The Macon Melody

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Funding freezes puts Bibb school programs at risk

Casey Choung
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A federal funding freeze by the Trump administration could put several vital Bibb County School District programs in jeopardy, school officials said.

The administration withheld roughly $6 billion last week in federal grants for before- and after-school programs, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services and teacher professional development, citing a need to review the grants to ensure they align with President Donald Trump's priorities.

The Bibb County School District expects to receive $3.2 million for its 21st Century Community Learning Center program, which pays for after-school programming at 29 different schools in the district.

The funding freeze also will impact the Boys and Girls Club of Central Georgia.

"We're talking about significant investments into the lives of children and the work that we do," Bibb Schools Superintendent Dan Sims said. "There's so many different categories of support covered through these funds and I can't imagine a world where we don't continue these good practices."

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After 25 years, film guild still offers 'a different rhythm'

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter

While film junkies this week might be keen on attending the advance showing of "Superman," the Macon Film Guild offers a different experience.

On Sunday, the film guild is set to show "The Ballad of Wallis Island," a British dramedy about two former bandmates reuniting on a private island, a far cry from the DC, James Gunn superhero remake that was filmed in Macon.

For the past 25 years, the Macon Film Guild has been showing independent arthouse films — including international titles — year round at the Douglass Theatre, offering a "different kind of rhythm" to the blockbusters playing at Amstar.

"There are different kinds of sensibilities than the big Hollywood films, both artistically, philosophically. You get an insight into different cultures," Macon Film Guild President Robert Fieldsteel said.

The guild screens 12 feature films throughout the year with four documentaries on a quarterly basis. In July the guild will screen the documentary "Honeyland" days after "The Ballad of Wallis Island," which will include a happy hour and a Q&A with local honey producer Joe Money.

The screenings reel in a few dozen folks every month, a mix of regulars and people who have never visited the Douglass before.

After the shows, viewers can rate the film by sticking a clothespin into one of four bags, where four says "you liked it a

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Fitness instructor Denise Sandifer-Upton runs through excercises for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities from The Arc Macon as part of its program to give adults with IDD more inclusive events and experiences. Sandifer-Upton is a day worker with The Arc, which provides services like job support, nursing assistance, workshops and entrepreneurial coaching.

Adults with disabilities find inclusivity in local program

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Nearly two dozen hands reach for the ceiling before dropping back down and "shaking it out."

"If you feel it, that means it works," fitness instructor Denise Sandifer-Upton told participants Wednesday morning.

The people breaking a sweat with her are part of The Arc Macon, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) live fulfilling lives in their communities.

Sandifer-Upton is a day support worker for The Arc but volunteers to lead fitness classes for people with IDD. She makes sure everyone stretches — she even encourages participants to come up with their own moves — and keeps them laughing for 40 minutes every month.

"Their smile makes me smile," she said. "It helps my heart."

The Arc Macon mainly serves adults with IDD through job support, nursing assistance, workshops and entrepreneurial coaching, among other services.

Arc also collaborates with local partners such as the Macon Arts Alliance and Artspace Macon to offer community art classes and with Georgia College for music therapy.

The nonprofit's programs aim to integrate those with IDD into their com-

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Periodical — Mail Label

From weddings to baseball, Macon artist finds her calling

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Caroline Stroud was born to be an artist.

You might say it was her destiny. After all, her mother's maiden name is Painter.

As a child, her best friends were every crayon in the box. She was a rising star with a paint brush in her hand. On career day at Macon's Gilead Christian Academy, she dressed up as an artist.

Her parents, Curt and Nancy Stroud, encouraged her to develop her talents and follow her dreams. When she enrolled at First Presbyterian Day School, she was inspired by her high school art teacher, Nancy Butler, who was instrumental in her growth. FPD already had produced well-known artist Steve Penley, whose works have appeared everywhere from the White House to the World of Coke to more than 20 congressional offices.

But there was a measure of hesitation in her dreams. Although Stroud wasn't worried about missing a meal, she wasn't quite ready to join the ranks of starving artists.

So, after graduating from FPD in 2014, she majored in marketing at the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia and minored in studio art.

"It wasn't until after college that I was confident I could make it a career," she said. "That's why I was a business major. It was something to fall back on."

Stroud, 29, took a corporate job in Atlanta. She painted on nights and weekends. She accepted any kind

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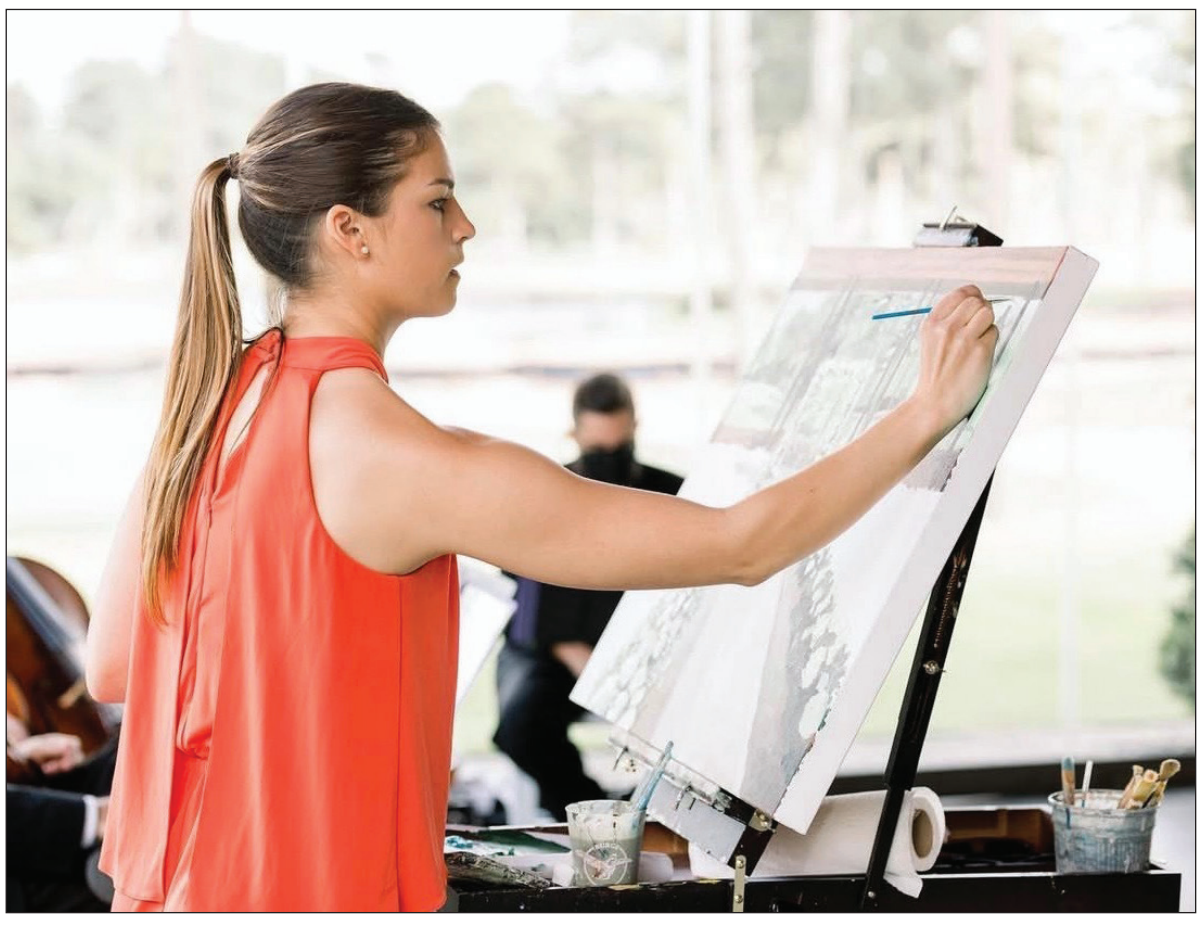


Photo provided
Macon native Caroline Stroud works on a live wedding painting. Stroud has taken her ability with the paintbrush to locations across the country, including the MLB All-Star Game, where she will have artwork featured again this year.

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Artist, from A1:

of artwork requests, which were mostly portraits. And she learned that one job usually led to another and another.

"That's sort of the rite of passage for everyone starting out ... anything that is going to sell," she said. "Once I had enough booked out, I said I'm going to take the leap, and I went full time in 2019."

As a fine artist and event painter, doing "live" wedding portraits became the cornerstone of her business. She now does between 30-40 weddings a year. She completed her 200th in late June.

She is getting married on August 9. "Everybody's first question is: 'Who is going to paint your wedding?' " she said, laughing.

Caroline did her first 'live' wedding painting when she was a junior in college. It was a gift for her cousin.

"That opened the door to where I started doing them for friends and family," she said. "There is so much instant gratification in this day and age that it's really cool for people to get to see a painting coming together over an eight-hour period. They get to see the whole process."

She begins by meeting with the couple to plan a wish list of wedding scenes. It could be walking down the aisle, exchanging vows, a kiss at the altar or a dance at the reception. She arrives at the venue early and uses her camera phone to take "reference" photos.

Stroud said it's both fascinating and entertaining for the wedding guests to watch the work in progress. They ask questions. They check back for updates.

"It's fun because it's different," she said. "People are so used to photos. With this, they get a behind-the-curtain look at painting. Some of them have never seen an artist in a studio."

To add a little levity to her work, she paints the bride first and then adds the body of the groom. "I don't do his head until the end," she said. "So everybody is talking about the headless groom."

When Stroud started out with her wedding gigs, she had a self-imposed deadline to complete the artwork by the end of the festivities.

"Then I realized they don't want to take home a wet painting on their wedding night," she said. "That took a lot of the pressure off me. I was too zoned in, and I wasn't enjoying it. One of the reasons I was there was to talk to guests and be entertaining."

She did a "live" painting of a different kind last year when she was commissioned by Onward Reserve apparel to create a collage for one of the official T-shirts for the Major League Baseball All-Star in Arlington, Texas. She did the special edition T-shirt, then attended the game at Ranger Stadium to paint in "real" time.

"I was on the level next to one of the retail stores sitting next to a mannequin that was wearing the T-shirt," she said. "I didn't get to watch the game. I was painting what was already on the T-shirt, and people got to come up and see me."

She was also commissioned to paint a commemorative collage for Onward Reserve shirts for next week's Major League All-Star Game, hosted by the Atlanta Braves on Tuesday, July 15 at Truist Park. (It has been a busy summer for FPD graduates. One of her former FPD classmates, Austin Cox, was called up from the minor leagues and is now pitching for the Braves' bullpen.)

Last October, Stroud did a custom painting for Home Depot co-founder and Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank at the dedication of the new Children's Healthcare of Atlanta hospital in Druid Hills. She was commissioned to do three paintings that hang in the office of Lt. Gov. Burt Jones at the state capitol. She also was contracted for a painting of golfer Davis Love III and his late father, Davis Love Jr., for the Sea Island Golf Club.

In June, she completed a large "conversation piece" mural in the lobby of Triangle Chemical headquarters in Macon. It is a colorful celebration of the company's 78-year history.

After six years, she doesn't have to find work. It finds her.

"A lot of it comes through the weddings," she said. "When I'm working at a wedding, I might meet 200 people. I get a lot of non-wedding business from the weddings.

"I put in the work, but there are a lot of chance happenings," she said. "So many times it's meeting one person at some event or gala. And then it's one after another after another. It always surprises me what comes next, and it's always something I never would have guessed."



Photo provided

Macon artist Caroline Stroud painted this work for the 2025 MLB All-Star Game, which will be hosted at the Atlanta Braves' Truist Park next week. It is her second time creating artwork of the midsummer classic.



Photo provided

Local Macon artist Caroline Stroud poses with her 2024 MLB All-Star Game artwork while at the game at the Texas Rangers' Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, last year as the grounds crew works on the field below.

Film, from A1:

lot," and one says, "I was bitter I attended," according to Fieldsteel. Usually, the guild's audience aren't fans of ambiguous endings, Fieldsteel noted.

"We don't necessarily think that a lower or not great score is necessarily bad, but some of the times we'll show a film that baffles some people and then some people are absolutely crazy about," he said.

Some of the documentaries, like the Amy Winehouse and Ruth Bader Ginsburg biopics, sell out, especially when they serve beer, Fieldsteel said.

The guild's board of 10 to 11 film enthusiasts meets once a month to decide what films to show. Wendy Johnston, the board's film selection chair, curates a list of six or so recent releases that can't be found at the Amstar.

In the past they've shown Oscar-nominated films like "I'm Still Here," a Brazilian film, and A24's "Sing Sing".

"The great thing is you can see these films without going to Atlanta, and sometimes we show lesser known gems that haven't played in Atlanta," Fieldsteel said.

Bob Burnham serves on the guild's board and was one of its founding members. He helped oversee the restoration of the Douglass Theatre in the late '90s when he and his fellow restoration committee members thought to utilize the newly created space as a haven for independent films.

The Douglass Theatre Film Guild held its first showing in 2000, a "rocky launch," Burnham said, and early on the guild had difficulties procuring the films it wanted to show.

Publishers felt iffy about giving its films to a group without a proven track record, Burnham said, but things changed when collaborator Camp Bacon "took the enterprise on his shoulders."

Bacon leveraged a connection with the established Sarasota Film Society, "piggybacking" off the society's resources.

The Douglass Theatre Film Guild eventually divested itself from its namesake theatre to become the Macon Film Guild.

The arthouse theatre is the only of its kind in Macon, and for Burnham, being able to bring something different to town makes him feel good.

"It's in really good shape after 25 years, I didn't have any idea that it would last 25 years when we started this thing. It's pretty great for the community that we've been able to hang in that long and bring independent films to Macon," Burnham said.





Downtown Macon leaders discuss ways to meet needs of local people without homes

Liz Fabian
The Macon Newsroom

Leaders of Macon's Downtown Business Improvement District, or BID, want to know how to better handle the unhoused population and address the needs of those living on the streets.

During its latest meeting, the BID's board of directors approved spending $3,200 to assess individuals' personal situations, the effectiveness of existing social service agencies and what keeps people from getting help.

"Our downtown district faces growing challenges with unsheltered individuals who remain disconnected from available social services. To develop effective solutions, we need a clearer understanding of what barriers prevent people from accessing help and how our current service network is performing," NewTown Macon's Chief of Staff, Erin Keller, stated in a memo to the board ahead of the June 25 meeting.

Property owners in the Central Business District pay more in taxes for additional services within downtown, including the Block by Block cleanup and hospitality crew that does everything from pressure washing and poop scooping to helping visitors navigate downtown.

Block by Block's Regional VP Clayton Ratledge recommended the company do a specialized assessment of the unhoused population during a recent visit to Macon, Keller said in the memo.

In the coming weeks, a trained assessor will spend three days in Macon to learn current trends and barriers keeping folks from securing permanent shelter, evaluate the unsheltered population's perception of current social services, explore those organizations' engagement processes and challenges, and provide a comprehensive survey of available services and where needs are not being met.

Following the assessment, the BID board will determine whether to expand Block by Block's current responsibilities to include outreach to those experiencing homelessness.

About a quarter of the company's operations in nearly three dozen states feature an outreach coordinator who maintains contact with the unhoused individuals in that city, offering snacks and assistance in getting them help.

"This is the person that is primarily talking to our unsheltered individuals, 'What do you need?' Because for some people, especially with their mental condition, they may or may not need immediate assessment, and right now we don't have a (trained) person to even approach people," Keller said before the board approved the assessment.

Even if Macon's issues don't warrant hiring an outreach person, the study's findings can be used to strengthen social service connections downtown, she said.



Liz Fabian / The Macon Newsroom

A cot, clothing and other personal items litter the front porch of a house on Spring Street. Business owners and other leaders in Macon discussed how to better address the needs of the city's unhoused population downtown in a recent meeting.

By early fall, the downtown BID also expects to complete renovations to the music park at Third and Poplar streets. New mulch will be added as damage is repaired following a vehicle crash at the intersection.

The BID also will conduct a survey during First Friday festivities on July 11 to identify areas that could use additional lighting.

Arc, from A1:

munity, according to chief administrative officer Katrina Spooner, who said inclusivity became a core focus for the organization in 2019.

"A genuine, normal life — that's the goal, unfortunately, for a lot of our folks," Spooner said. "It's not an extraordinary life, it's a normal life and to feel as normal as possible."

The Arc's outreach coordinator assists families in signing up for the medicaid waiver, which alleviates some of the programs' financial burdens.

The state- and federally-funded medicaid waiver provides support to those with disabilities who live independently in the form of service coordination, home health services and respite care. All of The Arc's services are supported under this waiver.

Although people with IDD aren't eligible for the waiver until they turn 18, Spooner says she encourages families to get on the 10-year-long waitlist early in order to reduce the time spent without services after aging out of the school system.

Spooner said The Arc previously worked with Howard High School's special education program to ensure Bibb students signed up for the medicaid waiver.

Without the waiver, adults with IDD "graduate to the couch and they have nothing to do or they have to pay out of pocket for services," she explained.

Some even turn to substance abuse or end up being trafficked, according to Spooner.

The Arc's history

The Arc Macon dates back to the 1950s during a time when children with IDD weren't allowed in the public school system.

What began as an association of parents and the establishment of a summer program grew into a class for children with IDD. Macon's first special education class was introduced to the Virgil Powers School downtown. The school has since closed but will reopen in 2026 as One Safe Place Macon, a partnership of more than a dozen organizations and agencies, including The Arc Macon.

The Arc Macon now has 115 staff members and 200-300 volunteers annually. Spooner said these numbers have risen since the pandemic when the organization had to cut its staff from 140 to 87.

Many programs are free for participants and The Arc receives grant funding from the Central Georgia Community Foundation.

The organization is also responsible for 10 group homes throughout Middle Georgia. Most of the homes are HUD subsidized and covered under the medicaid waiver with room and board costs based on income.

Some individuals need support for their whole lives, Spooner said, but they still want to build a sense of confidence and independence.

"The conception is they're not as capable and don't give as much back to the community as they really do," she said. "The capacity to give and make an impact on our community is huge, they just need the opportunity."

Those living in a group home can receive transportation to work and even learn to manage their own finances. Staff at the homes help residents meet their goals, whether it be a daily living achievement or saving for a trip to Disney World.

'This is in my blood'

Spooner has been with The Arc for a decade and says the personal interactions with the folks she serves are what makes the job worth it.

"This is in my blood," she said. "This is what I love to do."

Spooner grew up close to her aunt who had Down syndrome and was familiar with The Arc through her grandfather's work serving on The Arc board in Baltimore.

"My aunt was my best friend growing up," she said.

Doctors told Spooner's grandparents that her aunt would never amount to anything and would probably spend her life in the hospital, she recalled. Instead, she held a job at a local cafeteria and led a normal life.

"She was such a huge piece of our family," Spooner said of her aunt. "She taught all of us how to be."

Spooner remembers her aunt, who died from complications with Down syndrome, had a photographic memory and a forgiving nature.

"I am giving back to her legacy every day that I do this," she said.

In August, The Arc participants will gear up for the annual Camp ASCCA in Jackson's Gap, Alabama, for a week of horseback riding, tubing, swimming and zip lining. Typically, 40-75 adult campers participate. For more information on signing up and volunteering, visit thearcmacon.org.

Funding, from A1:

The district concluded its summer camps earlier this month. The before- and after-school programs are slated to begin on Sept. 2, and planning for the programs will continue despite the funding freeze, said Lori Ward-Rodgers, assistant superintendent for federal programs at the district.

The programs combined provide care to 2,894 total students every school year, and each program has 20-25 staff members. The district also has about 750 service agreements with tutors, psychologists and other specialists across the county to help run the program.

After-school programs are particularly important, Sims said, because they offer a safe place for students while parents are working or otherwise unavailable.

The Bibb County School District is the only district in the state that receives funding to provide its virtual school students with after-school programs, said Tracey Muff, the district's executive director of supplemental services.

Muff said such programs encourage stronger student academic performance, improve attendance and family engagement.

"We were somewhat shocked, like most school districts across the country, and we are anxiously awaiting clearance so we can move full steam ahead with our original plan for the year," Ward-Rodgers said.

Ward-Rodgers noted that the district also receives federal funds for its English for Speakers of Other Languages tutors and for teachers' professional development.

Sims said he is concerned about anything that impacts teacher development, because that leads to "improved outcomes for students."

For now, the district is waiting for updates and guidance from the state, he said.

Sims said it's too early to say whether the freeze will impact decisions on the millage rate or the budget the board of education approved last month.

Sims said the district stands with Georgia State Superintendent Richard Woods and his statement regarding the funding.

"I deeply believe in fiscal responsibility, which means evaluating the use of funds and seeking out efficiencies, but also means being responsible — releasing funds already approved by Congress and signed by President Trump," Woods wrote in a recent news release. "In Georgia, we're getting ready to start the school year, so I call on federal funds to be released so we can ensure the success of our students."

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Opinion

There are tears in the eyes of the Texas community



Ed Grisamore

Louann Nadalini moved to Macon in the summer of 1994. She found a small apartment at a house on Orange Terrace.

Two weeks later, it began to rain.

It rained ... and rained ... and rained.

It finally stopped after the Fourth of July. Then, the floodwaters came.

Although the rising waters of the Ocmulgee River were a mile away, she was safe on the high ground of a hill above the Medical Center. She had lived in Macon less than a month, and yet she was a part of something historic. She heard it referred to as the "Flood of the Century." It was a furious force of nature and the one of the most devastating natural disasters in state history.

She wrote her address in pencil. By the time things dried out in the months ahead, she figured she would be gone.

"I came to Macon sight unseen because I was ready for an after-college adventure," she said. "I was going to move here for two years, then go back to Texas and be a grown-up. I always joke that either it's been a long two years or I haven't ever grown-up because I'm still here."

She stayed and built a life in a city that remains impacted by the flood a generation later. Her children, Sarah and Ryan Bray, were born in Macon and went to school here.

But part of her will always be in the hill country of her native Texas, where she spent some of her happiest days at a girls camp on the Guadalupe River.

It is where her heart is.

And now that heart is breaking.

She began attending summer camp in Hunt, Texas, in 1980, when she was 7 years old, following a long tradition of grandparents, parents, siblings and other relatives.

Her grandmother, Julia Lee Taubert, attended Camp Mystic as a child in the 1930s. When her mother, Betty Taubert Nadalini, was of camp age, she began going to the "new" camp, Heart O' the Hills, just a mile downstream from Camp Mystic.

Since 1980, there has been only one summer when Louann has not spent time there as a camper, counselor, nurse or staff volunteer. It has been a huge part of her children's lives, too. Sarah attended Heart O' the Hills, and Ryan went to nearby Camp Stewart for Boys, on the north fork of the Guadalupe.

Ryan, a 2024 graduate of Macon's Stratford Academy and a rising sophomore at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, is in his third summer as a counselor at Camp Stewart. He and three other young men supervise a cabin of 10-year-olds. He is a riflery instructor at the camp.

Two weeks ago, Louann went to volunteer at Heart O' the Hills, helping her lifelong mentor and longtime camp director Jane Ragsdale. On June 29, Ryan joined her to return to Macon for a weeklong break.

He was scheduled to return to Texas on July 4, and Louann planned to go back for another volunteer stint in late July.

After she dropped off her 20-year-old son at the airport in Atlanta, Ryan received an urgent phone notification about the flash flood. He was advised to delay his return. Lives had been lost after the Guadalupe River surged 26 feet in 45 minutes as the campers and staff at Camp Mystic were sleeping.

"I had just dropped him off when they called and told him not to come," she said. "I asked him if he wanted me to come back and get him, and he said no. He still wanted to go. He wanted to be nearby when they were ready for him to help. I asked him if he was sure. It could be a while. And he said: 'Mom, as soon as they say the roads are clear, I'm going to be there cleaning up. I want to be there.'"

For the past week, the news of the catastrophic flooding in Kerr County has been met with the collective tears of a nation. Louann said the death toll would have been higher had Heart O' the Hills and Camp Stewart not been in between sessions. Camp Mystic, and others in the area, staggered their opening dates and had already started its session for the first week of July.

Last Saturday, Louann and a fellow camp staff member began driving back to Texas with heavy hearts. Ragsdale, who had been one of the most influential people in Louann's life, was among the victims as the death toll mounted.

"By the grace of God, most of the staff at Heart O' the Hills were on break," Louann said. "There was just a skeleton crew there and they all were able to escape to the hills. But Jane, unfortunately, did not."

Ragsdale had attended Camp Mystic as a child. When her parents became the owners of Heart O' the Hills and Camp Stewart in the 1960s, Ragsdale soon devoted her life to the camp. She began working there in 1978.

She had been co-owner and served as camp director since 1988. Last year, she received a national lifetime achievement award from the Camp Owners and Directors Association for her "wisdom, inspiration and contributions to camping and children."

"She was an enormously influential figure in my life and literally thousands of girls through the years," Louann said. "She was remarkable, an angel on this earth."

Before Louann left to return to Macon on June 29, she hugged her friend goodbye.

She did not know it would be the last time.

Ed Grisamore is a longtime journalist and author in Macon and Middle Georgia.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of bigger government



Marc Hyden

As the last fireworks went silent on Independence Day 2025, the countdown began for a truly monumental anniversary: Next year will mark the United States' 250th birthday. This is cause for celebration and also caution. Democracies and republics are fragile, and once lost, they are difficult to regain.

As our semiquincentennial approaches, I've been mulling over what our forefathers would think of the United States' trajectory. Candidly, I believe they would be impressed with many of our accomplishments—rising from 13 fledgling colonies to be the free world's leader. However, they would doubtlessly be disappointed in the erosion of our founding principles and leaders' malfeasance, despite the framers attempting to create a more perfect union.

Just about every American man, woman and child knows our national story: Americans grew weary of British rule and taxation without representation. So the 13 colonies revolted and secured their independence. Given that American patriots were a bunch of high-minded rabble-rousers who loathed taxes and big government, it is no surprise that they adopted a constitution giving citizens inalienable rights and curtailing government power.

The framers modeled the American system, in part, after the Roman Republic with some notable improvements. Our forefathers instituted a separation of powers between the three branches of government, which created checks and balances and limited presidential power.

But how has that turned out?

For some time this model worked relatively well. Each branch served as a counter-balance to the other branches but also depended on them. Fast forward many years, and Congress has ceded much of its authority to the executive who often rules unilaterally by executive order. To put this into perspective, President George Washington issued a total of eight executive orders during his eight-year tenure. Presidents Obama, Trump I, Biden and Trump II have instituted 276, 220, 162 and 165, respectively — acts that would certainly rankle our founders who feared a powerful executive.

They would also recoil at the notion of suspending habeas corpus. Enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, habeas corpus is a "fundamental instrument for safeguarding individual's freedom against arbitrary and lawless state action," according to Cornell Law School. The White House has explored suspending it to make it easier to deport those accused of being in the country illegally.

What's more, our government's power, size and scope has grown exponentially in the modern era, as has our mounting national debt. This would cause our founders to grouse, even though they were no strangers to it. By around 1791, the U.S. had $77.1 million of debt, but not everyone was entirely concerned at the time. "A national debt, if it is not excessive, will be to us a national blessing," Alexander Hamilton retorted. For the young nation, debt was a necessity in order to fund a war of independence and the government until it got on its proverbial feet. By 1835, President Andrew Jackson paid off the national debt.

Today, the U.S. is the richest nation on Earth and possibly the most indebted. Congress hasn't balanced a budget in more than 20 years and keeps irresponsibly adding to our seemingly insurmountable debt, which stands at around $37 trillion and counting. Our founders would find this wholly unnecessary and entirely excessive, and would be troubled by our foreign policy too.

In his farewell address, President George Washington warned against foreign entanglements. "[He] exhorted Americans to set aside their violent likes and dislikes of foreign nations," the State Department notes, "lest they be controlled by their passions: 'The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave.' Washington's remarks have served as an inspiration for American isolationism."

Washington's advice was prudent but has largely been cast aside. In fact, many American politicians look at military conflicts like some people look at their troubled ex-lovers: They just can't quit them. Some estimates suggest that the United States has been involved in as many as 400 military interventions since 1776. Some of these were necessary, but certainly not all. They have stretched American resources, created bitter enemies and resulted in myriad deaths. This is far from what Washington desired for the young country.

Since our government was modeled after Rome's, it seems fitting to quote a scene from my favorite movie, "Gladiator," in which Marcus Aurelius speaks of the Republic's fragility, which could also describe the American experiment: "There was once a dream that was Rome. You could only whisper it. Anything more than a whisper and it would vanish."

Looking back at our framers' actions, it is clear that they realized maintaining a free society and a democratic republic was a daunting challenge. Benjamin Franklin even famously quipped, "A republic if you can keep it," and if he and his colleagues were here today, I'd imagine they would voice plenty of disappointment.

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

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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The evolution of canines: A shaggy little puppy tale



Kyle Dominy

My parents recently brought home a puppy. It's a fuzzy, potato-looking creature that gets the attention of everyone sharing the room, because, of course, everyone loves puppies.

The majority of the folks in my family could be considered dog people. My parents, brother and cousins all have multiple canines in their households. Many of my friends — yes, I have a few of those — also share their personal space with more than one dog. I seem to be the only person on Planet Earth that thinks one dog is enough.

That belief is being put to the test thanks to this new companion animal that's made its way into my sphere of existence. My daughter has been hitting me up for a puppy ever since she laid eyes on this addition at her grandparents' house.

From serving in war zones to keeping company with royalty, dogs have played a major role in the history of civilization. No one knows who first laid eyes on a wild dog and decided it would make a good friend, but I'm sure he or she never intended to push one around in a baby carriage and pick up its poop in a tiny plastic bag. If you walk a dog in town and don't clean up after it, you are the worst possible kind of person and deserve to have a cinder block dropped on your foot. Where do you even buy cinder blocks? I've never in my life purchased one, yet I, and every other rural homeowner, have caches of them around my property, like a doomsday building-material prepper.

Dogs used to have to work for a living. They herded livestock or guarded a home or a junkyard. Canine unemployment is through the roof, but they seem to be getting along pretty well. I know a few dogs that live a more leisurely and pampered life than most people.

About 46 million American households have at least one dog, and a new study from the University of Oxford suggests that many of them could be connected to the early dogs of Mesoamerica. Researchers examined the genomes of thousands of dogs in Argentina, Chile and Mexico and discovered there's little difference genetically between the modern popular pet dog breed Chihuahua and the dogs that accompanied early farming communities as people migrated south through North, Central and South America.

Then Europeans arrived, and along with the course of history, altered dog breeds. Now we have things like pugs and breeds with "doodle" at the end of them, overbred, genetic abominations that serve no purpose other than looking at. I can say that because I have one of those dogs. My wife brought home a Berne-doodle about four years ago. In typical dad fashion I was angry at first, but now Zelda, named after the video game princess, knows who to come to when it's walking or feeding time.

Having a dog is very close to having kids. I can see why people call them their fur babies. You have to schedule vet appointments, keep up with vaccinations, feed it quality food and, if you have one of those doodles, get it a lot of haircuts.

So, yes, call me a dog person, but one is more than enough.

Local Knowledge: Man of Steel makes his return

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist

The Local Knowledge crack research department hopes you enjoyed the recent three-part "Macon One-ders" series and are certified as a contestant on "Jeopardy!" or a round of local trivia at Just Tap'd.

1. Scenes from the new "Superman" movie, which premieres in theaters nationwide today, were filmed inside Terminal Station in Macon. The late Christopher Reeve, who played the "Man of Steel" in the four Superman movies made between 1978-87, came to Macon in 1990 to appear in scenes at the Hay House for what movie?
(A) "The Rose and the Jackal"
(B) "Somewhere in Time"
(C) "Animal House"
(D) "Monsignor"

2. What do July 13, 1980, June 30, 2012, and July 1, 2012, have in common in Macon?
(A) The Ocmulgee River reached flood stage.
(B) Traffic lights miraculously synchronized on Walnut Street.
(C) The temperature was a record 108 degrees all three days.
(D) There were "No Queens" rallies downtown.

3. Mike Seekins, owner of Famous Mike's downtown, died on June 26. Which was NOT a job Seekins had before he got into the restaurant business?
(A) He toured with the Allman Brothers Band, selling merchandise at concerts and was a roadie for the Gratefield Dead band.
(B) He worked at the Grand Opera House, helped with the construction of the Willow Creek condominiums, co-owned a canoe rental business in Juliette and ran a knick knack store in Ingleside Village.
(C) Was the owner and chief cook and bottle washer at Biscuits, Burgers and More in a tiny gas station in Jones County at the corner of Ga. 49 and Joycliff Road.
(D Coached the equestrian team at Presbyterian College.

4. This former Miss Georgia appeared in episodes of "Cheers," "The Wonder Years," and "Full House" comedies early in her career before going on to succeed as a singer and soap opera star in "The Bold and the Beautiful." Although she is more closely identified with Warner Robins, she was born in Macon. What is her name?
(A) Julia Roberts
(B) Bobbi Eakes
(C) Kim Basinger
(D) Holly Hunter

5. Last week marked the 55th anniversary of the Atlanta International Pop Festival at the Middle Georgia Raceway in Byron. Which band/musical artist did NOT appear at the 1970 festival, which drew crowds estimated between 350,000-500,000.
(A) Grand Funk Railroad
(B) Jimi Hendrix
(C) Allman Brothers Band
(D) Bobby Sherman

6. Macon's Minor League Football System (MLFS) franchise in July 1990 was coached by the legendary Lou Saban, the former head coach of the Boston (New England) Patriots, Buffalo Bills and Denver Broncos. What was the local team's unique nickname?
(A) Middle Georgia Heat Wave
(B) Macon Humidity
(C) Pleasant Hill Raisers
(D) Payne City Sweat Shoppers

7. Singer Wayne Cochran was known as the "White Knight of Soul" in the 1960s because of his snow-white pompadour and lavish outfits. He moved to Macon in 1963, where he was inspired by this soul singer, who recorded his first record here. What was the singer's name?
(A) Bobby Brown
(B) Charlie Brown
(C) James Brown
(D) Bad, Bad Leroy Brown

8. Macon was mentioned in a scene about women's hair "scrunchies" in an episode of what popular television series 22 years ago in July 2003?
(A) "Sex and the City"
(B) "Two and a Half Men"
(C) "Everybody Loves Raymond"
(D) "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles"

9. Peach County holds the distinction of being which of the following?
(A) The oldest county in Georgia.
(B) The youngest county in Georgia.
(C) The county in Georgia with the most gnats.
(D) The only county in Georgia named after a food.

10. What words did British novelist William Makepeace Thackeray use to describe Macon in 1856?
(A) "Armpit of the South"
(B) "Loveliest Village on the Fall Line"
(C) "A great big, rambling, shambling village"
(D) "Not the end of the world, but if you stand on your tiptoes, you can see it"

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

REPORT CARD: (9-10) Fighting for truth, justice and the American way. (7-8) Faster than a speeding bullet. (5-6) Look, chief! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! (3-4) Lois Laned. (0-2) Kryptonite.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Macon's Terminal Station was used as a filming location for the new "Superman" movie by DC, which premieres today. This Macon landmark will appear as The Daily Planet newsroom in the film.

What does Marco Rubio's AI impersonation mean for all of us?



Joe Finkelstein

This week, a story broke that sounds like science fiction. Someone used artificial intelligence to impersonate U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, not with a fake quote or edited video, but with a synthetic voice so convincing it fooled people at the highest levels of government.

The impersonator reached out through the encrypted messaging app Signal, using the name Marco.Rubio@state.gov, and left messages that sounded just like Rubio. They contacted foreign ministers, a U.S. governor and a member of Congress. It wasn't a prank. It was a serious attempt to manipulate trust and authority using advanced AI.

We don't yet know who was behind it or why, but we do know this: the line between real and fake just got a whole lot blurrier.

A new kind of deepfake

We've heard of deepfakes before, videos or audio clips that show someone doing or saying something they never did. Usually it's a celebrity, sometimes it's political and often it's floating around social media. This incident was something different. It wasn't about spreading misinformation online. It was about using AI to directly impersonate a real person to real people in positions of power.

Think about how this could work in your own life. If someone left you a voicemail and it sounded exactly like your boss, or your child or your pastor, wouldn't you believe it? Most of us would. AI doesn't need to be flawless. It just needs to sound close enough to pass.

The fragile nature of trust

The State Department responded quickly, warning diplomats and partners to verify communication through secure channels. The FBI is investigating, but the real issue is bigger than any one incident. We're heading into a world where the sound of a voice or the appearance of a face is no longer proof of identity.

That affects all of us. Imagine a scammer using AI to sound like your friend, your kid's school principal or your doctor. It's no longer far-fetched. The tools are widely available and getting better every day.

This kind of manipulation doesn't just trick people. It chips away at trust. If we start second-guessing voices we once knew by heart, what happens to our sense of connection?

Signal isn't the problem

One thing that stood out in this story was the use of Signal. The app is known for its strong privacy features, including end-to-end encryption. This wasn't about breaking into a system. It was about pretending to be someone you trust and walking through the front door.

Even the best technology can't protect you if the person on the other end isn't who they claim to be. Encryption can secure the message, but it can't guarantee the identity behind it. That's a whole new kind of risk we haven't fully reckoned with.

The emotional toll of a fake voice

There's something deeply unsettling about hearing someone's voice, especially your own, say something that was never said. It's not just a tech issue. It's a psychological one.

Rubio hasn't made a big public statement about the incident, but imagine how strange it must feel to know that your voice was used to deceive others. Even if the message didn't cause harm, it creates doubt. Every time he leaves a voicemail now, the person receiving it might pause and wonder, "Is this really him?"

That's what makes this technology so disruptive. It doesn't just fool people in the moment. It creates long-term uncertainty.

What we can do

There's no easy fix, but there are steps we can take.

We need better tools to verify identity. Just like we use two-factor authentication for logins, we may need verification methods for voice and video communication. A digital stamp saying, "This message is verified," could help.

We need to raise awareness. The more people know that AI can mimic voices, the more cautious they'll be. That doesn't mean living in fear, but it does mean being smart.

And we need accountability. If someone uses AI to impersonate a public figure, there should be consequences. And if tech companies are building tools that make this easy, they need to build in safeguards too.

Most importantly, we need to talk about this around dinner tables, in classrooms, at churches and, yes, in columns like this one. The more open the conversation, the less power this kind of deception has.

Why this matters in Macon

You might be thinking, "This happened in Washington. Why should we worry here in Macon?" Here's the thing. If someone can impersonate a U.S. Senator, they can impersonate a mayor, a school superintendent or a small business owner.

The tools are no longer limited to hackers and big tech companies. Anyone with a phone and an internet connection can access AI tools that generate voice, video and written content that looks and sounds real.

Macon is a place where relationships matter. We know our neighbors. We trust familiar voices. AI can try to copy that, but it can't replace it. So let's hold on to what makes our community strong. Let's be alert, informed and connected.

In a world filled with artificial voices, the real ones matter more than ever.

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



Events

Visit Macon Film Tour Debut
Friday, July 11
3 p.m., 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Throughout downtown
Hop into Visit Macon's van and buckle up for an unforgettable ride through Macon's star-studded streets! You'll cruise past iconic film locations like the dazzling Douglass Theatre, the grand old Capitol Theater and the majestic Terminal Station. Along the way, you'll uncover behind-the-scenes stories, filming secrets and the Southern charm that keeps Hollywood coming back to Macon again and again. Seating is limited seating and priced at $20. The tour includes a keepsake souvenir and special entry into Terminal Station with a presentation.

Corks & Canvas
Friday, Jul 11
7 p.m.
456 First St.
Presented by The 567 Center for Renewal, Corks & Canvas is a fun, beginner-friendly painting workshop where you can relax and hang out with friends while a local artist teaches you how to recreate a beautiful painting. No painting experience required. Bring a beverage of your choice to sip on while you paint. The cost is $30, and includes all materials for an 11 x 14 painting (or $35 for a 16 x 20 painting). The two and a half hour-long workshop is led by Molly Fox who will teach participants how to create a painting of seashells on the shore.

Downtown Macon French Fry Fight
Wednesday-Friday, July 9-11
Throughout downtown
Get ready for a fry-tastic celebration in downtown Macon — now three days long! The Downtown Macon French Fry Fight is back July 9-11! Participating restaurants will serve up their best and most creative fry specials. After you try each mouthwatering fry creation, be sure to cast your vote for the top contender. The restaurant with the most votes will be crowned the Super Spud! Presented by NewTown Macon. No admission is needed, however, people must buy the fry offering at each business to participate. Prices range from $10-20, so there is something for everyone!

Macon Film Guild Presents: "The Ballad of Wallis Island"
Sunday, July 13
2 p.m. and 5 p.m.
355 MLK Jr. Blvd.
The surprise hit of Sundance and SXSW. Starring Carey Mulligan, Tom Basden and Tim Key. Old tensions resurface when former bandmates who were former lovers reunite for a private show at the island home of an eccentric millionaire. The film follows Charles (Tim Key), a lottery winner who lives alone on a remote island and dreams of getting his favorite musicians, McGwyer Mortimer (Tom Basden and Carey Mulligan) back together. Presented by Macon Film Guild at Douglass Theatre. There will be a discussion of the film after the 2 p.m. showing. $5 general admission.

Pickle Fest at Fall Line
Friday-Sunday, July 18-20
All weekend
567 Plum St.
Get ready to pucker up, Pickle Fest is back at Fall Line Brewing Co, and it's going to be bigger, brinier, and better than ever! Join Fall Line for a full weekend of pickle-packed fun you won't want to miss. Enjoy pickle drink flights, pickle sandwiches, pickle popsicles, pickle lemonade and straight-up pickles to snack on all weekend. On Sunday, folks can participate in Pickle Yoga — where they'll stretch, twist and brine with Homegrown Yoga in the garden — or grab their paddles and play some free indoor pickleball.

Sudoku solution

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

Meeting your plant's water needs


Karol Kelly

Water is a constant topic in the garden and landscape. The days are few and far between that Mother Nature hits it just right. While we had a run of wet weather over the last few months, it now seems like we are entering a stretch where the rain showers are scarce. When managing the water needs of your plants, there are a few things to consider.

First, determine if it is really time to water. We do more damage by applying too much water rather than too little. Keep in mind that the roots of most plants are healthiest when the soil is allowed to dry slightly between watering. It is easy to do a quick touch test with the tip of your finger to see if you detect moisture. Sometimes plants will clue us in when their leaves begin to wilt slightly. Remember, though, this can also be a sign of a root disease caused by overwatering. Our turfgrass specialist tells us when footprints are noticeable in the lawn, this should be a prompt to water.

The general rule of thumb is that plants need about an inch of water, once per week. However, it is better to water them less frequently and provide deeper watering. This promotes deep, healthy root growth. Of course, your frequency will need to be tweaked based on your soil type and plants. Sandier soil and potted plants tend to dry out more quickly. Light, frequent irrigation is discouraged as it will produce a shallow, weak root system.

Determine the time it takes to distribute an inch of water in your yard. This can be easily done by placing rain gauges or even cat food cans throughout the garden (or lawn) to see how long it takes to fill them with an inch of water. This allows you to estimate the length of time to run the irrigation system.

Monitoring irrigation patterns is crucial to ensure sprinklers are effectively wetting the grass and not the gutter, pavement or the neighbor's grass. An adjustment of the heads may be necessary so that no water is wasted. Additionally, check your system for leaks and call an irrigation specialist to correct any problems.

Application timing also affects water-use efficiency. Watering should take place between 9 p.m. and 9 a.m.. During this time, there is less wind, lower temperatures and therefore less water lost to evaporation. Also, irrigating during the evening after dew develops (9 p.m.) and before it dries in the morning (9 a.m.) prevents disease problems by minimizing the window of time that foliage remains wet.

Finally, install plants that require a higher amount of water, such as annuals, in beds together so supplemental water can be applied to targeted areas rather than the entire yard. One goal might even be to reduce the areas in your landscape that require more water and work toward increased natural areas utilizing native or low maintenance plants.

There are all kinds of user-friendly irrigation tools to utilize if you want to up your watering game. Drip irrigation, soaker hoses and inexpensive irrigation timers can automate some of the processes, reduce disease pressure and conserve moisture.

For more information, visit the UGA Extension publication page online.

If you have any gardening or landscape questions, contact us at 478-310-5350 or email us at bibb.extension@uga.edu.


Provided by UGA
A drop of water falls from the pipe of an irrigation system. Knowing how much water your plants need is crucial to maintaining a thriving landscape.

Dublin
Cooking Show & Expo 2025
A special event brought to you by The Courier Herald



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as featured chef

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From Our Kitchens:

Make summer last longer with watermelon kimchi... kind of



Casey Choung / The Melody

Melody Reporter Casey Choung transformed a watermelon, gifted to him by a fellow journalist, into a refreshing kimchi dish. Choung's recipe is inspired by kimchi he tried during a recent trip to Las Vegas.

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

The other day, veteran reporter Joe Kovac Jr. of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution bequeathed some fantastic watermelons to The Melody after returning from an assignment in Cordele, the self-proclaimed watermelon capital of the world.

Its deep green complexion was unlike anything I had seen from a fruit, the same goes for its rich pink interior.

While the melon likely could've fed several people, I made good work by eating half the melon myself, mostly just eating it with a little seasoning here and there.

Half the melon was left when I thought of turning it into kimchi.

Summer's fruit doesn't last forever, but you can prolong its vitality through the powers of preservation. Recipes for pickled peaches or jarred tomato sauce or pineapple jam are abundant.

But with the closure of Kimchi Factory ringing the death knell of kimchi for an entire city, I decided to pay homage by cooking my own.

Kimchi is typically thought of as the spiced napa cabbage served at Korean restaurants. However kimchi can be thought of more as a technique than a singular dish.

The same fishy, fermented paste used on cabbage is applied to radishes, potatoes and even watermelon.

Kimchi is made or bought in large quantities and a diverse collection of kimchi and other small dishes, known as banchan, are enjoyed before Korean meals.

This recipe is a copycat of the watermelon and peach kimchi I had at Roy Choi's joint, Best Friend, in Vegas. The food there was really awesome and inspired.

Roy Choi is the chef behind Kogi, a Korean-inspired taco truck based out of Los Angeles, Choi's hometown. He also helped Jon Favreau with culinary prep for the movie "Chef."

I also have never made kimchi before, so I learned that you need to pre-salt the watermelon before adding the paste in order to draw water out so you're not left with a big sloppy soup.

I also cannot guarantee this will be properly fermented, because traditionally kimchi is stuffed into pots in the ground to ferment, while this just went in my fridge.

I freestyled the kimchi paste, but the non-negotiables are chili flakes, ginger, garlic and onion.

Kimchi paste

(makes about 1 cup, enough for half a watermelon)

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup of korean chili flakes (gochugaru, found at Asian grocery stores or online)
- 4 cloves of garlic peeled
- A knob of ginger (about 1 tablespoon) peeled
- 1 teaspoon of oyster sauce
- 2 tablespoons of rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon of soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- 2 tablespoons of sesame seeds
- The whites of 3 scallions

Watermelon kimchi

Ingredients

- ½ a watermelon
- 1 cup of chili paste
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- Scallion greens slivered

Directions

Prepare the paste, add all of the ingredients into a blender and blend until pasty.

Cut the watermelon into bite-sized chunks and salt. Let watermelon chunks sit for an hour.

Drain excess water from the watermelon, rinse off excess salt.

Add kimchi paste to watermelon chunks, mix until each piece is well-coated.

Let kimchi rest for half an hour and enjoy.

Coffee, A8:

told their stories. The people we publish are telling stories. The graphics and signs and other communication pieces tell a story. What we do with Warner Robins Little Theatre is storytelling. It comes down to we're passionate about stories. Stories connect people. We have a very creative atmosphere here that I think encourages people to express themselves. This is a place we want everybody to feel welcomed."

They say the Between Friends menu is as diverse as the people it serves.

"The way the publishing started was that, for a year, a local kindergarten teacher wrote a letter to her father every day as part of her grieving his passing," Miller said. "It was difficult for her to go over them, so she asked if we'd help. We took her letters and got them in book form and were able to surprise her with it when she came in for breakfast on her birthday.

"Between Friends Publishing has published upwards of 300 books now. Our largest customer base writes one book, maybe two. They want something for family and don't see becoming a big deal author. Then there are the serious authors, our repeats. We find a lot of people aren't sure where to go or what to do to get something done.

"We see ourselves as a trusted, ethical publishing company providing independent authors with an affordable and empowering alternative to vanity press publishing, free of the pitfalls and scams, with all the related services they need."

Out of these efforts came the Middle Georgia Lit Fest, which started as a small affair in the coffee shop but expanding last year to a partnership with Warner Robins and 50 or so local and regional independent authors. Miller said the 2026 festival will be even bigger. It's Feb. 7.

When the Warner Robins Little Theatre opens its production of "Steel Magnolias" on Saturday, running through July 27, Miller will play the part of Mary Lynn "M'Lynn" Eatenton, played by Sally Field in the movie.

Miller said playing "the mama" is a dream role for her.

Miller is a WRLT vice president and Hawkins is a board member. Miller has directed since getting involved in 2019. Hawkins said she came on board in 2021, mainly doing set design, stage management and publicity.

"One neat tie to me and the coffee shop is we actually did 'Color Me Crazy,' a book I wrote as part of a series," Miller said. "(I) turned it into a play and the theater said, 'Yes, let's do it.' I directed it too – it was one of the coolest moments in my life."

I asked the pair how they find the time to do all they do — more than there's room to tell here and growing every month with new involvements serving their community. They smiled and said it's a 24/7 thing, running any small business is. Writers, artists, entrepreneurs, friends – the two have tied them all together to create and make a go of successful, sustainable ventures in the arts community.

Between Friends Coffee can be found on social media and at betweenfriendscoffee.com. It's located at 1080 Ga. 96, Suite 100, Warner Robins.

Have a suggestion about a potential "creative hotspot?" Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at mwpannell@gmail.com. Find him on Instagram at michael_w_pannell.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

AGING IN PLACE VS. DOWNSIZING: EXPLORING THE PROS AND CONS



Photo by Freepik.com

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If you're wrestling with the question of whether to downsize or age in place in your current home, there are many factors to consider.

First, if you're an empty nester, your adult children are probably living in their own homes. You may not need all the living space you have.

Next, if you are dealing with age-related physical or mobility changes, your current home may not be as convenient or safe as it once was. Another question to ponder is whether moving is financially feasible.

Finally, leaving your familiar home, neighbors, support network, and all the memories you've made can be emotionally challenging.

This guide explores the pros and cons of both choices to help you make an informed decision.

What Do Older Adults Want to Do?
If you're facing the life-altering decision to stay in your home as you age or downsize, you're not alone.

Older adults currently account for an unprecedented amount of the U.S. population, according to the Population Reference Bureau. The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to increase from 58 million in 2022 to 82 million by 2050. This surge represents a 47% increase during that period.

A 2021 AARP survey showed 75% of respondents aged 50+ want to stay in their current homes or communities for as long as possible.

Here are some pros and cons of both choices.

The Pros and Cons of Aging in Place
The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) defines aging in place as "the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level."

Chief considerations include your home's age and whether it safely supports your age-related physical changes.

Pros of Aging in Place

- You can live in a familiar home and neighborhood with people you know, who can provide support and social connection when you need it.
- You'll make future memories in the home where you've already made many cherished memories.
- You don't have to shop for a new place to live.
- You don't have to worry about home resale value, and whether you can get what you need when you sell your home.
- Renovations can make your home more accessible and easier to navigate.
- You can pass on your family home to your children.

Cons of Aging in Place

- Renovations to improve accessibility at home might be financially challenging. One aging in place expert told AARP that renovations can range "anywhere from $1,000 to $10,000" and depend on "whether you're doing a whole-house renovation or adding on."
- Renovations for a split-level home, an older home, or one that needs repairs might be impractical if it requires nearly tearing the house down and starting over.
- Home health care, if you need it, might be too expensive.
- The older you get, the harder it is to do home maintenance, upkeep, and repairs.
- The older a home gets, the more items like the roof, windows, and HVAC units need costly repairs or replacement.

The Pros and Cons of Downsizing
All seniors have unique needs, and downsizing might not be right for everyone.

Pros of Downsizing

- A smaller home requires less upkeep and offers lower utility bills.
- If you move to a condo, the HOA fee will cover exterior repairs, yard maintenance, and snow removal.
- Downsizing offers an opportunity to declutter and purge belongings you no longer want or need.
- Decreased living expenses can lower financial stress.
- You can still enjoy social opportunities in your new neighborhood and make new friends.
- If you choose to live in an assisted living facility, many offer help with personal care and medications.

Cons of Downsizing

- Acclimating to a new community can be challenging.
- Living further from family and friends may cause loneliness.
- Moving costs quickly add up, and the process may require physical labor.
- You may have to give up personal items due to limited space.
- If you buy a smaller home, maintenance and upkeep can still be increasingly complex as you age.

Senior Living Options
Downsizing entails multiple senior living options — what you choose may depend on whether you need extra care or help in a new home.

For example, condos offer a smaller living space with yard upkeep and snow removal included in an HOA fee. Many condo communities also provide recreational amenities like a swimming pool, tennis court, or clubhouse.

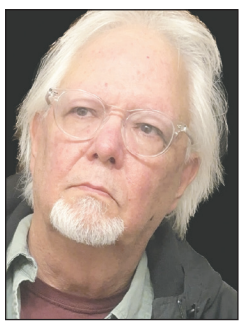
The National Institute on Aging lists different types of senior residential facilities, including:

- A nursing home offers nursing care, 24-hour supervision, and help with personal care.
- Assisted living facilities offer some support, although typically less specialized care. Some facilities provide transitional care, such as memory care, if residents eventually need it.
- A senior cooperative community offers a homeowner equity share in the entire community, maintenance-fee living, appreciation for your unit (which resembles a condo), and a bevy of social opportunities within the community that active agers can enjoy.

Choosing whether to age in place or downsize is a deeply personal issue that you and your loved ones should discuss and explore seriously. Ultimately, you deserve to enjoy the next chapter of your life in the way that suits your needs best.



Between Friends Coffee: a creative hotspot in Warner Robins with author-themed offerings



Michael W. Pannell

There are places – and people – that bubble with creativity. This is about one of them, part of an occasional series highlighting creative hotspots in Macon and Middle Georgia.

You wouldn't think I'd be talking about a spot called Between Friends Coffee, but it's more than a coffeehouse begun by two friends in Houston County. More than a café, a bakery, an event center or even a small bookshop, Between Friends wasn't started by two coffee gurus looking to break a new, secret roast to the scene but by two young entrepreneurs with artistic bents looking for a business that could be a creative outlet, create community and, certainly, be a successful operation.

Between Friends opened in 2016 when coffee shops were first becoming a thing in Warner Robins, but the many that opened couldn't make it on their own for more than a few months before closing.

Still, Jamie Miller, a book-lover and writer, and Victoria Hawkins, an artist-designer, thought opening, owning and operating one was a good idea.

And it has been.

But still you wonder, "What does a coffee shop have to do with arts and entertainment? With being a creative hotspot?"

Of course, it takes creativity to operate a business, make good coffee, bake pastries and serve up breakfasts and sandwiches. But there's more going on at Between Friends, beginning with the fact it's an author-themed coffeehouse to the extreme. Drink varieties — and there are many — are named after well-known and little-known authors: E.A. Poe Espresso, Virginia Woolf Café Au Lait, Robert Frost Hazelnut Frappe, Oscar Wilde Caramel Frappe, Emily Dickinson Vanilla Iced Coffee, C.S. Lewis Butterscotch Iced Coffee, Tolkien Hot Vanilla Latte, Mark Twain Sparkling Iced Americano, Alcott Blueberry Muffin Espresso Latte, Fannie Flagg Honey & Heavy Cream Latte — and it goes on and on.

Even the tables are decoupaged with pages from books.

But that's not the thing of it.

In its nearly 10 years of operation, Between Friends has not only become a successful coffee shop but has birthed a successful indie-publishing operation, begun offering web and brand design services, created the growing Middle Georgia Lit Fest, become integral to community theater, become a consulting source for both artful and business endeavors, and more.

These and other undertakings fall not so neatly under the umbrellas of Between Friends Coffee, Between Friends Publishing and Between Friends Consulting.

All these support Miller and Hawkins' creative dreams and those of many others. Doing it hasn't come through grants and whatnot, but through hard work and a sustainable setup.

That's huge.

"We were both looking for a business," Hawkins said. "We wanted something to pour our energy into, something that would be creative. We saw a need and filled it, which is sort of our mantra and how all the different things have evolved."

Hawkins has drawn since she was a kid but got into computers and web and graphic design. She does have a dab of retail experience through her family.

Hawkins is 30. Miller just celebrated her 37th birthday.

For her part, Miller earned degrees in psychology and literature from Alabama's Troy University. Side note: Miller has a photographic memory, which she said is both a blessing and a pain.



Michael W. Pannell / The Melody

Jamie Miller and Victoria Hawkins of Between Friends Coffee have created a steaming hot business that bubbles with artful endeavors carried out in sustainable ways. Both are involved with Warner Robins Little Theatre's production of "Steel Magnolias."

Miller has written nearly two dozen books of fiction, nonfiction and poetry. Obviously, she handles the editorial side of Between Friends Publishing but also takes care of Between Friends' social media. Hawkins handles the business end as well as the necessary graphic design and layout work for clients. Hawkins is strong in getting ideas; Miller in organizing, planning and keeping things operational.

In the coffeehouse-café, Miller handles most of the baking and coffee making while Hawkins is often sitting at work on a multiple-screen laptop until she needs to jump up to make the place's award-winning cinnamon rolls.

Between Friends has a string of "Best of the Best" awards in several categories.

"We've had so much fun fitting authors to drink flavors," Hawkins said. "But we really love the idea of friends coming in and engaging over coffee. You don't have to be a book-lover to be here, but we do always come back to the idea of people. We love getting to meet all the people we'd never have met if we'd never opened the place. We love that they can gather here and enjoy a coffee, something to drink, some food and time together. This shop and all the décor are a manifestation of our journey. Everything here has a story to it – something a customer brought us, something we found or worked to create."

For an author-themed coffeeshop, the idea of story naturally comes up, but not just in the expected way.

"People and stories, their story and other stories, are entwined in who we are here," Miller said. "At the coffee shop, what are people doing? They're here sharing their story with one another. The authors we see around us have written and

See COFFEE, Page A7

TAKE FLIGHT!



Warner Robins Mayor & City Council (L-R):
Charlie Bibb (Post 2), Larry Curtis, Jr. (Post 6), Clifford Holmes (Post 5), Kevin Lashley (Post 4), Mayor LaRhonda W. Patrick, Derek Mack (Post 1), Keith Lauritsen(Post 3)

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WARNER ROBINS

Two Mercer players face off in MLB matchup

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Well past midnight on the east coast, in the heat of the Sacramento night and during a blowout between the Atlanta Braves and the Athletics, two Mercer Bears met on the biggest stage.

If any Maconites stayed up late to watch the Athletics wreck Atlanta on the west coast Tuesday night, they might have noticed an unexpected treat in the late innings.

Austin Cox, a 2018 draft pick by the Kansas City Royals out of Mercer, was on the mound for the Braves in the late stages of the 10-1 throttling when Athletics rookie Colby Thomas strolled up to bat as a pinch hitter. Thomas, an outfielder, was drafted out of Mercer by the then-Oakland A's in 2022.

Though Thomas played years after Cox's time at Mercer, both are former Bears nonetheless.

"This is a Mercer-on-Mercer matchup in the big leagues," play-by-play man Wiley Ballard announced to viewers and his color commentator CJ Nitkowksi.

"Show no mercy, Austin Cox!" Nitkowski quipped in response as Thomas stepped into the batter's box. "For Austin Cox, this becomes about some bragging rights at the alumni game."

The showdown between the two Mercer standouts sparked a conversation about the Bears between Nitkowski and Ballard. Nitkowski even quizzed Ballard on who Mercer's all-time leader in "Wins Above Replacement" was — former Brave Cory Gearrin leads the pack with exactly 4 WAR, it turns out — in an amusing segment.

Ballard and Nitkowski also mentioned Thomas' high school career at Valdosta and his Georgia native status.

"It must be a thrill for the 24-year-old who just made his debut eight days ago, now facing the team he presumably grew up rooting for," Ballard said on the broadcast.

The two TV announcers mentioned some other Mercer players who reached the majors, even bringing up talented first baseman Nathaniel Lowe. He played at Mercer at one point but technically does not count towards the WAR trivia — otherwise he would easily lead Bears alumni with 12.1 WAR — since he was drafted out of Mississippi State, not Mercer.

Nonetheless, Atlanta's commentators discussed the Macon university and its alumni with ease as two of those alumni duked it out. It was

See MERCER, Page B2

NFL linebacker Dupree coaches up youngsters

Micah Johnston
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Los Angeles Chargers linebacker and Wilkinson County product Bud Dupree hosted his annual Skills and Drills youth football camp this week, teaching young Macon athletes about football, life and its challenges — both on and off the field — at Mercer University's Five Star Stadium.

The free event saw dozens of Bibb County youth turn out on a hot summer Sunday donning Los Angeles Chargers shirts to learn from Dupree, who played for teams including the Atlanta Falcons and Pittsburgh Steelers before joining the Chargers.

"Fundamentals and discipline, that's the main thing. Just being able to achieve and being able to envision that they can get to the next level," Dupree told reporters Sunday afternoon about the important lessons of the camp. "That's the thing about it — everybody not gonna be football players, but if you work hard at it throughout your career, you can end up being somebody important throughout your life."

Dupree, who was born in Macon and dominated with the Wilkinson County Warriors en route to the pros, is in his 11th NFL season and his third year hosting the skills event for Middle Georgia players.

The community service that lines up with his personal history of giving back to the region after reaching the NFL, as Dupree has also hosted fundraising events like a charity motorcycle ride and charity basketball game.

Much of the camp stayed the same as in past years, though Dupree did feel different himself as he ran the drills.

"I don't feel like I'm a different player, but I do feel like I'm a different coach," he said. "Being able to teach guys different things, I'm learning throughout the camp process how it actually feels for the coaching side.

"It all feels fun, and this stadium feels like a gameday, so I know walking down that tunnel, that sidewalk, those guys probably get goosebumps and feel like they're gonna go play. That's another thing that's important."

As Dupree has hosted the camp over the past few seasons, that has remained a point of emphasis — the impression of a "big game" experience, the message that hard work forges opportunity — on top of the technique and toughness the drills impress upon young football minds.

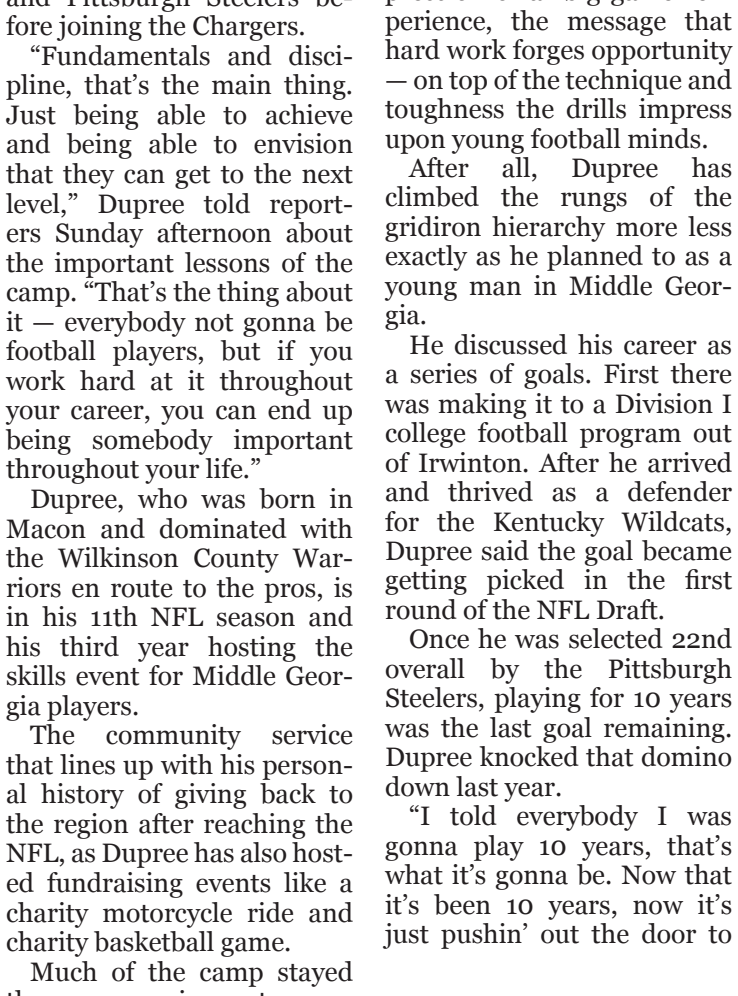
After all, Dupree has climbed the rungs of the gridiron hierarchy more less exactly as he planned to as a young man in Middle Georgia.

He discussed his career as a series of goals. First there was making it to a Division I college football program out of Irwinton. After he arrived and thrived as a defender for the Kentucky Wildcats, Dupree said the goal became getting picked in the first round of the NFL Draft.

Once he was selected 22nd overall by the Pittsburgh Steelers, playing for 10 years was the last goal remaining. Dupree knocked that domino down last year.

"I told everybody I was gonna play 10 years, that's what it's gonna be. Now that it's been 10 years, now it's just pushin' out the door to

See DUPREE, Page B2



Jason Vorhees / The Melody
Bud Dupree coaches campers at his football clinic. Dupree, an NFL linebacker for the Los Angeles Chargers, held his third camp last Sunday.



Mark Powell / For The Melody
Peninsula Pilots pitcher Cam Nuckols sends a fastball for the Easter Division in the 2025 Coastal Plain League All-Star Game at Luther Williams field.

Macon native, others show stuff as Bacon host CPL All-Star Game

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

The plan, as per usual for an All-Star Game, was simple: the hometown pitcher and representative for the hosting team would come on last, and hopefully be in a closer situation.

That wasn't the case for Houston County grad and Mercer sophomore Kai Decker, who represented the Macon Bacon for the West division in the final frame of the Coastal Plain League All-Star Game on Monday.

By then, the East offense had done plenty of damage, and its pitching prevented any damage en route to a 6-0 win Monday night over the host West in the CPL's own version of the midsummer classic at the historic the Luther Williams Field.

Still, it was a successful outing for the pitcher repping the Bacon and Bears. The East got a run off Decker in the ninth, but it didn't hurt since the West had been unable to get anything going all night, a trend unlikely to change in the bottom of the ninth.

"I thought it went pretty well," said Decker, owner of the lowest opponents' average in the league. "I was just trying to throw strikes, just trying to get guys out."

For about half of the game, it was about pitching, which doesn't usually happen in All-Star games.

"It was a good pitchers duel," Macon's Billy Ham said. "It was kind of unfortunate that they were able to crack some over the fence at the home field."

Last year's All-Star showdown in Forest City ended in a nine-inning, 4-4 deadlock a year after the East won 8-6 in Lexington, South Carolina.

But the 2022 battle in Holly Springs belonged to the arms, the West taking a 3-2 win.

It was similar to that 2022 story. East pitchers racked up 14 strikeouts to eight for the West crew.

The skills competition on Sunday might've been a little precursor to the East feeling at home at Luther Williams, since three of the four titles went to players from the East.

Boone's Michael Young was the lone winner from the West, taking the catcher accuracy competition over Wilson's Chase Waddell, Holly Springs' Andrew Keller and Asheboro's Seojun Oh.

The fastest man in the league is Peninsula's Kazuya Jordan, who ran 7.22 in the championship round to beat Lexington County's Brandon Gibbs (7.56).

Jordan did manage a stolen base in the seventh after getting hit by a pitch, then scored the East's fourth run.

The most accurate outfielder arm belongs to Charlie Bussey of Wilson, who topped Hayden Friese of Martinsville in the "frozen ropes" throwing contest.

Bussey entered the game in the final innings and also didn't get a chance to gun anybody down.

Another local, Evan Bouldin, was handled in his lone at-bat, popping out to second.

Bouldin finished runner-up in the derby after he belted nine bombs in the second round on Sunday before he was shut out in the final round.

That trend followed for the Bacon's Ham, whose lone plate appearance came in the seventh, and ended in an eight-pitch strikeout.

"It was a down-and-in slider," said Ham, a first baseman at Nevada, of the third strike. "It's just one you want to foul off.

"I tried to let the ball come to me, not trying to do too much. The setting, coming in the game, it is tough, especially getting the one at-bat."

The West escaped a bases-loaded first without giving up any runs, and then loaded the bases in the bottom half and came up empty.

Just when it seemed like the West would get out of another mild jam after a sweet 7-6-5 out at third when Trenton Lyons tried to stretch a leadoff double, Kyle Edwards drilled a first-pitch homer for the lead just one out later.

Waddell followed a two-out single with a homer to right that was just fair and just over the fence in the fifth.

The West got runners on — the first two batters in the fourth, for example — but couldn't push them across. The hosts stranded nine runners against eight left stranded for the East.

Greenville's Quinn Holt was named the game's top pitcher after striking out the side in the sixth.

Waddell took home top hitter honors, courtesy of the two-run homer.

Decker and Ham certainly would've liked better individual and team performances, but they still had smiles as all-star festivities concluded with the start of postgame fireworks.

"The experience was great, especially having it here," said Ham, echoing Decker. "It was great to hear the crowd cheer real loud for you. A great experience."

Ham will enjoy the time off until Wednesday, the second-place finish in the derby taking a little out of him.

"I woke up (Monday) morning, my back is pretty sore," he said. "Swinging real hard."

Dupree, from B1

see how long I can make it," Dupree said with a laugh. "It's fun, and I'm gonna keep playing 'til it ain't fun no more."

With such a long NFL history, there was plenty of wisdom for Dupree to impart upon his students, though one thing stood out above some of the purely football-related teachings.

"You gotta be disciplined. You gotta make a goal and stay committed to it," he said on his biggest piece of advice for young players about making the NFL. "[There's] no secret to success. You gotta go out there and grind."

Dupree said he plans to continue the camps after he retires from the NFL, though that date doesn't seem to be on the horizon. For now, he's focused on motivating Middle Georgia's next generation of football players using drills he runs in the NFL.

"These are all training-type drills. We're not gonna come out here and just make a kid run just to be tired. We come out here and make 'em work," Dupree said. "That's basically what it is, exposing them to those, making sure they have that mindset of what it's gonna be."



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Athletes run through a jumping drill at Mercer University's Five Star Stadium during Bud Dupree's football camp. The former Wilkinson County standout and current Chargers linebacker Bud Dupree held his 3rd annual football camp Sunday. Dupress said he plans to continue the camps even after he retires from the NFL.

Middle Georgia State moves up to the D-II Peach Belt

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

Middle Georgia State University's athletics will officially make the jump to the Division II level this year, the school announced this week. The Knights will compete in the Peach Belt as a full conference member and as a provisional Division II school.

The provisional status lasts three seasons, according to a plan released by the school, during which they will be able to play in regular season and Peach Belt playoff games but are not allowed into the NCAA Division II postseason. Middle Georgia is then slated to then become a full member with NCAA playoff eligibility in the 2028-29 athletic year.

The university — which has campuses in Macon, Cochran, Dublin, Warner Robins and Eastman — got approved by its board to move up to Division II back in February after the school began exploring the possibility of moving up from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) as early as 2022, the announcement said. The NCAA approval that came in this month was the last piece of the puzzle.

"This is a historic and transformational time for Middle Georgia State University," MGA president Christopher Blake said in a press release. "Joining NCAA Division II will align our athletics program with our broader mission as a state university committed to academic excellence, student success and regional engagement. This move strengthens our institutional identity, enriches student experiences and builds pride in the success of Knights athletics."

MGA will play in the Peach Belt with 10 other schools including six others in Georgia, three in South Carolina and one in Florida. Many Middle Georgians will recognize conference member Georgia College and State University over in Milledgeville.

The other schools in the conference include Augusta, Columbus State, Clayton State, Georgia Southwestern State and North Georgia in Georgia, along with USC Aiken, USC Beaufort and Lander in South Carolina. Flagler is the lone school from Florida and the only non-public university in the Peach Belt.

Middle Georgia State previously competed in the NAIA's Southern States Athletic Conference, where the Knights fielded respected programs in recent seasons across a variety of sports.

MGA finished ranked inside the top 20 in softball, men's tennis and women's tennis last season. The women's tennis team earned a top 10 finish when coaches across the country voted the Knights as the No. 8 NAIA program in the nation in the final poll of the season in April. They won a match in the NAIA tournament before running into a powerhouse program in Georgia-Gwinnett during the second round.

The softball team snagged the SSAC championship and got a walk-off win in the NAIA national tournament. The MGA men's basketball team also made the NAIA tournament after coming one win shy of the SSAC conference title.

Other teams in the 12-team SSAC included Brewton-Parker College, Life University and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

What to know about the Peach Belt

The conference was established in 1990 and has hosted a variety of schools. Three schools — GCSU, Columbus State and Lander University — have remained in the conference as founding members.

USC Beaufort is the most recent school to join the Peach Belt, as the Sand Sharks arrived in 2022 and just finished its three years of provisional status at the Division II level. Some notable former member schools include Kennesaw State, USC Upstate and North Florida, all three of which have since ascended to Division I.

The conference started out with championships in just two sports, men's and women's basketball, but now features 18 different conference championships.

The Peach Belt boasts a competitive group of programs. North Georgia is a particularly well-rounded program, as the Nighthawks made the NCAA Division II tournament in a whopping six different sports: baseball, softball, men's golf, women's golf, men's tennis and women's tennis.

Four of those teams made it out of region play to appear at their respective NCAA championship sites. North Georgia's men's golf team appeared in the national semifinals for the second consecutive year. Flagler also appeared in a national semifinal, its key year coming in 2024 in men's tennis.

Four different teams across four different sports in the Peach Belt have earned No. 1 national rankings at some point, according to the conference's website. Championship winners include Armstrong State, which won 10 women's tennis national titles, and Lander's record-setting eight straight championships in men's tennis, among others.



Photo Courtesy Middle Georgia State Athletics

Middle Georgia State players celebrate from the bench during the Knights' 77-66 win over Dalton State in the second round of the Southern States Athletic Conference tournament at the end of February. MGA's run in the tournament earned them a spot in the NAIA National Tournament for the first time.

As far as conference history, basketball is very competitive. Several teams have multiple conference titles, though Augusta — formerly Augusta State — leads the pack with seven men's basketball championships. Georgia College, UNG, Columbus State and Lander all have five women's conference titles.

One Peach Belt player, Augusta's Garret Siler, eventually made the NBA and played 21 games for the Phoenix Suns in 2010. Siler at one point held the record for best field goal percentage in NCAA history across all divisions, as he finished his career with a .735 mark.

Aside from history, a key change for the Knights as they join the Peach Belt will come in the form of travel time.

"One of the most exciting results of this move will be our ability to build strong rivalries with nearby schools," MGA athletic director Michael Brown said. "Half a dozen members of the Peach Belt Conference are University System of Georgia institutions, and others are relatively short distances away in South Carolina and Florida. I'm grateful to the NCAA and the conference for their confidence and I look forward to the opportunities this bring us, not just for athletics but for our entire University community and the region."

In the SSAC, Middle Georgia played a few Georgia teams but often had to travel significant distances for road matchups. Three of the longer road trips included Xavier in New Orleans along with Blue Mountain Christian University and William Carey University in Mississippi. The trio of schools still are each more than six hours away from MGA's Macon campus by bus.

The longest trip for the Knights in the Peach Belt should be Flagler, which will only require a four-and-a-half hour trek from MGA's Macon campus.



Photo Courtesy of The Citadel Athletics

Mercer outfielder Colby Thomas (8) taps helmets with a teammate in celebration after rounding the bases during a Bears game against the Citadel on the road in 2022. Thomas, now a Triple-A player in the Oakland A's system, is ready to make his Major League debut as soon as he gets the call.

Mercer, from B1

an interesting matchup, as the left-handed pitcher Cox is attempting to reestablish himself this season with Atlanta while Thomas is fighting to extend his first-ever MLB stint, which he started off in a 1-for-10 slump.

As all the conversation unfolded, so did the battle. Cox pulled ahead early with a stellar backdoor slider that painted the outside corner, but Thomas took the second pitch in the dirt to even things up at 1-1.

Cox hurled the third pitch in at 95 mph, but Thomas was unphased, turning on it and hitting it sharply but foul to make it 1-2.

The left-hander then wisely leaned on the breaking ball.

Thomas barely fouled off the next pitch then finally struck out swinging at a nasty curveball from Cox on the fifth pitch of the at-bat. Braves catcher Sean Murphy collected the ball in the dirt and tossed it over to first to complete the strikeout.

In the midst of such a one-sided showdown, the battle between two Bears provided some entertaining trivia for Macon's Mercer fans, though its Braves fans likely wished Atlanta's other pitchers had fared as well as Cox did.

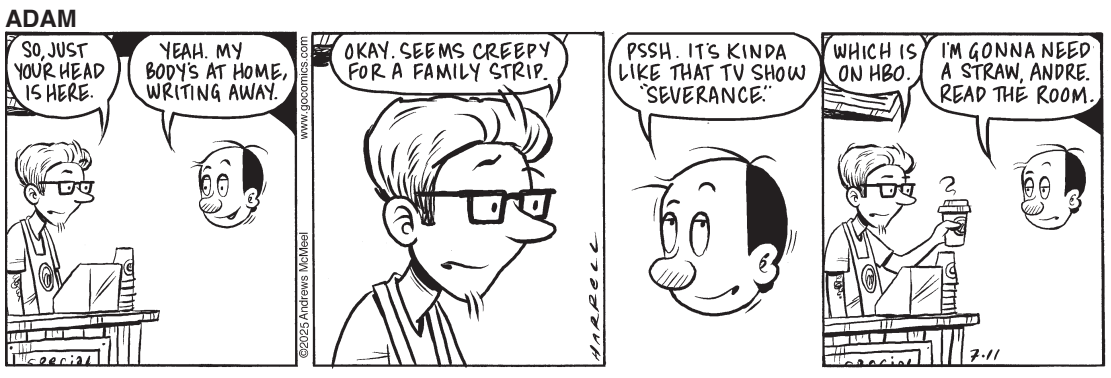
Cox has made a case to stay a part of Atlanta's relief corps for the foreseeable future, albeit over an admittedly small sample size. The lefty now has a 2.57 ERA through seven innings pitched as of Wednesday and still has not walked a batter, a luxury rarely afforded to managers by their bullpen arms.

Crucially, Cox also boasts a strikeout rate of nearly 40%, as he has K'd 11 batters over that seven-inning span since first getting called up last month. Though the Braves have shuffled Cox between the major league roster and Triple-A Gwinnett, it seems the Mercer alum might have a spot on the team for a longer period.

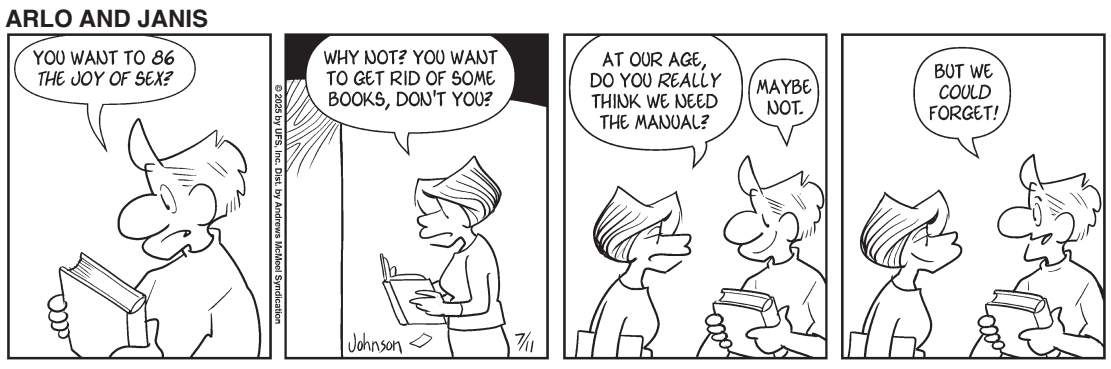
Thomas took his slump to 1-for-11 following the strikeout at the hands of his fellow Bear. It remains to be seen whether the Athletics will keep him up if he continues to struggle or return him to Triple-A, where he dominated at the plate to the tune of a .297/.365/.542 slash line in 2025.

Thomas did make a splendid play in his first major league game a week ago when he sprinted to catch a fly ball before throwing a dart to home plate to nab a runner, tumbling over in the outfield with the momentum of his throw in the process.

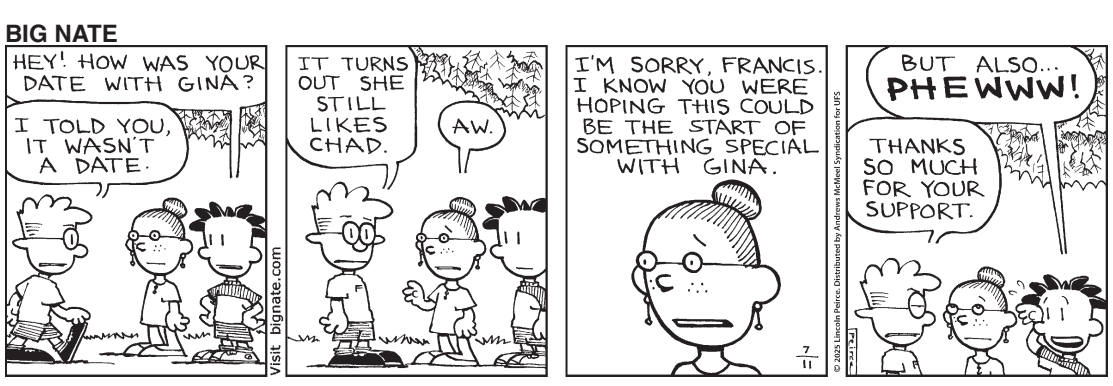
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ARLO AND JANIS



BIG NATE



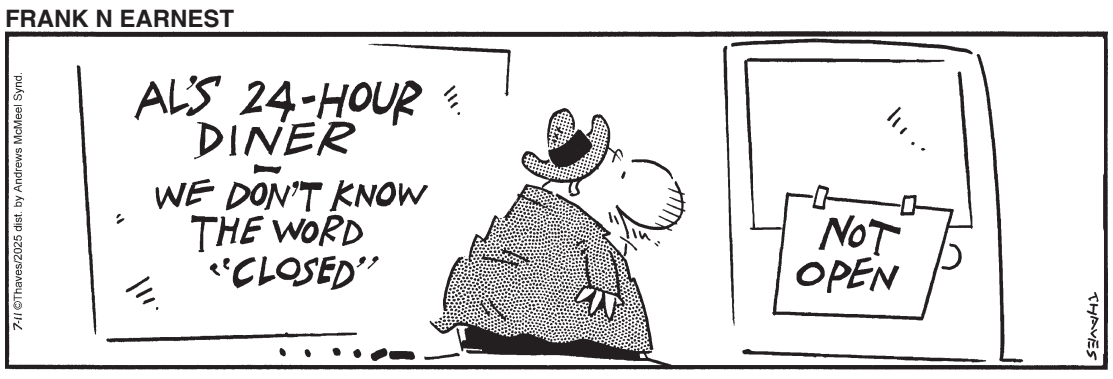
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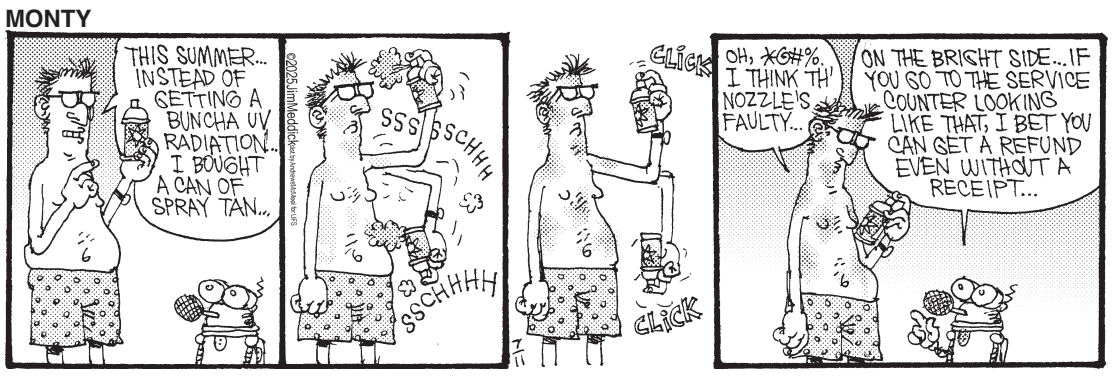
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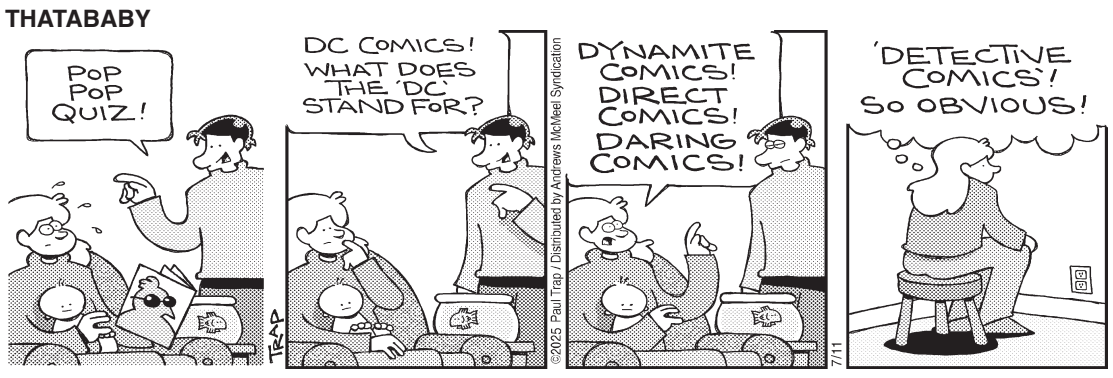
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

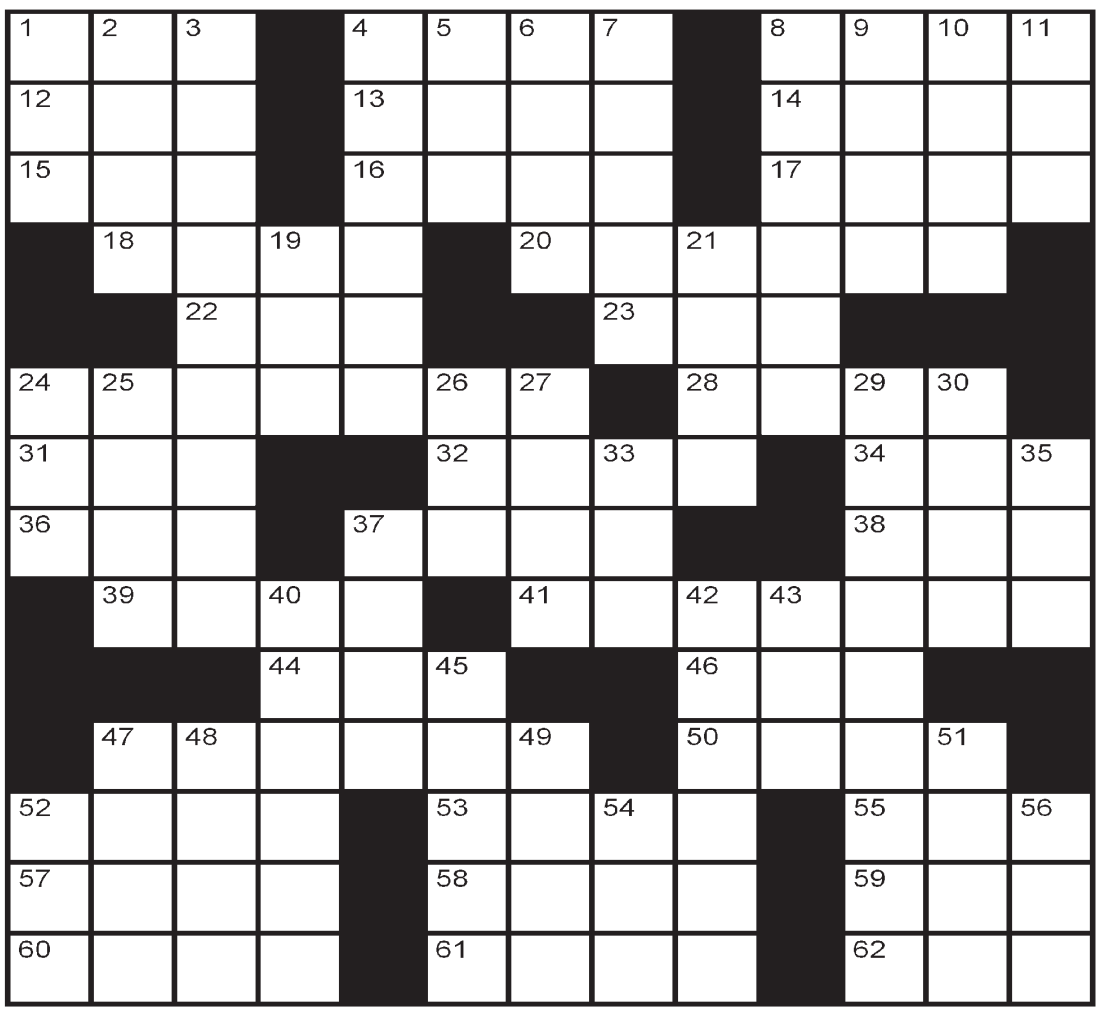
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4 Stage signals
8 Poke
12 Writer — Fleming
13 Gumbo veggie
14 Matching
15 Drill attachment
16 Sleeveless garment
17 Hertz competitor
18 Mention
20 Baby bird
22 — contra
23 — de plume
24 Window box cousin
28 Helper (Abbr.)
31 Fuel
32 Manner of walking
34 Time
36 Behave
37 Give shape to
38 Coral island
39 Dark eye makeup
41 Series installment
44 Goon
46 "— Quixote"
47 Heart
50 Means justifier
52 Smog
53 Dalai —
55 Cry of discovery
57 Gets it wrong
58 News item, for short
59 Actor — Lowe
60 Edible portion
61 Island goose
62 "Certainly!"

DOWN

1 White lie
2 Secular
3 Italian appetizer
4 Hidden
5 Small guitar
6 Irish Gaelic
7 Beelzebub
8 Sacred songs
9 Rant and —
10 Leave un-mentioned
11 — Plaines, Illinois
19 Sawbuck
21 Bleating creature
24 Sports org.
25 Be without
26 Conceit
27 Hard to come by
29 Of lesser importance
30 Jazz type
33 Devil
35 Positive vote
37 Off-key
40 Truthful
42 Form a conception of
43 Family guy
45 Criminal
47 Upkeep
48 Poet — Pound
49 Broccoli —
51 Brake part
52 — and haw
54 Time per.
56 Six-pack muscles

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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



7-11

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ☆☆☆☆☆

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



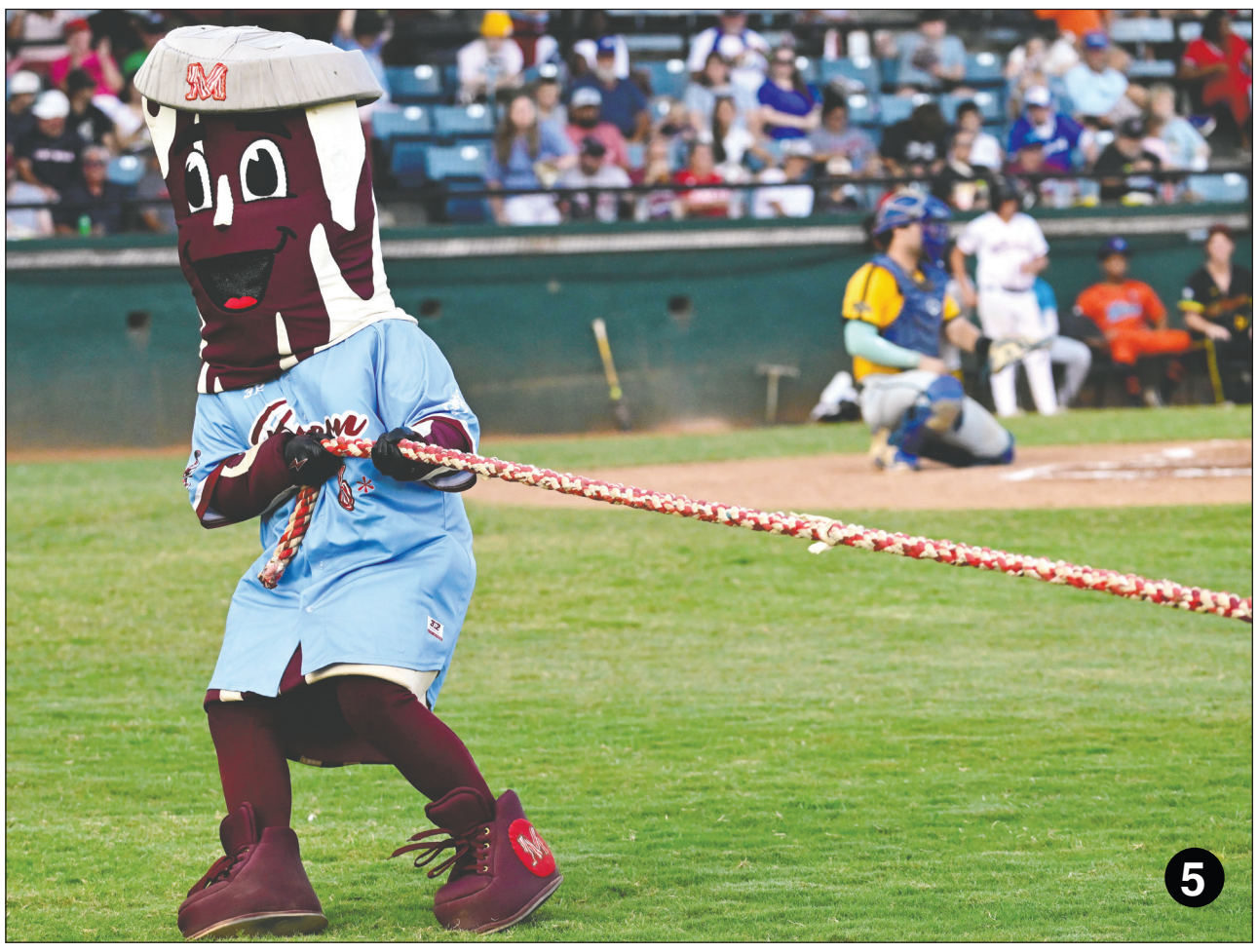


Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody

1: Dr. Edward Clark drives a tractor down Belvedere Drive on Friday during the Historic Ingleside Fourth of July Parade. The annual neighborhood parade started on Riverdale Drive before traveling down Overlook, Belvedere and Albermarle, before returning to Riverdale. **2:** Dustin Weiche and his 16-month-old son, John, get their photo taken atop a tractor after the Historic Ingleside Fourth of July Parade. **3:** Children ride their bikes on Ridge Avenue during the annual neighborhood parade. **4:** Fireworks light up the sky above Lake Tobesofkee Friday during the 28th Annual Sparks Over the Park.









Photos by Mark Powell / For The Melody

5: Macon Bacon mascot Kevin battles in a game of tug of war between innings Sundat during the 2025 Coastal Plain League All-Star Game at Luther Williams Field. **6:** Two boys participate in "Dizzy Waiter" game during the all-star game. **7:** Macon Bacon first baseman Billy Ham chats with fellow all-stars at Luther Willimas Field. **8:** Cade Fuller of the Forest City Owls signs a fan's baseball during the Coastal Plain League All-Star Game.



