I could've made a few better pitches, for sure," Gipson-Long told MLB.com after the game, "but I'm grateful to even be back out there and pitching again. I definitely have stuff to work on, but I can put this one in the rearview mirror and say, 'I made it back,' and just keep building."



Gipson-Long

Gipson-Long has made two appearances since that start, both in relief, and appears to be settling in. He tossed 4 ⅔ innings against the Baltimore Orioles on June 10, allowing only one run while striking out five.

Gipson-Long then worked in relief on a schedule, coming into a game against the Cincinnati Reds on Sunday to toss three innings after another pitcher was the opener. He gave up one run on three hits and struck out a pair of batters.

The two relief outings brought Gipson-Long's ERA down below 4.00, and the pitcher seems primed for more bullpen work with the Tigers with his lengthy recovery finally complete.

Not only are Gipson-Long's traditional stats and eye test performances encouraging, some deeper statistics tracked by Baseball Savant favor the former Bear even further. Though he is not yet qualified in most stats, he boasts an elite walk rate of just 4.3% in his limited work thus far, and also done well at limiting opposing hitters' exit velocities.

The most intriguing stat by far, however, is Gipson-Long's extension — how far away a pitcher is from the rubber when they release the ball. The Mercer alum gets 7.4 feet of distance between himself and the slab before he lets the pitch fly, ranking in the 98th percentile league-wide in that statistic, according to Baseball Savant.

Gipson-Long's fastball hovers around 93 mph — a fairly low radar gun tally compared to pitchers across the league — so extension is crucial for shortening the distance between him and the batter, making his fastball appear to reach the plate quicker.

Some other elite extension pitchers include Mariners star Logan Gilbert, former Brewers closer Devin Williams and Dodgers hurler Tyler Glasnow.

MGA introduces new basketball coach

The Middle Georgia State Knights introduced a new women's basketball head coach Monday, as coach Steven Rhodes took the reins of the program.

The move comes after former head coach Anderson Ligon became a full-time faculty member at the university. Rhodes will join the Knights following a gig as the Associate Head Coach at the

See Notepad, Page B2

As Club World Cup continues, LAFC calls Macon home

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

The Los Angeles Football Club is pretty young, having started play in 2018.

But it has been a successful youngster, winning the MLS Cup in 2022 and also taking its second Supporters' Shield — the MLS trophy for the team with the best regular season record — that year.

The Black and Gold Falcons are used to being a target.

For the expanded FIFA Club World Cup, though, they are underdogs.

The team that is calling Macon its home away from home for a week or so did not take that approach.

"I think that's for sure the storyline that's being set," veteran Ryan Hollingshead said Sunday during a short media session at Mercer's Betts Stadium, where LAFC practiced ahead of Cup games in Atlanta. "I don't think that's how we feel internally. I don't think we're talking about being the underdog."

Midfielder Yaw Yeboah wants to keep the focus simple, but also represent.

"Just to play our game against these top players," he said. "Also (see) how the league is (doing), to compete against these top teams."

The young LAFC team took on a legendary program Monday when it faced Chelsea FC out of London, which was founded in 1905 and is the defending Club World Club champion, beating Palmeira 2-1 in 2022. LAFC lost 2-1 but will play again Friday at 6 p.m., facing Tunisian club Espérance de Tunisie in Nashville.

LAFC arrived in Macon Friday night and got in its first practice session at Mercer's soccer stadium on Saturday. The facility is all but on lockdown, with a black privacy screening wrapping the entire complex, plus additional barrier fencing in the medical school parking lot adjacent to the field.

Fickle Georgia weather made an appearance on Sunday.

The team was to practice at 1 p.m. on Sunday, and meet local media beforehand for a short 15-minute window. Then it was pushed to noon.

The team arrived a little after noon for practice amid typically frisky weather that quickly disrupted the schedule, thanks to lightning in the area, and the different allowances for outdoor events based on Mercer's standards, the MLS, the team and FIFA.

In a span of a few minutes, the schedule changed multiple times and the media session was pushed to the end of practice, just long enough for reporters to start heading for the parking lot.

Just that quickly, plans changed again, and Hollingshead and Yeboah came to

See LAFC, Page B2

An anatomy of the home run call



Micah Johnston

It iiiissss...

Do you even need to read the third word of that sentence to understand? The third word used can vary — it is usually the word 'gone,' but sometimes it's even longer and features a fourth word, like 'outta here' or simply 'a homer' — but whatever words the announcer selects, they always get the sentiment across.

The words "it is" can make up the most exciting single moment in sports. The words "it is," when spoken the right way — whether through the crunchy static of an ancient radio mic or transmitted instantly via crystal clear, high-tech television speakers — can mean everything.

They are part of an intoxicating verbal cocktail, one equally familiar and unique each time around, that never ceases to amaze: the home run call.

A top shelf piece of home run commentary must be carefully crafted, a process that begins long before the words "it is" ever leave the announcer's mouth.

No, it begins with the swing. This is the most malleable cog of the home run call, one the announcer has no control over but which impacts everything. Sometimes the crack of the bat alone is enough to identify a certain home run call. The sound of the swing — or sometimes the sound of the splinters, in the case of a rare broken-bat home run from Bryce Harper or Barry Bonds — can be almost as iconic as an announcer's tone on occasion.

The swing, while sometimes a crucial prelude, also produces the next crucial aspect of the home run call: the flight path. In itself, the arc of the hit is not the most important, though the eventual landing spot of some long balls makes them more memorable — the recent walk-off home run by Cedanne Rafaela that was weakly tucked just inside of Fenway Park's "Pesky's Pole," for instance.

But the course a baseball takes to the stands is important instead because it determines, in a rapid flash of seconds sometimes too quick to be truly consciously comprehended, how the call begins.

Some home runs are close calls — wall scrapers, balls that bounce off of gloves (or heads, a la Jose Canseco). These begin with the announcer not changing his tone as the ball is struck, opting to wait beyond the initial instants of incline for more information as the ball rises.

Calls like this unfold slowly but surely as the ball gets closer to the wall, with commentators getting more and more certain the ball will leave the yard, voices escalating. Others in which the ball is crushed ascend to peak intensity instantly.

Regardless of how it is reached, it is at this point that we approach the impetus for this anatomy of the home run call, those two familiar words: "it is."

That exact terminology is not always used. Sometimes "it is" gets shortened to "it's," other times a bit of length is added with "that ball is." Baseball fans likely remember the alteration "she is" from quite a few calls, though it's hard not to

See JOHNSTON, Page B2

LAFC, from B1:

the side for a short interview session. No media observation — and filming — of practice followed. After practice, the team headed to Atlanta.

MBS hosts a knockout round match on June 29 and July 1, and then a quarterfinal on July 5.

LAFC is in Group D, and plays ES Tunis on Friday and then Flamengo on June 24 in Orlando.

The Club World Cup has undergone a major expansion since Chelsea won it, and bears much more of a resemblance to next year's full World Cup, during which CWC teammates will be opponents.

"We've never tested ourselves in this way," Hollingshead said. "We've never played against these sorts of clubs, and in this kind of tournament… It's a level playing ground. Everything's up for grabs."

Hollingshead is a defender who is seventh in minutes played, and has started 10 MLS games. Midfielder Yeboah is working his way into more minutes.

Denis Bouanga, of France, leads LAFC with eight goals and shares the team lead with Mark Delgado with five assists.

Goalkeeper Hugo Lloris brings plenty of world experience to the team, with 70 UEFA Champions League matches as well as World Cups in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 with France.

If the Black and Gold Falcons finish in the top two — and early analysis indicates that's a possibility — they'll advance to the Knockout Round while still working in Macon.

The city is unfamiliar to a team that has nine players from California, one from Maryland and one from New York.

But so far, so good in a new temporary home.

"The city has been great to us," Hollingshead said. "The facilities here, this field is amazing. Grateful to be here."

If that impression keeps up, Mercer could get a chance to host a national team during the full World Cup next year. This run as a practice site for the Club event is sort of a "trial run," athletic director Jim Cole and others explained when the university announced the partnership earlier this month.

Mercer and Macon began the application process to be considered a year ago, according to Visit Macon CEO Gary Wheat. The city has since offered giveaways of tickets to the game in Atlanta as a promotion for LAFC as Macon's "home team" in the Club World Cup.

Johnston, from B1:

hear it in the voice of Vin Scully calling Kirk Gibson's gimpy game-winner in the 1988 World Series.

The variations on the "it is," of course, offer signature touches for our favorite, most outta-here orators. The Athletics' Glen Kuiper is easily identified not just by his gravelly vocals but his use of "that baby is gone." Just across the bridge in the Bay Area, legendary Giants man Jon Miller often puts things in another language with his "adiooooooos pelota!"

Then there are calls with entirely transportive sentences. FOX announcer Joe Davis has trademarked this in recent World Series games with his "this game has been turned upside down" for Yordan Alvarez in 2022 and "the legend grows" on Adolis Garcia's walk-off for the Rangers in 2023.

The calls without a patented spot of lingo, however, are much more effective at their best.

Perhaps a piece of home run audio without a calling card is common, but when the call has an extra bit of juice and is memorable without the stamp of a sentence or slang term — that's when an audio file gets etched into history.

Take the Vin Scully call of the walk-off shot from Gibson, in which listeners and viewers are treated to the minute detail that completes the concoction of the home run call… those extra syllables.

Scully stretches the word "is," just as the ball clears the wall. It is not egregious or distracting, but it is enough.

When the words "it is" unravel, they become the pinnacle of sports potency. The plasticized pronunciation of "iiiiiiiisss" keeps us levitating, floating just as the ball is — the baseball and our minds hang there, rapt, enamored by America's pastime and the anticipation of its coup de grace.

For one of the most monolithic moonshots in recent Atlanta Braves history, Ronald Acuña Jr.'s postseason grand slam in 2018, then-Braves radio announcer Jim Powell's voice rose as soon as the ball left the bat. As Ronald's earth-shattering slam left the yard, Powell did the opposite of Scully and shortened the "it is" to "it's," instead choosing to elongate the word "gooooooonnnee," a stroke of genius.

The space between "it is" and "gone" by Powell here, though merely a few seconds long, feels just about large enough to drive a U-Haul truck through. It is baseball, and baseball commentary, at its goosebump-inducing finest.

For home run calls, the words matter — but the spaces between them make all the difference.

Notepad, from B1:

University of South Carolina-Upstate.

"We expected significant interest in our position and we were fortunate to interview a high number of outstanding candidates. Throughout that process we witnessed Steven and his vision for the future of the Knights women's basketball program really stand out," Middle Georgia State athletic director Michael Brown said in a press release.

"His vision of a holistic approach to coaching and student-athlete development provided our search committee with a vision for a bright future for MGA women's basketball and we can't wait to have him and his family on campus in Cochran," he said.

Rhodes spent time at North Carolina A&T and Radford before spending three years on the staff at USC-Upstate. NCA&T was the most successful program he worked with, as the Aggies won the MEAC regular season championship and conference tournament while he was on the staff.

"I'm incredibly honored to be named the head women's basketball coach at Middle Georgia State University," Rhodes said in the MGA press release. "I want to thank President Blake for his leadership and vision and extend my heartfelt gratitude to Michael Brown and the rest of the search committee for their belief in me. I've always believed that you win with people, and what makes Middle Georgia truly special is the genuine care, passion, and momentum that's building across campus and throughout the athletic department."

Rhodes fills the slot just as the school makes the transition from NAIA to NCAA Division II in all athletics.

"As we step into this exciting new chapter with our transition to NCAA Division II and the Peach Belt Conference, I'm committed to building a championship culture rooted in hard work, connection, care, and the holistic growth of our student-athletes," Rhodes said. "We will strive to make Middle Georgia not just a place to play basketball, but the best place in the country to grow, compete, and thrive. This is a family journey for me, and I'm so grateful to my wife, Gissell, and our daughter, Liliana, for their constant support as we take this journey together. We're thrilled to be joining the MGA community."

Northeast announces Raiderfest

Northeast High School announced via social media that it will host a fan party, Raiderfest, later this year.

The event will take place at the school on August 9 from 9 a.m. to noon, according to a post by Northeast on X.com. The post included a link and a QR code to a Google Form allowing services like food vendors, religious organizations, civic groups and more to apply to partner with Northeast for the event.



Photo Courtesy of Mercer Athletics

Mercer golfers Trey Mixon and Nathan Trodd swing from the tee box. The two Mercer players were recognized for their performances on the green and in the classroom.

Mercer golfers earn honors

Two Mercer men's golfers, Trey Mixon and Nathan Trodd, earned spots on the College Sports Communicators Academic All-District Men's At-Large team, the university announced Tuesday.

The team spots are awarded to players with the best combination of on-field prowess and performance in the classroom. Mixon, a senior, logged a GPA of 3.73 and had a 74.14 stroke average across 29 rounds this season for the golf squad. He also shot one-under at the Southern Conference championship this season, good for a team-high 17th place finish.

Trodd is a junior from South Africa who had a 3.50 GPA in his first year at Mercer. Trodd posted a 72.97 stroke average over 29 rounds on the course and also finished in the top five twice on the season, placing third at the Cullan Brown Collegiate and fifth at the Palmetto Intercollegiate.

Hall, from B1:

"If things get hard, and you don't sacrifice for your brother, it won't work. With transfers, people are going to move on if they play well, other guys will transfer down if they're not getting playing time. You have to really disregard all that, because we're still trying to build a family here."

The players can take Hall's word for it — after all, none of them will be wearing his number 21 because Mercer retired it in 2019. A banner hangs on the wall in the arena commemorating his time as a Bear, as do plenty of other banners denoting Mercer's conference championships, NCAA tournament appearances and CIT tournament victory that Hall helped secure.

"It does help that I have the experience, I think that gives it some legitimacy, like, 'Oh, he's telling me this because he played the game.' Every coach on our staff played college basketball, so that helps," Hall said. "We didn't beat Duke because somebody was being selfish. We got that far as a team, so I think building it the same way will be really important."

There will be other valuable coaching lessons to be learned, as well. Hall spent 10 years playing in Europe at the top of the key, a position where certain unique skills are a must-have.

"Communicating with people," Hall said of the most critical thing he'll carry with him from his time in leagues overseas. "As the point guard of a team in Greece, I kind of had to be the guy in the middle. Some American players weren't happy with how something was going, they would come to me to communicate with the Greek players, and vice versa.

"You have to communicate with everyone while it's going on, and spending that much time with players from all over the place helped me learn how to communicate by any means necessary."

While he might not be teaching any Mercer players any foreign languages, Hall said the bond between players will strengthen as they talk more on and off the court. He's also excited for rivalries similar to those he had during his time as a Bear, when Mercer feuded with conference foes like Florida Gulf Coast — which had its own March Madness run in 2013, one year before Mercer defeated the Blue Devils — and Stetson.

"I've never experienced it first-hand, but I know the SoCon is one of those real big mid-major conferences," Hall said. "It's good basketball, and I know these guys feel the way I did about our rivals when they play those teams, when they play a conference rival."

As Hall learns, the players will learn with him. The former point guard just hopes he can help Ridder and the staff bring the Bears back to the top of their game.

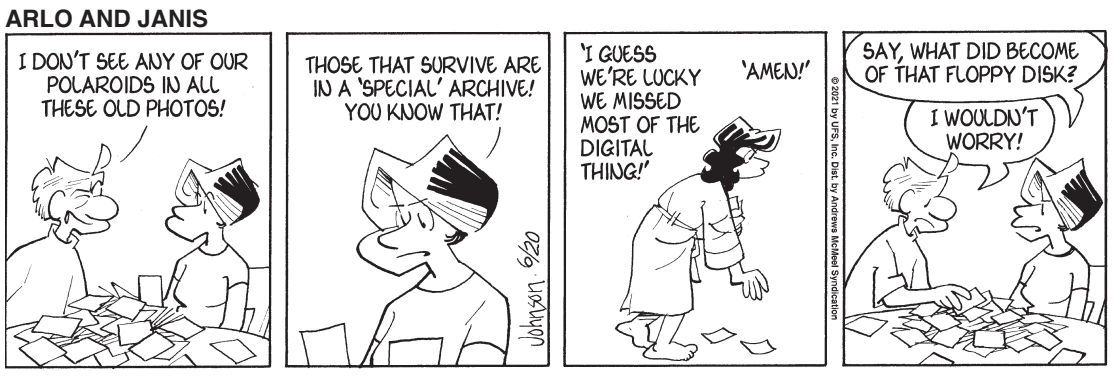
We know it's a good conference, and we know we can compete. We want to catch up to the Furmans, the Wofords, the (Chattanoogas)," Hall said. "I'm looking forward to seeing that in person and hopefully learning and getting Mercer to that level."



ADAM



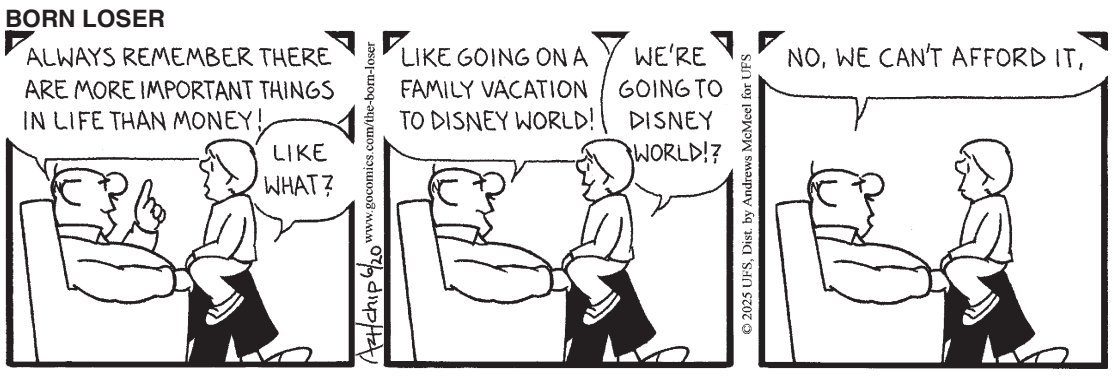
ARLO AND JANIS



BIG NATE



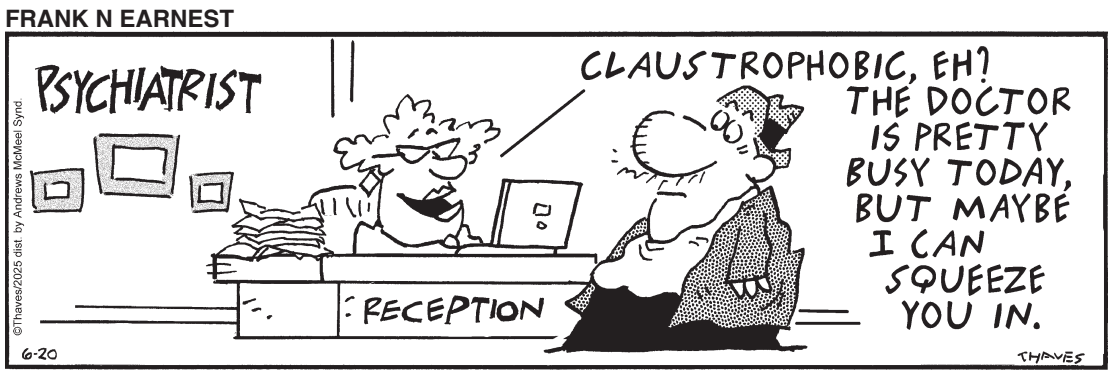
BORN LOSER



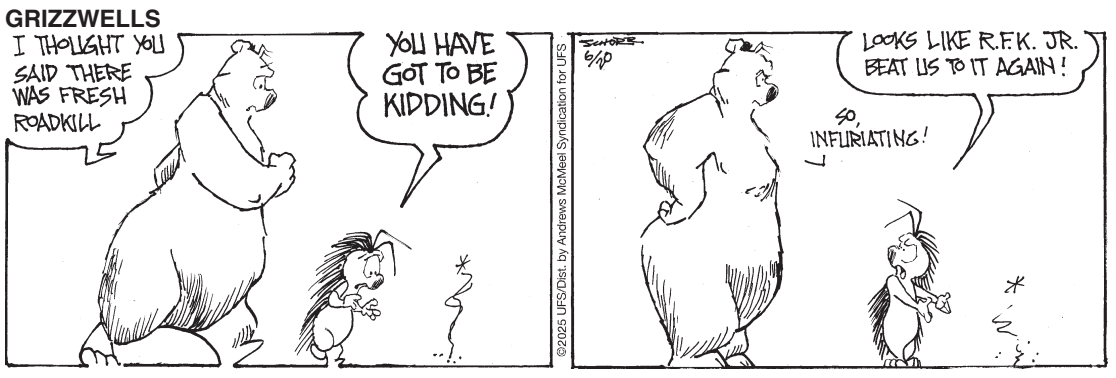
DEFLOCKED



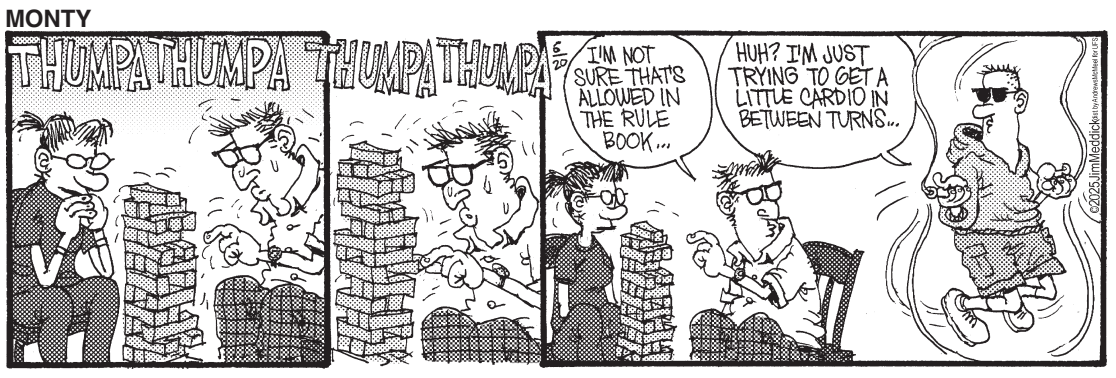
FRANK N EARNEST



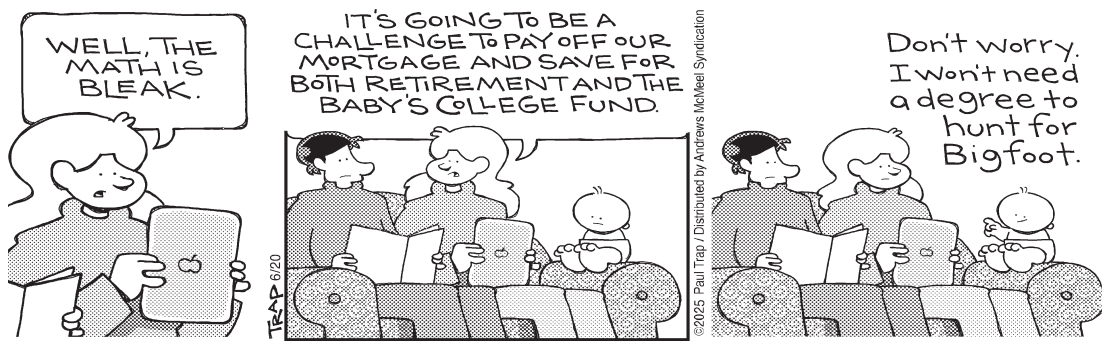
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



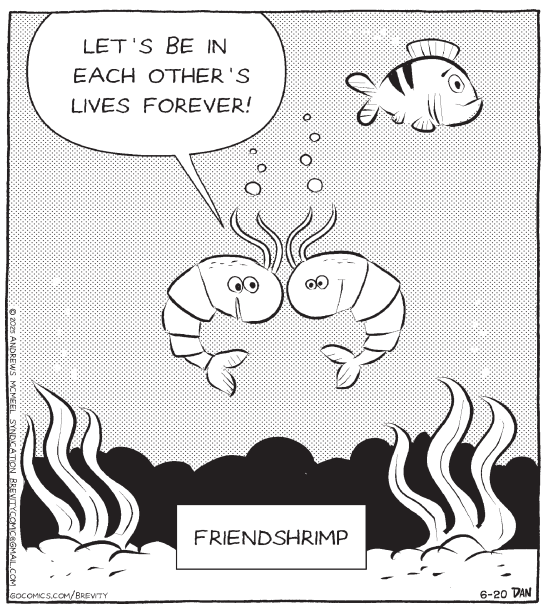
THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

1 "The — Couple"
4 — d'oeuvres
8 Leisurely
12 Evergreen tree
13 Orchestra instrument
14 Cassette's contents
15 Actress — Gardner
16 Sob
17 "So be it!"
18 To wit
20 Effect
22 Get older
23 Be under the weather
24 Toronto's province
28 Requirements
32 Foray
33 Reach across
35 — de mer
36 Letter for pluralizing
37 Agent (Hyph.)
38 Fashion
39 Dull surface
41 Restricted
43 Skill
45 Sea urchin, at a sushi bar
46 Loudness
49 Religious house
52 Eager
53 Dull sound
55 Wedding announcement word
56 Interlock
57 Marathon
58 Santa —, California
59 Nuisance
60 Part of USA
61 French article

DOWN

1 In the blink — — eye
2 Prima donna
3 Playwright
4 Glaring mistake
5 Comply
6 Fish eggs
7 Brown pigment
8 Fasten a certain way
9 Dalai —
10 Oil cartel
11 Traveled
19 "Holy cow!"
21 Neighbor of Wisc.
24 Utah town
25 Cape Canaveral grp.
26 Doctrine
27 October birthstone
29 Full of feeling
30 Miami- — County
31 Luge
34 Black cuckoo
37 Time in office
38 Short skirt
40 Instructed
42 "How To Get Away With —"
44 Aquarium fish
46 Femme fatale
47 Pointed arch
48 Deprivation
49 Brownish-purple
50 Philosopher — Descartes
51 Some votes
54 Prosciutto

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

1	2	3	■	4	5	6	7	■	8	9	10	11
12			■	13				■	14			
15			■	16				■	17			
18			19			■	20	21				
■	■	22			■	■	23			■	■	■
24	25				26	27	■	28		29	30	31
32				■	33		34		■	35		
36			■	37				■	38			
39			40		■	41		42				
■	■	■	43		44	■	■	45			■	■
46	47	48				■	49				50	51
52				■	53	54			■	55		
56				■	57					58		
59				■	60				■	61		

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SUDOKU

Answer on A6

DIFFICULTY RATING: ☆☆☆☆☆

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



1



2

Photos by Grant Blankenship and Evelyn Davidson

1: A young girl attempts to catch bubbles she created as a large crowd gathers for a 'No Kings' protest in downtown Macon Saturday morning. **2:** Protestors hold up signs and wave at cars at the corner of Second and Poplar streets Saturday morning during the protest. The event was part of a nationwide protest against President Donald Trump's policies and actions.



3



4

Photos by Jessica Gratigny, Macon-Bibb County and Jason Vorhees

3: Keresha "Bella" McGlothurn of Diamond Luxe Beaute' Bar shows off pink nail polish before a manicure during the 33rd annual Juneteenth Freedom Festival at Tattnall Square Park. **4:** Ajile Axam's Dancical Productions performs during the Juneteenth Festival at Tattnall Square Park. The festival featured food and arts vendors, historical exhibits, community speakers and performances. **5:** Old Dominion performs Saturday at the Atrium Health Amphitheater. The performance was part of the group's "How Good is That" world tour, which includes stops in Canada and Europe. **6:** Volunteers hand out watermelons during Atrium Health Navicent's annual drive-thru community food drive June 13. **7:** Automobiles make their way through a community food drive held outside the Atrium Health Amphitheater. Three tractor-trailer trucks filled with fresh fruit and vegetables were distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. **8:** Patricia Prime receives a hug from her sister after being surprised with Piedmont Macon's 'Community Hero' award June 12. Prime, who lost her mother to complications from childbirth, has gone on to champion education for expecting and new mothers. The award is presented quarterly to a deserving individual in the community, along with a $500 donation to the charity or nonprofit organization of their choice**. 9:** Phillip Bryant, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Georgia and Riley Blount, president of AT&T Georgia, cut the ribbon on a new Connected Learning Center Wednesday morning. The center features free access to high-speed internet and Dell computers and will be open to youth and families in Macon-Bibb County.

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



5



6



7



8



9