The Macon Melody

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Bibb school board mulls Milestone state test scores

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The Bibb County School District shared results from the Georgia Milestones test at the school board's regular meeting Aug. 21, celebrating small gains as the county continues to trail the state averages.

Test results released earlier this month show English scores fell statewide across grades three through eight while scores in other areas, including math, social studies and science, remained the same or increased marginally, according to the Georgia Department of Education's Milestones dashboard.

District officials noted there is still room for improvement.

"While we see increases in reading statuses in some areas, the overall goal for this year is really to get every single student reading on or above grade level," Superintendent Dan Sims said.

"I know that's ambitious, but it's possible."

Board president Myrtice Johnson said while she acknowledges improvement in math scores, she "wasn't as pleased" with English scores.

The school district's median reading across grades three through eight hovered "below grade level" last school year. The state's third grade quantified reading score was 605, while Bibb County's score was 525, according to the state's reading dashboard.

The year-to-year change in the number of students reading at grade level varied between grades. The number of eighth graders reading at grade level fell by 6.5% compared to last year's class.

Board member Daryl Morton asked about the "yo-yo" nature of reading scores, noting the fourth grade class had higher scores last year when they were third graders.

Ethel Lett, the district's assistant superintendent of teaching and learning, said the variation could have resulted from teachers and schools trying to reach the

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Jason Vorhees / The Melody

James Wolf sits atop the ice at the Macon Coliseum on his zamboni. Wolf has one of the most unique jobs in Macon as the zamboni driver at the venue, smoothing out the ice with the vehicle's large blade so skaters and hockey players can enjoy the rink as cleanly as possible.

For Labor Day, a look at the most unique jobs in Macon

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B. Keith Williams has been making music in his adopted hometown since the days of bell-bottoms and long sideburns.

His name has been on marquees at local pubs and music venues for more than half a century.

Mike Fuller has been pulling rabbits out of hats at birthday parties and plucking coins from behind the ears of unsuspecting children for three generations.

For the past 32 years, Rachel Moore has made a 120-mile daily commute from Macon to Oglethorpe for her job as a process control engineering manager at International Paper. She also serves as a "life coach" for women, helping them navigate and balance their careers and families.

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Photo courtesy American Jet Sport Association

A watercross competitor soars through the air on a Jet Ski, sending waves splashing as he completes a trick during a watercross event put on earlier this year by the American Jet Sport Association. The AJSA is set to host an event in Macon soon.

Lake Tobesofkee to host Jet Ski races, skill shows

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter

Jet Ski races, high-flying flips and spins will be on full display at Lake Tobesoffkee this Saturday for the first annual U.S. Open of Watercross.

Watercross, the aquatic twin of the motorcycle racing sport known as motocross, made its way to Sandy Beach Park back in 2023, when the American Jet Sport Association held its first race in Macon.

Brad Adams, CFO of the American Jet Sport Association, said the first U.S. Open will be the "season finale" for the association's series of summer competitions. The AJSA typically hosts and promotes races across the southeast.

This competition is expected to draw in about 100 racers from all over America, Adams said.

"With the championship we said, 'hey, we have the best racers in the country here,'" he said. "We figured that would be the best time to come together and bring racers from other regions to see how they stack up."

The competition will consist of races and freestyle events, akin to figure skating routines, for each different type of Jet Ski — seated and stand up, modded and unmodded engines — age and skill level.

With the races, riders try to make as many laps on a course as possible within the given time. The pro races last 12-15 minutes while the amateurs and juniors race for 10 and 7

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Periodical — Mail Label

Legendary Maconite who hiked Appalachian Trail dies

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist

He carried a 45-pound backpack and a walking stick he had carved as a Boy Scout.

Gene Espy started his historic 2,050-mile journey on May 31, 1951, at Mount Oglethorpe in north Georgia, one month after his 24th birthday. He walked across 14 states.

By the time he reached Mount Katahdin in Maine four months later, he was sporting a 123-day-old beard, had lost 28 pounds, worn out three pairs of hiking boots and killed 15 rattlesnakes.

The longtime Macon resident became only the second "thru-hiker" to complete the Appalachian Trail, the longest continuous and marked footpath in the world. When he completed his walk, he knelt and thanked God.

Espy died on Aug. 22 in Alpharetta, where he and his wife, Eugenia, had gone to live with their daughter, Jane Gilsinger, six years ago.

He was 98.

"He kept going right up until the end," Gilsinger said. "He was alert and sitting in a chair the day before he died. When he was in the hospital, he kept talking about getting out into the woods and going camping. He loved the trail."

Eugenia Espy said her husband had been in declining health for several years, and had fallen a few weeks ago, but had not been ill.

"He didn't have an illness," she said. "He didn't have diabetes, cancer or have a heart attack. At his age, he just wore out."

Funeral services will be Saturday, Sept. 6, at 11 a.m. at Highland Hills Baptist Church on Briarcliff Road across from the home where the Espys lived in Macon.

There will be a visitation at 10 a.m. at the church, and a reception will follow. Burial will be private on Thursday, Sept. 4, in Espy's hometown of Cordele.

As a young man, Espy was always looking for his next adventure. He

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Jobs, from A1:

James Wolf drives a zamboni ice machine on the frozen rink at the Macon Coliseum and considers it artwork.

Monday is Labor Day, an annual celebration of American workers. Journalist Studs Terkel, who wrote the best-selling book "Working," defined our jobs as the "search for daily meaning as well as daily bread."

'I want to be a part of this'

When Wolf was the band director for 15 years at Union Elementary School in Macon, he held a variety of side jobs.

He ran dart tournaments at the Hummingbird Stage & Taproom, rented river tubes at Amerson Park, worked at local pizza restaurants and taught at summer camps at Wesleyan College.

"I was throwing noodles at the wall until something stuck," he said.

In 2016, he attended his first Macon Mayhem game and was afflicted with a serious case of hockey fever.

"Wow," he said, "I want to be a part of this."

He applied for a part-time job at the Coliseum with an interesting request. He wanted to drive the Zamboni, the giant resurfacer that shaves the ice with a large blade, then distributes a layer of freezing water to repair blade marks and divots on the ice.

A Zamboni is as smooth as a street sweeper and as loud as a tractor.

"It's like a Jeep Wrangler with the windshield down," he said.

It holds 300 gallons of water and has a state-of-the-art, laser-guided level ice system. Wolf sits 5 feet in the air on top of more than four tons of machinery.

The ice rink is 200 feet long and 80 feet wide with rounded corners. The machine sweeps across the ice with a 77-inch swath. He works in tandem with Raymond Smith, the other Zamboni driver.

"I like to tell people once you drive the Zamboni, you'll never cut your yard the same again," Wolf said. "It's all right turns. It's a very peaceful job, turning the ice into this perfect glass. It's something you can be proud of. Each time you do it, you're turning something damaged into something beautiful."

When Wolf was teaching, he was asked to participate in a career day at Union and talk to students about his double life as a Zamboni operator.

He is now manager of operations for the Macon Centreplex (Coliseum and City Auditorium) and the Atrium Health Amphitheater.

But whenever he introduces himself, he doesn't always tout those credentials and his fancy title.

"I tell them I'm the Zamboni driver," he said, laughing.

Success on paper

Rachel Moore spends her mornings and afternoons dodging deer and hoping she doesn't get stuck behind a slow-moving logging truck on her way to work.

She commutes to Macon – the county, not the city. It's a two-hour round trip from her home in Lizella to International Paper off Ga. Highway 49 in Oglethorpe.

The company was Weyerhaeuser before it was bought by International Paper. Last week, it announced it is selling its pulp division for $1.5 billion to American Industrial Partners, a private equity firm.

It is somehow fitting that Moore has spent her career at a large paper plant.

After all, she has written three books ... two of them Amazon best-sellers. In 2012, one of her stories found its way onto the pages of an edition of "Chicken Soup for the Soul."

Moore is a woman of many hats. In addition to her work as an engineer and writer, she has been an entrepreneur, inventor, dancer, speaker and "life coach."

She has also raised four sons, which may be the toughest job of all. Her "J-Stars" are Jonathan, 29, twins Jamicah and Jeremy, 26, and 20-year-old Joshua.

Moore holds two U.S. patents. One of them is for her "Mr. Zippy Bib" – a waterproof bib designed with pant legs. The idea came when her twins were 6 months old.

"I couldn't keep their clothes clean when they were eating, so that situation is what inspired it," she said, laughing.

The springboard for her passion as a life coach also came from her family 15 years ago.

"It all started with me wanting to do a family activity," she said. "I did a 'vision board' to set creative goals with my children. After we did the first one, they all adopted it. We still do it every year. It helps them to stay on track."

She launched a website, mooreofrachel.com, where she encourages and empowers women.

"It's fulfilling when I can inspire others," she said. "It brings me joy to see how excited they get when things begin to happen, when they take that step and start being intentional."

She has developed resources for a "21-Day Mindset Makeover Challenge" and a "Manifest More" self-help program. She has plans to launch a "Manager Mom's Marketplace" online shopping project.

"I put a lot of focus on women who have children and want to be entrepreneurs," she said. "I try to show them how to balance that and not have to put their dreams on hold."

A career made in music

In 1970, B. Keith Williams was 19 years old and working at a Publix in Lakeland, Florida. A friend who had attended a Grand Funk Railroad concert told him how exciting it was.

"That's what I want to do with my life," Williams told him.

He finished the semester in college and assembled a band. They named it "Job."

That's Job, as in the Bible, not a job like going to work ... even though he would make a career in music.

Job won a local "battle of the bands" contest and soon found itself playing at the Jacksonville Coliseum. It later merged with a band called Paradise Lost. Williams sang and played the guitar.

Pat Armstrong managed the band Lynyrd Skynyrd with Alan Walden, the younger brother of Phil Walden, co-founder of Capricorn Records in Macon. Armstrong convinced Paradise Lost to relocate to Macon in 1973, and Williams has been here ever since.

"Music has been my livelihood," he said. "I haven't had a 'job' since Publix in 1970. I never questioned that I was going to be able to do it. I had such a passion for it."

Paradise Lost had a loyal following in the Southeast. The band opened concerts for Ted Nugent, REO Speedwagon, Elvin Bishop, Sea Level, the Dixie Dregs, Chubby Checker, The Platters and Molly Hatchet.

One night, they were playing a club called Uncle Sam's on Gray Highway in Macon when Gregg Allman pulled up on a motorcycle, came in and jammed with the band.

After the band broke up in 1982, Williams embarked on a solo career.

He was the house musician at Yesterday's in Macon. He was the opening act for David Allan Coe at the City Auditorium and for Gregg Allman's return to Macon in 1983. He's also opened for Willie Nelson and Ronnie Milsap's shows in Macon. And he worked with guitarist David Marks, one of the original Beach Boys.

Williams now performs music in places like Parish on Cherry Street, Fish N' Pig at Lake Tobesofkee, 20's Pub on Riverside and the American Legion on Thomaston Road.

He is especially proud that he has been able to mentor and encourage young musicians like country singer-songwriter Caylee Hammack, and guitarists Adam Gorman and Hughes Taylor. His son, Sean Williams, has followed in his dad's footsteps.

Williams has three solo albums. He has toured the country as far west as California and to the north in Michigan and Wisconsin.

"I was able to be a full-time musician because my wife (Barbara) worked during the day as a speech therapist, and I played at night," he said. "We have four kids and never had to have daycare, which worked out well."

Paul Hornsby has operated Muscadine Studios in Macon since 1982. Williams said Hornsby once told him he was the "only musician he knew to make a full-time living without signing a major record deal."

For Williams, it has been simple. Do what you love and love what you do.

From weather to wand-waving

Mike Fuller has been a part-time meteorologist with WMAZ-TV and once peddled "Fuller's Famous New York Hot Dogs" from vendor carts in downtown Macon.

But magic has always been his meal ticket.

Now 72 years old, his first paying job as a magician was when he was 12. He was hired to perform at a birthday party at Idle Hour. His mother had to drive him. He did an hour's worth of magic for about 50 guests.

"After the show, the man asked how much he owed me, and I said, 'Oh, well, whatever you think,' " Fuller said. "And he gave me five bucks. I have had a set price ever since."

His love of magic began when he was a shy first-grader at Alexander II Elementary. He read every magic book in the school library and checked out "300 Magic Tricks You Can Do" from the Washington Library, not far from his boyhood home on Lawton Avenue.

His mother, Iola, wanted him to take piano lessons, but Fuller opted to hone his magic skills. He even practiced his tricks on the family's pet parakeet. His sister, Nancy, survived his attempts to saw her in half, although they would often joke that she was his "half-sister."

"Magic is the one thing I have always done," Fuller said. "When I was a kid, and they asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would tell them I wanted to be a magician. I paid my way through college doing magic shows.

"I've always done other things, but finally settled down to do magic. If you love what you're doing, you'll never work a day in your life."

He was a charter member of the Middle Georgia Magic Club in 1970, and the International Brotherhood of Magicians Ring local chapter No. 289 was later named in his honor. In his prime, he did as many as 300 shows a year. He had his own Saturday morning magic show on WMAZ for 10 years.

Fuller is a cancer survivor and has had two knee replacements. He wishes he could wave a magic wand and make the arthritis in his fingers disappear. Card tricks were once his signature. Now, it hurts to shuffle the deck.

In October, he will return to the Georgia National Fair in Perry. He was invited to the inaugural fair in 1990. He missed the second year, but has been asked back every year since – except for 2020, when everybody had to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only the popular Robinson's Racing Pigs have had a longer gig at the fair than Fuller.

"The fair will wear me out," he said. "But then when it's over, I can't wait until next year."

For now, retirement is not in Fuller's bag of tricks.

"As long as I can still entertain, I'll still do it," he said. "But if it gets to where they're watching me because they feel sorry for the old guy who can't shuffle cards any more ..."

He considers it a labor of love.

"I can get tired doing it," he said. "But I never get tired of doing it."

Jet Ski, from A1:

minutes.

Matthew Richuk, a North Carolina native and pro jetskier, is in first place for the AJSA's summer series. Richuk is focused on the Pro Ski 1050 class, which includes the stock class, meaning engines can only be marginally modified and not "tricked out," as allowed for the "all-out" GP class jetskis, he said.

Where GP class jetskis can clock 72-75 mph, stock class jetskis are limited to 50-53 miles per hour.

While racing the course, Richuk said he makes sure that he is doing a good job of handling the jet ski, accounting for other racers, the waves and obstacles like the log jump.

"Jetskiing is one of the hardest sports," Richuk said. "Similar to motocross, there's a lot of cardio. I've been doing a lot of training, and the way you get better is by jetskiing, so the more you jetski the better it is."

Richuk will be racing in Macon for the first time this Labor Day weekend, with him and other racers already having zipped through courses in Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina earlier in the series.

Adams said Macon makes for a great spot because of its central location. He added that the sandy beach makes for a nice spot to hang out as opposed to a rocky or muddy beach.

The opening ceremony will be held on Saturday at 10 a.m., and the first races will begin shortly after. Races and freestyle contests will take place all Saturday and Sunday at Sandy Beach Park, and general admission is $3.

County commission awards contract to pave roads at Tuesday meeting

Laura Corley
Accountability Reporter

The Macon-Bibb County Commission voted to award a contract for 9 more miles of road paving work at a special meeting early Tuesday.

The contract awarded to Professional Paving Services LLC, a company created a decade ago and registered to Amina Financial Solutions on Forsyth Road, is the second $1.9 million paving contract the county awarded to the company this month.

The company provided estimates for both bids at $1.98 million, an amount well below estimates tendered by other companies.

Commissioners also approved an alcohol license for USA Grocer's mini food stores Inc. on Ingleside Avenue. The gas station was closed for a time after county inspectors redesignated it a vice mart upon finding it met the criteria. However, the store is now stocking fresh foods necessary for it to be reclassified as a food mart.

Other items approved by the commission include:

- Appointment of Macon Transit Authority spokesperson Jami Gaudet to the pensions and retirements system board for a four-year term
- An agreement with Coliseum Medical Center to rent 425 parking spaces on county-owned property at 200 Coliseum Drive for $8,102 per month. The agreement is for one year and stipulates a 3% increase in rent for each year thereafter
- Acceptance of $2.93 million local road assistance grant from GDOT with no local match required
- An independent contract agreement with Turner Construction Management LLC for $641,100 for renovations to the Piedmont Grand Opera House to be paid for using 2018 SPLOST money
- A purchasing order for Dell computers at a cost of $104,444 in general fund money

Espy, from A1:

was the first Boy Scout in Cordele to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. He taught himself to water ski on a pair of homemade skis at Lake Blackshear by watching newsreels at the movie theater. When he was 16, he took a 740-mile bicycle trek through three states. He navigated a 125-mile stretch of the Ocmulgee River in a homemade sailboat.

When he was a student at Georgia Tech, Espy drove a motorcycle up the sloped side to the top of Stone Mountain – the largest piece of exposed granite in North America. He once hitchhiked to St. Louis and back in two days just to prove it could be done.

His fascination with the Appalachian Trail came from his seventh-grade teacher. He later hiked for a week in the Great Smoky Mountains, which whetted his appetite even more.

He got off to a late start for the hiking season when he had to wait for his 18-year-old hiking companion to graduate from high school. After one day on the trail, the young man quit and returned home, leaving Espy to go it alone.

He was a trailblazer in every sense of the word. The trail in the 1950s was often crude, overgrown and poorly marked. It was very much a work in progress. After requesting maps from the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., Espy was asked to take notes and make revisions along the way.

He averaged 16.5 miles each day, including as many as 34 miles in one stretch. Espy would stop in towns along the trail and buy postcards to send to his family.

He was dating Eugenia, who lived in nearby Warwick. They married three years after he finished the hike and celebrated their 71st anniversary in July.

Espy did not seek notoriety after his hike. He did not consider it all that remarkable. He and Eugenia moved to Macon in 1960, where he worked at the Naval Ordnance Plant and was an aerospace engineer at Robins Air Force Base.

He became a legend in the hiking world. In 2008, he wrote his autobiography, "The Trail of My Life." His book has been displayed everywhere from the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., to L.L. Bean in Freeport, Maine.

In Macon, he often spoke to school groups and scout troops about his hike and desire to seek "God in nature."

Espy was among those who cut the ribbon for the dedication of the visitor's center at Amicalola Falls in 2023. A commemorative plaque honoring him was placed where a section of the trail crosses the Richard Russell Scenic Highway between Helen and Blairsville.

There is a carved bust of Espy at the Appalachian Trail Hall of Fame at Pine Grove Furnace State Park in Pennsylvania, which is near the midpoint of the trail. Espy was one of six men inducted into the inaugural Hall of Fame class in 2011. The late Earl Shaffer, who was credited with finishing in August 1948, six years before Espy, was among those inducted posthumously.

Although the Appalachian Trail Conservancy recognizes Shaffer as the pioneer of the AT, some trail historians have claimed that Espy actually might have been the first thru-hiker. Shaffer reportedly bypassed about 170 miles of the trail by taking shortcuts on country roads and traveling for short distances as a hitchhiker.

The soft-spoken Espy once said, "hiking the trail meant more to me than just about anything I've ever done."

Scores, from A1:

rigor of state standards. She added that the district should be seeing an increase in scores for each class, year after year.

"It's not an apples-to-apples comparison either," she told Morton. "Those third grade students are compared to last year's third grade, but they aren't the same students."

Lett said the district works closely with state curriculum guidelines and "aligns expectations" in special education and after-school programs. She also spoke about central office efforts, such as the district-wide "school walk," which works with teachers to improve instruction.

The school district highlighted score increases at individual schools on social media since the state release results on Aug. 8.

Sims said he wants to make sure "people don't get so down in the dumps" when improvements aren't at the level they had hoped.

"It's important that we focus on recognizing schools when they are making progress," Johnson said.

The district has honed in on literacy initiatives as the answer to improving student performance. Sims has pushed a K-2 literacy campaign, which he said helps build a reading "foundation" for kids as they move into third grade.

The board also accepted grants for its afterschool programs and approved a contract of $233,674, awarded to KD Epps Enterprises LLC, for a new school-based health center at L.H. Williams Elementary School in the historic Pleasant Hill neighborhood.

The board postponed voting on a policy that board member Henry Ficklin took issue with in a previous board meeting. The policy "removes overly prescriptive duties that make it challenging to align with established or changing protocols," according to the district's memo, but Ficklin said the policy would limit the board's ability to hold the district accountable.

The board voted nearly unanimously to take the policy off the agenda, with board member Kristin Hanlon voting against the measure.



Opinion

Proof that a heart can live in two places



Ed Grisamore

Red is the dress code for Georgia's season opener on Saturday, and Molly Muse will be in compliance.

She will be wearing green, too.

No, she is not getting a head start on the holidays with red-and-green attire.

'Tis the (football) season, not Christmas.

The only other place you might notice green — besides the Sanford Stadium grass and the beloved hedges — is the outnumbered Marshall fans in the visitors' section.

Molly is a real estate agent in Macon. She will be sitting in the club level with family members and friends. Her older brother, Matt, will be cheering for Marshall. (His color scheme might not rival Buddy the Elf, but he graduated from Georgia Tech, so no explanation is needed.)

Molly was born in Huntington, West Virginia, the home of the Marshall Thundering Herd. Her parents, Murrill and Helen Ralsten, were big Marshall boosters.

She graduated from the University of Georgia, where she met Ed Muse. They fell in love and married at Christ Church in Macon on Sept. 3, 1994. Next week will be their 31st wedding anniversary.

She wore her mother's wedding dress at the rehearsal dinner.

Molly is proof that a heart can live in two places.

On Nov. 14, 1970, Marshall's football team was on a Southern Airways DC-9 returning from Greenville, North Carolina, following a heartbreaking 17-14 loss to East Carolina.

The pilot was attempting to land in cold rain and fog at the Tri-State Airport in Kenova, West Virginia. The plane hit the tops of the trees above a ridge and crashed into a thick, wooded hollow with almost a full tank of fuel.

It claimed the lives of all 75 people on board, including 37 players, members of the coaching staff, faculty and booster club.

Among those killed were Murrill and Helen Ralsten.

It was the worst air tragedy involving a sports team in U.S. history. The school's efforts to rebuild the program the following season were the inspiration behind the 2006 movie, "We Are Marshall," starring Matthew McConaughey and Matthew Fox.

Molly has her own part in the movie's final scene. She is gathered around the memorial fountain on the campus in Huntington, with others who lost family members.

She was 3 years old when her parents died. Her brother was 5. They were two of the more than 70 children who were orphaned. They were raised by their aunt and uncle.

Molly doesn't remember the plane crash. Her brother, who was almost 6, sat by the window, waiting for his mom and dad to come home.

Murrill Ralsten owned a men's clothes store in Huntington. He was a city councilman and some believe he might have been elected the city's next mayor.

He certainly had royal pedigree. His great-great-great grandfather, John Beckley, was friends with Thomas Jefferson. He was the first Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives — serving during the signing of the Declaration of Independence — and was the first Librarian of Congress.

The town of Beckley, West Virginia, is named in his honor. Molly and Ed named their firstborn son, Beckley, and call him "Beck" for short.

Helen Banda met her future husband when they were students at Marshall. She was from Weirton, West Virginia, a steel town along the Ohio River in the state's northern panhandle bordering Pennsylvania and Ohio.

She was the first in her family to go to college. She was tall and athletic. Her nickname was "Flip." They were married 66 years ago last week, on August 22, 1959.

The Ralstens had been invited to make the trip with other Marshall boosters. It was the first time the school had traveled by plane to a road game and was the first experience on an airplane for several of the players. Some of the parents were superstitious and raised objections about the team flying to North Carolina on a Friday the 13th.

Those who knew her family have told Molly she is pretty like her mama and personable like her dad. The stories and snapshots are her only means of filling a blank canvas.

She cannot remember the sound of their voices. Her dad was 38. Her mom was 32.

Molly is 58 and is now a grandmother.

Early in their marriage, she and Ed had season tickets to UGA games. Jim Donnan, the head coach at Marshall, became Georgia's head coach in 1996.

When sons Beck and Matt were 7 and 5 they took them to the Georgia-Marshall game on September 18, 2004. It's the only other time the two schools have met. (The Dogs won 13-3.)

The Muses were able to see Marshall play on several occasions when their sons were students at Georgia Southern. (Both schools are in the Sun Belt Conference.)

The Muses make an effort to attend the annual "We Are … Playing for the 75" game. The memorial ceremony is held on the home date closest to the Nov. 14 anniversary. This year, the game is on Nov. 8 against James Madison.

The names of all 75 people who died in the crash are read aloud, and family members are given roses to carry and place in the fountain.

Her brother, Matt, was asked to give the keynote speech at the ceremony in 2019. The following year, which marked the 50th anniversary, Molly and her brother were chosen for the ceremonial coin toss before the game.

The fountain is turned off at the ceremony and does not flow again until the spring.

Many of those in the crowd at Sanford Stadium on Saturday had not been born in 1970.

Molly wasn't old enough to tie her shoes or recite the alphabet.

She keeps the charm bracelet her mother left behind in a jewelry box. She will wear it on Saturday.

And even though she was too young to remember when it happened, she can never forget the pride she has always carried with her.

Ed Grisamore's columns appear weekly in The Macon Melody.

Crazy Uncle Kyle's myths and legends: The snake rat



Kyle Dominy

Gather 'round chil'ren and get ready for another lesson from good 'ol Uncle Kyle. I've been traveling the highways and byways of this wacky, weird and amazing land of ours, and it's time I bestow a little more wonder into your otherwise boring existences.

Now, it's come to my attention that many of you don't know the difference between fact and fiction anymore. That's probably because you spend too much time consuming information on social media. With computer advancements and artificial intelligence, it's never been easier to pull the wool over someone's eyes. By manipulating a few pictures and sound bites, you can make anyone in the world say or do anything you want them to. Just the other day, your favorite uncle (that's me, of course) dove headfirst into the worldwide web and found videos of Bigfoot narrating his adventures in the woods, including trying various food items, if you can call them that, from Taco Bell. He described the results in language most foul.

These are clearly fakes because I know Bigfoot and not only is he kind of a health nut but he's also quite well spoken and would never resort to the use of colorful language. In fact, he holds three university degrees, including one from the prestigious Harvard Law School.

But my adventures with Sasquatch are not what brought me here today. I want to tell you about another creature that calls the woods home – the snake rat. The following story is 100% true, except for the parts I made up or misremember due to the possible consumption of inebriants.

If you ever find yourself traveling rural Middle Georgia, down the Old Macon Road, a stretch of pavement that runs through parts of Laurens, Wilkinson and Twiggs counties (the dead center of nowhere), you might encounter the Old Macon Road Snake Rat. Half-snake, half-rat and all monster, the snake rat is just what it sounds like. It's got a long, thin body covered in greasy hair and carried about with four legs armed with sharp claws; it has a long snouted head with yellow, reptilian eyes; and a mouth full of teeth dripping with venom. It stalks its prey in silence, striking out and swallowing its victims whole.

The creature is too small to hurt a human, but it will hitch a ride as you pass by and decimate livestock and pets, much like its distant cousin, the Chupacabra. But it does significant damage to automobiles because it chews on wires and strips out insulation. Legend has it that if you park your car along an isolated stretch, get out and walk away at least 15 paces away, the Snake Rat will come and steal your catalytic converter. I'd try it, but I sold mine years ago.

Now, coincidentally, my cousin Geech, the same one that was beaten to death by out-of-work party clowns, lost a pet ferret before his timely death. You just trust your Uncle Kyle and stay in the car when driving in the middle of nowhere.

A bear of a true war story



Marc Hyden

It's not every day that spouses happen upon obscure pieces of history that fascinate them both, but that's exactly what happened to me and my wife. We — along with our child — traveled to the United Kingdom to celebrate my wife's birthday, and we planned to visit ancient Roman ruins and search for the ever-elusive good British food.

As we made our way northward, we spent a couple nights in Edinburgh, Scotland where we saw a curious sight that recalled a bear of a true story. Not far from our hotel was a bronze statue of a kind-looking bear and a World War II era soldier with an inscription that read "WOJTEK In memory of the Polish men and women who fought 'For Your Freedom and Ours.'"

Seeing a Polish memorial in Scotland does seem admittedly unusual, but I've seen weirder things. However, when you throw a bear into the mix, it becomes truly bizarre. The genesis of this statue stems from the story of a bear that was part frat boy, part pet and part soldier, and you can trace the seeds of its fame to Russia's invasion of Poland.

In September 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland and deported hundreds of thousands of Poles to the farthest reaches of the Russian hinterland, but when Nazi Germany decided to wage war against the Soviet Union, the Russians saw utility in the exiled Poles. As such, communist leadership decided to enlist them to fight against the Nazis.

A band of Poles subsequently made its way from a Siberian concentration camp to Alexandria, Egypt, but they stopped in the Middle East. It was in Iran that they discovered a bear cub whose mother had been killed by hunters, and the Polish soldiers quickly adopted the lovable Syrian brown bear. "Nursing the bear with condensed milk in a vodka bottle, the soldiers treated Wojtek like a baby, perhaps because their own families had been torn apart by the war," according to Time Magazine.

The troops raised the bear and named him Wojtek, which roughly translates to "joyous warrior." Much like the soldiers, Wojtek liked to wrestle, kick a soccer ball and acquired an insatiable taste for beer and cigarettes, "He would accept lit cigarettes, take a puff and swallow them," one of his Polish caretakers wrote. "He loved to drink from a beer bottle, and when it was empty, he would look through the opening to see where the rest of the beer was."

Wojtek was great for the Poles' morale, but the good-hearted rough-housing couldn't continue in perpetuity. Europe was in the throes of World War II, and Wojtek's friends were part of the 22nd Transport Company's Artillery Division in the Polish 2nd Corps, which was eventually deployed to Europe.

This deployment created challenges for the Poles. Soldiers generally aren't permitted to bring pets to battle fronts, let alone 500- or 600-pound bears, but they didn't want to part from their beloved Wojtek. So they got creative.

"When the Polish forces were deployed to Europe, the only way to take the bear with them was to 'enlist' him. So he was given a name, rank and number and took part in the Italian campaign," the BBC reported.

Once in Europe, the Poles participated in one of the fiercest battles in Italy — the Battle of Monte Cassino — and Wojtek supported his fellow soldiers on the front lines. "In one interview, a British veteran told how taken aback he was to see the 1.82m (6ft) bear carrying shells during the Battle of Monte Cassino," the BBC continued.

"He absolutely showed that he was scared by the explosions, but he got used to it and was carting artillery around the place in big boxes," a daughter of one of the Polish soldiers said. Another report claims that Wojtek was carrying boxes of spent ammo, but whatever assistance he provided, it was nothing short of amazing. The bear subsequently became famous, and the Polish division changed its insignia to that of a bear carrying a massive artillery shell.

In time, the war ended, but instead of transporting Wojtek back to the East where the Soviet Union may have used him in communist propaganda, the Poles ensured that he ended up in Scotland where he lived in the Edinburgh Zoo. One of his former Polish caretakers visited him afterward, and even though he considered crying a sign of weakness, he "sobbed like a baby" upon seeing his old friend.

Wojtek sadly died in 1963. In 2015, his statue became a permanent fixture in Edinburgh and has captured the imaginations of countless passersby, like my wife and me. If you make it to Edinburgh, you can pet the statue's nose and see Wojtek's cheerful smirk.

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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Not every job is built to last forever: A glimpse at bygone occupations in honor of Labor Day



Ed Grisamore

My wife and I took our boys to the circus when they were little.

We pointed out the lion tamers, trapeze artists and tightrope walkers. They got to see clowns, jugglers ... and an elephant taking a dump.

That's all they wanted to talk about on the way home – the elephant performing a bodily function in the middle of a three-ring circus.

Even though it was crude and embarrassing, all eyes were trained on the sideshow at the Macon Coliseum.

What I remember most was the poor guy whose job was to stand behind the elephant holding a large garbage can.

I did not attempt to explain it to my boys. Had they been older, I might have used it as a teaching moment.

Study hard in school so you won't have to shovel elephant manure.

I often wonder if that circus fellow got a promotion. Or if that job still exists. It's not exactly something you want to put on your resume.

Labor Day is a celebration of American workers. Maybe it should double as a memorial day.

Think about all occupations that have vanished, like the ferry boat captains at Dames Ferry. They were replaced when the bridge was built across the Ocmulgee at Ga. 18 in 1962.

And milkmen. Whatever became of those guys? I remember one came to our house when I was in about the fifth or sixth grade. It was in glass bottles back then. And there weren't so many options – organic, lactose free, almond, soy, cashew, coconut and oat.

Milk was milk.

My first job was a paper boy. I delivered newspapers on my bicycle in the afternoon. My mother — bless her — drove me around on my route in her station wagon on Sunday mornings when the papers were larger and heavier.

Now, newspaper carriers are practically an endangered species. The medium has been shifting to digital platforms and many printed editions are delivered through the mail.

Next Thursday, Sept. 4, is National Newspaper Carrier Day. I wonder how many paperboys are left to celebrate.

I have watched a parade of jobs that have changed or been eliminated in my lifetime.

The clock has run out on so many of them ... like clock repairmen.

At age 99, Raymond Hamrick was still repairing mechanical clocks and watches at Andersen Jewelers on Second Street. He was one of the few in the country who still did it.

Now, it has almost become a lost art. We have digital watches. Our phones and TVs keep time for us.

We live in a disposable society. We quit fixing things. We throw them away. Years ago, I had to hunt for somebody who could repair an answering machine. He leveled with me. I could buy a new machine for what it would cost to get it working again.

Geraldine Hudson sold men's clothes for more than 50 years in Macon, most of them at the long-closed Bowen Brothers Clothiers on Mulberry Street.

But before she entered the world of button-downs, she pushed the buttons on the city's first elevator at Jos. N. Neel Department Store. In 1961, the elevator operator at Jos. N. Neel called in sick, and Geraldine was eventually hired as her replacement, taking the customers between floors.

She later began answering the phones at the iconic department store. Switchboard operator is another job that is all but extinct.

We still have fossil fuel, but full-service gas stations have gone the way of the dinosaurs. The late Charles Hicks used to pump gas, check your oil, tires and wipe windshields. He began working at the Standard Oil at the corner of Broadway and Mulberry in 1949, when gas was 10 cents a gallon. He spent six years at a Gulf station on Vineville, then worked at the Amoco and Exxon stations on Riverside for almost 40 years.

Artificial Intelligence will continue to shape and restructure the American workforce. There are projections that 30% of American jobs will be automated in another five years and almost two-thirds will be significantly impacted.

I am fascinated and frightened at the same time.

The watch list of occupations possibly headed to the gallows includes everything from bank tellers to researchers, translators, lab technicians, postal workers, truck drivers, assembly line workers, paralegals, customer service representatives and telemarketers, to name a few. (I'm sure there won't be much pushback from the public on the telemarketers.)

Technology has taken over. I usually avoid the self-service checkouts at stores. So many things go wrong that you end up not saving that much time.

But my wife and I tried the new "Scan & Go" technology at Sam's Club a few weeks ago. It allows customers to scan items with their phones and pay as they shop. The company plans to phase out its self-checkout kiosks, as well as its traditional checkout lanes.

I was prepared to show my phone code to the lady who checks receipts at the door, but she waved me on through. I later learned that this AI technology verifies purchases through image classification as customers exit the store. I guess that means receipt checkers could be on the way out as well.

A few years ago, there was an Asian restaurant downtown near The Medical Center. A waiter or waitress would take your order then program a robot to bring the food to your table. It was amazing.

Earlier this week, I was telling a friend about cutting my own grass. Rather than going to the expense of hiring a lawn service, I still push that mower all over the yard. And I'm not getting any younger.

My grandson was sitting next to me and spoke up.

"Gris, why don't you get one of those robots that will cut your grass?" he asked.

"No way," I said.

"Then teach me how to cut your yard," he said.

I told him he was hired. In the future, he knows he has a summer job.

Sure beats the circus.

In his youth, Ed Grisamore fried chicken for Colonel Sanders, scooped 31 flavors at Baskin-Robbins and grilled ribeyes at Bonanza Steakhouse. He mixed Sherwin-Williams paint in the home improvement department at Kmart. Yes, latex was on his first bucket list.

Tips on saving tomato seeds at season's end



Photo provided by UGA Cooperative Extension

Several underripe tomatoes hang from a tomato plant. Bibb master gardener Rosann Kent has several tips for how to preserve seeds for the next season.

Rosann Kent
Bibb County Master
Gardener Extension Volunteer

As the growing season wraps up in Macon, capturing the future in a jar becomes both an art and a legacy for heirloom tomatoes you enjoyed this season. Saving seeds preserves and passes forward regional traits that thrive in our Georgia heat.

Here is what you need to know about saving tomato seeds, especially if you have never saved seeds before.

1. **Hybrid versus heirlooms.** Tomatoes are self-pollinating, making them reliable choices for seed saving. However, if the seed packet or catalog description contains the letters F1, or first generation, the seed is hybrid. Plants grown from the saved seed may not come back true to type, and the resulting plants next year may not be at all what you are expecting. Sometimes seeds saved from hybrid tomatoes might give you a little garden surprise. However, if you save the seeds of open-pollinated or heirloom varieties, the saved seeds will grow plants almost identical to the parent.
2. **Choose the right fruit:** Do not save the seeds of diseased tomatoes. Look for the healthiest, fully ripe (or even better, slightly overripe) tomatoes from vigorous plants.
3. **Ferment first.** The gel sac around the tomato seed needs to undergo a fermentation process before it is dried. Seed saving supplies do not have to be expensive: use recycled jars and secure an old piece of window screen with a rubber band as the lid. Scrape the pulp of the tomato in the jar and add equal amounts of water. Put it in a sunny place and wait two or three days. (Tip: This concoction will smell, so I use my back porch.) Stir the jar daily. This process takes three or four days — sometimes longer if there is a drop in temperature. The viable seed will fall to the bottom, and the gel and non-viable seeds will rise to the top. A white layer of mold will form. Pour off that top layer and any seeds that have risen to the top.
4. **Rinse thoroughly.** It takes more water than you would expect to clear away the gel and fermentation. Consider using a hose and an old strainer. When the seeds are no longer slimy, they are ready for the next step.
5. **Dry thoroughly.** Spread the cleaned seeds out on a non-stick surface like a coffee filter or paper plate. The wet clumps will not spread easily at first so continue to check the seeds every few hours until each seed is separate from the others. Let the seeds dry for a week or so. Avoid hurrying the process by using an oven or the direct sun.
6. **Store properly.** Put the dry seeds in small envelopes or recycled bottles and store away from sunlight. Label with the name of the variety and the month harvested. A small piece of paper rolled up inside the bottle is a good backup if the external label gets smudged. Also insert a small pack of silica gel. (I save those that come from electronics or other packaging.)

Saving the seeds of a pass-along plant takes a bit of time and effort, but preserving an old timey seed is worth it!

For more information on seed saving, visit UGA's website.

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

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Make the most of a long weekend with help from artificial intelligence



Joe Finkelstein

Labor Day weekend is upon us. It's the unofficial last blast of summer before pumpkin spice takes over everything. Maybe you've already got big plans, or maybe you're just trying to figure out how to squeeze a little fun into your long weekend without overthinking it. Either way, artificial intelligence can help make things easier, more interesting and maybe even a little more fun.

This isn't about robots taking over your barbecue. It's more like having a helpful sidekick that can plan a day trip, recommend a recipe or come up with something fun to do with your family or friends. Best of all, most of these tools are free or built into apps you already use.

Finding local events and happenings

Sometimes we forget what's going on right in our own backyard. Want to know if there's a food truck festival, concert or farmers market happening this weekend? Try asking ChatGPT or another AI assistant: "What's going on in Macon this Labor Day weekend?" Or use tools like Eventbrite or the app AroundMe, which can quickly show local events, live music or even which restaurants have good Labor Day deals.

You could also ask an AI model to find something off the beaten path like free museum days or outdoor movie nights. It's a fun way to stumble onto things you might not have known about otherwise.

Day trip ideas

Let's say you and a friend decide Saturday morning that you want to go somewhere new, but not too far. You can use a tool like Roadtrippers or Mindtrip.AI to map out a fun route. Just type in something like "one-day road trip from Macon within two hours with cool food and scenery," and you'll get back a full itinerary, directions, and even restaurant suggestions.

You can also keep it super simple and just ask ChatGPT, "Give me three unique day trip ideas from Macon," and see what it comes up with. I've gotten some great answers involving hidden parks, small-town diners and quirky roadside attractions.

No plans? No problem

Maybe you don't want to go anywhere. That's cool too. Long weekends are a great time to chill out. But if you're looking for low-key ways to mix things up at home, AI can still pitch in.

Want to cook something new? Ask ChatGPT or an app like Cookpad: "What can I cook with ground beef, rice, and bell peppers?" It'll generate recipes in seconds. Want to plan a themed movie night or game night? Just ask your favorite large language model (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini…), "Create a Labor Day movie marathon for my family," or "Suggest trivia categories for a backyard game night." The AI can build a whole night of entertainment, from food ideas to playlists.

You can also try AI art generators (like Bing Image Creator or Leonardo AI) to make printable coloring sheets for kids or funny postcards to share with friends. It's a way to add a creative spark to your downtime without spending much money.

Getting organized for future weekends

Here's a bonus idea. You can use this long weekend to plan for the next one. If you're the type who likes getting ahead, AI can help you build a simple calendar with ideas for future three-day weekends. Want to visit family in November? Check drive times and traffic forecasts. Want to make a holiday gift list? Ask for ideas based on your budget and interests. Some people even use AI to create group text messages or weekend packing lists.

It's like having a super-organized friend who doesn't mind doing the prep work.

Tools worth trying

Here are a few tools that play nicely with long weekends:

- ChatGPT — Just ask it for plans, ideas, routes, recipes, or activities.
- Mindtrip.AI — Try their AI trip planner.
- Eventbrite or AroundMe — See what's happening nearby.
- Roadtrippers — Plan custom routes for road trips, big or small.
- Cookpad — Type in ingredients, get a recipe (or five).
- Canva Magic Studio — Create flyers, photo collages, or fun graphics with AI help.

Most of these have free versions. If you're not sure where to start, just pull up your phone and try asking, "What's something fun I can do nearby today?" You might be surprised what pops up.

Take the pressure off

Not every weekend has to be jam-packed. But if you want to make the most of your time off, whether that means going somewhere new, cooking something different or just relaxing with a little more intention. AI can help you make it happen without a ton of effort.

So whether you've got big plans or no plans at all, have a great Labor Day weekend. And remember, with the right tools in your pocket, a little bit of inspiration is always just a tap away.

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

Tests, unfunded mandates, vouchers among school complaints to Georgia legislative panel

Ty Tagami
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA — When Georgia lawmakers asked what they could do to make the lives of educators a little easier, they got a predictable response: stop telling us what to do, especially if you will not pay for it.

The first hearing Tuesday of a House study committee on reducing mandates for public school administrators revealed concerns about an old law that mandates high-stakes testing, an even older state funding formula that has not kept up with costs, and two new laws.

The Early Literacy Act passed two years ago is an unfunded mandate that has forced school districts to cut back in key areas to pay for teacher retraining and new curriculum, said Mack Bullard, the superintendent in Twiggs County.

Technology does not get upgraded, he said. Fine arts, clubs and sports that keep students connected to school get cut. Safety improvements and facility repairs get skipped. And teachers do not get paid a competitive salary, leading to attrition.

"Every dollar we redirect to cover an unfunded mandate is a dollar that we take away from another essential service," Bullard told the panel, which convened in Warner Robins for a livestreamed meeting.

There were also complaints about Georgia's Quality Basic Education funding formula from the 1980s. It pays an average $18.75 per day for substitute teachers in Houston County, said Chris Brown, the deputy superintendent there. The $17,452 per year for secretaries does not cover their health insurance, which exceeds $22,000 annually, let alone their pay, he added.

Brown also pointed to the 2024 law giving students a $6,500 annual voucher if they leave a public school to attend a private one.

Those private schools do not have to face the same accountability measures as public schools, Brown said.

Rep. Shaw Blackmon, R-Bonaire, leads the committee. He said the concerns deserve further discussion. He said the next hearing will be Sept. 29.

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Kemp sending Ga. National Guard to support ICE efforts

Dave Williams
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA – The Georgia National Guard will deploy about 75 soldiers and airmen to help support U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations across the state, Gov. Brian Kemp announced Monday.

The request to support ICE in Georgia is not related to President Donald Trump's recent decision to deploy National Guard troops in Washington, D.C.

Kemp also emphasized that assigning the Georgia National Guard to work with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies is nothing new. The governor sent Guard troops to the Texas border with Mexico early last year, accusing the Biden administration of failing to secure the border.

"Under the bad policies of the prior administration, every state became a border state," he said. "I was one of the first to mobilize both personnel and policies to crack down on illegal immigration. … Georgia has led on this front for years and will continue to do so through this latest measure while still meeting all responsibilities and duties the Guard has to the state."

The Georgia Guard troops will not conduct law enforcement functions or make arrests. Rather, they will be providing administrative and logistical support including appointment scheduling, biometric collection, data entry and performing basic vehicle maintenance in order to free up ICE personnel for law enforcement activities.

Nonetheless, Democrats criticized the deployment decision as unconstitutional and unsustainable.

"As a retired naval officer, it goes against my core values and principles to use Georgia's National Guard for purposes beyond its lawful duties," said Georgia Rep. Derrick Jackson of Tyrone, one of several Democrats vying to succeed the term-limited Kemp as governor.

"I believe the brave men and women in uniform did not take an oath to use force against our citizens in the United States. Let me be crystal clear: the purpose of the Georgia National Guard is to defend against foreign threats and aid in natural disasters."

The Guard members assigned to the mission are scheduled to receive training in mid-September be on duty shortly thereafter.

Events

Chosen Family Feud — Macon Pride
Friday, Aug. 29
6 p.m.
543 Plum St.
Macon Pride is bringing you Chosen Family Feud, a benefit game show for LGBTQ+ resources that's guaranteed to have you laughing, cheering, and maybe even shouting answers from the crowd. Hosted by the duo Yutoya Avazé León & Christina León, with all proceeds supporting NOMO Organization.

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.

Macon Walk to End Lupus Now
Saturday, Sept. 13
10 a.m.
2551 Pierce Drive N.
Join the Lupus Foundation of America Georgia Chapter for the Walk to End Lupus Now season! According to the Georgia Department of Community Health, approximately 55,000 Georgians are living with lupus. This chronic autoimmune disease disproportionately affects women of childbearing age and is more prevalent among African American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American women. The Macon community's involvement would help bring much-needed awareness, education and encouragement to those impacted. Visit lupus.org/georgia for more information.

Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration
Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 13–14
10 a.m.
1207 Emery Highway
Hosted by the NPS & Ocmulgee Mounds Association in partnership with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, come celebrate Southeastern Native American cultures with traditional dances, music, storytelling, art, food and kids' activities. Admission is free and event parking is located at the Macon Bibb County Health Plaza.

"Into the Woods" — Macon Little Theatre
Sept. 5-14
Times vary
4220 Forsyth Road
A spellbinding journey unfolds as classic fairy tale characters cross paths in unexpected ways, facing wishes, consequences and the reality of "happily ever after." With a rich score, humor, and heartfelt moments, this enchanting production explores the magic and challenges of life, reminding us to be careful what we wish for.

Third Thursday Concert at St. Joseph
Thursday, Sept. 18
12:30 p.m.
830 Poplar St.
Gregory Hamilton will offer a program of American Music entitled "American Impressions," featuring the music of Hamilton (a world premiere) and Carson Cooman (Third Symphony for Organ).

From Our Kitchens:
Caramel Puff Corn: Eat your heart out, Buccee



Photo courtesy of Michelle Gowan

Michelle Gowan, former Bibb County educator and creator of Cookie Nip flavoring, holds two bags of her homemade caramel puff corn. Gowan teaches baking classes at Cookie Nip Studio Kitchen in Marietta.

Michelle Gowan
Special to The Melody

If you need a recipe for a perfect snack for a tailgate, a party or a long road trip, this is it.

You may be familiar with caramel puff corn if you happen to be a fan of a particular beaver with his own gas station, gift shop, barbecue restaurant and caramel coated beaver nuggets.

No matter when you make it or where you take it, you will never have any left over and everyone will want the recipe. And because you only need a few ingredients, a bowl and a microwave, you can totally make this deliciousness in a hotel room.

Cookie Nip is an artisan blend of butter, vanilla and salted caramel flavors. It is the reason these nuggets are more delicious than the beaver's and exactly why Buccee WISHES he had some Cookie Nip.

It was developed in Middle Georgia, is manufactured in Marietta and sold online and shipped all over the world.

Locally, you can pick it up at If It's Paper or you can order on Amazon or at cookienip.com. You can use it in any recipe that calls for vanilla extract but you definitely want it for this recipe.

Caramel Puff Corn

Ingredients

- 2 bags of butter flavored puff corn
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 stick butter
- ¼ cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon Cookie Nip flavoring
- Salt, if desired

You can kick it up a notch by packaging it with candy corn, M&Ms, chopped nuts or chocolate chips.

Directions

Begin with two bags of butter flavored Puff Corn. Chester Cheetah has a variety but so does Aldi. Pour the bags into a microwave safe bowl and set aside.

In a four-cup glass measuring cup, put a stick of butter, a cup of brown sugar and ¼ cup light corn syrup. Microwave for one minute and stir until butter is melted and sugar is incorporated.

Next, cook the mixture for three minutes in the microwave. It will bubble and boil but it won't overflow.

At the end of three minutes cooking, add 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of Cookie Nip and stir until the mixture puffs up and becomes a lighter color.

Don't make the mistake of adding the baking soda before it has finished cooking unless you want a sticky, caramel volcano to clean up in your microwave.

Pour the caramel syrup mixture over the puff corn and toss with a spatula to cover the nuggets. Place the bowl in the microwave and cook for one minute. Take it out and stir the puff corn.

Repeat this step two more times, being sure to take it out each minute and stir to prevent scorching the caramel. After three trips in the microwave for one minute each, pour the nuggets onto a cookie sheet and spread it out. If you like salty and sweet together, gently sprinkle a little salt on the caramel-coated nuggets.

Because we are in Georgia and constantly battling humidity, I will put the pan in the oven at 170 degrees for about a half hour if the humidity is high. Soggy nuggets are not as delicious as crispy nuggets. Break it apart when cool and store in an airtight container.

Retiring after 30 years in Bibb County classrooms, Michelle Gowan had planned to spend her golden years indulging her passion for baking cookies. She started teaching people to bake and decorate sugar cookies in her kitchen which ultimately led to the development of Cookie Nip, her signature flavoring.

After introducing the product into the baking world, production increased and it is now manufactured in Marietta and shipped all over the world. She co-owns the Cookie Nip Studio Kitchen in Marietta, where she continues to teach baking classes on weekends. Michelle also works in teacher support at the Academy for Classical Education.

Revue, from A8:

and invited them to come to town and see and hear it all for themselves.

Side note: guitarist McCook had to fly in for the G&G gig from Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheater where Eddie 9 Volt, whom McCook plays guitar for now, was opening for ZZ Top.

The debut album, "Macon Music Revue," hits stores and streaming services on Friday with the Grant's release party. It costs $10 to get in and you might want to get tickets early. You can get them through links at themaconmusicrevue.com and historicgrants.com. Appearing with Macon Music Revue on Wednesday will be Terminus Horn out of Atlanta who played on the album recorded at Capricorn Studios. Copies of the album will be available at Grant's and at Fresh Produce Records on Cherry Street.

***

Some upcoming events to get on your calendar:

- "Gidion's Knot" — Mercer Theatre/Tattnall Square Center for the Arts, Sept. 1-21.
- "Into the Woods" — Macon Little Theatre, Sept. 5-14.
- "Decision Height" — Warner Robins Little Theatre, Sept. 13-28.
- Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration — Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, Sept. 13-14.
- Ocmulgee to Okmulgee 2025 — McEachern Arts Center: an exhibit in conjunction with the Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration.
- "How to Train Your Dragon Jr." — Theatre Macon, Sept. 19 to 28.
- Macon-Mercer Symphony Orchestra — Piedmont Grand Opera House, Sept. 22.
- Mercer Fabian Concert Series: Chamber concerts at Fickling Hall beginning the 2025-26 season Oct. 7.
- "I Spy: For Your Ears Only" — Macon Pops, Oct. 10 at the Piedmont Grand Opera House.
- "Public Lies, Private Truths" — Mercer Opera/Fickling Hall, Oct. 30-Nov. 1.

And of course, next week is a chance to get out to galleries for openings and other downtown events for First Friday.

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Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

GOLDEN HOUR MENU: BRIGHT AND COLORFUL IDEAS FOR SUNSET MEALS



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

The final weeks of summer in September bring some of the most beautiful evenings filled with sunsets, soft breezes, and golden hour light. Enjoying late-summer meals on the patio with friends and family is a fantastic way to make the most of the light and healthy ingredients that are abundant during this season. This menu will give you fresh, colorful, and unique ideas to make any September sunset meal memorable.

Bright and Fresh Drinks

As summer days come to a close, September sunsets remind us of the garden harvest and bright, natural light. This Garden Gin cocktail strikes the perfect balance of sweet, spicy, and tangy, thanks to its gin base and additions of ginger beer and grapefruit juice. The soft pink-orange color mirrors the sunset and complements the fresh, bright flavor.

Alternative: For a non-alcoholic option, try this delicious Lavender Lemonade mocktail. The subtle purple and yellow hues match perfectly with the golden hour light. Make the lavender syrup ahead of time to chill until you're ready to pour a glass at the start of your sunset meal.

Sophisticated Appetizers

If you're enjoying a sunset dinner outdoors, imagine yourself on a beautiful European plaza, taking in the late-summer sights. Serving a sophisticated and healthy appetizer makes the experience all the more realistic. This Carrot Gazpacho is a simple, elegant addition to a sunset meal. A cold soup means your menu doesn't need to change if the weather is still hot, and the antioxidants and vitamins from the vegetables help keep the dish healthy. You can juice the carrots yourself or buy premade carrot juice at any health food store. Add ginger to the gazpacho instead of jalapeno for an earthier flavor.

Alternative: If your guests don't enjoy soup, offer these Greek Salad Bites that turn a commonplace side dish into sophisticated, bite-sized morsels.

Light and Colorful Main Dishes

Although September sunsets can bring chillier weather, it's still a wonderful time to grill outdoors. This Pork Tenderloin Served with Pineapple Salsa can be made in under 30 minutes on the grill, so you can enjoy your drinks and appetizers with a sunset view while the main dish cooks. Choose red bell peppers, cilantro, and even avocado to pair with the pineapple in your salsa so that the vibrant colors jump off the plate. With such a colorful and light addition to top this lean protein, you can rest assured that you'll have plenty of room left for dessert.

Alternative: For a vegetarian option, try this Asparagus Tofu Stir Fry. The yellow summer squash and green asparagus give the dish a bright pop of color and flavor that pair well with the hints of ginger and almond.

Unexpected Sides

Salads are a late-summer staple, but serving an unexpected combination of colors and flavors will give your meal an extra pop. This Grilled Corn and Blackberry Salad combines some of the best summer ingredients with rich hues and flavors that your guests won't soon forget; as a bonus, this colorful and unexpected side dish is full of antioxidants and fiber to help keep the meal healthier. If you're grilling the main dish, you can easily add the corn at the same time. The addition of radishes and avocado round out the textures and flavors, so don't skip these ingredients.

Alternative: Instead of a lettuce-based side, serve this Tomato, Peach, and Corn Salad as a side dish. The tomatoes and peaches complement each other surprisingly well, and the corn adds just the right amount of crunch to the dish.

Awe-Inspiring Desserts

Your final course during a golden hour meal should look and taste as amazing as the sky. This Prickly Pear Ice Cream is brilliantly bright, yet with a subtle, sweet flavor that makes it the perfect end to any dinner. You can find prickly pears at many health food or international grocery stores, and homemade ice cream makers are easy to find (especially at a thrift store!). If you don't have the ability to make ice cream at home, buy a rich vanilla at the store and drizzle Homemade Prickly Pear Syrup on top for a delightful alternative.

Alternative: For something dairy-free, try these Colorful Layered Fruit Jellies that you can make ahead and shape into any molds you have on hand. They look (and taste) like professional desserts despite their easy preparation.

Take advantage of the last colorful sunsets of summer with a meal that matches the atmosphere in both style and enjoyment.



Macon Music Revue's debut album release party, more upcoming community events



Michael W. Pannell

It's time for an overview of some things to come. Here are some highlights, like a significant album release party Friday at Grant's Lounge and a note on a traditional Labor Day event you won't get to attend this year.

First, what you can't do next week but will return in 2026. It's the annual McDuffie Center for Strings Labor Day Festival which brings eight select rising high school seniors to the McDuffie Center for an intensive, three-day workshop and close look at what the center offers.

The three days typically culminate in a free concert with the high school guests playing in chamber quartets and alongside current McDuffie students.

Patty Crowe, McDuffie operations manager, said concerts and scheduling conflicts among the center's faculty are preventing the 2025 festival but that it should return as normal for Labor Day next year.

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The Macon Music Revue has recorded its first album and is having an album release party Friday at 9 p.m. at – appropriately enough – Grant's Lounge on Poplar Street. It's $10 to get in.

Macon Music Revue is a preservation band dedicated to Macon and its musical history, much like the Preservation Hall Jazz Band is for New Orleans.

In fact, that's where the idea came from.

"We wanted to create a preservation band for Macon inspired by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band that would keep our musical traditions, personalities and songs alive," said Lisa Love, head of the Georgia Music Foundation. It was her idea to put a band together to do just that. Partnering with Visit Macon and others, the band came together featuring some of Macon's finest musicians. Band members are:

- Charles Davis, vocals
- Dustin McCook, guitar
- Ethan Hamlin, keyboards
- Caleb Melvin, drums, and
- Evan Bentzel, bass.

With Macon music at its core, the band brings a diverse range of music to every performance, from Soul to Blues to Rock and more. And, of course, Southern Rock.

Their debut album reflects that, too.

Band members have put their own touch on tunes while building an amazing repertoire of more than 140 songs honoring legends like Otis Redding, Little Richard, the Allman Brothers, Swamp Dog and others.

The eponymous debut album features 10 songs, including Little Richard's "Greenwood, Mississippi," Otis Redding's "Mr. Pitiful" and "These Arms of Mine," the Allman Brothers Band's "Stand Back" and R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion."

"Most people know Otis and the Allman Brothers and Little Richard, but most don't realize the role Macon played in hits like Elvin Bishop's 'Fooled Around and Fell in Love,'" Love said. "There's such a range and depth to the music that's come out of Macon, often far beyond what people normally think of. It's all worth preserving and the musicians of Macon Music Revue do an extraordinary job of it."

Love said there are many "full circle" aspects to the band and the album's release, including the fact that two band members, McCook and Bentzel, are themselves products of the Otis Redding Foundation's Otis Music Camps.



Photo courtesy Kevin Garrett

From left, Macon Music Revue members: Dustin McCook, guitar, Evan Bentzel, bass, Charles Davis, vocals, Caleb Melvin, drums, and Ethan Hamlin, keyboards. The group plays at Grant's Lounge every Wednesday at 8 p.m.

Grant's ties to Macon's music history, particularly the Allman Brothers Band and Capricorn heydays of the late 1960s and early 1970s, make it an ideal venue for the release party. Add to that the group plays each Wednesday at 8 p.m. at Grant's before locals and folks in town to take in the music tourism sites that have flourished in recent years.

I was there one Wednesday not too long ago and met a guy who had traveled from Scandinavia to do just that.

The band represents Macon wherever it plays and it's played gigs from Food Truck Fridays to Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium to shows in Savannah, Nashville, Tennessee, Little Rock, Arkansas and more. Most recently, they did a set on Garden & Gun magazine's long-running Back Porch Sessions music program in Charleston. Love said their performance brought Macon's music and stories to an audience of 30,000 but Garden & Gun claims an overall audience footprint higher than that.

In fact, Macon Music Revue brought their Macon sounds to potentially more than a million folks

See REVUE, Page A7

CITY OF WARNER ROBINS EVENTS

WR

INTERNATIONAL CITY FESTIVAL

SATRUDAY, SEPT. 6, 2025
11AM-6PM | PERKINS FIELD

Experience the world right here in Warner Robins! The International City Festival will feature global cuisine, cultural performances and family fun as we celebrate why Warner Robins is the International City.

SEPTEMBER FOOD TRUCK ROUNDUP

THURSDAY, SEPT. 18, 2025
5PM-9PM | PERKINS FIELD

Let's "Go Green" at the September Food Truck Roundup! Enjoy tasty eats, family fun, and a special partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Don't forget to wear green to support all of the mentors in our community.

WARNER ROBINS BURGER • WEEK

SEPTEMBER 19-28

Warner Robins Burger Week brings together 20 local businesses serving up their own unique burger creations —celebrating community, creativity, and the tastes that make our city one of a kind.

TAKE FLIGHT!



Mark Powell / For The Melody

Northeast's opportunistic defense greets Southwest freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Sapp (37) during the two teams' game last week. The contest became the talking point of Week 2 in Middle Georgia for the wrong reasons when the two teams got into a brief fight that led to the game getting suspended.

HS Football: Week 2 notes, Week 3 matchup previews

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

After a tumultuous Week 2 that saw most Macon teams play on the road, plenty of Bibb County high schools will have intriguing games in Week 3.

The story of the second week of the 2025 season was easily the scuffle that put a premature end to the Northeast-Southwest showdown at Thompson Stadium last week.

A hard hit on Patriots quarterback Chase Dupree — followed by some chatter between linemen on each team — led to Southwest players sprinting from the bench to the middle of the field, where Northeast players followed as a brief brawl ensued.

There was a swarm at midfield for roughly a minute as tempers flared. Some players from the two teams got entangled, falling to the ground in the affray. After the scrum ended, officials suspended the game and declared the Raiders the winners with a 30-8 final score.

The GHSA is investigating the fight using a high-quality camera — every GHSA stadium in Macon has one — to fully assess the situation, a Bibb County school board member told The Melody.

Players who leave the bench area of a game are typically suspended for a game, the school board member said. Per GHSA's constitution, schools that have players leave the bench to go toward a fight could also be fined between $250 and $1,000 by the GHSA.

The GHSA had not announced any suspensions, fines or other discipline as a result of the scuffle as of Wednesday afternoon, so Macon's high school football slate for Week 3 should remain intact. Here are other notes from last week, along with previews of some key matchups involving Bibb County teams.

Northeast (1-1) vs. Washington County (0-2), at Thompson Stadium, 7:30 p.m.

Last meeting: Northeast won 42-9 in 2024; Last week: Northeast defeated Southwest 30-8, Washington County lost to Jefferson County 29-7

After last week's rivalry game ended in unsavory fashion, the Raiders will try and get back on track pending any GHSA sanctions.

Northeast should have a good opportunity to do so against a Washington County team looking to build some momentum. The Golden Hawks lost in heartbreaking fashion against Jeff Davis in Week 1 — the Yellow Jackets won 21-20 in overtime — before struggling in the first half against Jefferson County.

Washington County picked things up in the home opener though, scoring all 29 of its points after the intermission and thoroughly containing Jefferson County. Rekevious Swint finished with more than 100 rushing yards in the victory.

Northeast got a solid rushing performance in its abbreviated contest, too, as linebacker Tailen Sampson doubled as a weapon on the ground for the Raiders. In just more than a half of football, Northeast's offense looked much better against Southwest than it did in the season-opening loss against Peach County.

The Golden Hawks lead the all-time series 10-6, but the Raiders have won the last four straight, including a blowout last year in head coach Robert Edwards' first season at the helm for WaCo. This showdown will be Northeast's first true home game this year, though they did play at Thompson Stadium last week as the away team.

FPD (2-0) vs. St. Anne-Pacelli (1-1)

Last meeting: St. Anne-Pacelli won 18-6 in 2024; Last week: FPD defeated Marion County 42-7, St. Anne-Pacelli defeated Tattnall 28-6

FPD is off to a monster start as it attempts to reach the GIAA Class 4A state title game for the third consecutive season, as the Vikings defeated a pair of GHSA teams handily in their first two games.

Now FPD will look for some revenge against a fellow GIAA 4A team as St. Anne-Pacelli comes to town with a new head coach, Walter Grider, who comes to the Columbus school after coaching at Alabama high schools for several seasons.

Pacelli's start has not been as scorching as FPD's. Stratford defeated Pacelli 49-17 in the season opener, though Pacelli did bounce back against a strug-

See FOOTBALL, Page B3

Mercer prepares for Presbyterian

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

After a strange weekend with a weather delay, a comeback attempt cut short and a long bus ride back to town, the Mercer Bears are ready for a reset.

They'll certainly get one. After all, the team's opener against UC Davis in Montgomery for the FCS Kickoff classic technically never happened, according to the official records — the stats from the three-plus quarters of play were voided when lightning led to the game being called a "no contest" Saturday.

Still, the team learned a lot from the rain-delay debacle that unfolded in Montgomery over the weekend at the FCS Kickoff Classic game against UC Davis.

"We need to start faster," head coach Mike Jacobs said simply in a press conference Monday afternoon.

Jacobs and the Bears struggled in the first half against the Aggies and went down 23-3 at one point in the third quarter. Key mistakes — missed sacks on eventual touchdown plays, fumbles in the red zone and special teams miscues — were the difference for Mercer in its opening game.

"It just came down to shooting ourselves in the foot ... We couldn't get out of our own way in the first half," Jacobs said. "The way I look at that, most of the penalties were not out of our control. The things that we didn't do great can be corrected."

With about five minutes left in the third quarter, though, the Bears found their footing and turned on the jets. Junior running back Autavius Ison provided the momentum swing almost single-handedly, as his 69-yard touchdown run finally got Mercer into the end zone and began a turnaround.

The Bears followed that score up with a nice stand on defense, then put

See MERCER, Page B2

Notepad

FPD, Tattnall start hot in softball

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

While some weather delays impacted schedules across town, Macon's softball teams mostly stuck to the status quo last week as the season continued to unfold.

FPD and Tattnall stayed hot, as the Vikings improved to 12-1 despite one game getting cancelled while the Trojans moved to 6-3.

Tattnall's 11-8 loss against Loganville Christian Academy was sweetened by an impressive victory over Westfield, a longtime area rival, on Tuesday.

The Trojans rode great performances from the Still sisters to a thrilling 8-7 win over the Hornets. Both sisters had three hits while Anna Still drove in five runs. Callie Still pitched five innings, allowing two earned runs on seven hits.

Westfield had the lead for most of the game after a five-run third inning, but the Trojans clawed back with runs in the third and the fifth. The key blow was delivered in the seventh when, after a back-and-forth affair, Abigayle Baugh crushed a two-run homer to give Tattnall the lead for the first time since the first inning.

FPD extended its winning streak to seven games with victories on back-to-back days to start the week. The Vikings first defeated CFCA 11-3 on Monday, then got a 7-1 win over Jasper County on Tuesday in the second matchup of the year between the two teams.

Gracyn Fuller stole the show for FPD, pitching a no-hitter against Jasper County and striking out 17 batters in the process. The one run was scored after some errors by the Vikings. On the offensive side, Junior Mallie Moughon collected five hits combined over the two games while Lyric Jones and Addison Arnold each homered.

ACE is 4-4 so far after a tough opening schedule,

See NOTEPAD, Page B2

Henley ties for second at Tour

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

In the past, when Tommy Fleetwood came into Sundays with a lead, he fell short and returned to the field.

This time was different, unfortunately for Macon native Russell Henley.

Fleetwood pulled ahead after the first hole Sunday, and held off challengers like Henley breathing down his neck to close out his first PGA Tour win, taking home $10 million and the Tour Championship as well as the FedEx Cup title.

Henley was in a crowded group atop the leaderboard for 14 holes, but couldn't manage a second birdie to put any pressure on Fleetwood or Patrick Cantlay.

The Stratford grad and Bibb County legend finished tied for second with Cantlay, who just missed a 12-footer on 18 for sole possession of second, and $5 million himself.

As it is, Henley — after his 10th top-10 finish in 2025 — and Cantlay take home $4.35 million.

Henley was close almost all day, with his longest putt of only four feet. He finished the day with 90 feet and 2 inches of putts made.

His putter may have been tired.

After covering 207 feet, four inches of made putts in the first round, Henley had 152 feet and 6 inches of made putts in the next three rounds.

Sunday, he didn't go backward until No. 15, but spent the day coming close to going forward, finally managing a second birdie on No. 17. But that only pulled him within three of Fleetwood and in sole possession of third.

It's the first time this year that Henley has had a two-birdie/one-bogey round.

Since missing the PGA Championship cut in mid-May, Henley's worst finish is a tie for 17th last week at the BMW. And in 28 rounds since then, he has

See HENLEY, Page B3



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Russell Henley follows through on a shot from the fairway during his stellar Tour Championship effort last week. Henley, a Stratford Academy graduate, tied for second with Patrick Cantlay, bagging $4.35 million for his efforts. Henley opened this year's Tour Championship with a 61.

Mercer, B1:

together a more balanced drive with chunk plays that ended with quarterback DJ Smith finding the end zone on a tush-push run.

"I think Tay's run was what got us back into it. I thought that was, 'Alright, hey, we're done.' The jitters, whatever was holding us back, we've gotten out of our own way. This is who we are," Jacobs said of the explosive score from Ison, who transferred to Mercer from Charleston Southern this offseason.

"Tay had had a tremendous year at Charleston Southern. So we expect big things and we really had seen it from him all through spring and all the training camps."

After yet another defensive stand — Mercer got a few fingers on one UC Davis field goal try and blocked another entirely — the Bears had all the momentum on their side as they drove downfield. The weather delay was called with just under eight minutes to play while Mercer had the ball inside Aggies territory with the score at 23-17.

"I've coached for 23 years. I've been a part of wins, I've been a part of losses, I've been a part of ties. Not many, but I have. But to be part of something that didn't exist? I don't know. I told somebody, it's like the scene in 'Back to the Future 2,' where the world is run by Biff Tannen," Jacobs joked. "We're in a parallel universe. It happened, and it didn't. It was strange."

Mercer athletic director Jim Cole explained that the game was declared a no contest because the lightning was staying put over Montgomery and the city ordinance on the stadium, the Carlton Bowl, would not allow the game to be played past midnight. UC Davis also had no hotel accommodations and needed to fly back to California that night — or morning, rather.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Mercer football head coach Mike Jacobs at a Aug. 25 press conference. Mercer played against UC Davis on Saturday in Montgomery but the game was canceled because of weather and ruled a no-contest. The Bears were down 23-3 at one point in the third quarter before the game was called off.

Once it was clear that the game would not be finished, it was up to Cole and UC Davis' athletic director to agree on the game's official status. They agreed to call the game a no contest.

Still, the Bears learned plenty. Jacobs said he was surprised with his squad in a lot of pleasant ways once the second half came around.

"I think defensively, other than maybe a handful of plays, I think the D-line room, although by committee, we knew was still going to be a really strong unit for us," Jacobs said. "I think there were a lot of question marks about 'what is that linebacker room going to look like? Can we come close to matching the production of three all-time greats in that room?'

"I think those guys came in and played really at a high level. I thought in general with some of the question marks there, we were good."

Defensive lineman Jordan Swain, responsible for one of the field goal blocks, said his team learned a lot even if the stat sheet won't reflect it as the season rolls on.

For one thing, he got to recall — not learn, as he had put the kibosh on a kick before in his Mercer career — what a blocked field goal feels like.

"It actually doesn't hurt that bad. It's kind of a good thump, like blocking a shot in basketball," Swain said, smiling.

Swain said a harder lesson was taught by opposing quarterback Caden Pinnick. The redshirt freshman was red-hot in the first half for UC Davis, and his mobility created some problems for the Mercer defense.

"We knew coming in that they had a new quarterback and that he was mobile, but you don't really see it until you get out there on the field. There were times where we had him in our grip but he just slipped out, kind of Kyler Murray-esque," Swain said. "I was talking to my pops about him the other day, we were raving about him. So that was a good challenge for the D-line."

The defense eventually settled in at around the same time the offense did following Ison's huge touchdown run, a play that brought a sense of relief to some of the players.

"It definitely felt like (Ison) lifted the elephant off the shoulders right there," offensive lineman Blake Martin said. "(We'd been) seeing that happen all of training camp, we'd break off a couple big runs. Seeing it happen and come to fruition in a game, it really shows you that all your hard work's not wasted."

Mercer will have its first official game Saturday as it hosts Presbyterian to open the home schedule for the second straight year. The Bears defeated the Blue Hose 63-10 last season 500 total yards of offense and a defense that held Presbyterian to -7 yards rushing.

The game kicks off at 6 p.m. in Mercer's Five Star Stadium.



Photo Courtesy Mercer Athletics

Larkin Thomason lines up a kick in an Aug. 25, 2024 game against UNC-Asheville. Thomason transferred to Alabama in the offseason after scoring 16 goals for the Mercer women's soccer team last season en route to winning the Southern Conference Player of the Year award. Thomason and the Tide will play against Mercer in Tuscaloosa at 8 p.m. Friday.

Notepad, B1:

though the Gryphons are 3-1 in region play. They lost a crucial matchup 8-5 against region rival East Laurens on Tuesday for their first defeat against a region opponent this season.

It was a pitcher's duel early as the Falcons took a 1-0 lead in the first inning that lasted until the top of the fourth, when ACE broke through with three runs courtesy of a walk and a trio of singles.

But East Laurens got a barrage of runs across the ensuing three frames — they scored twice in the bottom of the fourth to tie it, then plated three in the fifth inning and two more in the sixth inning — to pull away with the win.

The Gryphons did score two more in the sixth, but the comeback fell short. The offensive effort, while not enough for a win, was a good one. ACE spread nine hits across seven innings and seven different Gryphons each got at least one hit in the contest.

One of the most important games of the season unfolded Thursday evening, after The Melody went to print, when ACE hosted Dublin to face off with its former head coach Josh McLendon, who now leads the Irish. Read full coverage of the game at maconmelody.com.

Mercer to face former Bears star in key soccer match

The Mercer women's soccer team will go up against a familiar face when they take on the Alabama Crimson Tide on Friday.

Larkin Thomason, who scored an incredible 16 goals for the Bears last season to lead the team and the entire Southern Conference, transferred to Alabama during the offseason. Now Thomason and the Tide will host Mercer in Tuscaloosa at 8 p.m. Friday.

The Bears enter the matchup 1-1 after losing 2-0 to No. 22 Oklahoma State on the road to start the season, then getting their first win at home with a 1-0 victory over West Georgia. Maria Karipidis scored the first goal of Mercer's season when she netted one after a neat cross from Payton Nutzman in the 77th minute of the match.

Alabama is 4-0 coming into the contest with wins over Louisiana Tech, Michigan and two of Mercer's fellow SoCon teams, Samford and Chattanooga.

Thomason had her best game thus far with Alabama in its showdown with the Wolverines, as she notched a goal and an assist against the Wolverines. The reigning SoCon Player of the Year has played 117 minutes so far with the SEC squad.

Mercer men win, draw to start season

The men's team got two home games to start the season and went 1-0-1 with a win against Oglethorpe on Aug. 22 and a draw with Evansville on Sunday.

Both the Bears and Aces scored in the first 25 minutes of Sunday's match before things quieted down. Mercer keeper Henry Hempshaw made several clutch saves to keep the match a draw. Liam Corr scored the Bears' lone goal off an assist from grad student Junior Casillas, who now has three assists in addition to a goal through only two games after transferring in from Omaha this season.

After a road match with Memphis on Thursday, the Bears will take on Lipscomb in Nashville on Sunday.

In other Mercer soccer news, former Bears standout keeper Trevor McMullen signed a pro contract last week, joining Birmingham Legion FC on Saturday.

FPD, Stratford win categories at cross country meet

FPD hosted a cross country meet Tuesday which saw several solid team and individual performances from Macon schools and their athletes.

Stratford's girls team won first place overall in the 5K, with Ellie McMahon finishing second and Annie Garner coming in fourth. Campbell McIntyre, Mary Marshall Swift and Tinsley Loyd finished in 10th, 11th and 12th for Stratford, respectively.

FPD's girls finished fourth, with Megan Casey earning the highest Vikings finish at 14th.

FPD won first overall in the boys 5K, however, thanks to a third place finish from Daniel Moughon and a 10th place finish by Ty Hendley. It was a team effort for the Vikings, as Northside had the top two individual finishes but could not match FPD's marks across the board. Vikings runners finished in third, 10th, 13th, 23rd and 24th.

Stratford's boys placed sixth overall, though they did have two runners in the top 10. Joshua Dreher finished seventh, while Jon Emory Hall placed ninth.

ACE picks up where it left off, knocks off Central 35-0 in weather-delayed showdown



Mark Powell / For The Melody

ACE running back Bryson Vincent makes his way through a tangle of Central defenders during the Gryphons' 35-0 victory against the Chargers Monday. Vincent and his younger brother, Brayden, led ACE to the win thanks to some dominant rushing performances.

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

The debut of Monday Evening Football for ACE Charter and head coach Keith Hatcher went pretty well.

"I've been coaching for well over 20-plus years now," Hatcher said. "And this is the first Monday game I've ever coached in.

"You never know how kids will respond to something like this."

ACE showed some energy and sharpness from the start of the game — which began Thursday but was finished Monday because of a lightning delay — by scoring on the first play from scrimmage en route to a 35-0 win Monday over Central at Ed DeFore Sports Complex.

Thursday's game was stopped with ACE up 7-0. The Gryphons scored on their first possession thanks to Brayden Vincent, the younger brother of main running back Bryson Vincent, going in from 12 yards out to end a nine-play, 66-yard drive.

They got the ball back after Drake Davidson sacked Central quarterback Wyquavis Gaither for a 6-yard loss on fourth and 7. The Chargers ended two possessions on Thursday in ACE territory.

Thursday's action ended when Noah Syme dropped the handoff on a sweep and the Gryphons lost 14 yards.

That was but a distant memory under a nice sun on Monday.

Quarterback Brady Balkcom — in charge for a few weeks until Ace Hatcher returns from groin-area surgery — faked a sweep and hit a wide-open Syme, who got loose when a Central defensive bit too hard on the fake, for an easy 75-yard touchdown on the first play.

"We had run the jet a couple times in the first quarter," Hatcher said. "We felt like we saw something on film that would be there. They bit on the jet. (Offensive coordinator Thomas) Darrah did a great job of seeing something on film that we thought would work, and it did."

On the other side was a struggling Central program that had held its own for that first quarter.

"It was something we had just gone over 15 minutes earlier," Central head coach Jarrett Laws said. "ACE does a very good job of making you count, and it was a youthful mistake. The kid thought he was one thing, and didn't believe his eyes.

"On Thursday, we were pretty good in our count. Then we came out today, and I don't think they anticipated having to make that count that early, even though it was mentioned."

With momentum clearly on the visitors' side, Central went three-and-out — sabotaged by a delay of game on third-and-1 — and ACE strolled seven plays, all Bryson Vincent runs, and covered 40 yards for a 21-0 lead with 6:16 left in the half.

The Chargers ran eight plays before settling for a field goal that missed.

The same scenario followed, as ACE standout kicker Henry Carter got off to an uncharacteristic start and missed field goals of 39 and 45 yards in the second quarter.

"Our best player out there, man," Hatcher said of Carter with a chuckle. "He'll be fine."

The knockout blow came on ACE's first possession of the third quarter, which covered 65 yards on nine plays — sparked by a 20-yard keeper by Balkcom — with Vincent getting the final 5 yards, and it was 28-0 with 8:20 left in the third.

They finished up the scoring on Vincent's 1-yard touchdown 72 seconds into the fourth quarter.

"We left a couple opportunities on the (field) early," Laws said. "One thing we talk to them about is, the type of offense we're running and the type of defense we're running, execution is paramount.

"So when the door opens, you've got to rush through it."

The Gryphons (1-0) did that, especially up front.

"We've got a lot of inexperience on the defensive line, so to see those guys play well ...," Hatcher said. "More importantly, they played really hard every snap. Made some mistakes, played really hard, and effort made up for it a lot.

"We were real simple with our game plan, and we did that because of some of the inexperience at different spots."

The Gryphons ran 46 times for 254 yards and completed 5 of 11 passes for 92 yards.

The Chargers were held to 25 yards on the ground, and managed 167 yards through the air on 8-of-17 passing.

Bryson Vincent had a quality game with 142 yards and three touchdowns on 26 carries. Brayden Vincent added 72 yards and a score on seven carries.

"We've got to continue to try and take an incremental step," said Laws of his 0-2 team. "A couple of key positions, we showed our youth and inexperience. You've got to take a little bit of pain with the joy."

Henley, from B1:

shot 70 or better 18 times.

Henley opened last year's Tour Championship with a 61 and closed with a 69 for a 17-under — adjusted with normal scoring — 269 to tie for fourth.

He opened this year's Tour Championship with a 61, and concluded with a 69 for a 15-under 265.

Fleetwood and Cantlay were the final group, just after Henley and Keenan Bradley. The four were together on the leaderboard most of the day, with Scottie Scheffler lurking, joined by Cameron Young and Corey Conners and Bradley falling behind late.

Henley had company with Cantlay and Bradley in a tie for second much of the afternoon, with Scheffler trying to join them.

Cantlay dug a hole with a double bogey on No. 2 after opening with a bogey.

Fleetwood got off to a solid start and marched out a 3-shot lead within a few holes, then Henley played it fairly close to the vest, getting a birdie on No. 3 and pars the rest of the way through the front nine, highlighted by another sweet sand save for par on No. 8.

He and Bradley made the turn tied at 15 under for the tournament.

Bradley dropped from the trio with a bogey on 10, with Henley leaving himself a short par putt after a 59-5 shot was close to a birdie.

Fleetwood's tee shot on No. 10 went into the left rough amid trees. He escaped safely, but was left with 69 yards to the pin on the par 4. His 12-footer for par was just right, dropping him to 17 under and one up on Cantlay, who birdied the hole for sole possession of second.

Henley just missed a birdie putt on 12 to tie for second.

At that point, Fleetwood led Cantlay by one, Henley by two, and Bradley, Scheffler and Young by three.

That didn't last long, Cantlay bogeying No. 11 after a tee shot to the bunker, dropping him into a tie for second with Henley, two back.

Scheffler's 17-foot birdie putt on 14 lifted him into a tie with Henley and Cantlay.

Still in need of a birdie or two, Henley missed one on 13 by an inch.

The leaderboard cleared by a spot when Scheffler stunned the crowd by going too far left on the par-3 15 and going straight into water. His bogey putt of 12 feet was just left for the double bogey.

Conners was the first among contenders to finish, going in with an 8-under day and tying for fifth, while the other contenders were on 15 or later.

Cantlay's 23-foot birdie on 12 put him back in second by himself, Fleetwood restoring the lead to two with a birdie moments later.

Henley's sharp 5-iron approach from the right intermediate left him an 8-footer for birdie, but he was just right, settling for his 11th straight par.

It was still Fleetwood, Cantlay and Henley, with Bradley, Young, and Conners tied for fourth.

Henley's contention then came to an end when his tee shot over the water on No. 15 sailed and rolled off the green and down a hill, resting on the fringe of the low rough and intermediate, a tough lie.

Just before that, Fleetwood took a 3-shot lead with birdies on 12 and 13, and three players were right behind Henley.

Henley didn't hit his second shot well, and it landed barely on the edge of the green, a not-so-smooth 17-footer left for par. It peeled off to the right for a bogey and a temporary four-way tie for third, two back of Cantlay.

And five behind Fleetwood with three to play for Henley.

He slipped into a tie for second moments later when Cantlay bogeyed No. 16, putting them three behind Fleetwood.

His chance for sole possession of second, at least temporarily, lipped around the left side of the hole on 18, leaving him with a par to finish.

A little time off is next before Henley — in the top 5 in both the FedEx Cup and Official World Golf Rankings — begins preparing for his Ryder Cup debut from September 26-28 in New York.



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Russell Henley follows the ball after a shot from the fairway. Henley tied for second at the Tour Championship, which concluded on Sunday.

Football, B1:

gling Tattnall program last week for a 28-6 win.

FPD lost the only meeting between the two teams last season, though that was under longtime Georgia coaching icon Dwight Jones. If the Vikings of Macon continue their red-hot ways of late — they scored 28 points in the first quarter alone last week against Marion County — then they may defeat the Vikings from Columbus.

Tattnall vs. George Walton

Last meeting: Tattnall won 20-14 in 2024; Last week: Tattnall lost to Pacelli 28-6, George Walton defeated Lake Oconee Academy 13-6

It will be familiar territory for returning Tattnall coach Barney Hester as the Trojans host the Bulldogs in their first home game of the season after a rough start through two games.

While last year's win for Tattnall was the first duel between the two teams since 2009, Hester notched an impressive 16-5 record against George Walton as the Trojans' head coach, including an eight-game winning streak against the Bulldogs in the 1990s and a six-game streak from 2004-2009.

But the last time the Bulldogs saw Hester — in that same 2009 season, this time in the playoffs — they got revenge and knocked Tattnall out of the postseason in the semifinals.

Now George Walton and fifth-year head coach Logan Beer catch Hester and the Trojans at a vulnerable moment following an 0-2 start. The Bulldogs themselves are a sizzling 2-0 after a 44-6 romp over cross keys and a closer 13-6 win over Lake Oconee Academy.

Tattnall had trouble containing St. Anne-Pacelli's rushing attack. George Walton's running back senior Zach Wolf and run-threat quarterback AJ Dillard could take advantage of that. The Bulldogs have attempted only 11 passes through two games, according to MaxPreps statistics.

Southwest @ Dublin

Last meeting: Dublin won 56-34; Last week: Southwest lost 30-8 against Northeast, Dublin game against East Laurens postponed to bye week

As if last week's injury to Chase Dupree and subsequent scrum against the Northeast Raiders was not enough, Southwest must also continue contending with one of the most difficult early schedules in the area.

While Northeast played in last year's GHSA Class A-Division I title game last year, Dublin came within a game of it before losing to eventual champion Toombs County in the semifinals. While it may have lost a lot of talent, Dublin is still a top-tier program in Middle Georgia.

That said, the Irish got off to a slower start than expected against Swainsboro, losing a 15-14 barnburner in front of their home crowd. Last week's game got postponed, so Dublin is likely itching for a reset as Southwest comes to town.

As of Tuesday night, no players for the Patriots were suspended or injured as a result of last week's scuffle, but it seems likely that quarterback Chase Dupree will have to miss at least one game due to injury.

Dublin owns a 6-1 lead all-time in the series and has won the last four straight dating back to 2016, when Southwest got its lone win in the matchup via a 48-38 shootout in Macon. The Patriots looked listless on offense in the abbreviated game against Northeast and will need to find more of an advantage running the ball at the Shamrock Bowl.

Other games and team updates

ACE and Central each have short weeks because they completed their game on Monday after the initial game Aug. 21 was halted by lightning.

The Gryphons dispatched of the Chargers with ease in a 35-0 win and will try to carry that momentum into a home game with Jefferson County, which eventually lost to Washington County last week but gave the Golden Hawks trouble in the first half.

Central will host Dodge County, which comes to Macon off a thrilling 31-29 win against rival Bleckley County.

Westside struggled in a tough 43-22 loss against one of Georgia's top high school football programs, Prince Avenue Christian, in Athens last week. The Seminoles tallied less than 100 yards each rushing and passing while allowing more than 400 yards of offense.

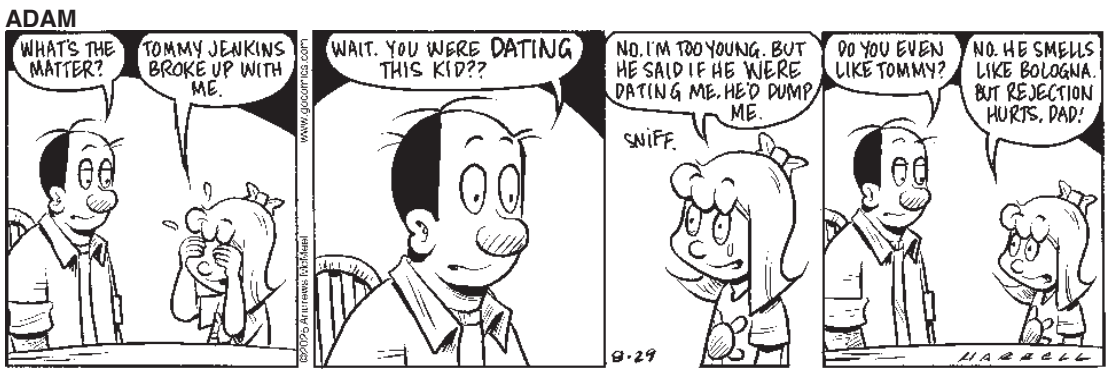
Another difficult road trip awaits Westside as it travels to Albany this week to face Westover, though the Patriots' only game so far was a surprisingly close 24-20 victory over Early County.

Covenant Academy got a key bounceback win after getting shut out by Georgia Christian at home in its season opener, rolling to a 46-6 win over Crisp Academy. Three different Rams rushed for more than 50 yards in the victory. Covenant hosts Holy Spirit Prep this week.

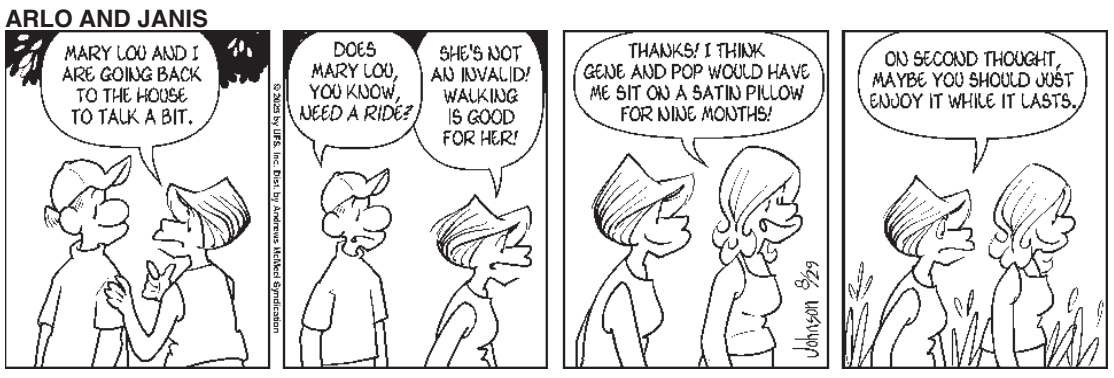
Rutland and Howard faced off Thursday night, after The Melody went to print.

Visit maconmelody.com for full coverage of this week's action.

ADAM



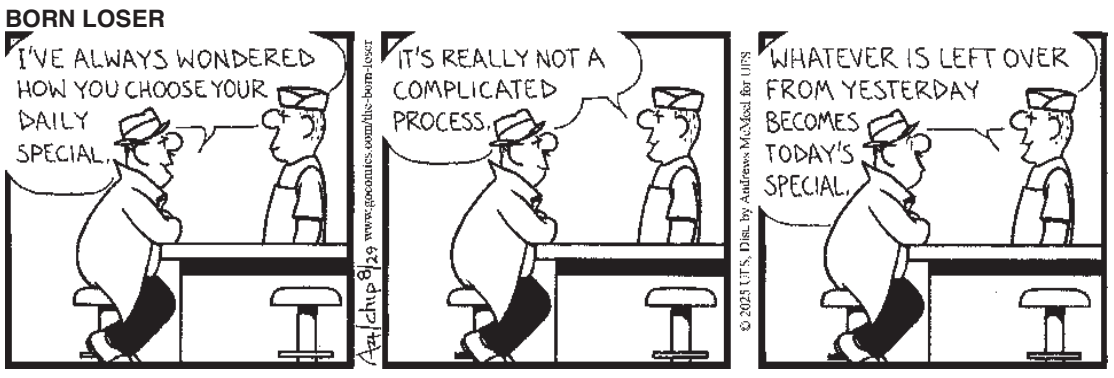
ARLO AND JANIS



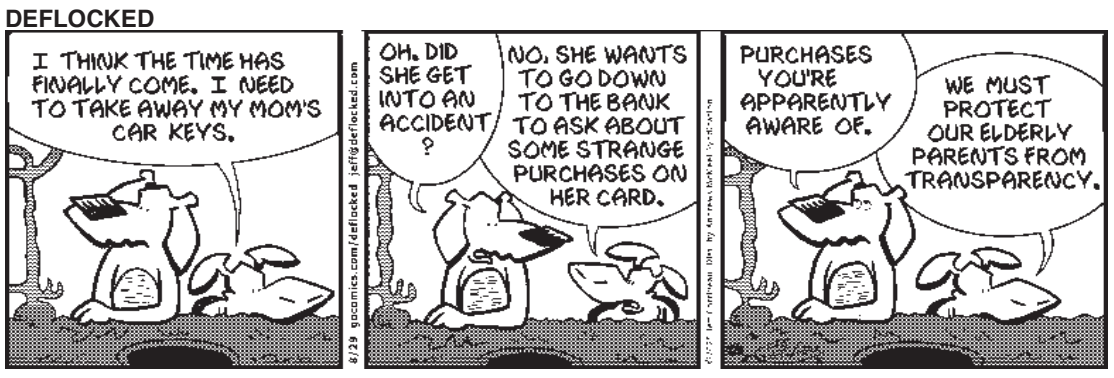
BIG NATE



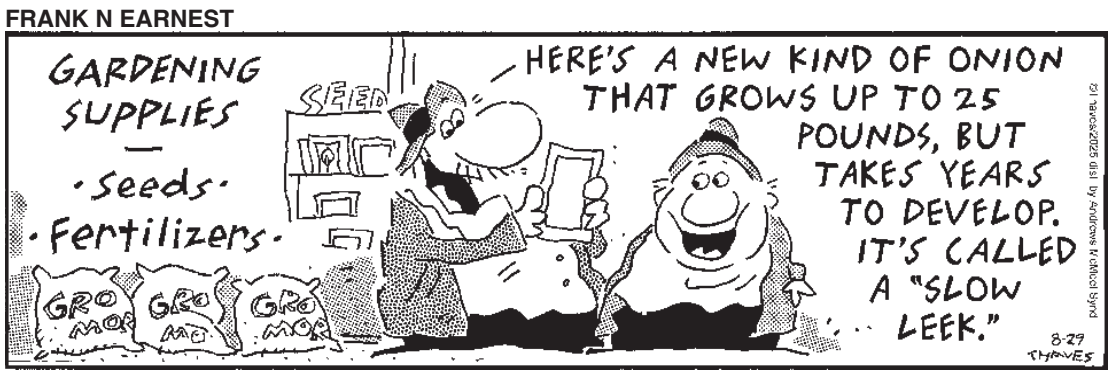
BORN LOSER



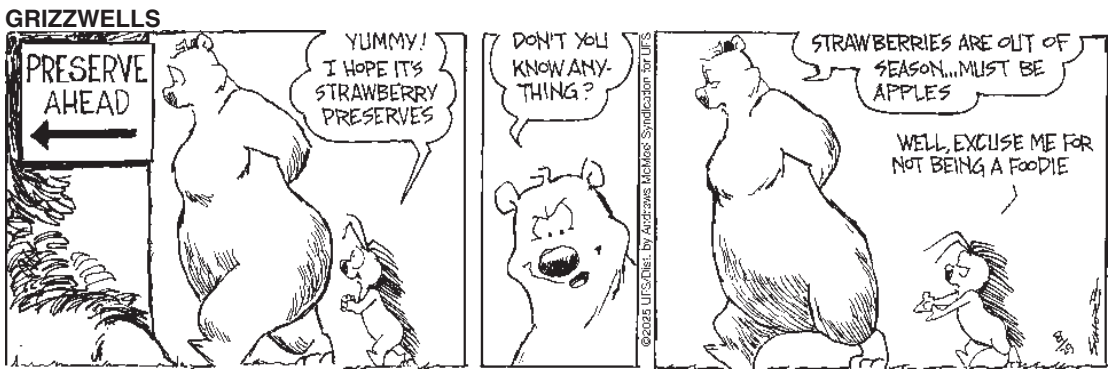
DEFLOCKED



FRANK N EARNEST



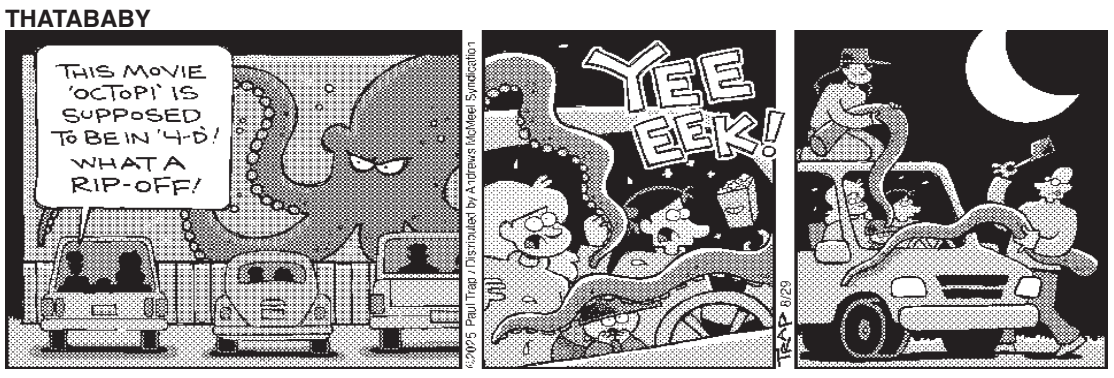
GRIZZWELLS



MONTY



THATABABY



MODERATELY CONFUSED



BREVITY



NEA Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

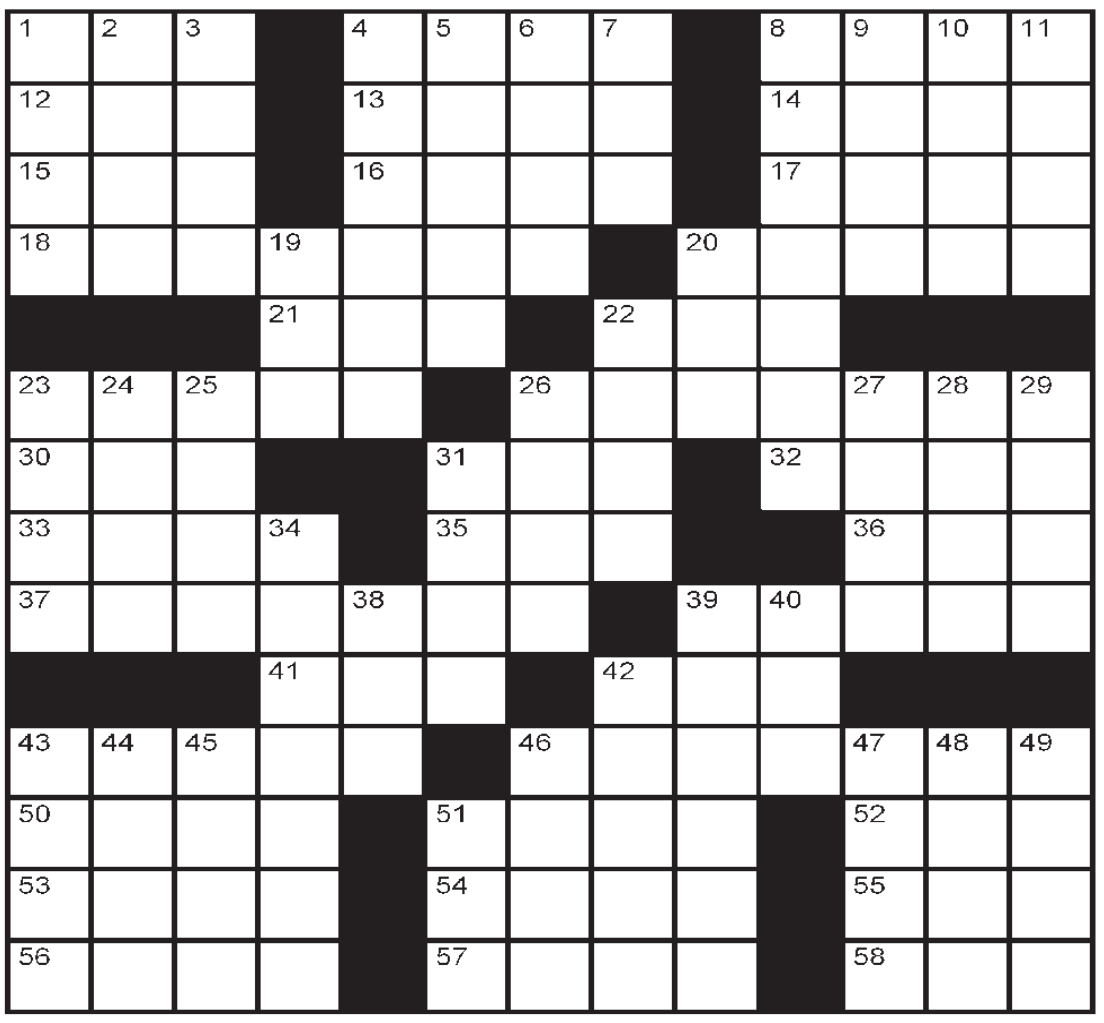
1 Paragon of patience
4 Singer Chappell —
8 Went fast
12 Tokyo, formerly
13 "— — girl!"
14 Traveled on
15 Family member
16 Broken-off piece
17 Culture medium
18 Windpipe
20 Garden figurine
21 "Death Becomes —"
22 Yoga need
23 Foundation
26 Domed building
30 First lesson for many
31 — Angeles
32 Deep sleep
33 Hint
35 Big boat
36 Finger count
37 Tomato sauce
39 Liable (to)
41 Turf
42 Greek letter
43 Blackboard
46 Inactive
50 Singer — Horne
51 Pelts
52 Actress — Farrow
53 Rental car giant
54 — facto
55 Badly
56 Cunning
57 Gas for signs
58 Winter mo.

DOWN

1 Make jokes
2 Stench
3 — fide
4 Wealth
5 Different
6 Largest continent
7 Snooze
8 In a frenzy
9 Corporate emblem
10 Cheese variety
11 Adele song, "When We — Young"
19 Greek letter
20 Opening
22 False face
23 "— to the Future"
24 Ready, willing and —
25 Rabbit's tail
26 Business abbr.
27 Dorothy's dog
28 Sign
29 Road division
31 Speak highly of
34 Rapture
38 Farm implement
39 Clergyman
40 Cuba libre ingredient
42 Trunk
43 Cabbage salad
44 Strauss of jeans
45 Indigo
46 Deceive
47 In the company of
48 Long river
49 Soft mineral
51 Shark feature

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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



8-29

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SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

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

Almanac

Today is the 241st day of 2025 and the 71st day of summer.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1949, the Soviet Union conducted its first atomic bomb test.

In 1957, Democratic Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina concluded his over 24-hour-long filibuster against the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

In 1991, the parliament of the Soviet Union suspended all Communist Party activities.

In 2005, Category 3 storm Hurricane Katrina made landfall near New Orleans.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: John Locke (1632-1704), philosopher; Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. (1809-1894), author; Ingrid Bergman (1915-1982), actress; Charlie Parker (1920-1955), musician; Richard Attenborough (1923-2014), filmmaker; William Friedkin (1935-2023), film director; John McCain (1936-2018), U.S. senator; Elliott Gould (1938-), actor; GG Allin (1956-1993), singer-songwriter; Michael Jackson (1958-2009), singer-songwriter; Lea Michele (1986-), actress; Liam Payne (1993-2024), singer-songwriter.

TODAY'S FACT: Strom Thurmond's 1957 civil rights filibuster remains the longest one-man filibuster in history. It lasted 24 hours, 18 minutes and opened with Thurmond reading the voting laws of all 48 states.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1977, St. Louis Cardinals left fielder Lou Brock stole two bases to match, then break, Ty Cobb's record for career stolen bases, which had stood at 892 bases for 49 years.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "Don't play the saxophone. Let it play you." – Charlie Parker

TODAY'S NUMBER: 175 – top sustained wind speed (in mph) during Hurricane Katrina.

TODAY'S MOON: Between new moon (Aug. 22) and first quarter moon (Aug. 30)

Community Briefs

Credit union donates to Bibb County teachers

Robins Financial Credit Union recently donated more than $10,800 to seven local teachers through its fourth annual GRANTED program.

The credit union founded the GRANTED program in 2022 to help alleviate some of the financial burden teachers face in their efforts to educate and engage their students. Educators who teach at grade schools located within one of the credit union's 45-county service areas were eligible to apply. Recipients receive classroom supplies or money to purchase items from their classroom wish lists.

Recipients in Bibb County are:

- Alexis Carson, Howard High School in Macon
- Brenda Bacat, Appling Middle School in Macon
- Christopher Allen, Howard Middle School in Macon
- Kelli Daniels, Academy for Classical Education
- Kimberly Mullen, Ballard Hudson Middle
- Leontyne Harris, Burdell-Hunt Magnet Elementary School
- Rosalyn Hendrix, Heard Elementary School

Hoax shooter threats called in to schools

The Macon-Bibb County Sheriff's Office and Central Georgia Technical College police responded to a 911 call of an active shooter on CGTC's campus shortly after 1 p.m. Tuesday.

The college alerted the Macon campus group about the threat at 1:37 p.m. and sent out an "institutional alert" at 2:07 p.m. The all-clear was given at 2:25 p.m. when authorities determined the threat was a hoax. Normal campus operations resumed shortly after.

Also Tuesday, another threatening call from the same telephone number was made to Rutland High School a Bibb Schools spokesperson said.

On Wednesday, Mercer University students were notified of a threat on campus. The school gave the all-clear shortly thereafter.

Piedmont adds primary care doctors

Dr. Abraham Butler and Dr. Nisarg Patel recently joined Piedmont Primary Care at Charter Boulevard as new providers.

The two doctors will join Dr. Syed Rizvi at the clinic, which opened earlier this year on the fourth floor of the medical office building at Piedmont Macon North Hospital.

"We are thrilled to welcome two outstanding primary care physicians to our Piedmont family," Piedmont Macon CEO Stephen Daugherty said. "Access to primary care is one of the greatest needs in our community, and their arrival marks an important step in strengthening that foundation."

Christmas Lights Extravaganza adds new Holiday Market

Downtown Macon has become a must-visit holiday destination in Middle Georgia thanks to the popular Macon Christmas Light Extravaganza, which draws in visitors each year to experience millions of sparkling lights synchronized with music by the Macon Pops.

This year's extravaganza will feature a new event called the "Marché de Noel: Macon Christmas Market," a European-inspired holiday experience designed to complement the light display. The market is set for Dec. 5-14 at Cherry Street Plaza.

With decorated wooden chalets, twinkling lights, themed nights and daily programming, the market is expected to support the continued growth of visitors from across the region, Visit Macon recently announced.

"The new Macon Christmas Market will expand and support Macon on its rapid growth as a nationally-renowned seasonal destination and an annual holiday tradition for families in and around Central Georgia," Visit Macon CEO Gary Wheat said. "The Christmas Market not only creates magical memories for families but also supports local artisans, small businesses and downtown commerce while showcasing Macon as a vibrant holiday destination."

Now a global phenomenon, the holiday market tradition traces its roots to medieval Europe and its first documented appearance in Vienna in 1296. In the 17th & 18th centuries, the markets spread through Europe as a widely adopted holiday tradition. Macon's sister city relationship with Mâcon, France, will heavily influence Macon's blend of French, Bavarian and German traditions.

Visit Macon is inviting local and regional businesses to partner with the Macon Christmas Market as sponsors. Sponsorship provides exclusive brand exposure at one of Middle Georgia's premier holiday events while also demonstrating community pride and support for a growing holiday tradition.

A range of sponsorship opportunities are available and sponsors will receive recognition across event signage, marketing, advertising and on-site experiences.

For more information about sponsorship opportunities, email maconchristmasmarket@gmail.com or call 478-954-5540.

Little Richard Festival back on

The Little Richard Festival is rescheduled for this Saturday, months after the annual event was cancelled amid missing money and allegations of theft.

The festival, from 2-8 p.m., will take place in Jefferson Long Park just across Craft Street from one of the iconic musicians' favorite boyhood homes. The event is meant to celebrate the legacy of Wayne Richard Penniman, called the architect of Rock and Roll.

The festival is free and open to all ages. Planned events include an American cook off contest, kids' activities, a DeeJay and several live music performances.

Macon-Bibb County plans 9/11 Memorial Service

A ceremony in honor and remembrance of the Sept. 11, 2001 attack victims is set for Sept. 11 at Public Safety Park located at Mulberry and Second streets downtown. The event will be livestreamed on the county's Facebook page.

Macon pair charged with fraud, money laundering COVID-19 relief money

A jury trial is set for next month for Frank Austin Jr. and Rosalend Way, who face federal charges including money laundering and bank fraud for allegedly obtaining fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program loans using bogus businesses. The indictment alleges the two reaped millions and used the money for personal gain.

Austin ran for a state house seat to represent Macon in 2016 but was disqualified due to residency issues.

Austin and Way were indicted in September 2024. Earlier this month, Austin's lawyer notified the court he intends to plead guilty. A pre-trial conference is set for Sept. 15.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

What to watch

FRIDAY

August 29, 2025

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



'Two Graves'

NETFLIX

Two Graves

Netflix ■ New Series

This Spanish mystery/thriller begins two years after the disappearance of Verónica and Marta, two 16-year-old friends, and the investigation is declared closed due to lack of evidence and suspects. The grandmother of one of the girls, Isabel (Kiti Mánver), who has nothing to lose, decides to carry out an investigation beyond the law. She will do whatever it takes to uncover the truth about what happened that night, and what begins as the search for a culprit soon becomes a story of revenge.

College Football

ESPN, FOX & FS1, beginning at 7 p.m. Live

Friday night college football action includes Western Michigan at Michigan State (FS1), Auburn at Baylor (FOX), Georgia Tech at Colorado (ESPN) and Central Michigan at San José State (FS1).

Hurricane Katrina: 20 Years After the Storm With Robin Roberts

ABC, 8 p.m.

Robin Roberts visits New Orleans to explore the city's recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

The Quest for Gold

The CW, 9 p.m.

Hosts Dean Cain, Laura McKenzie, Montel Williams and Elizabeth Stanton explore gold's iconic role in blockbuster films, and in real-life treasure hunts.

My Lottery Dream Home

HGTV, 9 p.m.

In the new episode "Golden State of Mind," after selling their Georgia vacation home, a couple's ready to level up with a luxe new summer home in San Diego. With David Bromstad house hunting there for the first time, they're about to discover one of California's hottest markets.

Great Performances

PBS, 9 p.m.

Enjoy "Vienna Philharmonic Summer Night Concert 2025," an annual concert from Schönbrunn Palace conducted for the first time by Tugan Sokhiev. Opera star Piotr Beczala joins as soloist, performing arias from *Carmen* and *Turandot* along with the Vienna Boys Choir in their "Summer Night" debut.

Zillow Gone Wild

HGTV, 9:30 p.m.

A former mobster's compound, a sprawling manor created by a beer mogul and an engineer's techy dream are all part of comedian Jack McBrayer's adventures in the new episode "Secret Stash."

CATCH A CLASSIC

Cary Grant Icon-a-Thon

MOVIES!, beginning at 9:50 a.m.

Spend your morning and afternoon with Archibald Leach – better known as Cary Grant, among the most suave and charming stars in Hollywood history – with four of his greatest hits: **North by Northwest** (1959), the classic Alfred Hitchcock thriller in which Grant plays an adman wrongly identified as a spy by enemy agents and chased across the county, with Eva Marie Saint, James Mason and Martin Landau costarring; 1963's **Charade (pictured),** one of Grant's last films, a romantic comedy/mystery pairing him with Audrey Hepburn; **Arsenic and Old Lace** (1944), director Frank Capra's screwball/dark comedy crime film also featuring Priscilla Lane, Raymond Massey, Jack Carson, Josephine Hull and Jean Adair; and **His Girl Friday** (1940), director Howard Hawks' famed screwball comedy costarring Rosalind Russell, Ralph Bellamy and Gene Lockhart.



UNIVERSAL PICTURES

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



'Step Brothers'

COLUMBIA PICTURES

The Shawshank Redemption (1994, Drama) Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman **E!, 6 p.m.**

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom (2023, Action) Jason Momoa, Patrick Wilson **TBS, 8 p.m.**

Footloose (1984, Drama) Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer **AMC, 8 p.m.**

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

The Beach Read Murders (2025, Suspense) Christie Leverette, Rob Mayes **LMN, 8 p.m.**

The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo (2011, Suspense) Daniel Craig, Rooney Mara **VH1, 8 p.m.**

Thor: Love and Thunder (2022, Action) Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman **FX, 8 p.m.**

The Hangover Part II (2011, Comedy) Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms **TNT, 8:30 p.m.**

Death She Wrote (2021, Suspense) Samora Smallwood, Paula Brancati **LMN, 10 p.m.**

Black Panther (2018, Action) Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan **FX, 10:30 p.m.**

Step Brothers (2008, Comedy) Will Ferrell, John C. Reilly **Comedy Central, 11 p.m.**

From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com



Henley ties for 2nd at Tour Championship

Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody



1: Russell Henley tees off on the 9th Hole at East Lake Country Club on Aug. 21 during the first round of the Tour Championship.



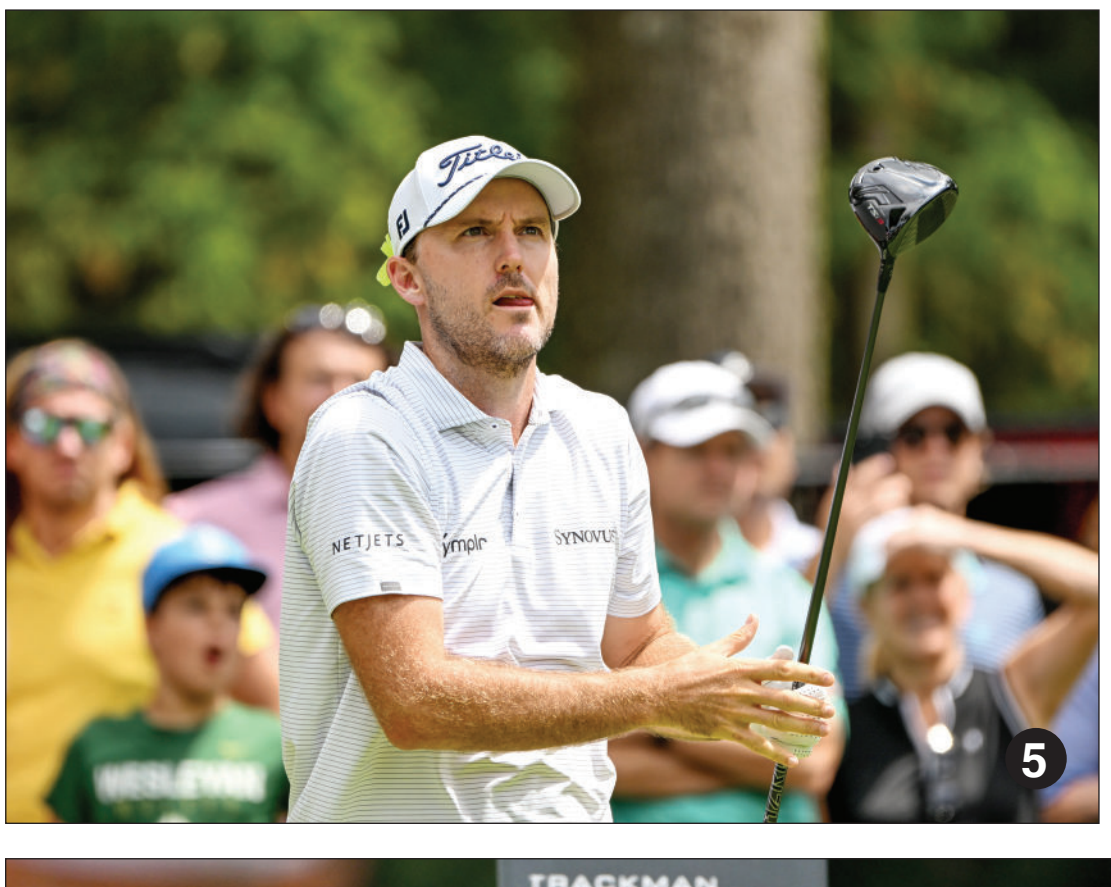
2: Henley hits his approach shot on the 7th Hole at East Lake Country Club Sunday during the final round of the Tour Championship.



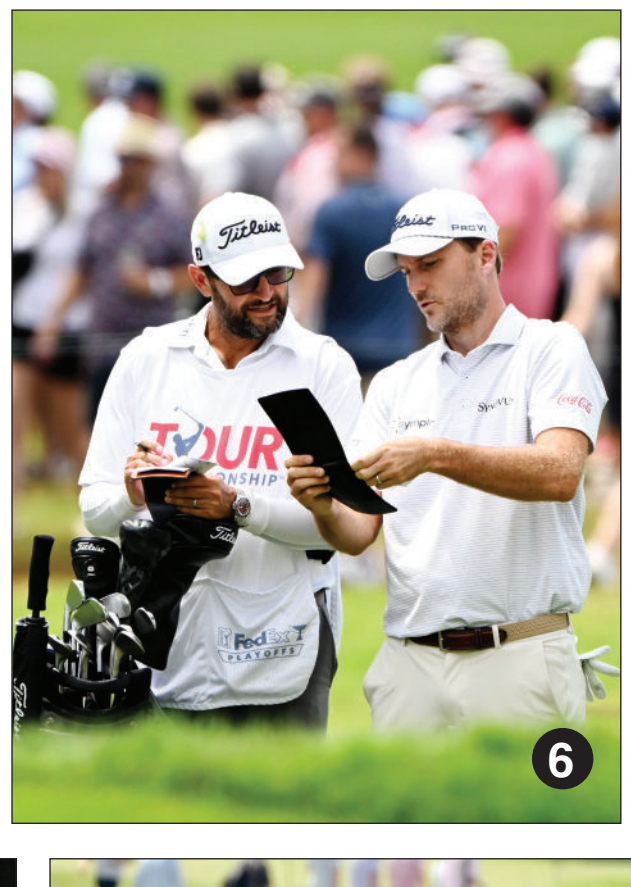
3: Russell Henley putts for birdie on the 10th Hole at East Lake Country Club Saturday during the third round of the Tour Championship.



4: Henley hits his tee shot on the 7th Hole during the final round of the Tour Championship.



5: Henley watches his tee shot on the 5th Hole during the final round of the Tour Championship.



6: Henley and his caddie, Andrew Sanders, discuss his approach shot on the 4th Hole during the final round of the Tour Championship.

7: Russell Henley waits for his turn to tee off on the 9th Hole during the third round of the Tour Championship.

8: Henley and his caddie, Andrew Sanders, walk down the fairway on the 10th Hole Aug. 21 during the first round of the Tour Championship.



