

# The Macon Melody

Friday, August 22, 2025

Bibb County's local source for community news

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## Miller, commission member argue over merits of SPLOST

**Laura E. Corley**  
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The Macon-Bibb County Commission voted unanimously Tuesday to roll back the millage rate in a move that will lead to less property tax revenue.

Tuesday's board meeting turned testy as Mayor Lester Miller and Commissioner Stanley Stewart argued about the county's financial stability as the tax base continues to shift away from property taxes to sales taxes.

Miller informed the commission Tuesday that the county is projecting collecting \$54.7 million in property taxes in 2026, a sizable reduction from the \$81 million collected in 2022.

"We've been able to use the taxpayers' dollars wisely," Miller said. "By 'wisely,' I mean we are targeting certain areas that we need for tourism and things of that nature while providing the services in increased amounts."

Miller touted Bibb County's reduced property tax collections while surrounding Houston and Monroe counties are raising taxes.

Commissioner Donice Bryant asked how the county will make up the difference in lost property tax revenue.

Miller said the county is relying more on taxes collected from the voter-approved special sales taxes. Last year, Macon-Bibb voters overwhelmingly passed a penny-on-the-dollar tax known as Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). Another voter-backed sales tax intended to reduce property taxes by 40% was approved in 2021.

Stewart, who represents the county's east side, said although he supports the property tax rollback, he is concerned about the county's increasing reliance on sales tax for revenue.

"My sincere concern is for the future administra-

See TAXES, Page A2

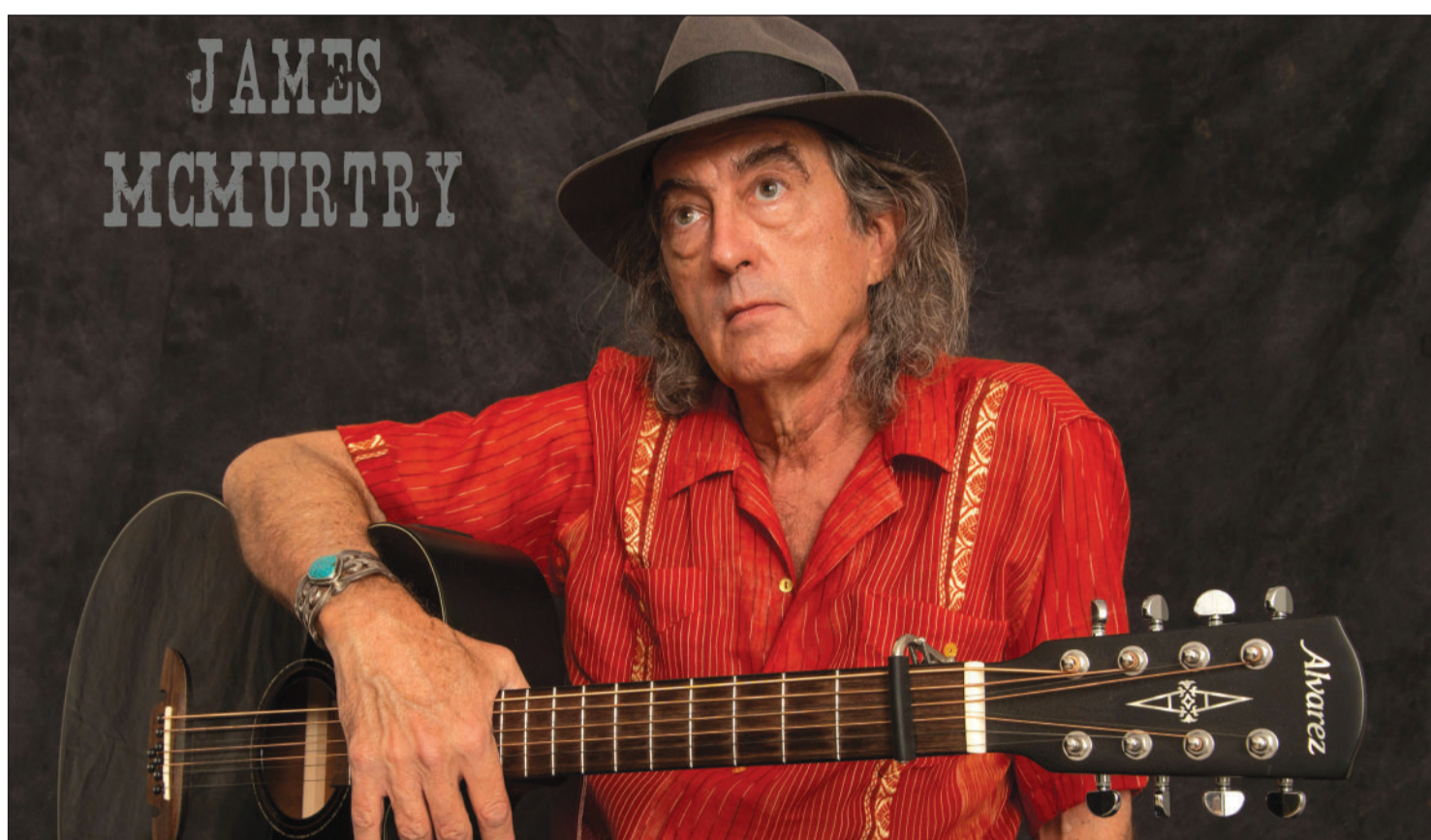


Photo Courtesy James McMurtry

Songwriter James McMurtry poses with his guitar in this promotional photo. McMurtry will play a show in Macon next month to support his new album.

## Folk icon McMurtry to visit Macon on tour for new album

**Evelyn Davidson**  
Community Reporter  
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James McMurtry will bring the gritty meanderings of a songwriter who's traveled backroads and dirt paths to the stage Sept. 24 at Macon's Capitol

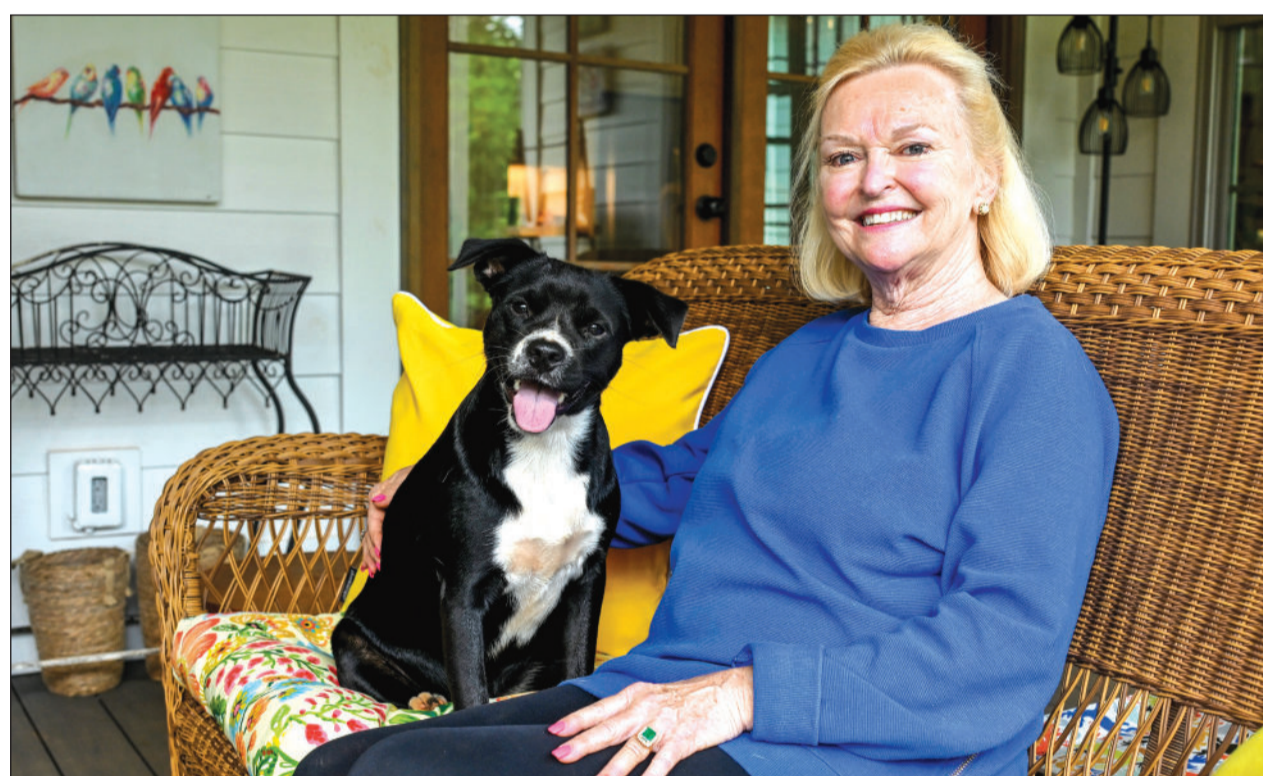
Theatre.

"The Black Dog and the Wandering Boy," McMurtry's first new album in four years, is a collection of songs woven from loose lines that he says kept him up at night, stories pocketed from friends throughout life.

In "South Texas Lawman," Mc-

Murtry pulls a story from the lines of a poem written by a friend. He touches on the topic of getting older while singing about a man who "hunts quail from horseback" and "cheats on both

See MCMURTRY, Page A3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Libbie Walthall poses on her porch as one of her dogs, Lily Bean, looks curiously at the camera. Walthall has had an "open-door policy" of sorts for dogs throughout her life, rescuing them and taking care of them for as long as she can remember.

## Door is always open for dogs in Walthall's heart

**Ed Grisamore**  
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Read Ed Grisamore's column on all the dogs in his life on page 4.

Libbie Walthall has an open-door policy for dogs.

She has a soft spot for them. They are always wagging their tails at her feet. They are forever barking during "yappy hour" on the porch.

She cannot remember a time in her life when a dog wasn't in it.

"I think I might have been born this way," she said, laughing. "I have a natural feeling for animals. My mother and grandmother grew up that way. Dogs. Cats. Birds. Rabbits. I've had them all with my children. It's just a part of us."

"We love our dogs. They are family." Tuesday, August 26 is National Dog Day. It's a day dedicated to the celebration of canines — both mixed breed and purebred — and to promote awareness of animal rescue.

The date is considered the universal birthday of all adopted dogs. For the past 12 years, National Dog Day on Aug. 26 has consistently trended No. 1 worldwide on Twitter (now "X").

Walthall has been an advocate for animal rescue for more than a decade. She fosters dogs for Catherine Wood, of Rock On Rescue of Middle Georgia.

She has three dogs of her own — Fresca, Bear and Lily Bean — who watch a revolving door of fur babies come through her Monroe County

See DOGS, Page A2

Periodical — Mail Label

## Bibb school board approves tax increase in tense meeting

**Casey Choung**  
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Henry Ficklin stood up and stepped outside during the Bibb County Board of Education's meeting — as he's done before votes in past meetings — right before the board voted to raise property taxes.

By the time he returned, the board had already voted to maintain the millage rate, effectively raising property taxes by roughly

5%.

The school board held a public hearing Thursday before its final 4-2 vote to maintain the millage rate, a measure expected to net the district \$3.8 million and reduce its \$20 million 2026 budget deficit down to \$16.7 million.

Board members Myrtice Johnson, James Freeman, Sundra Woodford and Lisa Garrett-Boyd voted in favor of the tax increase, while board members Daryl Morton and Barney Hester voted against it.

Board member Kristin Hanlon was absent.

Ficklin said the board "disenfranchised" the district he represents, which encompasses downtown Macon and Unionville, when it called for the vote while he was out of the room.

"I let her [board president Myrtice Johnson] know that it was not appreciated and to not disrespect me or any other board member that way," he said.

Ficklin said he steps out of

meetings because of a medical condition.

Johnson said she did not know why Ficklin stepped out and that he breached protocol by walking out during the meeting. She said she saw no reason to delay the vote if there was no motion to wait for him.

"He can't just walk out and come back in," she said. "It doesn't work

See SCHOOLS, Page A2

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**Taxes, from A1:**

tions and commissions,” Stewart said. “To forecast the financial well-being on sales tax and, in particular, sales tax generated from tourists ... As we all know, that number will fluctuate.”

Stewart said data recently published by United Way of Central Georgia shows 57% of Macon residents are “living paycheck-to-paycheck, better classified as ‘the working poor’ ... We have to find some way to alleviate the stress and strain on them as well.”

Stewart also expressed concerns about lost revenue from demolishing the Macon Coliseum before a new sports arena is built and about last month’s closure of the Riverside Library Branch because the county could not afford to continue leasing the space.

Stewart also proposed that the county consider opting out of the 4% state sales tax on groceries as Gwinnett and Cherokee counties have done.

Miller disagreed. “I don’t generally like to go back and forth but I do want to clear up a few things you said,” he said.

“Number one, I can’t envision a time that the Coliseum would be closed and lose revenue before a new arena was built,” Miller said. “So, anyone thinking that is entirely incorrect. We would be a fool to lose GHSA and have them go somewhere else.”

“I can assure you that this penny sales tax you see is a balanced approach to taxes and you can’t rely on just property taxes either because the more you tax people, the less people you have and it puts the burden on people that

have less money than other people,” Miller said.

“This is not any political show for me. This is doing what’s right by our community,” Miller said, adding it’s important to be factual.

Miller cut off Stewart’s microphone, prompting the commissioner to respond tersely.

“Don’t give me that bull,” Stewart said.

“Mr. Stewart, you’re not impressing anybody, sir, by violating decorum in here,” Miller said. “If you don’t agree with what we’re doing, vote ‘no’ against it.”

After the vote, Stewart left the room before the commission went behind closed doors to talk about potential or pending litigation, property acquisition, cybersecurity and personnel matters.

In other business Tuesday, the commission approved alcohol licenses for the Flying Biscuit Cafe, QuikTrip on Riverside Drive, Vineville Beverage & Cigar and Dos Amigos Food Mart on Emery Highway.

Commissioners also approved spending \$100,000 on a Georgia Department of Transportation study to widen Bass Road. Miller said GDOT will reimburse the county in three to six months and that the study is the initial stage of a project that won’t begin until 2027-28.

Commissioners also voted to reappoint George Thomas Sr. to the Board of Tax Assessors.

Other items approved by the commission include:

- A \$1.9 million contract with Macon-based Professional Paving Services LLC for deep patching and asphalt resurfacing



Macon mayor Lester Miller (left) and county commissioner Stanley Stewart, pictured here, got into a verbal spat at this week’s commission meeting about the merits of SPLOST, as Stewart said the county relied too much on sales tax to generate revenue.

- A \$7,000 per month contract with Cynthia Adams for attorney services as chief of appeals for the district attorney’s office
- A \$94,500 independent contract with Macon-based Ace Entities LLC for the emergency replacement of a concrete culvert on Hopewell Road to preserve the flow of Lamar Branch, a tributary to Echeconnee Creek
- Spending \$99,320 for a one-

- year contract extension with Southern Behavioral Services for the Employee Assistance Program
- Acceptance of a \$365,114 Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council with no local match required
- A budget transfer of \$64,090 in contingency funds to pay Stafford Builders for additional amenities at Linear Park

- Appropriating \$230,000 in 2018 SPLOST funds for lighting improvements at Carolyn Crayton Park (once Central City Park)
- Abandoning an alleyway and selling it for \$1,306 to Crisp Street Church of God in Christ, which plans to expand its church

**Schools, from A1:**

like that.”

The board voted unanimously to adopt the tentative millage rate back in July and held two public hearings on July 31 for members of the public to share their thoughts.

Johnson said she was “pleased” with the outcome of the vote. She said the district needs the money and the increase will go a long way and at a “minimum cost to our voters.”

Maintaining the rate at 14.674 mills nets the school district \$3.8 million. For homeowners, the increase means about an additional \$50 in annual property taxes for a \$200,000 home.

The millage rate is set annually by the school board and determines how much property owners will pay on every \$1,000 of taxable property value. The taxable property value in the county has increased by \$274 million this year.

Freeman said he wouldn’t have voted in favor of a millage rate increase, but maintaining the rate keeps property tax rates at a “nominal amount.” He said the board has

already made cuts in the face of unfunded mandates, such as new state health insurance costs.

“I think maintaining the level we’re at, as Ms. Johnson pointed out, for a minimum increase per household, less than \$4 a month per household, is the most financially responsible thing to do when we have those huge expenditures coming out that we weren’t accounting for,” he said.

Ficklin said he would have voted against the tax increase because members of his district want to keep in line with the county’s trend of rolling back the millage rate.

He added that the district needs to look

again at cutting unnecessary spending, as “little things roll into big things.”

The board had previously rolled back the millage rate every year from 2020-24, then voted to maintain the rate last year at what it is now.

Bibb Schools CFO Eric Bush told the board that maintaining the millage rate this year should keep the general fund balance ratio at a “tolerable” level, above 12%, through 2027.

The board will reconvene next Thursday at 4:00 at the Professional Learning Center on Riverside Drive.

**Dogs, from A1:**

home from shelters in three counties.

Many of her foster dogs are like weary travelers at a rest stop. They want nothing more than a safe place to land. They have been neglected in back yards, dumped on the side of the road and rescued from sidewalks in front of grocery stores.

Their emotional luggage is heavy, and their physical conditions are fraught with heartworms and chemical burns. She once kept a foster dog who was blind, and another that was deaf, at the same time.

The animals arrive with names like Percy, Ellie, Maple, Willow, Lemon and Luke. She loves them unconditionally and gives them a new “leash” on life.

Sometimes she becomes so attached she gives them the key to her house ... and heart.

In 2011, she received a dog through Maine Lab Rescue. She had him with her in the car when she pulled up to the drive-thru window at Zaxby’s on Zebulon Road.

“I want y’all to see my new dog,” she said to the employees. “What should I name him? I’ll tell you what. Let’s name him Zaxby.”

Two years later, on July 6, 2013, Walthall and her daughter, Allison, were seriously injured in a car accident on Interstate 16 near Savannah. Allison’s dog, Bella, died in the wreck.

After weeks in the hospital, followed by months of extensive recovery and rehabilitation, Walthall returned home ... and Zaxby

was there.

“When I walked in that door, he never left my side,” she said.

Zaxby died in 2023, five months after Walthall moved from her home in Macon to Monroe County, north of Smarr.

A black lab arrived for fostering in the spring of 2016. Her name was Raven but she might as well have been called Serendipity. Walthall had no idea the dog was pregnant. Raven birthed eight puppies in a plastic kiddie swimming pool in the laundry room.

Another lab named Gracie had been left in an outdoor kennel after her owner died. She was deaf. Walthall took her in when she was 12 years old.

“She followed me, and we got attached,” Walthall said. “She would look in my eyes like she knew what had happened to her and knew she had been rescued.”

“She was a homebody who wanted to be with me. And, even though she couldn’t hear me talking to her, she wanted to be right there beside me.”

Gracie died this past December.

There have been times when Walthall has fostered as many as 20 dogs at a time. Now, the number has leveled off to around half that number.

She said the three dogs she owns all get along and are patient and good-natured with different housemates that come in and out the door.

And that door is always open. Walthall wouldn’t have it any other way.

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# P&Z studies housing needs, approves rezoning for duplexes intended to serve Hindu community

**Liz Fabian**  
The Macon Newsroom

Does Macon have enough affordable housing to meet current and future needs?

That is the focus of the Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission's Housing Assessment & Forecast Study, which was completed this week.

"We have created a survey to help us better understand housing suitability, (whether existing housing options meet community needs), and affordability, (can residents and workers afford to rent or own in Macon-Bibb County)," Planning Director Gregory Brown emailed to stakeholders.

The survey took about 10 minutes to complete, was provided in English and Spanish, and closed Monday.

Macon's Hindu community will have 24 new homes adjacent to the Umiya Temple under rezoning approved at Monday's Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission meeting.

Widner & Associates applied to rezone about five acres from agricultural to multi-family residential at 4706 Raley Road as the developer pre-sold the dozen duplexes to congregants of the temple next door.

The planned, private, gated community will be similar to another small neighborhood across from the temple.

Applicant Tony Widner explained the houses will be facing north in keeping with their faith tradition.

"Buildings will be oriented based on direction, not necessarily based on street location?" P&Z's Kesia Stafford inquired.

"It will look like a normal development but we'll have to work with other restraints but we don't see it as being an issue," Widner said.

P&Z staff found that the proposal improves the housing stock of the surrounding area, and the ag-

ricultural zoning no longer fits the property as the small site would not be marketable for large-scale farming operations.

"The current zone imposes a negative effect on the property owner, who does not currently use the property for agriculture. The gain of local housing for the Umiya Temple residents will allow them to walk to their worship center, and is more consistent with 2050 (Comprehensive) Plan, Future Land Use classification of Urban Residential," the staff report stated.

The time has come to update the so-called "Comp Plan."

P&Z Executive Director Jeff Ruggieri announced TSW Planners, Architects, Landscape Architects with offices in Atlanta, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Lexington, Kentucky and Tulsa, Oklahoma was the winning bid of 10 applicants to update the Comprehensive Future Land Use Plan for Macon.

Commissioners approved TSW's selection and authorized Ruggieri to negotiate a contract of up to \$300,000 for the process.

## Other agenda items

- 3495 Riggins Mill Road — P&Z rezoned nearly three-quarters of an acre from R-1 single-family residential to R-3 multi-family residential to allow for construction of a single-story, 6,050-square-foot personal care home. "This facility will provide daily living support to residents who seek a stable, respectful, and home-like environment within the comfort of a residential neighborhood," Nickia Rigby stated in the application. Rigby plans to run the 11-bedroom personal care home while living in a house on one of the five tracts that total nearly four acres at the corner of Dorothy Drive. The other plots provide the opportunity for expansion or other housing, depending on the evolving needs of the community, she said.



Liz Fabian / The Macon Newsroom

Maconites who practice Hinduism can walk to the Umiya Temple from planned duplexes in a gated community at 4706 Raley Road. The complex will feature 24 new homes in the form of 12 duplexes that were pre-sold to congregants of the temple.

- 420 Forest Hill Road — Residential rezoning approved from R-1 single-family to R-3 multi-family to allow for professional offices in a previously abandoned house on a 0.84-acre parcel.

- 1220 Jackson St. — Certificate of appropriateness granted to replace three-tab, asphalt roof shingles with fiberglass ones.

- 2695 Stanislaus Circle — P&Z approves the appropriateness of replacing a four-panel sliding glass door ensemble with two French-style doors surrounded by two fixed windows of the same size. A new design for a side door

was also approved.

- 2437 Vineville Ave. — New sign approved for Moore Hall Trial Attorneys.

- 1262 & 1240 Forsyth St. — New 6-foot fence approved for the parking lot behind St. Paul's Episcopal Church that also is shared with St. Paul Apartments.

- 311 First St. and 732 Mulberry St. — P&Z removed a previous requirement that First Presbyterian Church to replat its parking lots before renovating them.

- 5223 Riverside Drive — Infusion clinic approved to operate five spa-like infusion suites five days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

in the more than 8,900-square-foot building that has a history of medical uses. Twelvestone Health Partners provides the medication needs of patients with complex and chronic conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's disease, thyroid issues and Alzheimer's.

*Civic Journalism Senior Fellow Liz Jarvis Fabian covers Macon-Bibb County governmental entities for The Macon Newsroom and can be reached at fabian\_lj@mercer.edu or 478-301-2976.*

## McMurtry, from A1:

his wives."

A self-described fiction writer, McMurtry slips into different narratives and change characters like clothing.

"The trick with the song is to stay in character, even if I don't agree with the character," he said, noting that to stray from the character results in a sermon not a song.

McMurtry has written from the perspectives of men and women, even drawing inspiration from man's best friend — he wrote one of his favorite songs off the new album, "Back to Coeur d'Alene," about his rescue dog, Mikey.

"Somebody mistreated him at some point," McMurtry said. "For a long time, he always seemed to wake up, thinking he was in trouble."

Co-produced with Don Dixon and released June 20 under New West Records, McMurtry's album title is a reference to hallucinations had by his late father, famous novelist and "Terms of Endearment" author Larry McMurtry.

If there's anything that ties all 10 songs on the album together, McMurtry says it isn't intentional and he never thinks about it.

Though some of his songs echo similar themes — like mentions of the Pentagon in both "Sailing Away" and "Annie" — McMurtry's explanation is much simpler: "I wasn't thinking about the other song, I was just looking for a line that rhymes."

He said the writing process begins with a couple of lines and a melody, and if it seems to stick, he builds a character to help unravel the rest of the story.

"I follow the words where they lead," McMurtry said.

Some of his songs take a couple weeks to write, said the Texas-born musician, while others can take decades.

"The rule is, you don't throw anything away," he said, recalling an incident where his laptop fell off the hood of his car.

The device, which contained snippets of songs and lyrics, disappeared on Interstate 35 in Texas somewhere between Denton and Fort Worth, McMurtry said, likening the accident to the famous tale of Ernest Hemingway's suitcase of lost writings.

The same roads that swallowed his laptop, however, are often where new material is born.

"If I'm at the wheel I'll be turning a verse over in my head," he said. "I listen to the white noise of the tires on the pavement. That's how I can get stuff written."

McMurtry doesn't listen to the radio while on the road, instead he searches

for melodies amidst the white noise.

"It's sort of like if you hunt deer," he said. "It's better on a misty day because the deer will move around in that mist."

McMurtry first dug his heels into the music scene with his granular depiction of Americana in his debut 1989 album "Too Long in the Wasteland," produced by John Mellencamp.

Now on his 11th album, he is no stranger to the ebb and flow of the music industry. Musicians used to tour to promote their record sales, he explained, but now it's flipped upside down.

"I make records when my tour draw starts to fall off," he said. "I put out records to advertise tour dates."

McMurtry's tour will take him and his band throughout the country, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to New Orleans and all the towns in between.

He enjoys playing certain songs live more than others and said the tracks he gravitates toward usually differ from the fan favorites.

"The Color of Night" plays itself, McMurtry said. In the song, he describes the color of night as a "sixty watt bulb on a cinder block wall."

His easygoing twang tells listeners, "seems you miss what you're missing more than you want what you've got / And I guess this beats boredom, but it hurts just the same."

On "The Black Dog and the Wandering Boy" tour, fans gravitate towards "Sailing Away" and "Sons of the Second Sons," he said.

A hit song has to truly resonate with people, something that McMurtry said has eluded him, even with his most famous song, "Choctaw Bingo" which he called likeable but not relatable.

Some songs click better with listeners than others, such as "Canola Fields" off his 2021 album "The Horses and the Hounds."

The "relationship song" seemed to be more listener-friendly, said McMurtry, who remembers hearing concert-goers all the way in the back of the venue singing his lyrics.

"That's what makes a hit song," he said. "When everybody thinks, 'that could be me.'"

# The Macon Melody

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# Opinion

## For all the dogs I have loved in my lifetime

Aug. 26 is National Dog Day.

Woof. Woof. How 'Bout Them Dogs?

No need to get your pup a Hallmark card on Tuesday. Just give her an extra dog biscuit. Or scratch him behind the ear.

Better yet, let her stick her head out the window riding down Vineville Avenue. Let him chase every squirrel in the yard, then come inside and drink out of the toilet.

If you're a cat person, you must wait your turn. National Cat Day isn't until October 29. So you might as well reach across the aisle and show some bi-partisanship to lap dogs, bird dogs, guide dogs, rescue dogs, mutts and mascots.

Our dogs are like our children. We brag that they are the cutest and the brightest. We bring out pictures from our pocketbooks and cell phones.

We dress them in socks and sweaters, and put bows on their heads. They have their own parks. They practically have their own aisle at Kroger.

Dogs have a deep bench with Lassie, Snoopy, Toto, Old Yeller, Spot, Pluto, Benji, Rin Tin Tin, Bingo, Clifford, Beethoven and Scooby Doo.

And, lest we forget, Dog is God spelled backward.

I have rubbed paws with a few celebrity dogs. I have gotten to hang out with a couple of generations of Ugas, the beloved University of



Ed Grisamore

Georgia mascot. (Swann Seiler, whose family has provided the bulldog mascots since 1956, is a longtime friend from college.)

Likewise, Paul and Alice Williams are dear peeps from Macon. They are the owners of a line of pink poodles — Casper, Lacie, Blossom and now Cherry — for the Cherry Blossom Festival.

I had the opportunity to appear at some events with AC Pup, who was 4 weeks old when he was found abandoned in freezing weather. He went on to become the name and face of animal rescue efforts in Middle Georgia for the next 13 years.

I never met Lt. Bobby, but he is perhaps Macon's most famous fur baby. He died on January 29, 1936, and is buried in Macon's historic Rose Hill Cemetery. He was the first dog to receive a commission in the Army, signed by President Calvin Coolidge.

And, of course, there was "Sam the Beggar Dog," a saucy Spitz who became a local icon when he appeared in a painting by former Macon fire chief B.H. Brown. Sam is pictured at the feet of a boy, who is holding a newspaper and a hot dog. It became the logo for Nu-Way, the second-oldest hot dog restaurant in the country, and is featured on everything from bags to cups, hats and T-shirts.

My wife and I have not owned a dog for several years. But that comes after a lifetime of our dogs

owning us.

We have six "granddogs" now, ranging from a couple of rescued puppies found abandoned in Stinsonville to a mini golden doodle, who appeared on stage as Sandy in the musical "Annie" at Macon Little Theatre.

My first dog was named Elvira. She was a boxer. She loved to chase cars. I'm afraid she might have chased one car too many. My parents never explained why she disappeared one day. We later had a toy poodle we called Tillie Bean. My mother named her after a character in a book she was reading. Tillie Bean died in the back seat of our station wagon when we were moving from Portsmouth, Virginia, to Jacksonville, Florida. My father was still in Vietnam. It was traumatic. My mother and her five kids were all in tears. Mama pulled over at a veterinarian's office in Charlotte and made arrangements for them to bury Tillie.

Tillie begat Luci Baines. She was named after President Lyndon Johnson's youngest daughter, who gave birth to her first child the same day Tillie Bean had her puppies.

Later on down the bloodline, our dog, Honey, had a litter of puppies. My sisters took them around the neighborhood, trying to give them away. They found homes for all but one. He was brown and black and looked like a shriveled-up raisin. That's what they named him. My dad and Raisin became best buddies.

After college, I had a dog named Herschel. In the early 1980s, I think

every Georgia fan named their dog Herschel. When I married, my wife had a chow named Punkin. We kept one of her puppies and named her "Glory," from a Kenny Rogers song.

Later, we owned a couple of basset hounds we named Emmy and Sevier. Emmy was the namesake of Emmylou Harris, one of our favorite country singers. Sevier was named for John Sevier, the first governor of Tennessee, who was my wife's great great great great great grandfather. (Sevierville is the home of Dolly Parton.)

The basset hounds were loveable, large and clumsy. A neighbor at the top of the hill once told me, "I saw your dogs walking your boys this morning."

Scout was a beagle. Her real name was Jean Louise "Scout" Finch from "To Kill a Mockingbird." We spoiled her with too much table food. She would sit by the supper table waiting for a crumb to fall. She grew as wide as she was long. When Scout got old, we went through the unshakeable grief of having to put her to sleep.

Jerry was the first stray we brought home. He wandered onto the playground at Sonny Carter Elementary School without a collar.

His fur was as black as chimney soot. The boys named him Jerry, after Jerry Garcia and Jerry Seinfeld. He was an Australian blue heeler cattle dog, smothered with Heinz 57.

But he was mostly a wonder dog. His photo ended up on the cover of one of my books, "Smack Dab in Dog Crossing." When our son,

Jake, was in the fifth grade, he did a school project on "A Day in the Life of Jerry." The documentary somehow won first place in the Bibb County Schools technology fair.

One day, my wife went to the vet's office to pick up some medicine and came home with Harper, who had been dumped there. She was named for author Harper Lee.

Harper was a psycho dog. She would have snapped at Mother Teresa had she knocked on our door. She spent her days running into things at full speed. She chewed everything from leather chairs to TV remotes.

Zuzu was named after the young daughter in "It's a Wonderful Life." She is still with us, although she now lives with Jake and his two other dogs, Ranger and Tonka.

Our dogs are buried in the back yards of the four houses we have lived in, so our hearts are there, too.

We miss them, but at least we know they left this world knowing they were loved.

*Ed Grisamore's favorite movies about dogs are "My Dog Skip," "Old Yeller," "Where the Red Fern Grows" and "101 Dalmatians." His favorite books about dogs are "The Speckled Beauty: A Dog and His People" by Rick Bragg, "The Dog Buried Over the Bridge" by Rheta Grimsley Johnson, "Travels With Charley" by John Steinbeck and "Marley & Me" by John Grogan.*

## Georgia housing market may be nearing tipping point

If you are one of the untold number of Georgians impatiently waiting for the housing market to correct, then you may be in luck soon. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution even announced, "Metro Atlanta becomes buyers' market — for those who can afford it," but this is a bit of a confusing declaration.



Marc Hyden

If housing remains doggedly unaffordable, then it is hardly evidence of a buyer's market, but there are some data points suggesting prospective buyers have room for some cautious optimism. This is a welcome change after years of malaise.

For some time, the housing market has been frozen in place thanks to a witch's brew of factors: New housing development has lagged for years, an imbalance between supply and demand has led to surging prices and mortgage rates have remained near 25-year highs. In short, low supply and high costs have ravaged the market, but that might be changing.

"The median Atlanta sale price for homes has decreased by 2.5% year over year, pushing it into the top five U.S. metros with the biggest decreases," reported the AJC and Zillow found

that the average home value in Georgia has declined by 1.7% over the past year.

This is becoming concerning for those who purchased their homes during the pandemic boom — as homeowners realize they overpaid and are now underwater. "Tim Hur, a real-estate agent in Atlanta, is seeing more people willing to sell at a loss because they are fearful their equity will turn negative," the Wall Street Journal notes.

A market imbalance and migration could be factoring into these shifts. High prices have sidelined many buyers, and now there are 63% more sellers than buyers in the Atlanta area. Across the state, there are 57,500 homes for sale, which is a 10% increase from last year, and

homes stay on the market for about 48 days. This is 11 more days than last year, and around 35% of listings have decreased the asking price.

What's more, after years of surging growth, Atlanta might be on track to contract. "Census data show more people from within the U.S. left metro Atlanta than moved to it during the 12 months that ended in mid-2024," according to the Wall Street Journal.

"It was a modest decline, about 1,330 people. But it heralds a significant moment for the longtime growth magnet: This is the first time metro Atlanta lost domestic migrants since the Census Bureau started detailing these numbers three decades ago."

Combined, it looks like the market may be improving — albeit modestly — for buyers, but Georgia isn't in the same situation as some cities in Texas and Florida where markets are deflating quick-

ly. Cape Coral, Fla., for instance, has perhaps the worst housing market in the country. When the city was booming, housing prices jumped by 75% in three years. Now many homeowners can't sell their homes and some are going into foreclosure. Prices have tumbled by 11% in two years.

Meanwhile, "The [national] inventory of unsold homes on the market increased to 511,000 units, the highest level since October 2007, from 505,000 in May. At June's sales pace it would take 9.8 months to clear the supply of new houses on the market, up from 9.7 months in May," Reuters found.

Despite experiences outside of the Peach State and also housing developments here, it is still a challenging time to buy a home in Georgia. We only have 4 months' supply of homes for sale; a six-month supply is considered healthy. The average home sales price is about

\$391,400, which is up from \$235,000 in January of 2020. To reasonably afford a home in Georgia, you need household income of over \$100,000, but the median household income is roughly \$75,000.

Nationally, the housing market has entered unsure times, but don't expect another 2008 crisis. A different set of circumstances caused that disaster, but the shifts in the current market could benefit homebuyers. While Georgia doesn't necessarily mirror all of the national trends and its housing market remains somewhat stubborn, there are some signs of a market correction — at least a modest one — which should provide some relief to prospective homebuyers.

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

## The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

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

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## From the front lines: Some more thoughts on the robot revolution

The wireborn are among us.

In case you didn't know, the term wireborn defines an entity that exists solely in cyberspace, typically generated by artificial intelligence. The term, though not officially entered into our lexicon, can be considered derogatory, if you can have negative emotions against something digital, and is getting more and more common as artificial intelligence worms its way into every facet of daily life. People use it for school, folks get it to do their work for them, people talk to it and some even say they are in love with it.

What an age to be alive. Every day it seems the lines between science fiction and reality get a little blurrier. All the things we've seen in movies, television shows and books about machines taking over and making humanity obsolete are seemingly coming true. And there is no escape from it. Every time you turn around another company is introducing an AI feature that's supposed to make our lives easier. I'm sure it will soon be on grocery buggies.

Your next medical exam could be performed by a wireborn physician. More and more doctors are using AI in basic screenings, using artificial intelligence to spot abnormalities such as growths and tumors. A recent study in Poland suggested that gastroenterologists who used AI to spot polyps during colonoscopies lost their ability to spot them on their own when tasked to do it the old-fashioned way, at least



Kyle Dominy

as old-fashioned as a colonoscopy can be. I'm sure the bill was the same.

Opinion is still split on how AI will affect education. While some think it saves time serving as a high-end search engine by helping gather and organize data, others argue that AI will destroy critical thinking, especially in younger students. Why think about something to form an opinion when a machine can tell you how to think? I have a brother who is an English professor. Don't get him started on artificial intelligence after a long day of flunking students for using AI to compose their assignments.

I can assure you this feature is entirely human composed, straight from my exemplary brain to my dexterous fingers into a keyboard. It's times like this that I wished I had paid more attention in math class. I could be writing the code for AI, not waiting to be replaced by it.

But there's hope yet. The other day my robot vacuum got lost. That's right, my AI-driven, GPS-equipped room cleaner failed to make it back to its charging station. It was smart enough to send an SOS via text message but couldn't make its way through a finite space. I rescued it eventually. I let it die first, stranded on the hard woods, vacuuming in a circle.

Was that cruel of me to not immediately come to the robot's rescue? Maybe. But I had to let it know I was still in charge ... at least for a little while longer.

# Timing is critical when planting a fall vegetable garden in Middle Georgia

**Rosann K.**

Bibb County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Fall vegetable gardening in USDA Zone 8b can be tricky. Plant too soon and the cool-season vegetables will suffer from the heat of summer's last hurrah. Plant too late and they won't mature before the cold sets in. Therefore, determining the "Goldilocks moment" for Middle Georgia should be one of the first tasks you tackle to help ensure success.

Here's the formula: First Frost Date - (Days to Maturity + Frost Buffer) = Planting Date.

Understanding and applying the formula will help you make better decisions about when and what to plant for a fall garden.

## First frost date

In Middle Georgia, this date typically falls between Nov. 1 and Nov. 10. However, this date is an average of historical frosts. It's interesting to look at the past data. Of the last 10 years, first frost occurred as early as Oct. 20 in 2022 and as late as Dec. 9 in 2016. Go to Georgia Weather

Network at [weather.uga.edu](http://weather.uga.edu) and from the menu in upper right-hand corner, select "Calculator" and then "First Frost." Now select, "Byron," the nearest station to Macon and press calculate. Here, you can see historical data for first frost dates going back to 2003. I'm using Nov. 5th for planning purposes this year as my mother told me many times there's usually a frost near her grandchild's birthday. Sometimes, it's worth asking an older gardener about their experience of first frost.

## Days to maturity

This crucial number indicates the number of days between planting a seed or setting out transplants and harvesting the crop. Some cultivars mature earlier than others, so be sure to check the seed packet or catalog for individual growing instructions. For example, I'd like to try Black Magic Kale, an heirloom variety. Its days to maturity range from 65 if I use transplants and 80 if I direct seed. Now, I count back 65 days from Nov. 5, which is Sept. 1. For direct seeding, I'd need to plant by Aug. 17. If I need a bit more time to get my kale in, I might want to think

about a hybrid like Rainbow Crush which has shorter days to maturity.

## Frost buffer

Remember, frost dates are based on long-term averages, so November 5 is an average frost date. Will this be the year of an early frost? There's always a chance! That's why Extension recommends a buffer of about 18 days. That means for sowing Black Magic kale seeds, I should have started on July 31. Whoops.

Luckily, for those of us who love leafy greens, folklore and science tell us that the flavor of frost-tolerant greens improves when exposed to a light frost which converts starches to sugars. I have a feeling that kale "kissed by frost" would have suited Goldilocks just right.

To learn more about fall gardening, please join me for a Fall Gardening Class on Monday, Sept. 8 at 6 p.m. at the Washington Memorial Library.

*If you have any other gardening or landscape questions, contact us at 478-310-5350 or email us at [bibb.extension@uga.edu](mailto:bibb.extension@uga.edu).*



Photo provided by UGA Cooperative Extension

A row of lettuce plants grow from the ground. Bibb County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Rosann K. shared tips for determining when to plant fall vegetables.

# Local Knowledge: Hank, Flannery and smoking guns

**Ed Grisamore**

Melody Columnist  
[gris@maconmelody.com](mailto:gris@maconmelody.com)

Did you know the late Rev. Jimmy Waters served a combined 86 years in the ministry — 31 years at Mabel White Memorial Baptist and 55 years as chaplain for the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department?

Are you aware that the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, with more than 43,000 square feet, is the largest state sports museum in the nation?

If you already know that, congratulations. Pat yourself on the back. Give yourself an extra scoop of ice cream. Collect \$200 as you pass "Go" on the Monopoly board. (But don't expect me to pay.)

Unfortunately, none of the above is included in this week's "Local Knowledge" quiz.

Here are 10 other questions to inform and entertain you.

**1. Actor James Arness received his basic training during World War II at Camp Wheeler in Macon. Arness was famous for what television role?**

- (A) Sebastian Cabot in "Family Affair"
- (B) Matt Dillon in "Gunsmoke"
- (C) Eddie Haskell in "Leave It To Beaver"
- (D) Spock in "Star Trek"

**2. The former Oak Street in downtown Macon once had a reputation as a "red light" district for prostitution. In an attempt to change the reputation, the street's name was changed. Ironically, it was renamed after a poisonous plant. What name does it go by now? (Hint: It is the main address for Atrium Health Navicent The Medical Center.)**

- (A) Oleander
- (B) Sumac
- (C) Hemlock
- (D) Poinsettia

**3. Ambrose Baber was Macon's first doctor, helped build the city's first courthouse, bank and library, was a founding father of Christ Episcopal Church and was responsible for the formation of Central City Park. He originally was from the Twiggs County**



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

A brick archway marks the entrance to Carolyn Crayton Park, which was once called Central City Park. Ambrose Baber is credited with the formation of the Macon park on Willie Smokie Glover Drive. Baber also contributed to building the city's first courthouse, band and library.

**community of Marion, which holds what distinction?**

- (A) It is the geographic center of Georgia.
- (B) It became home to a little cafe known as "Eat, Drink and Be Marion."
- (C) It gained a reputation as I-16's most famous speed trap.
- (D) It received notoriety as the hometown of Honey Boo Boo.

**4. The Monroe County community of Juliette is famous for its Whistlestop Cafe and the movie "Fried Green Tomatoes." What was the cafe's original name?**

- (A) Romeo
- (B) Esther

See TRIVIA, Page A7

# Artificial intelligence isn't just a tool, but a conversational pal: From pop culture chats, funk experiments and a few misfires

If you've been following my columns, you know I've been having lots of conversations with artificial intelligence. Sometimes insightful, sometimes ridiculous and often somewhere in between. But I've noticed something: AI isn't just good at summarizing the news or helping with lesson plans. It's also becoming a quirky sidekick for pop culture, music and the weird ideas that pop into your head late at night.

I've come to think of AI not just as a tool but as a kind of conversational companion. Like that friend who doesn't always give the right answer but always has an answer and never gets tired of talking. Let me take you inside two recent examples that show how unpredictable these AI buddies can be and why they're still worth keeping around even when they get it wrong.

## The "Baby Reindeer" test

My wife and I watched Baby Reindeer on Netflix and thought it was terrible. So I turned to my AI pals to ask: Why is everyone raving about



Joe Finkelstein

this show? Here's what I got:

- **Gemini** confidently told me people might enjoy the song "Baby Reindeer" by Taylor Swift. It broke down genre and nostalgia appeal. Impressive, except the show isn't a song and the Swift track doesn't exist. Gemini made it up then doubled down with bullet points.
- **ChatGPT** took the polite route. It acknowledged tastes vary and offered a neutral, therapist-like reply: "Everyone's different. What didn't you like about it?" Fair question, but it dodged the real one: Why is everyone else into it?
- **Poe** tried to help but veered off course. It gave a thoughtful essay about theater and artistic subjectivity but didn't seem to know what Baby Reindeer was. It felt like someone bluffing their way through book club.
- **Copilot** came the closest at first. It correctly identified the show as a dramatized version of Richard Gadd's real-life stalking ordeal and praised the raw tone

and performances. But it felt like a PR summary. It didn't mention the backlash, disturbing content or any of the criticism I'd heard from others. Too slick, not enough substance.

- **Perplexity**, on the other hand, brought balance. It explained why Baby Reindeer was praised, including its portrayal of male trauma, emotional depth and Gadd's performance, but also acknowledged strong criticism. It cited articles calling it manipulative, excessive and even narcissistic. It linked to sources like WalesOnline and The Mary Sue that offered opposing viewpoints.

Perplexity didn't just summarize. It showed me what others were saying and let me decide. That's what made it stand out.

## Shaft vibes without saying "Shaft"

Now let's shift from gritty Netflix drama to the 1970s funk business anthem. A friend of mine wanted a theme song for his business, something with the vibe of "Shaft" but without saying "Shaft." That turned out to be smart. I used Suno, an AI music tool where you type a de-

scription and it generates a song. I wanted a funky instrumental with bass, horns and swagger. No lyrics, just a cinematic groove.

But if you mention "Shaft" or Isaac Hayes, Suno stops mid-generation for copyright reasons. And it doesn't save progress, you lose everything. Ask me how I know. So I asked AI to help me rewrite the prompt using safe, descriptive language. I went with something like "1970s action film intro, wah-wah guitar, bold brass, cinematic energy." That worked.

Kind of.

The songs had a beat but no bounce. Something was missing. I uploaded the track to ChatGPT and asked for feedback. To its credit, ChatGPT didn't need to hear Theme from Shaft to know what was wrong. It said the tempo was too slow, the bassline wandered, the horns lacked punch and the energy wasn't right. It helped me understand the gap between what I wanted and what I got.

So I tweaked the prompt, made changes and tried again. Eventually, we got something that worked. Not Isaac Hayes but funky enough to use. It wasn't perfect, but it felt like collaboration between me, music AI and a language model that helped

me hear the missing ingredients.

## The case for casual AI

So here's what I'm learning. The value of AI isn't just in the answers, it's in the process. Whether you're trying to decode a controversial show or chase a funky theme song, the back-and-forth with AI can feel surprisingly human.

Of course, it still gets things wrong. Sometimes hilariously wrong. But these tools are learning and so are we. You have to be part editor, part detective and part improv partner. Ask the same question to five models and you'll get five different answers, some helpful, some bonkers. That unpredictability keeps you curious. It turns AI from a search tool into a thinking tool.

So next time you've got a cultural question, a creative itch or just want to poke around an idea, try asking an AI. Be ready for a few misfires, a Taylor Swift hallucination and maybe, even better than an answer, a new way of thinking.

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

# Georgia legislature explores ways to end state income tax, but critics warn against it

**Alander Rocha**  
Georgia Recorder

Georgia officials discussed eliminating the state income tax Tuesday, Aug. 19 but provided little detail on how to do so.

Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, who is campaigning to be Georgia's next governor, helped kick off the first meeting of the Senate Special Committee on Eliminating Georgia's Income Tax.

"If we want to continue to stay competitive here in the state of Georgia, and continue to be the number one state to do business, we've got to be looking for ways to keep us competitive and make it where we have a competitive advantage over states that we are competing with all the time," Jones said at the start of the meeting.

The goal, lawmakers discussed in the committee, is to make Georgia more competitive with neighboring states that have no income tax, such as Florida and Tennessee, and states that are in the process of eliminating its income tax, such as Mississippi and North Carolina.

Personal income taxes are estimated to account for 41.6% of Georgia's estimated revenue for the current budget year, which started on July 1, according to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget. With corporate income tax included, which officials indicated would be reduced along with personal income tax, that number rises to just over 50% of all state revenues.

Danny Kanso, senior fiscal analyst at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, said after the meeting that he'd "like to see the math on that." He said that for most of Georgia's households, eliminating the income tax would amount to a "massive" tax increase. The state would have to triple the sales tax and expand the



Grover Norquist, president of the Americans for Tax Reform speaks at a podium. He said he believes the state could do away with its 5.19% income tax rate without needing to increase sales tax.

sales tax to new products to make up for the deficit, calling it "a very tall order to replace the state's largest source of revenue."

"The proposal would have to increase taxes on far more Georgians than it would reduce taxes on, and so it's a little bit of a solution in search of a problem that would likely cause ripples all across the state and across the economy as well," Kanso said.

But Grover Norquist, president of the Americans for Tax Reform,

a conservative organization advocating for tax cuts, said that it's possible for Georgia to eliminate its 5.19% income tax rate without increasing sales tax. He argued that eliminating the income tax could still allow the state budget to increase through sales tax revenue as Georgians would have more income to spend.

"When you attract more people into the state and more business into the state and more investment into the state, you end up with both

more money for individuals earning it, but also more tax revenue at lower rates," Norquist said.

He said that Florida, which does not tax income, "makes more money every year from sales tax and other taxes that aren't going up. There's more money because there are more people with higher earnings who have more resources who move to Florida."

Norquist also said that with tariffs the Trump administration is imposing on other nations to promote

domestic manufacturing, eliminating the income tax would make Georgia a more attractive state for industries looking to move manufacturing to the state.

"President Trump put in a lot of incentives for people to invest in the United States. There are still 50 choices," he said.

Sen. Nan Orrock, an Atlanta Democrat, saying that lawmakers are tasked with "meeting the needs of our population," asked for clarification about how the Legislature could raise revenue at a time when the federal government is shifting the cost of disaster relief and food assistance programs to the states.

"How do you square reducing our state revenues with the needs that we have as a state, and the unknown needs that are going to happen as higher ed and K-12 [and] enormous cuts that are coming down from [the federal government]?" Orrock said.

Norquist did not say how the state could raise revenue but instead pointed to North Carolina, which has lowered its income tax rate but "spending has gone on every year."

"It is going up because revenue is coming, and they have reduced marginal tax rates and revenue has come in higher than before," he said.

Kanso called it "wishful thinking," saying that relying on growth is not a "viable path to raise \$19 billion a year and replace more than 50% of the state budget."

"(It) doesn't really make sense when you hear we're going to lower taxes, eliminate sources of revenue, and somehow we're also going to raise more money," Kanso said. "That's not something we've really seen work in the past."

*This story was originally published by the Georgia Recorder on georgiarecorder.com.*

## State lawmakers examining addiction, look at potentially regulating treatment centers

**Ty Tagami**  
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA — Centers that offer services to people experiencing addiction could face more regulation in Georgia, as lawmakers investigate how they operate and whether they are effective enough.

"There are rehab centers all over the state of Georgia that are not meeting the standard that we feel should be there," state Sen. Randy Robertson, R-Cataula, chairman of the Senate Study Committee on Recovery Residences, said Monday during the panel's first meeting at the state Capitol.

Robertson and a handful of his Senate colleagues from both sides of the aisle concurred that there is work to be done.

They heard from Dr. James Craig, a medical doctor and addiction specialist, during a three-hour meeting that explored the genetic and environmental links to substance abuse.

Craig said society treats addiction like an ethical or moral fail-

ing, yet it is a medical condition, marked by physical changes in the brain that stem from exposure to the stress hormone cortisol and other causes beyond a person's control. A war on drugs would reduce the scope of addiction about as well as a war on candy bar sales would reduce the prevalence of diabetes, he said.

"The vast majority of people that are entering the penal system right now, the vast majority, meet diagnostic criterion for the disease of addiction, which is something that, at least as an addictionologist, I see as a massive human rights violation," he said. "We're putting people with a mental illness in a cage."

Craig said treatment facilities too often return patients to their communities well before they have control over their addiction, whether to alcohol, a drug or something else. It can take a year or more to return the brain's chemistry to a normal baseline, yet these programs typically last a month, he said.

Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick, R-Marietta, said residential treatment

facilities are not regulated by the state. That is a concern for the retired orthopedic surgeon.

"The problem right now is we don't even know where all these things are," she said. "We don't even know who's running them."

Sen. Kim Jackson, D-Stone Mountain, said the General Assembly has the power to require "fair labeling" of treatment facilities.

"It shouldn't just be based on Yelp reviews," said Jackson, the Senate's minority whip.

Robertson, the Senate's majority whip, said the General Assembly regulates too much but that this is "life and death" and too many of these facilities "have been run terribly," so the issue merits a closer look.

Representatives of the facilities were not present to defend themselves, but Robertson said their leaders will be invited to the next hearing, which has not been scheduled. The hearings will eventually include the insurance industry and affected families, he said.

## Postal Service unveils a new Forever stamp honoring the late President Jimmy Carter

**Dave Williams**  
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA — A commemorative Forever stamp honoring former President Jimmy Carter will be released on Oct. 1 in Atlanta, the U.S. Postal Service announced Monday.

Representatives of the nonprofit group Friends of Jimmy Carter and the National Park Service joined the Postal Service in unveiling the new stamp at the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park in Carter's hometown of Plains.

"It is difficult to consider a more fitting honoree than former President Jimmy Carter," said Peter Pastre, the Postal Service's government relations and public policy vice president. "He lent his quiet, thoughtful and deliberate energy around causes he believed in. ... In his conduct and accomplishments as a former president, Jimmy Carter truly personified the best in America."

"We've had the privilege of a front-row seat to his life and legacy," added Kim Carter Fuller, Carter's niece and executive director of the Friends of Jimmy Carter. "Today's reveal gives the world an opportunity to share his

legacy with others on a daily basis."

After serving in the Georgia Senate and as governor, Carter — a Democrat — became the nation's 39th president in January 1977. He served one term before losing his reelection bid in 1980 to Republican Ronald Reagan.

During Carter's post-presidential years, he emerged as an activist for peace, human rights and social and economic progress around the world. In 1982, he partnered with Emory University to establish the Carter Center, which advances democracy, monitors elections, mediates disputes and works to prevent tropical diseases in the poorest nations.

In recognition of those efforts, Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Carter died in December 2024 at the age of 100, a year after the death of his wife of 77 years, former First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

The new stamp depicts a 1982 oil-on-linen painting created in preparation for Carter's official White House portrait.

The stamp's Oct. 1 release date coincides with what would have been Carter's 101st birthday.

## \$20 million in fines for insurers who violate Ga. Mental Health Parity Act

**Ellen Eldridge**  
GPB News

Georgia's Office of Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John King is fining health insurance companies over \$20 million for violating the state's mental health parity laws, but an advocacy group says more can be done.

"Parity" means physical and mental conditions should be treated in the same way. So, if a person has a broken leg or becomes suicidal, both concerns would be addressed in an emergency room.

Jeff Breedlove with the Georgia Council for Recovery says the fines are a drop in the bucket for big insurance companies, and lawmakers need to pass House Bill 612, creating a panel to review complaints.

"We cannot let Georgia get into a pattern where big insurance executives and their cronies decide it's more affordable financially for big insurance to simply pay a state a fine every year," Breedlove said. "And if that becomes a pattern, that will have to be dealt with because a \$2,000 fine and a \$5,000 fine to big insurance, that's like charging me a quarter for a fine."

King's Aug. 15, 2023, report found more than

6,000 violations by 22 health insurers of the state's mental health parity law that passed in 2022. The fined companies were not named in the press release.

"I was there when Georgia's Mental Health Parity Act was signed into law in 2022," King said. Three years later, our initial examinations show that insurers have turned a blind eye to the rules and continue to deprive Georgians of the essential behavioral health resources they deserve."

The action that King took is the very validation of why House Bill 612 must pass the General Assembly and must be signed into law so that we can get to work on more effective oversight for the Parity Act itself, Breedlove said.

"Because big insurance is making a laughing stock of this historic effort of the General Assembly and that can't be tolerated," he said.

Consumers who believe they are the victim of a mental health parity violation may file a complaint online or call 1-800-656-2298.

*This story comes to The Melody through a reporting partnership with GPB News, a non-profit newsroom covering the state of Georgia.*



Gov. Brian Kemp (right) shakes the hand of late House Speaker David Ralston after signing House Bill 1013, the Mental Health Parity Act, into law on April 4, 2022.

**Riley Bunch / GPB News**

# From Our Kitchens: These pecan crisps will disappear before kickoff



Photo courtesy Michelle Hornaday

Macon native Michelle Hornaday swears by her pecan crisp recipe. She says it's sure to please and is always a big hit at parties or with her husband's friends. The dish can also be frozen easily as leftovers.

## Michelle Hornaday Special to The Melody

These Spicy Sausage Cheddar Pecan Crisps may be a little labor intensive at the onset. But they are absolutely perfect when pulling out a roll from the freezer, and wowing your friends at a last-minute get together, impressing your husband's game-day buddies or sending off a box of these lovelies with your kids after they come home from college to wash clothes.

They are great to give to friends at church or for office parties. And they are oh so addictive. They will be gobbled up before kickoff with your friends clamoring for more.

I package these for my husband to take to the various offices he travels to for his job.

Year after year, he receives repeated requests for a new batch to make it back with him.

I recently made these for a game night with friends and they were a total hit. Pecan crisps and poker chips are a perfect combo.

## Spicy Sausage Cheddar Pecan Crisps

Makes about 100 crisps (2"x2") round

### Ingredients

- 1 roll spicy breakfast sausage cooked crumbled
- 1.5 softened butter
- 8 oz softened cream cheese
- 4 cups freshly shredded extra sharp cheddar cheese
- 2.5 cups freshly milled soft white wheat flour
- 2 cups almond flour
- ½ teaspoon salt

- ½ teaspoon cayenne powder
- 1 cup toasted pecans - finely chopped

### Directions

Cream butter and cream cheese until light and fluffy. Stir in sharp cheddar.

In a separate bowl, whisk together both flours, garlic powder and cayenne.

Slowly combine wet and dry ingredients. Fold in pecans.

Shape into 4-6 logs about 8-10 inches long and 2 inches wide.

Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least two hours.

Slice into ¼ inch wafers and place on parchment lined baking sheets.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes until the tops are browned and crispy, rotating pans and swapping shelves half way through.

Freeze remaining logs wrapped in plastic wrap and sealed in freezer bags. Let thaw in the fridge overnight to cook.

*Michelle Hornaday is a Macon native who only learned to cook after getting married to her "first, last and only husband" seven years ago. For the last 25 years, she has proudly displayed a wooden plaque in her kitchen: "I only have a kitchen because it came with the house." And it was fact until meeting her husband on a church pew one Sunday morning in January 2018. They were married and her cooking journey began six months later. She is a self-taught cook, and enjoys making dishes for her church family and local friends, giving thousands of meals since getting married — out of gratitude to God for her new family.*

## Trivia, from A5:

- (C) Trepidation  
(D) Iceburg

5. **Guitarist Duane Allman, of The Allman Brothers Band, was killed in a motorcycle accident on Macon's Hillcrest Avenue in October 1971. His brother, Gregg, wrote a song that was one of Duane's favorites. Gregg played it on Duane's guitar at his funeral at Rose Hill Cemetery. The song wasn't released until four months later on the "Eat a Peach" album. What was the name of it?**

- (A) "It's Not My Cross To Bear"  
(B) "Midnight Rider"  
(C) "Ramblin' Man"  
(D) "(Sweet) Melissa"

6. **Which food icon visited Macon in April 1976?**

- (A) Aunt Jemima  
(B) Harlan "Colonel" Sanders  
(C) Howard Johnson  
(D) Jimmy John

7. **Watts Gunn was a star golfer at Macon's Lanier High and a two-time winner of the Georgia state amateur golf title. While playing college golf at Georgia Tech, he became a member at Atlanta's East Lake Golf Club. Gunn finished runner-up to his friend and rival in the 1925 U.S. Amateur Championship — 100 years ago this year. It marked the first time two players from the same club met in match play for the amateur title. Who was his opponent?**

- (A) Bobby Jones  
(B) Sam Snead  
(C) Ben Hogan  
(D) Arnold Palmer

8. **This month marks the anniversary of the death of Southern writer Flannery O'Connor in Milledgeville in August 1964. A movie based on one of O'Connor's short stories was filmed in Macon. What was the name of it?**

- (A) "The Violent Bear It Away"  
(B) "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"  
(C) "Wise Blood"  
(D) Everything That Rises Must Converge

9. **Legendary country singer Hank Williams Sr. gave a concert at Macon's Grand Theater (now the Grand Opera House) in July 1952. Red Foley and Les Paul also performed, along with which famous comedienne, known for her unique style of hat. What was her name?**

- (A) Phyllis Diller  
(B) Lucille Ball  
(C) Carol Burnett  
(D) Minnie Pearl

10. **Which wildlife species is NOT found in Bond Swamp, located 6 miles southeast of Macon?**

- (A) Alligators  
(B) Black bears  
(C) Duck-billed platypus  
(D) Wild turkey

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

REPORT CARD: (9-10) Unbelievable. (7-8) Unstoppable. (5-6) Uncanny. (3-4) Uncertain. (0-2) Uncomfortable.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

## HOW TO TUNE INTO YOUR BODY AND TACKLE AGE-RELATED MOBILITY ISSUES



### Sponsored by: **Carlyle Place**

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

Age-related changes in muscles, joints, bones, and the central nervous system can lead to mobility issues that increase the risk of falls in older adults. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) reports that falls are the leading cause of injuries for adults ages 65+ nationwide and prompt three million visits to the emergency room each year.

Recognizing and fighting changes in stability, flexibility, and coordination is crucial for healthy aging and helps prevent falls.

Tuning into your body, acting on changes, and consulting your doctor is key. Tackling these challenges can physically and mentally drain you. Practicing mindfulness techniques and journaling can also have a positive impact on your overall well-being.

Learn how to recognize age-related mobility warning signs and navigate challenges in this guide.

### Recognizing Age-Related Mobility Warning Signs

Maintaining mobility is crucial for maintaining independence and performing daily activities safely. Your muscles can lose strength, endurance, and flexibility as you age, which affects your stability, balance, and coordination and increases your fall risk.

Being aware of physical changes can help you work through challenges as they arise. These warning signs may indicate you're experiencing age-related mobility issues:

- Struggling to climb stairs
- Difficulty getting up from or sitting down in a chair
- Walking slower than usual
- Decreasing physical activities due to joint pain, fear of injuries, reduced flexibility, weakness, or fatigue
- Chronic health problems like arthritis and cardiovascular disease affect your stamina
- Dizziness and/or balance challenges
- Vision or hearing trouble that impairs movement and mobility

Geriatrician Dr. Suzanne Salamon, an instructor at Harvard Medical School, recommends doing the Get Up and Go Test to assess your mobility. Pay attention to how long it takes to do the test and whether you stay steady. If you're

worried about safety, ask a friend or family member to watch you.

- Stand up from sitting in a chair
- Walk 10 feet
- Turn around, walk back to the chair, and sit down

Also, consider if you struggle to climb steps or walk one-quarter of a mile. This typically reveals mobility issues.

### Maintain or Improve Mobility with These Exercises

If you are struggling or notice a decline, exercising regularly helps improve strength, stamina, flexibility, and balance. It also helps maintain or increase mobility and is good for your overall health.

Lora Stutzman, a physical therapist at Johns Hopkins Rehabilitation Network, recommends the following with supervision, if necessary:

### Sit-to-Stand Exercise

This simple workout increases leg strength and improves balance:

- Place a sturdy chair that doesn't slide or roll in front of a table or countertop. Use the surface for support if needed while standing.
- Sit comfortably on the edge of the seat with your feet flat on the floor. Lean forward so your chest is over your toes, and shift your body weight forward.
- Tighten your glutes and slowly rise to a stable standing position.
- Slowly sit down to return to the starting position. Repeat this 10 times. If you're able, the goal is to stand without using your hands.

Do 10 reps twice a day. Discontinue and consult your physician or physical therapist if you feel pain in your knees, back, or hips.

### Balance Exercises

Do these balance exercises while standing in a corner or in front of a table to steady yourself if you start losing balance.

- Feet apart — Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, eyes open. Hold your position for 10 seconds to start, eventually increasing to 30 seconds.
- Feet together — This time, stand with your feet together, eyes open. Hold for

10 seconds and gradually increase to 30 seconds.

- One foot — Stand on one foot, eyes open. Hold for 10 seconds and slowly increase to 30 seconds. Switch to your other foot.
- Eyes closed — If you do the first three exercises safely with little support, try each one again with your eyes closed. Doing weight-bearing exercises like walking, jogging, and climbing stairs, if you're able, strengthens bones. Tai Chi or yoga is also good for strength, balance, and flexibility.

For strength training, use resistance bands, perform chair squats, and do wall push-ups. Swimming and aquatic exercise are fantastic workouts that don't tax joints.

### How Journaling or Mindfulness Techniques Help

Many older adults struggle emotionally and mentally with mobility decline or other age-related health concerns. Journaling and other mindfulness techniques can help reduce stress and boost your mood.

Specifically, gratitude journaling has been shown to increase feelings of well-being and calm and decrease stress. Writing down what you're thankful for each day also helps improve focus and memory.

Plus, research shows mindfulness training "helped reduce stress and impairment associated with physical health problems, including pain, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and other chronic conditions" in participants.

Mindfulness practices include:

- Deep breathing
  - Positive visualization
  - Mindful movement like Tai Chi, yoga, and chair exercises
  - Mindful body scan in which you focus on and feel each part of your body from your feet to your head
- Identifying mobility warning signs, consulting your doctor, and engaging in exercises to build strength, improve balance, and boost flexibility can help enhance mobility. Additionally, journaling and practicing mindfulness techniques can have a profoundly positive impact on your overall health and well-being.

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# Carlyle Place

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Photo by Katie Powers

Lucy Sheppard at center stage as Clara in Nutcracker of Middle Georgia's 2018 production at the Piedmont Grand Opera House. The Nutcracker of Middle Georgia is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year with a free, three-day ballet intensive workshop with Sheppard as one of three guest teachers.

## Regional Nutcracker honors 40 years: Classes at the Grand Opera to host dancers from Middle Georgia, beyond

When Nutcracker of Middle Georgia's leadership started thinking about what to do to celebrate their 40th anniversary this year — that's right, it's been 40 years since Jean Weaver and a handful of others first brought what has become a holiday tradition to stage in Macon — they thought about how to give back to the community they say has been so faithful and supportive through the years.

A committee decided it would be best to stick with what they know and offer a free weekend ballet intensive with classes at the Jean Evans Weaver Center for Dance.

But they had no idea what was to come. "Our goal was to get people interested in coming and hold it in the two studios of the non-profit Weaver Center," said Rachel Sheppard, Nutcracker board president. "We decided to bring in two nationally known instructors and let dancers from eight to adult sign up for individual classes. That was the plan."

NMG sent out notices about the intensive to area dance academies, put it on social media and generally got the word out saying sign-up would begin online on Aug. 11 at 6 p.m.

That's Monday of last week.

The response was immediate, overwhelming and literally beyond the bounds of what organizers had thought possible.

"We had such interest that we knew right away we had to bring in an additional guest teacher and arrange with the Piedmont Grand Opera House to expand classes to their stage," Sheppard said.

As it turned out, the "bounds" for students signing up went beyond Macon, Warner Robins, Bonaire, Kathleen, Byron and Fort Valley, as might be expected, to Roberta, Hawkinsville, Jeffersonville, Poulan, Sumner, Statesboro, Columbus and all the way down to Tifton.

Plus, to Phenix City, Alabama.

"We closed registration with over 70 dancers coming," Sheppard said. "We still have people calling to get attend and we have a waiting list in case someone drops out."

NMG's artistic director, Alice Sheridan, said the response is amazing.

"What's particularly exciting is how this has widened our reach with dancers coming not only from Middle Georgia but from all over," she said. "We feel this is really important as part of our ongoing mission and our community service efforts, which we see as a big part of who we are. Rachel has done a wonderful job spearheading the event."

Sheppard passes the credit on to what she calls the "very active" NMG board of 24 working members and all who serve on committees and volunteer in other ways.

"The intensive is sponsored by a group called '4 for 40 Anniversary Donors,'" she said. "That's led by Paul Cable and Kent Baldschun. They've done a fantastic job raising money to allow us to offer the intensive for free and give back to the community that's loved and supported Nutcracker for the past 40 years."

Sheppard has served on the board for



Michael W. Pannell

almost five years and has been president since January. And there's this: she knows the value and draw of NMG beyond Middle Georgia's borders since she lives in Columbus.

How did someone from Columbus wind up board president?

Like so many others, it's through her daughter.

"Our daughter, Lucy, began dance at 4, took a couple of years off, then was back at it at 7."

It's Rachel and Todd Sheppard's daughter Lucy, who was added as the third guest teacher for the intensive, and it's not because of the family connection but because of Lucy's own bona fides.

"I think the first time she stepped on stage to dance would have been in 2010 and she loved everything about it. She loved the classes, rehearsals, being backstage, everything. As a student, she didn't shy away in a corner but threw herself into it even wanting the correction her teachers gave. I think at an early age she knew that was the only way."

But how did she connect to Macon and NMG?

"She attended a summer intensive in Pennsylvania and met girls from Macon who were part of the Nutcracker," Sheppard said. "Halfway through her 9th-grade year, we brought her to Macon just to take one class with Alice Sherridan. She got in the car three hours later and was ecstatic. 'Mom,' she said, 'you are not going to believe how good these girls are. I have to go again.' So, we brought her back the next week and she had the same response. By the end of her freshman year, we were coming twice a week every week."

After another summer at the Pennsylvania intensive — by then she and the Macon girls were great friends — they convinced her to try out for the Nutcracker. She did and landed the 2018 lead role of Clara.

"Getting that role was an offer she couldn't refuse, even though we had never actually seen the Nutcracker here," Sheppard said. "When she got the role, Alice gave her a DVD to watch in the car on the way home to Columbus. She literally started screaming, 'Look at the sets, look at what they're doing.' I had to pull over to watch. People thought we were crazy, driving all that way so often. Leaving school at 3:15, doing homework in the car, eating in the car, practicing, getting back in the car and home late and doing it again several times a week. But this was the answer to what my daughter needed in high school and this is where her deep friendships grew. She considers Macon home now. Macon and the Nutcracker helped make her dreams come true."

Sheppard said what NMG meant to her daughter and seeing for herself the passion, commitment to quality and commitment to bringing out the best in the girls, boys and adults involved grew her passion for it and got her involved.

It also gave her a unique, fresh-eyed perspective.

"I've never been on any board or done anything like this before," she said. "Much

less be president."

After high school, Lucy continued her training at Indiana University's prestigious dance department, performing and teaching while there. She spent three years at MotionArts Dance Academy and, in July, joined the Chattanooga Ballet and continues teaching. Along the way, she's garnered awards and kudos.

\*\*\*

As for the intensive itself, there are 20 classes this weekend covering ballet, pre-pointe, pointe, conditioning, contemporary and ballet variations plus a Q&A session with guest teachers and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Grand.

Other guest teachers are:

- Lauren Fadeley Veyette, who trained at the Orlando Ballet School and the School of Performing Arts in Florida before moving to New York to study full-time at the School of American Ballet. Her stature as a dancer is clear in that she began her professional career at 16 with the New York City Ballet. Her illustrious, multi-faceted career includes performing in the Academy Award-winning film *Black Swan*.
- Brooke Moore, who has trained and performed with the Laurel Youth Ballet, Pittsburgh Youth Ballet and San Francisco Ballet School and many other companies, including being soloist and principal dancer with the Philadelphia Ballet.

"We are elated to have guest teachers of Lauren and Brooke's stature," Sheppard said. "It's going to be an amazing three days for all who attend and we are beside ourselves that we get to do it for them wherever they're from."

When tempted to become complacent or downplay the value of NMG, consider the families that have made the annual holiday production a vital part of their traditions, how many find new wonder in it each year, how many young people's dreams — and adult's — come true through it each year and consider this: how many have come through NMG and it been a launching pad to their professional dance careers. Here's a list of those who have been part of the Nutcracker and are currently working professionally:

- Roxy Shackelford, St. Louis Ballet
- Murray McCormack, Ballet Arkansas
- Lucy Sheppard, Chattanooga Ballet
- Lilla Simmons, Georgia Ballet Marietta
- Dagny Ingle, Ballet Quad Cities
- Ellen Smith, Nevada Ballet Theatre
- Madison Kemp, Nevada Ballet Theatre
- Anna Slade, St. Louis Ballet
- Max Richters, Ballet Zürich

Inspired? Auditions for people eight and above for the coming 2025 Nutcracker production are Sept. 13 and 22. There are spots for dancing and non-dancing participants and adults. For more, visit [midganutcracker.com](http://midganutcracker.com).

Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at [mwpannell@gmail.com](mailto:mwpannell@gmail.com). Find him on Instagram at [michael\\_w\\_pannell](https://www.instagram.com/michael_w_pannell).

## Events

### The Macon Film Festival

Aug. 21-24

Locations vary by film

The Macon Film Festival, presented by Mercer University is back and better than ever for its 20th year. You can watch incredible narrative features, documentaries, shorts and FullDome films all over Macon! Purchase tickets and view the full schedule online. Participants can purchase tickets for film blocks, all screenings, day passes and all-access.

### Rock the '90s: A Tribute to the Golden Decade of Rock at The Society Garden

Friday, Aug. 22

8 p.m.

2389 Ingleside Ave.

Rock the '90s is the ultimate time machine for fans of '90s rock and pop culture! Celebrating a decade of electrifying live performances, the band brings the spirit of the '90s back to life with authentic renditions of the classic '90s hits we all love. From Nirvana, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Foo Fighters to Coolio, Stone Temple Pilots, Matchbox Twenty and Collective Soul, Rock the 90s recreates the soundtrack of a generation, sparking nostalgia and introducing a new audience to the magic of 90s music. It's a pure celebration of the music, energy and attitude that defined the decade. Whether you're reliving your youth or discovering the era for the first time, get ready for a '90s throwdown that will keep you singing and dancing all night long!

### Kool-Aid & Canvas with The 567 Center for Renewal

Saturday, Aug. 23

10:30 a.m.

456 First St.

An artist takes children ages 6-12 step-by-step through the process of creating a fun painting with acrylic paints on a real canvas. The students learn a variety of painting techniques to inspire them in their own creative endeavors. Parents are encouraged to drop their child off and pick them up when class is over, or sign up to paint along with their child. \$20 includes all materials for the class and a drink to sip.

### Joshua Ray Walker at Grant's Lounge

Saturday, Aug. 23

9 p.m.

576 Poplar St.

Joshua Ray Walker's *Tropicana* is a sun-soaked departure from a dark, dangerous chapter. Written during his treatment for Stage 3b colon cancer, the album's beach-country songs were born from fantasies of ocean breezes and sandy beaches, dreamt up while the longtime road warrior was confined to his home in Dallas, Texas and undergoing chemotherapy. *Tropicana* trades honky-tonks for hammocks, offering a rallying cry of resilience wrapped in tropical twang. It's the sound of a critically-acclaimed songwriter who's unwilling to let anything — even the promise of his own mortality — stand in the way of a good hook.

### Fall Line's Clothing Exchange

Sunday, Aug. 24

2 p.m.

567 Plum St.

Hold onto your hangers, because Fall Line Brewing Co. is bringing you an afternoon of thrifting, brews and good vibes at its clothing exchange this Sunday. Let your unwanted clothes find new homes, while you revamp your personal closet with amazing finds. It's the perfect opportunity to embrace sustainable fashion and show off your unique style. Raid your closet for your favorite, gently used clothing items that deserve a second life (except for T-shirts and athletic wear), then bring your items to the Fall Line Taproom through Aug. 22. Each item you bring will earn you a "swap dollar" which can be used to purchase new-to-you items at the event. Run out of swap dollars? Additional items can be purchased for \$1 each. All remaining items will be donated to the Brookdale Resource Center!

### Readers Lounge at Longleaf Distillery: Fantasy Edition

Wednesday, Aug. 27

6 p.m.

664 Second St.

Step into a storybook kind of night at the Fantasy Edition of the Readers Lounge at Longleaf Distillery! Whether you're a fan of epic quests, magical creatures or enchanted realms, this evening is made for you. Bear's Books is back with a curated table of fantastical reads for sale — come browse, sip, and settle in. Enjoy an \$8 fantasy-themed cocktail, free coffee and tea to keep it cozy and a free bookmark with your drink. Come as you are or in your finest fantasy-inspired fit. Cloaks and crowns are welcome.

### Reggae on The Rooftop

Saturday, Aug. 30

7 p.m.

401 Cotton Ave.

Join Hightales Rooftop Bar for an electric night under the stars filled with island vibes and irresistible rhythms. The DJ mixologist will be spinning the best in Reggae, Dancehall, AfroHouse, Afrobeats and more — guaranteed to keep you moving all night long. \$5 door cover and free for hotel guests. This high-energy rooftop party happens every 4th Saturday, and next Saturday is one you won't want to miss!

### Blown Glass Pumpkin Workshop at stARTup Studios

Saturday, Sept. 6

1 p.m.

1055 Riverside Drive

Whether you've been to a glassblowing workshop before or not, this is one you won't want to miss! Learn the basics of glass blowing as you choose your colors and use optic molds to make your very own blown glass pumpkin. All skill levels are welcome, but participants must be 12 years or older. All glassblowing classes are provided by Blazing Paddles Studio. \$105 per person. All glasswork must cool overnight to ensure it does not break. Your piece will be available for pickup after 3 p.m. the next business day.

## High school football returns

Notepad

### Week 2: Northeast meets Southwest, ACE takes on CHS

**Micah Johnston**  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

With Week 1 finally over after the long wait for football season, most of Macon's teams have the first-game jitters out of the way and are ready to dig into the rest of the schedule.

The opening week had some zany close games and some blowouts, but every team learned something about itself regardless of the final score. Here's a look at some of the key games coming up in Week 2.

**Northeast (0-1) @ Southwest (1-0), at Thompson Stadium**  
Last meeting: 2024, Northeast won 36-14. Last week: Northeast lost 33-14 at Peach County, Southwest beat Macon County 38-13.

The rivalry of streaks picks up for the 56th time when the 1-0 Patriots welcome the 0-1 Raiders to the Raiders' home field.

Northeast has won seven straight in the series and leads 30-25. This streak came after Southwest won four straight, following a five-game Raiders' run — that's how the series has been.

The Raiders unveiled some new offensive schemes in Friday's 33-14 loss at Class 3A Peach County. Freshman quarterback Jordan Wiggins, son of head coach Jeremy, made his debut, subbing in and out with returning quarterback Bam Glover. He had a nice game on the ground, but Northeast's passing game struggled.

The son of another head coach was not

See FOOTBALL, Page B3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Rutland head coach Anthony Williams celebrates after a successful extra point during the Hurricanes' 33-13 loss against GHSA Class A-Division I Bleckley County on Aug. 14 at Thompson Stadium during the Bibb County Gridiron Classic. The Royals pulled away in the second half of the game.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Westfield's Madeline Katz (left, #1) slides safely into second under the tag of Stratford shortstop Reagan Ray (right, #22) during their game Tuesday night. Westfield won the game 9-0 to continue a slow start for the Eagles, who are winless early in the season in which they field a very young roster.

Notepad

### FPD, Tattnall have strong starts, Westside football earns honors

**Micah Johnston**  
Sports Editor

The FPD Vikings continued their hot start on the softball diamond last week, rattling off four straight wins after their first loss of the season.

FPD moved to 10-1 with wins over Piedmont Academy, Jasper County, Centennial and Taylor County, two of which came by eight runs and nine runs each.

Two of the games were at the Watermelon Invitational in Cordele, where the Vikings defeated Taylor County 8-0 and Centennial — a GHSA Class 4A school — 4-0.

Gracyn Fuller hit two home runs while pitching five innings, allowing only one hit and striking out 12 batters against Taylor County. FPD tallied five hits and seven walks as a team in the win.

Things were closer against Centennial as the two teams were knotted up in a scoreless tie through four innings, but the Vikings broke through with three runs in the fifth inning — one off a triple from Claudia Green and two more from a Lyric Jones ground ball that led to an error — and another in the sixth to secure the win.

The solid performance in Cordele puts FPD in first place in GIAA Class 4A/3A District 6, though the teams have not begun region play yet.

The Tattnall Trojans are right behind FPD in district play at 5-2 so far, largely thanks to some impressive offensive numbers.

Several Trojans including returners Anna Still and Reese Covington, who each have a pair of home runs already, are playing well. Madison Malcom, an eighth-grader playing in the infield, has 11 hits in 19 at-bats, good for the most base knocks on the team as of Wednesday.

Callie Still is handling most of the pitching for the Trojans and has already thrown more than 23 innings while notching an ERA of exactly 3.00. Malcolm and Bryton Tarver have also contributed from the circle so far.

While Tattnall did lose to Westfield 7-1 last week, the Trojans bounced back with a 10-2 victory over George Walton and a 15-0 blowout against Bulloch.

The other two Macon teams in the region, Stratford and Mount de Sales, have each started the season winless with very young rosters.

On the GHSA side of things in Macon, the ACE Gryphons have seen mixed results early on in their first season under new head coach Andrew Claxton.

ACE is 2-3 so far this season, with each game being a blowout for the winning team. The Gryphons fell 7-1 and 8-0 in two games against Veterans and lost 8-0

to Taylor County, but defeated Dodge County 10-2 and 11-3 on two occasions.

The games so far put ACE at 2-0 in Region 2-A Division I thanks to the wins against Dodge County, good for third place so far with Washington County and Bleckley County each having 3-0 region records so far.

The first key region test for the Gryphons comes Aug. 26, when they will face East Laurens. The Falcons are 1-1 in region play, the loss being a 9-8 defeat in a shootout with Bleckley County.

The Central Chargers are the only other Macon squad in the region with a win — a 15-3 victory over crosstown foe Rutland — though they have scores missing from their MaxPreps schedule against East Laurens and Dodge County.

Southwest and Northeast are 0-2 and 0-1 to start the season, respectively.

At the 2A level, Westside has not yet begun its season. The Seminoles will open against the Howard Huskies Aug. 26. Rutland started the season 0-6 with a very tough schedule against teams like Northside, Peach County and Spalding.

Howard also had a tough start at the 3A level, facing off with Northside twice to start 0-2. They got a chance to rebound against Rutland Thursday, after

See NOTEPAD, Page B3

### Bears to kick off season in Montgomery

**Micah Johnston**  
Sports Editor

The Mercer Bears will be back on the gridiron this week in a nationally-televised game as they face off with the UC Davis Aggies at the FCS Kickoff Classic in Montgomery Alabama on Saturday night.

"Not a lot of competition for TV time this week, which means we have a great stage to really continue to tell our story as a team that's really going into its 14th or so season coming back from the restart," Mercer head football coach Mike Jacobs said at a press conference Monday afternoon, referring to the university bringing back its football program in 2013.

The game — a rare Week 0 clash between ranked opponents, as the Bears are No. 11 in the FCS Coaches poll while the Aggies are No. 7

— will begin Mercer's effort to follow up the best season in program history last year in which the Bears finished 11-3, won the Southern Conference outright for the first time ever and reached the FCS Quarterfinals in 2024.

"It's been a great training camp... there's a good mix of faces that have been around for quite some time. Some of them maybe are just coming into starting roles, but they've been here and understand how we function and what's expected," Jacobs said. "Then we have several new faces that have been added, both freshman-wise and through the transfer portal, to kind of fill in the gaps."

"The competition's been great. We're looking forward to finally getting to hit

See MERCER, Page B2

### Henley on a roll, makes Ryder Cup

**Michael A. Lough**  
For The Melody

Throughout last season, Russell Henley was playing his way up the PGA Tour ladder and its two rankings, the FedEx Cup and Official World Golf Rankings.

As summer — on the calendar, not thermometer — came to an end with the three FedEx playoff tournaments, Henley's name was attached to speculation about a Presidents Cup appointment.

Two days after he finished an epic final round of the Tour Championship in Atlanta with an impressive 36-yard eagle to tie the course record with a 62, which helped him finish tied for fourth, Henley was named a Captain's Pick to the Presidents Cup team.

Fast forward to about 11 months later, and there was much less suspense on whether Henley would follow up with his Ryder Cup debut.

That was all but sealed before the start of last week's BMW Championship in Maryland, but it didn't lessen the joy when it became official shortly after Scottie Scheffler finished off the BMW.

Sept. 3, 2024 and Aug. 17, 2025 are days Henley and his fans won't soon forget.

Henley more than showed out at the Presidents Cup, becoming fairly attached to the world's best golfer, Scheffler, during the festivities in Montreal.

So solid was his debut in match-play action that he didn't need the impressive 2025 he's had so far to be high on the Ryder Cup consideration list, but he more or less sealed that automatic top-6 spot weeks ago.

Last year's Presidents Cup came a month after the Tour Championship, and this year's Ryder Cup at Bethpage Black starts a month

See HENLEY, Page B3

# Westside strikes again: Seminoles defeat rival Howard 41-34 in another barnburner

**Micah Johnston**  
Sports Editor

When Westside coach Spoon Risper called a timeout with six seconds left in the Seminoles' game against the Howard Huskies on Friday night, it may well have been the most important timeout of his career.

With a 35-34 lead in his pocket, Risper called time just as the Huskies snapped the ball on a would-be field goal try, a kick that — if it sailed through the uprights — would give Howard a two-point win over the Seminoles, its first victory in the rivalry since 2019.

The kick looked good, until the whistles blew it dead. From the Howard side of Thompson Stadium, the ball seemed to hurtle through the goalposts. Players jumped in ecstasy as fans hooted and hollered — the whistles were only background noise, not to be heard for a few more seconds.

But it was not to be.

The Huskies instead had to line up again, and this time Vocke's kicked was blocked with ease. The Seminoles added insult to injury as James Neville scooped up the blocked kick and took it the distance to finalize a 41-34 Westside win.

"They just iced us. You see it all the time on Sundays, and it works

on Fridays, too," Howard head coach Trey Porter said of the timeout that nullified what could have been a program-altering field goal. "He makes that field goal routinely, but they got a good push on the block and they got close enough to our long snapper and blocked."

The victory — Westside's fourth straight win over Howard to come by only one score — came after a game packed with eight combined turnovers, multiple long kick returns and more of the chaos that has, in recent years, become the calling card of this matchup.

"It's just a Westside tradition. That's all I can say," Seminoles head coach Sheddric "Spoon" Risper said. "My kids'll never quit on us... our kids just don't quit. They're gonna fight and play 'til the end. That's all that we know."

If not for the touchdown return after the field goal block, it would have been the second one-point differential between the 'Noles and Huskies in four years.

Howard got off to a fast start, leading 14-0 in the first half thanks to early turnovers and a punt return touchdown, and ran the ball very consistently all night. Julius Ramsey finished with 103 yards and a touchdown, while Jaidon Grayer also chipped in some carries.

The biggest difference-maker

all night might have been quarterback Kingsley Ware, who battled for the Huskies in a two-QB system along with Joshua Ussery. Ware had more than 100 yards on the ground and through the air, even after getting banged up in the second half.

"That kid's resilient. It's one of those situations where I don't name the starter until we get out there. Him and (Ussery) are both going, you'll see a lot of them throughout the season," Porter said of Ware's performance under center. "He made some throws, he threw a pick but he was able to help us in the run game and hit some passes. He makes the right reads and is a pass threat, a run threat and good in the option."

But the Huskies turned the ball over four times — two of those came in the red zone, one of which was a fumble inside the 5-yard line — and were doomed by other mistakes, including penalties.

"We could commend 'em for the effort, but we don't want a moral victory. I feel like we were the better team, but Coach Spoon over there, it's something with his program in the rivalry," Porter said. "He's 12-2 now against Howard. I hugged him and talked to him and said, 'Bro, I don't know what you do to your team.'

"In these situations — I looked

back at the history — this year will make four losses to (Westside) by a combined 20 points."

Westside had problems passing, as quarterback James Neville overthrew several open looks, but forcing turnovers helped them get good field position.

The Seminoles also had a knack for explosive plays — an 80-yard kick return here, a 43-yard run there — that set them up in the red zone despite not having any completely consistent possessions on offense.

That helped them tie it up at 14-14 after Howard had its quick start. The two teams then traded scores, with Howard taking a 21-14 lead before the Seminoles scored twice with the help of solid play from running backs Tyleik Flint and Kaleb Blount to go up 28-21 late in the third quarter, their first lead of the game.

The Huskies tied things up with about six minutes left on a scramble by Ware, then took advantage of a bad Westside snap. Jamal Ivory scooped up the fumble and ran it all the way inside the 5-yard line where, even after penalties, Howard scored thanks to a nice run by receiver Jarrius Gibson to take the lead.

Though the missed extra point on that drive with less than four minutes left did not bother the

Howard faithful in the stands, it would come back to haunt the Huskies.

Westside drove down the field, manufacturing an excellent two-minute drill. The Seminoles even drew Howard offside on a crucial fourth-and-short with only two minutes left, a result that garnered excruciating groans from Husky fans.

Westside's quarterback Neville came up clutch to finish it off, making up for earlier overthrows by scoring the go-ahead touchdown when he bounced a red zone carry outside for six.

The rest was history, as a promising Howard drive came up short thanks to Risper's timely timeout and Neville's touchdown return on the ensuing block.

"With coaches it's just like playing chess. You gotta always think one play ahead, you can't be thinking about the play you just called, everything is ahead," Risper said. "Hats off to coach Trey Porter. He's a heck of a coach, he's a competitor and his kids compete."

"If they play every game like they just played us, they can win the region, they really can."

Westside will face Prince Avenue Christian on the road in Athens this week, while Howard is set to play another Macon rival, Rutland, at home.



Mark Powell / For The Melody

Howard receiver Deondray Sheffield starts to make a cut in attempt to evade a pair of Westside defenders during the Huskies' heartbreaking 41-34 loss to the Seminoles in Friday night's season opener at Thompson Stadium.



Mark Powell / For The Melody

In a game marred by turnovers, Jaiden Stephens (19) records a takeaway while his teammates celebrate during Westside's thrilling 41-34 victory against cross-town rival Howard in the Bibb County Gridiron Classic.

## Mercer, B1:

somebody else, right? We're three weeks in. They're kind of tired practice against one another and ready to go up it on the line this weekend."

The offense returns several key names, including quarterback DJ Smith, who will likely start for Mercer as he did for seven games last season before an injury hampered him in the second half of the season. He accounted for nearly 1,500 yards of total offense and was 6-1 at the helm for the Bears.

Smith's replacement after his injury last year, freshman Whitt Newbauer, played very well to finish out the season and in the playoffs but transferred to Oklahoma in the spring.

"You have a quarterback room that coming out of spring you maybe thought it was going to be Whitt Newbauer and he ends up in the transfer portal. But now you got DJ Smith, and now the rest of that room is brand new so you have some competition," Jacobs said.

Also back on offense are key players like offensive lineman Xavier Jennings, wide receiver Adjatay Dabbs and receiver/return specialist Brayden Smith.

On defense, Jacobs mentioned sophomore defensive lineman Andrew Zock, the SoCon Preseason Defensive Player of the Year and last year's conference Freshman of the Year. The head coach mostly praised entire position groups as the thing he's been most impressed with in fall camp.

"I think the defensive line room is deeper than maybe I thought it would be. Same with the corners group, and then the linebacker room had tremendous competition," Jacobs said. "That room in particular in the lineback-

er room, you know, we lost all three starters. Two of the guys in that room were one and two in tackles all-time at the school. So it's been fun to watch that competition unfold, I think just the battle back and forth. Not that I'm shocked, but it was good to see."

The players in lots of those position groups will need to step up, particularly on the defensive side.

Mercer had what Jacobs described fittingly as an "all-decade" type defense last season, a group that was one of the best in the country for multiple stretches of the season and wrecked havoc on opposing offenses.

Because of that success, however, graduation and the transfer portal took several of the team's starters.

"One of the biggest things for us coming into this fall camp was, 'Who's gonna be that next group of guys?' I thought we did a great job with guys stepping up," Mercer defensive coordinator Jahmal Brown said. "Very pleased with our defensive line, we lost a couple guys at that position over the off-season, but that group has shown to have depth."

Brown named Brayden Dudley, a redshirt senior that played in all 14 games last year after transferring to Mercer from West Virginia, as a particularly talented player this season who had a great fall camp.

Jacobs was confident in his defense's ability to continue its impressive form.

"We have a standard of how we want to play defense here. It's got to be the next man up and it's the kids' job to get to the level that we need them to play at. It's our job to recruit people that are talented enough and we think we've done that," Jacobs said. "Will there be a little bit of a learning curve? Sure, because we don't have guys like TJ



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mercer receiver Brayden Smith (21) returns a kickoff during the Bears' 17-10 win over Rhode Island Dec. 7, 2024 in the second round of the FCS Playoffs. The Bears, who lost some defensive talent but return a strong offense and some experienced defenders, will try and repeat as SoCon champs.

Moore, who's playing for the New York Giants right now, that have been doing it literally for the last four years, (guys) like Isaac Dowling.

"But what we have are guys that have learned how to do it from them, and we'll look to emulate some of that similar success."

As far as Saturday's matchup in particular, the team is anxious to take on another top program on national TV to start its season. Jacobs espoused the marketing upside of such a matchup and said he'll enjoy reaping the recruiting benefits, but also talked about how competitive the game should be on the field.

"They're very similar to us," Jacobs said of the Aggies.

"(Head coach Tim) Plough, he's done a tremendous job, right? You look at him, he was a first year head coach, he went 11-3 and they had their best they've had in seven or eight years.

"They lost a bunch of defensive starters, but they're a high academic school similar to us, they've done a great job in the portal. They've put an emphasis on people that have played football... you see D-linemen from the Ivy League, they'll come in ready to play and they're game-challenged."

Jacobs also complimented the Aggies on a multi-faceted offense and All-American safety Rex Connors, who returns for UC Davis after a stellar season last year.

The showdown with the Aggies means something extra special for Mercer offensive coordinator Anthony Soto, who played wide receiver at UC Davis and tallied over 1,200 yards from 2009-2012.

"I don't know that it's much different than any other game, but I think it's exciting for my family especially to be a part of the game. I think it's a great opportunity for both programs. It's cool to see the progress that Davis has made over the past few years," Soto said.

Overall, Jacobs and his staff are confident that Mercer has a shot at running it back in the SoCon this year. Historically speaking, back-to-back champions are rare in the conference, though

the Bears were the preseason pick to win it all in the SoCon polls.

Jacobs said it's all about players who are ready for their moment.

I think some (momentum) naturally builds because again, you have a bunch of guys that have been in the program, that it's kind of their time," Jacobs said. Like I got like Julian Fox, who's been a tremendous special teams player for us. Mick Wesson, who's been a tremendous special teams player for us. They have the opportunity to have enhanced roles on the defense.

"You just continue to develop a rapport and you try to create competitive moments and you go from there."

# Schedule

## Friday, Aug. 22

- Football**
- Southwest vs. Northeast, Thompson Stadium, 7:30 p.m.
  - Mount de Sales vs. Deerfield-Windsor, 7:30 p.m.
  - Rutland @ Jeff Davis, 7:30 p.m.
  - Westside @ Prince Avenue Christian, 7:30 p.m.
  - FPD @ Marion County, 7:30 p.m.
  - Windsor vs. Thomas Jefferson Academy, 7:30 p.m.

## Saturday, Aug. 23

- Softball**
- Tattnall (5-2) vs. Loganville Christian (5-2), 10 a.m.
  - Stratford (0-4) vs. Athens Christian (0-3), 11 a.m.
  - Tattnall vs. Calvary Christian (8-0), 2 p.m.
  - Doubleheader: ACE (3-3) @ Vidalia (5-5), 1 p.m.; and @ Jeff Davis (3-1), 3 p.m.

## Sunday, Aug. 24

- Monday Aug. 25**
- Softball**
- FPD (8-1) @ Central Fellowship (1-4), 5 p.m.
  - Central (1-0) @ Dublin (3-4), 5:30 p.m.

## Tuesday, Aug. 26

- Softball**
- CFCA @ John Milledge (3-4), 4:30 p.m.
  - Stratford vs. Strong Rock (5-2), 6:30 p.m.
  - Tattnall vs. Westfield (8-1), 6:30 p.m.
  - Northeast (0-1) vs. Dublin, 4:30 p.m.
  - Southwest (0-2) vs. Dodge County (0-5), 4:30 p.m.
  - Central @ Washington County (6-3), 5:30 p.m.
  - ACE @ East Laurens (3-2), 6 p.m.

## Wednesday, Aug. 27

- Softball**
- Central vs. Westside, 4 p.m.
  - ACE vs. Mary Persons (3-3), 6:30 p.m.

## Thursday, Aug. 28

- Softball**
- Tattnall @ George Walton (4-1), 4:45 p.m.
  - Stratford vs. CFCA, 5 p.m.
  - Mount de Sales (0-3) vs. Bull-och (1-7), 5 p.m.
  - FPD vs. Pinewood Christian (2-4), 5:30 p.m.
  - Central vs. Jefferson County (2-3), 4:30 p.m.
  - ACE vs. Dublin, 5:30 p.m.
  - Northeast @ Bleckley County (3-1), 5:30 p.m.

To add an event to the sports calendar, email micah@maconmelody.com



Jason Vorhees/ The Melody

Northeast receiver Jacory Sherman (9) fumbles the ball during the Raiders' game against Peach County Friday night. Northeast fell 33-14 to the Trojans in their season opener.

## Football, from B1:

part of the preseason conversation but was in uniform anyways Friday night when Southwest's Chase Dupree led the Patriots to a 38-13 win over Macon County for their first season-opening win since 2020. It was Southwest's biggest win over a playoff-caliber team since the Patriots beat Macon County 31-0 in Week 2 of the 2019 season.

Aside from a few miscues — a bad snap and a special teams coverage bust were the only things that allowed Macon County to get on the board — Southwest played lights-out defense and moved the ball with ease on offense. The Patriots' defense held power-4 prospect Noah Parker and the Bulldogs' run game in check. Northeast hasn't opened 0-2 since 2022, and Southwest hasn't been 2-0 since 2009.

### ACE (0-0) @ Central (0-1), at Ed Defore, 7 p.m.

*Last meeting: ACE won 38-6 at home in 2024. Last week: ACE did not play, Central lost 51-14 against Dougherty.*

In an intra-Macon matchup with a much shorter history, relative newcomer ACE once more takes on Central in an early-season matchup.

The Gryphons may have only been playing football since 2018, but they have clashed with the Chargers every year since 2022 and won all three meetings handily. Nonetheless, ACE head coach Keith Hatcher was in the stands for Central's season opener Thursday afternoon scouting the competition.

"He's a hard-working coach and he's always going to be a challenging opponent," Central head coach Jarrett Laws said after the Chargers' loss to Dougherty last week. "We gotta get in better shape and we gotta count. Coach Hatcher is one of the best coaches at manipulating numbers and making your kids think. We've gotta go through all the possibilities of what could happen from an alignment standpoint.

"We've gotta get a little tougher. We have to be more aggressive on the line of scrimmage, and we have to learn how to count. They're not gonna make it any easier on us."

The Gryphons' 38-6, 48-0 and 32-6 wins in the three all-time meetings don't bode well for the Chargers, who showed flashes on offense but had trouble on defense against Dougherty last week. Central did score two touchdowns and notch a safety against the 3A Trojans, marking a better start than last season.

ACE has yet to play a game but will look to get off to a running start. Quarterback Ace Hatcher has more reps and running back Bryson Vincent should finally get a full season after going down with an ankle injury in last year's opener against the Chargers.

### Mount de Sales (0-1) vs. Deerfield-Windsor (1-0)

*Last meeting: Deerfield-Windsor won 35-14 in 2024. Last week: Mount de Sales lost 28-26 to Loganville Christian, Deerfield-Windsor defeated Southland Academy 35-13*

The Cavaliers brought a lot of starters back from a very young team last season but could not finish off a game against Loganville Christian

Academy in the season opener, as they went for a two-point conversion to tie things up in the fourth quarter but came up short on the road.

The loss came after Mount de Sales defeated the Lions 47-35 at home to start last season. Now the Cavaliers will hope for another reversal against the Knights, who are the defending state champions of GIAA Class 3A, after losing to them last year 35-14.

Mount de Sales is 5-12 all-time against Deerfield-Windsor and had won the last two meetings prior to 2024's loss, both under former Cavs head coach Keith Hatcher. Prior to that, though, the Knights won seven straight meetings between the two teams dating back to 2001.

While Deerfield-Windsor's championship roster did list 12 seniors on MaxPreps last year, this year's squad opened the school's title defense with a convincing win over Class 2A Southland Academy.

Young quarterback Zavion De-Shazier and the Cavaliers will try to open at home on a high note Friday at 7:30 p.m.

### Other Macon games

Those three games are the only ones in town, as every other Macon squad hits the road or gets an early week off.

The Tattnall Trojans (0-1) have a difficult road trip, travelling right back to Columbus after a disheartening 49-6 loss at Brookstone to begin the season.

They will face St. Anne-Pacelli (0-1), which looks to bounce back from a blowout loss at the hands of Stratford. The Trojans have played the Vikings five times — none of those in head coach Barney Hester's first stint

at Tattnall — and have a 4-1 record against them, including a 27-0 win last season.

Stratford had perhaps the best Week 1 of any Macon team when it manhandled Pacelli 49-17 in its opener. It was an even bigger win for the Eagles than their 27-13 victory over the Vikings last season and signified another strong start to the year for head coach Paul Carroll in his second season at Stratford.

The Eagles will try to continue that fast start against GIAA 3A Pinewood Academy in Bellville. Stratford defeated the Patriots 48-7 last season at home.

After a momentum-building, typical last-second victory against cross-town rival Howard, Westside (1-0) will travel to Prince Avenue Christian (1-0) for a challenging matchup against one of the state's top private school teams in Athens. The Wolverines were dominant last season, winning their region and earning the No. 5 seed in the bracket before they it all the way to the GHSA Private School State Championship last season. Georgia High School Football Daily ranked Prince Avenue Christian as the No. 1 private school team in the state in its power rankings after Week 1.

The difficult matchup for Westside replaces what would have been the home side of a two-year series with First Baptist Academy, a private school in Naples, Florida. The Seminoles have never played Prince Avenue Christian.

## Notepad, from B1:

The Melody went to print.

### Westside earns multiple POTW honors

Westside earned two of the three Macon Touchdown Player of the Week awards for the first week of the high school football season, the club

announced Monday.

Seminoles running back Tylik Flint earned Back of the Week honors. Flint ran for 171 yards and two touchdowns on 21 carries in Westside's thrilling 41-34 victory against rival Howard.

Defensive lineman Kenneth Hoggess earned the Lineman of the Week for his dominant performance in the trenches. He notched 12 tackles, five of which were TFLs and two of which

were sacks. He also had a fumble recovery and a pair of blocked field goals in the win against the Huskies.

Stratford kicker George Dunn won the third award, Special Teams Player of the Week. Dunn hit all seven of his extra point attempts in the Eagles' dominant 49-17 win over St. Anne-Pacelli and kicked three kick-offs for touchdowns.

### Mercer falls to Oklahoma State in season opener

The Mercer women's soccer team kept things close but could not keep up with Oklahoma State late, allowing two goals to take the loss against the No. 22 Cowgirls to begin the season last week.

The Bears were able to hold Oklahoma State scoreless until the final ten minutes of the contest, when the Cowgirls scored twice off corner kicks to get the 2-0 victory. Mercer had a corner kick of its own in that

final stretch but could not convert. The Bears had four shots on goal to Oklahoma State's eight.

Mercer's keeper, Lindsay Bell, returned and made her 55th career start for the Bears after a stellar season last year and played well for most of the match. Two freshmen, Payton Nutzman and Regan Moore, each played the full 90 minutes for the Bears.



Woody Marshall / News & Record

Russell Henley follows his ball after a shot at the Wyndham Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina last year. The Macon native finished fifth at the Open Championship last weekend.

## Henley, from B1:

and two days after the final round in East Lake.

A year ago, Henley entered the Tour Championship ranked 12th in FedEx and 14th in OWGR. And the speculation grew on his chances at a Presidents Cup selection.

That announcement came two days after he finished an epic final round with an epic 36-yard eagle to tie the renovated course record with a 62.

And speaking of that, the Tour Championship is up next this week at East Lake in Atlanta. Henley tees off at 1:27 on Thursday.

Last year was interesting.

He opened with a quality 67, appeared to drop from contention with a 71, made it interesting with a 67, and then dazzled with a 62.

In the Tour's staggered scoring, he was 19 under, 11 shots back of winner Scheffler. In real golf scoring, his 17-under 267 was the fourth-best score, only three behind Scheffler, who had the third-best weekend at 264, trailing Collin Morikawa by two.

This year, staggered scoring has been ditched, and everybody starts even, like they do normally. The purse has been adjusted to \$40 million, with a quarter of that

going to the winner. That's \$15 million less than Scheffler took home last year.

Henley deposited a check for \$4.83 million after tying for fourth, which was slotted at \$6 million for a lone fourth-place finish. That's dropped to \$3.2 million this year, with the top eight individual finishers earning at least a million.

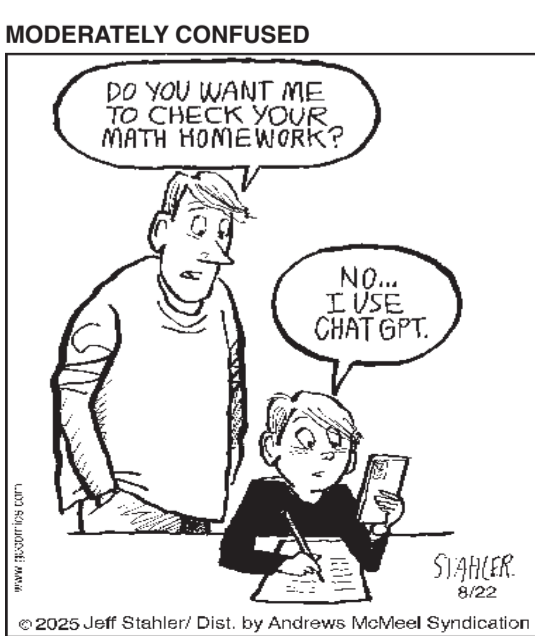
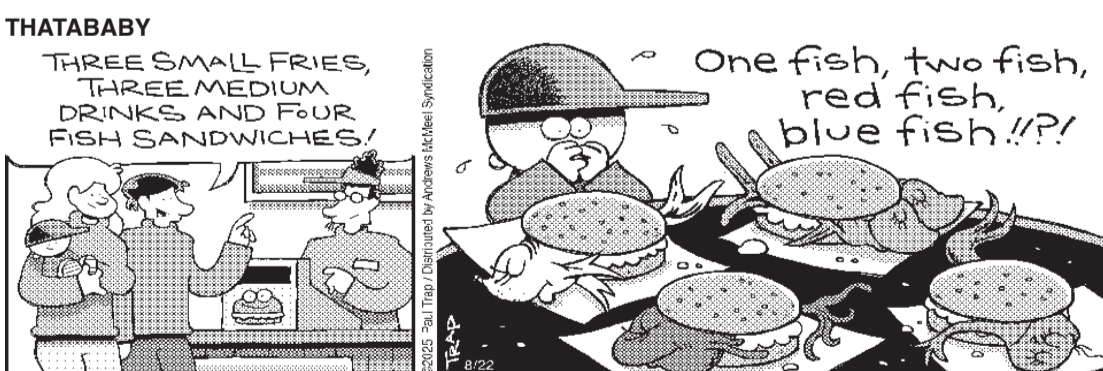
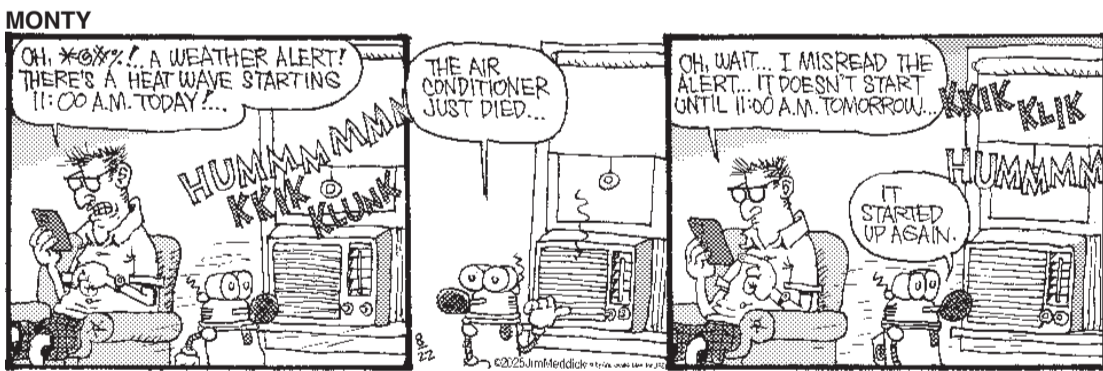
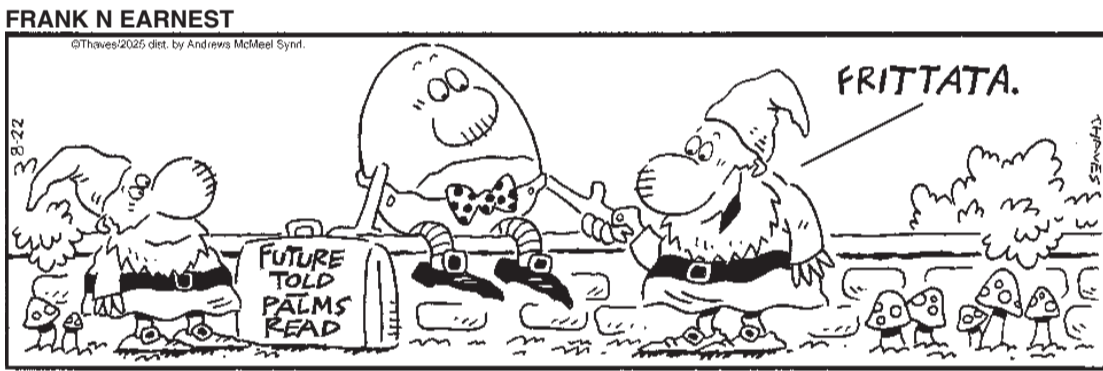
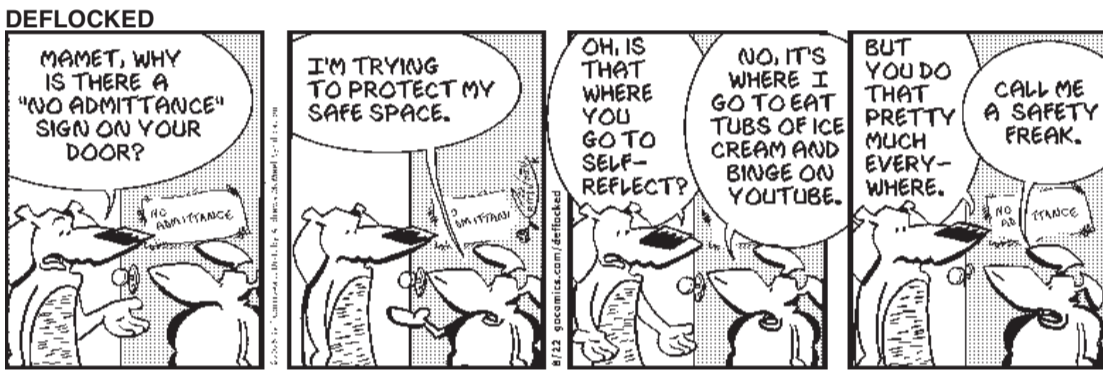
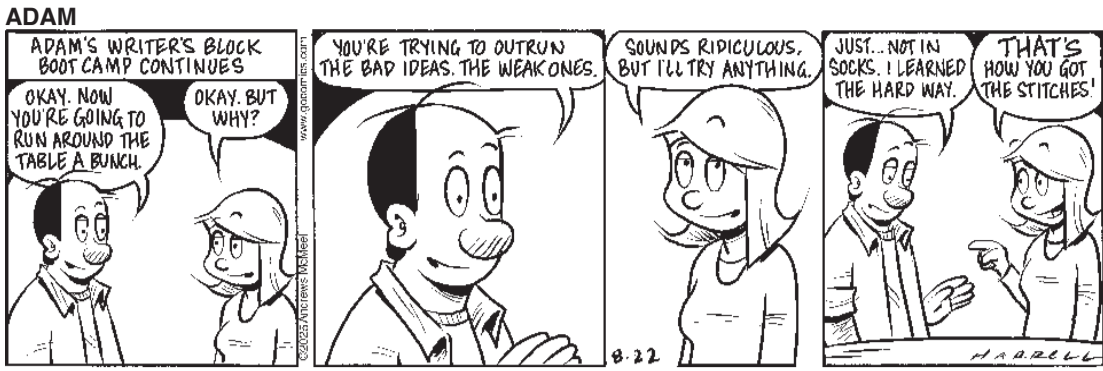
When players are tied, the pool of money for the spots is added up and divided. Last year, fourth was \$6 million, fifth was \$5 million and sixth was \$3.5 million, which equals \$15.5 million, then divided by the three players who tied for fourth.

Should Henley match last year and take fourth by himself, he'd pass \$45 million in career earnings. He's currently 31st in all-time earnings at \$42,274,246. His \$10.28 million for 2025 is fifth.

East Lake this year is par 70 and 7,490 yards, with No. 14 back to a par 4 and a slight fairway reduction on No. 17, with some added short grass on No. 8.

Thus, Henley will have to make few strategic adjustments from 2024 when that 267 turned out to be his second-best four-round score of the year.

He also entered the finale with more momentum than last year. His average finish in the five tournaments preceding last year's Tour Championship is 22nd, compared to ninth this year.



# NEA Crossword Puzzle

## ACROSS

- 1 Surround on all sides
- 4 Wail
- 7 Reckless
- 11 Sick
- 12 Hay bundle
- 13 Actress — Falco
- 14 Corp. bigwig
- 15 Rotating shaft
- 16 Tardy
- 17 Eccentric
- 19 Attired
- 21 Female deer
- 22 Cast a spell on
- 23 Pleased
- 24 Naughty
- 25 Harvest goddess
- 28 Follow
- 29 Mil. rank
- 30 Rara —
- 31 Human bone
- 32 Totality
- 33 Part of NB
- 34 Second of 26
- 35 Hgt.

- 36 Caliber
- 37 — -tac-toe
- 38 Same old thing
- 39 Accelerate (2 wds.)
- 43 "In — words ..."
- 46 Wash against
- 47 Beach resort
- 49 Actress — McClanahan
- 50 Utah city
- 51 Like hand-me-downs
- 52 Mine's yield
- 53 Playing cards
- 54 Saying
- 55 Cooking pan

## DOWN

- 1 Jagger of the Stones
- 2 Butter rival
- 3 Ancestry
- 4 Brass instrument
- 5 — podrida

## Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	P	E	S	E	T	A	D	A	D	A	
L	O	X	A	R	A	B	E	M	I	R	
I	M	P	H	E	R	A	C	A	N	T	
T	E	R	R	A	S	L	A	N	T	S	
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K	N	E	E	T	E	N	T	D	E	S	

- 6 Taphouse
- 7 Take it easy
- 8 "Call it —"
- 9 Location
- 10 Attention
- 12 Howled
- 18 Tree-dwelling animal
- 20 Blushing
- 23 Strong wind
- 24 Metal fastener
- 25 Topple, as a government
- 26 Evergreen
- 27 Dir. letters
- 28 Slow boat
- 29 Branch of mathematics
- 30 Concerning
- 35 Succor
- 36 Animal young
- 37 Abounds
- 39 Opening for mail
- 40 Do a kitchen job
- 41 Regular
- 42 Town in Italy
- 44 Franc's replacement
- 45 Smell
- 48 Moisture

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# SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

1				9	5	6					
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		7	5	6							2

## Almanac

Today is the 234th day of 2025 and the 64th day of summer.

**TODAY'S HISTORY:** In 1851, the American yacht America won the first America's Cup.

In 1864, the first Geneva Convention, which, among other protocols, established protections for those wounded and sick in active warfare, was signed by 12 European nations.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act – a major welfare reform bill – into law.

**TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS:** George Herriman (1880-1944), cartoonist; Dorothy Parker (1893-1967), author; Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003), film director/actress; Ray Bradbury (1920-2012), author; Valerie Harper (1939-2019), actress; David Chase (1945- ), screenwriter/producer; Tori Amos (1963- ), singer-songwriter; Kristen Wiig (1973- ), actress/comedian; James Corden (1978- ), TV personality; Dua Lipa (1995- ), singer-songwriter.

**TODAY'S FACT:** The Comics Journal named George Herriman's "Krazy Kat" the best American comic strip of the 20th century in 1999.

**TODAY'S SPORTS:** In 1989, Texas Rangers pitcher Nolan Ryan struck out Rickey Henderson of the Oakland A's, becoming the first major league pitcher to reach 5,000 strikeouts.

**TODAY'S QUOTE:** "But you can't make people listen. They have to come round in their own time, wondering what happened and why the world blew up around them." – Ray Bradbury, "Fahrenheit 451"

**TODAY'S NUMBER:** 30 – Major League Baseball modern-day record number of runs scored by a team in a single game, set by the Texas Rangers in a 30-3 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on this day in 2007.

**TODAY'S MOON:** New moon (Aug. 22)

## Community Briefs

### GDOT reopens bridge at Bass and Rivoli

The Bass Road bridge built over the Norfolk Southern railroad is set to reopen Saturday, according to a press release from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

The one-mile stretch of Bass Road, between Forsyth Road and Rivoli Drive, was closed in February for renovations to the bridge. GDOT built a new bridge due to concerns about its age and structural integrity.

The new bridge can accommodate the minimum height requirement over the railroad.

The approximately \$11 million project took slightly longer than the six months originally noted on signs blocking off the road.

Commuters temporarily rerouted to the Rivoli Drive and Tucker Road intersection will be able to use the new bridge to access Zebulon and Tucker Road.

### Lake Tobo dragon boat races set for September

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heart of Georgia is thrilled to announce the 13th Annual Heart of the Dragon Boat Races set for Sept. 20 on Sandy Beach at Lake Tobesofkee. What began as a small community fundraising event has evolved into a premier Southeast paddling competition and this year's races are poised to be the biggest and most exciting yet.

The 2025 event has grown beyond Macon's borders, attracting a record number of professional and club teams from across the Southeast, now outnumbering local corporate teams for the first time. These teams not only bring high-energy racing to Middle Georgia – they also fundraise within their home states to support mentoring programs of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"At the end of the day, whether a team is traveling hundreds of

miles or coming from a few blocks away, they're here because they believe in our mission to support at-risk Central Georgia youth – and they know BBBS delivers results that truly matter," said Betsy Fitzgerald, President & CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heart of Georgia.

### Navicent awards 25 community health grants

The Navicent Health Foundation has awarded HEAT (Healthcare Employees Achieving Tomorrow) Grants to 25 local organizations totaling \$253,000 this grant cycle. The grant awards directly impact Middle Georgia communities by providing health care support, food and mentorship for children, mental health prescriptions assistance, survivor support services for breast cancer patients, diagnostic services and more.

Organizations that received grants include:

- Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association, Inc.
- American Red Cross of Central Midwest Georgia
- Backpack Ministry Forest Hills Church
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heart of Georgia
- Crossroads Christian Counseling Center
- Depaul USA, Inc.
- Families and Youth Innovation, Inc.
- Family Counseling Center of Central Georgia Inc.
- Georgia College & State University Foundation Inc.
- Jay's HOPE Foundation
- Joshua's Wish
- Loaves and Fishes Ministry
- Macon Outreach at Mulberry
- Macon Volunteer Clinic
- Mothers Nest
- Rebuilding Macon
- Rescue Mission of Middle Georgia
- Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Georgia

- The Arc Macon
- The Mentors Project of Bibb County
- The Next Level Community Development Center
- The Society of St. Andrew
- Twin Cedars Youth and Family Services (Georgia Industrial Children's Home Campus)
- United in Pink
- Wesley Glen Ministries

### Downtown restaurant closes suddenly

Kinjo Kitchen + Cocktails, an Asian-inspired comfort food restaurant that opened five years ago at Second and Poplar streets, announced Monday it is permanently closed for business.

"What has carried us through these years has been the people – our wonderful patrons who filled these rooms with warmth, conversation, and celebration, and our incredible staff, who poured their energy, talent, and heart into every shift," the business posted on its Facebook page. "We had planned to remain open until August 23rd and then reopen as a new concept, but circumstances have changed, and we will close our doors permanently, effective immediately."

### New red light installed at South Bibb intersection

A new red light at Sardis Church Road and Frank Amerson Parkway is set to start controlling traffic at the intersection. Macon-Bibb County Commissioner Bill Howell said the lights will flash for three to four days before becoming fully operational.

### Young teens arrested in shooting of 12-year-old

Six teenagers are facing criminal charges related to the shooting of a 12-year-old boy early Sunday evening in Bloomfield, the Bibb County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

The injured boy was taken to a hospital and the other teens were arrested shortly after the shooting.

Investigators learned there were two separate shooting incidents that night. A little more than an hour after the boy was shot on Mint Green Lane, a second shooting occurred two miles away on Silver Pines Drive and was reportedly "in retaliation" to the Mint Green Lane shooting.

Investigators arrested a 12-year-old and a 14-year-old in the 2300 block of Houston Avenue, about 5 miles from Silver Pines Drive.

Other teens facing charges of aggravated assault and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony include a pair of 15 year olds, a 12-year-old, a 13-year-old, a 14-year-old and 17-year-old Tauquavious Dean. The 12-year-old was released to his parents and awaits a juvenile court hearing. Dean was booked in the Bibb County jail and the other teens were booked at the Macon Regional Youth Detention Center.

Anyone with information about the shooting is urged to call the sheriff's office at 478-751-7500 or call Macon Regional Crimestoppers at 1-877-68-CRIME.

### SUDOKU ANSWER

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

# What to watch FRIDAY

August 22, 2025

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

## Long Story Short

Netflix ■ New Series

This animated comedy from the creator of *BoJack Horseman* follows one family, the Schwooper siblings, over time, jumping through the years from childhood to adulthood and back again to chronicle their triumphs, disappointments, joys and compromises. Paul Reiser, Lisa Edelstein, Max Greenfield, Ben Feldman and Michaela Dietz lead the voice cast.

## Women's College Volleyball: AVCA First Serve

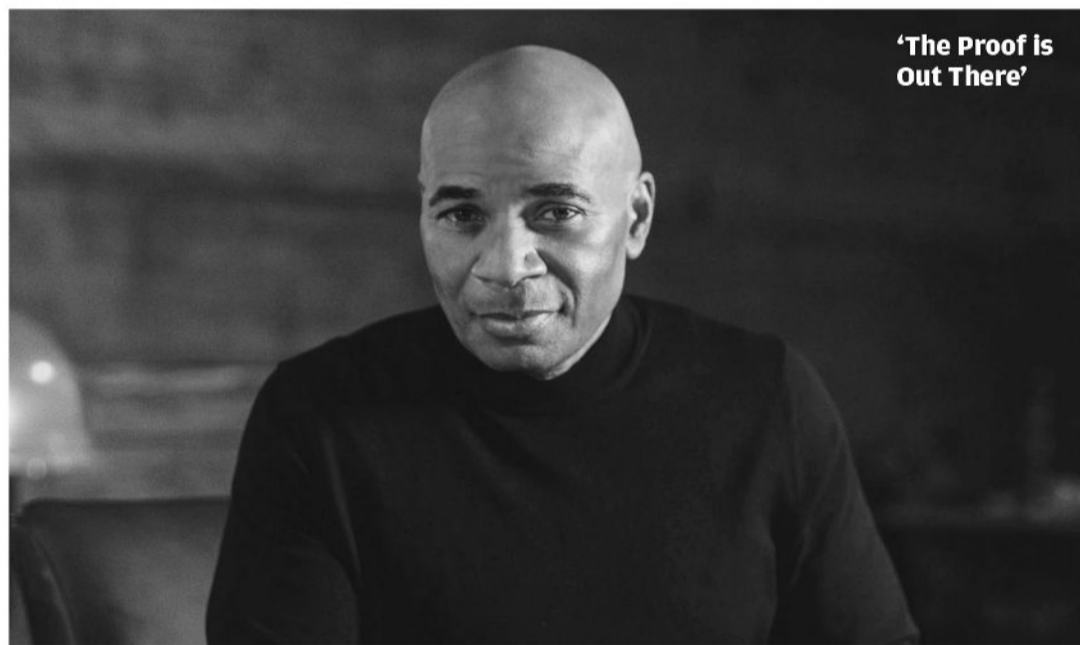
FOX, 7 p.m. Live

Some of the nation's top Division I women's volleyball teams are in action at Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln, Nebraska, for the AVCA First Serve season-starting event. Tonight's games are Pittsburgh vs. Nebraska and Florida vs. Stanford.

## The Proof Is Out There

History, 10 p.m. ■ Season Finale

Is a mysterious object moving through the sky a UFO disguised as a cloud? Is Lake Superior home to a massive water creature? Is a ghost haunting a young couple's bedroom? Who sent the police an anonymous letter with a terrifying Bigfoot photo? Tony Harris and his team examine the clues in these videos to determine their validity. This episode is preceded an hour earlier by the season finale of *The Unexplained*, "The World's Deadliest Assassins," details of which were unavailable at presstime.



'The Proof Is Out There'

HISTORY

## CATCH A CLASSIC

### 2025 Summer Under the Stars: Frank Sinatra

TCM, beginning at 6 a.m.

Not just a legendary singer, Frank Sinatra was also a great and sometimes even award-winning actor. You can see his acting (and, on occasion, some of that singing!) in action today with his 11-film celebration on Summer Under the Stars. Up first, *Ol' Blue Eyes* appears as a dramatized version of himself in the musical *Higher and Higher* (1943), one of his earliest screen roles. Some of Sinatra's other 1940s favorites also air today: the 1945 musical comedy *Anchors Aweigh* (pictured), also featuring Gene Kelly and Kathryn Grayson; the Western comedy *The Kissing Bandit* (1948), which re-teams Sinatra and Grayson; and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949), also with Kelly and Esther Williams. More song-and-dance is on tap in other highlights, including *The Tender Trap* (1955), also featuring Debbie Reynolds and Oscar-nominated for its title tune, "(Love Is) the Tender Trap," which



TURNER ENTERTAINMENT CO.

was a hit for Sinatra; *Guys and Dolls* (1955), costarring Marlon Brando and Jean Simmons; *High Society* (1956), costarring Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong and Grace Kelly, in her final film before marrying Prince Rainier III of Monaco; and *Robin and the 7 Hoods* (1964), also with Crosby as well as a couple of Sinatra's Rat Pack pals, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. Martin is also on hand for a couple of other Sinatra-led titles today: the non-musical Western comedy *4 for Texas* (1963), also featuring Anita Ekberg and Ursula Andress; and *Ocean's 11* (1960), the classic heist comedy that, in addition to Sinatra and Martin, also features Rat Packers Davis Jr., Peter Lawford and Joey Bishop. Sinatra's dramatic side is also seen today in *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955), which earned him a Best Actor Oscar nomination as a junkie trying to kick his drug addiction. – Jeff Pfeiffer

## MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



MARVEL

**Maid in Manhattan** (2002, Romance-comedy) Jennifer Lopez, Ralph Fiennes **E!, 6 p.m.**

**Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania** (2023, Action) Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly **FX, 7 p.m.**

**The Equalizer** (2014, Action) Denzel Washington, Marton Csokas **AMC, 7 p.m.**

**Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets** (2002, Children) Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint **Bravo, 8 p.m.**

**Mystery Island: Play for Keeps** (2025, Mystery) Charlie Weber, Elizabeth Henstridge **Hallmark Mystery, 8 p.m.**

**Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides** (2011, Adventure) Johnny Depp, Penélope Cruz **TBS, 8 p.m.**

**The Doctor With Two Faces** (2025, Suspense) Masiela Lusha, Jonathan Stoddard **LMN, 8 p.m.**

**Black Adam** (2022, Action) Dwayne Johnson, Aldis Hodge **TNT, 8:30 p.m.**

**Captain America: The First Avenger** (2011, Action) Chris Evans, Hayley Atwell **FX, 9:30 p.m.**

**A Nurse's Revenge** (2024, Suspense) Carissa Murray, Kristina Clifford **LMN, 10 p.m.**

From the editors of

TV Weekly and tvinsider.com





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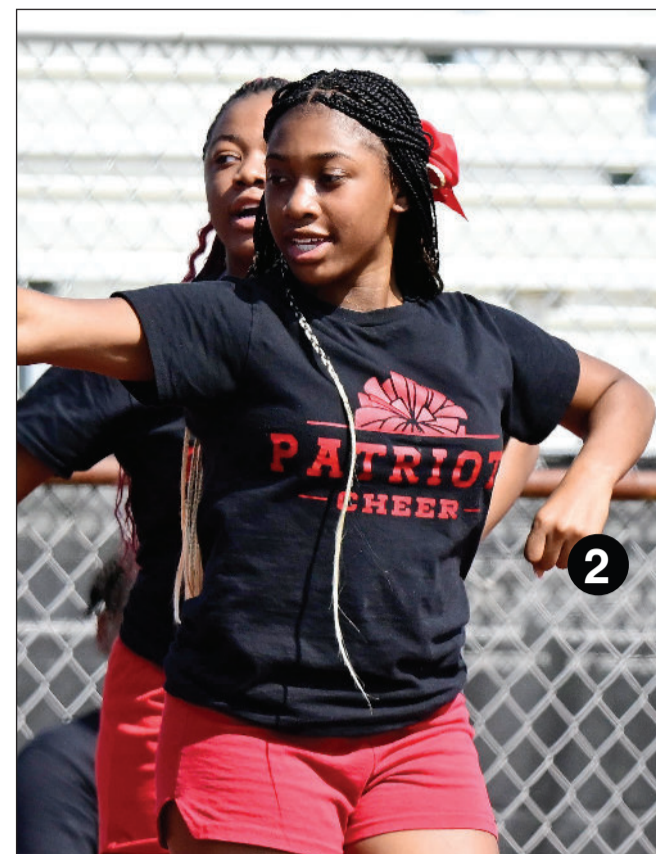
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Photos by Mark Powell and Jason Vorhees / The Melody

1: Southwest defensive end Rinaldo Callaway leads the Patriots onto the field before their game against Macon County Friday, Aug. 15. The Patriots defeated Macon County 38-13. 2: Southwest cheerleaders cheer on the Patriots during their 38-13 win over Macon County. 3: The Howard cheerleaders pose for a photo during the Huskies game against Westside Friday Aug. 15. 4: The Westside cheerleaders pose for a photo during the Seminoles' game against Howard Friday night. The Seminoles secured the 41-34 win over the Huskies with a blocked field goal in the final seconds of the game. 5: Rutland cheerleaders cheer on the Hurricanes during their game against Bleckley County Aug. 14. Rutland lost the game 33-13. 6: The Northeast band performs at halftime the Raiders' game at Peach County on Friday night. The Raiders lost to the Trojans 33-14. 7: The Central High School Sugar Bear Band performs during the Chargers' game against Dougherty Aug. 14. The Chargers came up short 51-14.

To submit photos to the People page, email them to [photos@maconmelody.com](mailto:photos@maconmelody.com)

