

The Macon Melody

\$2.00 • Bibb County's Community News Source • MaconMelody.com • Friday, September 26, 2025 • Vol. II, No. 14

Bibb schools exceed cap on education tax, eye new \$250M levy

BY CASEY CHOUNG
casey@maconmelody.com

The Bibb County School District has received \$197,257,488.30 from the state for its Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, exceeding its allotted cap of \$185 million, according to state reports.

The district began collecting the tax in 2021 after more of than 75% of voters approved it in 2019. It goes toward funding capital projects, including renovations and technology upgrades.

According to the district's July 31 ESPLOST report, the district collected a total of \$189,950,570.95 and at that time had already spent \$138,430,153 in project expenditures.

A state tax report showed the district received a total of \$193,389,174.05 as of July 31 and another disbursement of \$3,868,314.25 on August 31.

The state will cease collecting the ESPLOST at the beginning of October, school district spokesperson Stephanie Hartley wrote in an email to The Melody.

Joseph Snowden with the Georgia Department of Revenue wrote in an email to The Melody that when a local government or school district exceeds the cap on a sales tax, it can retain those funds if certain conditions are met. The cap can be exceeded because of quarterly rate changes impacting collections, state officials said.

If all projects are fulfilled, the extra funds can be added to the school district's general fund for the purpose of "reducing any indebtedness" and "reducing ad valorem taxes," according to state law.

"The District will follow legal guidelines regarding any additional funds collected by the state," Hartley wrote. "Updated ESPLOST information will be included in the District's regular monthly financial reports."

It's unclear if the district meets the state's requirements

See TAX
Page A2

Periodical — Mail Label

Sex offenders list odd 'homes'

Vague state law makes it difficult for sheriff to monitor homeless registrants

BY LAURA E. CORLEY
laura@maconmelody.com

Sex offenders in Bibb County claim to live at City Hall, a tax business on the east side, fast food joints on the west side, in the woods around Bass Pro Shops on the north end and at the rest area off Interstate 475 — if the Bibb County Sheriff's Office's sex offender registry is to be believed.

"Those are offenders who are homeless," Sgt. Janet Whetstone said in an email to The Melody of about 20 sex offenders whose addresses were listed at locations including grocery stores, automotive shops and even Whetstone's office on Hazel Street. "They are required to register their 'sleeping' locations."

As the county continues to grap-

ple with the growing problem of homelessness, vagueness in state law makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the sheriff's office to keep tabs on the small portion of offenders who lack a fixed address. Sheriff's offices are required by law to verify addresses for sex offenders at least once each year.

"The law is very vague on how homeless offenders are to list their addresses or how law enforcement can enforce the sex offender law in regards on how to verify those addresses," Whetstone said.

Homeless sex offenders will often list the street address for the nearest building to where they are sleeping,



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
City Hall is listed as a "home" address by some homeless sex offender registrants in Bibb County, highlighting challenges local deputies face under a vague state law that governs how addresses are recorded.

See LIST
Page A2



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Kathleen O'Neal, left, records headstone details at Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon, Wednesday, Sept. 17. She and fellow Macon native Liz Riley are cataloging every burial in the 50-acre cemetery to create a public, searchable database.

New Rose Hill registry helps Maconites trace lineage

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Two Macon natives, Kathleen O'Neal and Liz Riley, are shedding light on the everyday people buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, a 50-acre site listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

O'Neal is a historian, and Riley has a background in information technology. They have teamed up to document and catalog each grave in a database accessible to the public.

Both women have generations of family buried in Rose Hill and frequently visit the walkable cemetery located on Riverside Drive. O'Neal

has led the Historic Macon Foundation's Rose Hill Ramble tours for the past two years and knows many of the stories behind the headstones.

The 150-year-old cemetery is the final resting place for many notable Maconites and historically significant figures, including music icons Duane Allman and Gregg Allman of The

Allman Brothers Band. Thousands of individuals are buried on the cemetery's grounds.

"This is an enormous amount of history that needs to be recorded," Riley said.

See LINEAGE
Page A6

FPD students learn practical life skills — and how to handle loss

BY ED GRISAMORE
gris@maconmelody.com

By the end of the semester, high school students in the Family Life classes at First Presbyterian Day School will know how to change a tire, sew on a button and tie a tie.

Their teacher, the Rev. Bob Veazey, is convinced these tasks are essential tools.

"I call them life skills," he said. "They learn things like how to write a thank you note and address an envelope."

Veazey has been around the block enough to know. He and his wife, Nora, have been married for 41 years. He is a father and grandfather. He has been a pastor for 35 years and has taught in the Bible Department at FPD for 22 years. He also coaches middle school football and golf.

In generational ways, showing a teenager how to balance a checkbook may appear to be old-fashioned and antiquated. And the young people he instructs are more familiar with emails and text messages than pen-to-paper notes of gratitude.

Sew on a button? They grew up with Velcro. Change a tire? AAA is just a phone call away.

But Veazey believes these experiences are standard equipment for navigating the road ahead. Somewhere in life's instruction manual, they should include directions on teaching Gen Z how to wash laundry and fold clothes.

He takes time to go over these simple lessons during breaks in the broader units of the course curriculum — topics such as dating, marriage, divorce and personal finances.

The class is an elective and is made up of seniors and juniors who will soon be out on their own. Some of the most impactful moments come at the end of the course when Family Life focuses on "Death and Dying."

"We are coming at it from a Christian perspective, a Christian worldview," he said. "I explain to them that we are all going to have to go through this. Some of them have experienced the death of a family member or

See SKILLS
Page A7





FALL FARM FESTIVAL

October 18th | 11am-5pm

Corn Maze

Hayrides

Arts & Crafts Vendors

Food Trucks

Special Appearance by Bingo and Bluey
12:00 pm-2:00 pm - Call to make reservations

Kids Play Area full of bouncy houses

Face Painting

I-75, Exit 142 - Fort Valley
www.lanesouthernorchards.com • (800) 277-3224



Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

BALANCE TOOLS AND MEDICAL ALERT SYSTEMS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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

Falls can pose serious health issues for seniors. In fact, the CDC reports that falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for adults 65 and over.

Staying physically active, maintaining safety, and following doctor's orders can help combat the muscle, joint, and balance issues that occur naturally with aging — and help prevent catastrophic falls.

Using balance equipment and/or fall detection devices can also help stave off fall-related injuries and provide critical assistance.

So, how can you tell if you or a loved one needs these tools? Here are some signs to look for, how medical alert systems work, and different options to consider.

Signs You or a Loved One Needs Balance or Fall Detection Tools

It's crucial for your healthcare provider to identify fall risk factors through regular fall risk assessments, as noted by the Cleveland Clinic.

Benefits of the screening for older adults include:

- Minimizing fall and injury risks
- Decreasing your own personal fall risks
- Maximizing mobility and physical activity
- Maintaining health and independence

Signs that indicate you or a loved one might need balance support or a fall detection device include:

- Feeling unsteady while standing or walking
 - Having fallen in the past 12 months
 - Worrying about falling
 - Struggling to get up and sit down in a chair without using your arms
 - Difficulty holding certain positions for 10 seconds each, including balancing on one leg
 - Difficulty getting up from a chair, walking 10 feet at a normal pace, and then sitting back down in the chair
- Your healthcare provider will identify any issues during the assessment process and discuss fall prevention options with you. This may include balance exercises and tools.

Balance Exercises and Tools

Maintaining balance helps ensure stability and

prevent falls. Mayo Clinic suggests including balance training with physical activity and strength training daily, always following your doctor's recommendations regarding restrictions and limitations.

Exercises include standing on one leg, if possible, and maintaining the position for 30 seconds while holding onto a heavy table or desk for support. Then, switch to the opposite leg.

You can also try shifting your weight by lifting one foot at a time off the floor, holding that position for 30 seconds, and using heavy furniture as support. Doing tai chi or yoga is also good for improving balance.

A physical therapist or trainer who specializes in older adult routines can guide you through using balance equipment like stability balls, balancing poles, and balance boards.

Medical Alert Systems: What Are They and How Do They Work?

Medical alert systems can provide critical help in a medical emergency. There are monitored and unmonitored versions. A monitored medical alert system connects the wearer to the device's response center when the emergency button is pressed. The call center team asks questions to decide whether you need emergency services or if they should contact your designated family member, friend, or caregiver.

An unmonitored medical alert system, by comparison, automatically contacts emergency services like 911 when you press the emergency button.

The fall detection feature on a medical alert device uses built-in accelerator technology to detect sudden changes in movement that indicate falls and instantly call the response center for help. This is an add-on feature to the medical alert monitoring system that usually increases the monthly fee.

If you or a loved one falls and is incapacitated, a medical alert system with fall detection may even be lifesaving.

The system is not perfect. For example, dropping the device may present as a fall to the monitoring team. They will call to

determine if you have fallen and whether you need assistance.

Medical Alert System Considerations

Like most technology, there are several considerations to finding the medical alert system that best meets your needs.

For example, will you connect it to a landline or use a cellular network?

Cellular connectivity can be spotty in some homes. So, make sure your carrier can boost signal strength if necessary. Landline connections are more stable.

Also, will you use an in-home or mobile device and what is the range?

Most in-home medical alert systems have a range of 200-1000 feet from the base. On-the-go devices utilize GPS, Wi-Fi, and cellular networks to transmit your location to the monitoring center's response team.

With mobile devices, consider battery life. Most brands last one to five days between charges.

Some medical alert systems feature caregiver apps that allow family, friends, and caregivers to connect with you, track your location, offer reminders, and more.

Monthly subscription fees also vary by brand and typically range from \$20 to \$60 per month.

Wearable Medical Alert Device Options

There are several options for wearable medical alert devices. The most common include:

- A lanyard-style necklace
- A wrist device
- Attached to a belt
- Attached to a pocket
- Inside a purse

The National Council on Aging reports that necklaces and wristbands are the most popular wearable devices.

Overall, minimizing fall risk and maximizing safety are essential components of active aging. Deduttering the house, removing or taping down rugs, and using a medical alert system with fall detection enhance your safety and provide peace of mind.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Children jump out of a trailer while collecting trash along Pansy Avenue during a Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful and Westside Neighbors United community cleanup on May 3.

Recycling push, cleanup projects get new funding

BY CASEY CHOUNG
casey@maconmelody.com

Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful will use a \$25,000 private grant to educate students in Bibb County Schools about the importance of recycling.

Asha Ellen, executive director of the beautification nonprofit, announced the grant from Georgia Beverage Co. Sept. 18.

The grant will work hand in hand with \$30,000 of allotted county funds, which are used for cleanup efforts at Southwest High School, Ballard-Hudson Middle, Hartley Elementary, Southfield Elementary and Ingram Pye Elementary.

Around 30 attendees, including Superintendent Dan Sims and Bibb County Sheriff David Davis, gathered inside the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame to hear the announcement.

Ellen said data from the county's waste collector, Ryland Environmental, showed that southern Bibb County both recycled the least out of all areas in the county and often did so improperly.

The \$25,000 from Georgia Beverage will go toward teaching proper recycling habits in schools and encouraging families and neighborhoods to sign up for the county's recycling program. Two elementary schools, Bruce and Southfield, will receive educational resources related to recycling "starting immediately," Ellen said.

Bruce Elementary Principal Kizzie Lott said the initiative will help this generation of students understand trash and their ability to recycle.

"Transformation happens when we take ownership," Lott said.

The \$30,000 from Macon-Bibb County comes from

its public safety fund and is designated for litter reduction in District 8, which encompasses parts of Eisenhower Parkway and Rocky Creek Road.

Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful has previously organized cleanup efforts in Greenwood Bottom and Unionville, and its Walking School Bus initiative has cleared paths for students going to school at Bruce Elementary and around Fort Hill and east Macon.

The public funds will help hire contractors for larger debris and vegetation removal projects as well as allow Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful to organize future cleanups.

Ellen said litter can "foster a sense of neglect" and "discourage clean habits" in the areas it is most prevalent in.

"We do more than just pick up litter," Ellen said. "We are picking up an entire community."

TAX

Continued from Page A1

to move the excess funds to its general fund. In August, board members voted to raise property taxes.

The district spent \$53 million of collected funds for school renovations and \$12 million on staff computers and mobile devices. The district also used ESPLOST money for new buses and renovations to Thompson Stadium.

District officials originally planned to use \$20 million of the collected funds to build a new fine arts center, but those plans were canceled because of increased construction costs and similar facilities being built around the district, according to information from an advisory committee guiding spending efforts.

The district hopes to pass a new ESPLOST for 2026. Voters will decide on the Nov. 4 ballot if the district's plan to collect \$250 million through that tax will proceed.

Assistant Superintendent of Operations Sam Kitchens presented a list of projects that could be funded by the new tax at the school board's Aug. 21 meeting. That wishlist includes security and classroom technology upgrades and renovations to several schools, including Porter Elementary and L.H. Williams Elementary.

Those schools were previously considered for closure by district officials.

Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning upgrades account for a large chunk of those proposed renovations, Kitchens said in a previous interview with The Melody.

LIST

Continued from Page A1

whether it be in a nearby wooded area, a parking lot or an encampment, she said.

Though state law designates the Georgia Bureau of Investigation as the central repository for maintaining the sex offender registry, local sheriff's offices are tasked with registering and monitoring hundreds of offenders without state funding to do so.

Local sheriff's offices also are required to maintain their own lists of offenders and predators.

At least once each year, two Bibb County sheriff's deputies verify addresses for some 478 sex offenders who are required to register with the sheriff's office within 72 hours of being released from prison or parole. Offenders with a history of noncompliance are checked on more often.

The laws governing homeless sex offender registration have changed over the past decade or more.

In 2015, the Georgia Court of Appeals overturned a Coffee County man's sentence for failing to register because the state never contested evidence showing the man was homeless and also never alleged the man had a fixed address that he didn't provide to the sheriff's office.

The judge found the statute requiring offenders to register had "no guidelines for what a homeless person who was without a route or street address should do to comply," according to the written opinion.

Since then, homeless offenders have been required to provide the address of where they sleep. If they move, they must notify the sheriff's office of their new sleeping location within 72 hours.

Whetstone did not reply to an inquiry about

how often homeless sex offenders update her office with their sleeping quarters.

Atlanta lawyer Bernard Brody of Brody Law Firm specializes in representing sex offense cases and said he's only ever represented one homeless client.

"My one client who was in this situation, he ended up sleeping in a tent in the parking lot behind like a warehouse where all these other people on the registry were sleeping as well," Brody said, adding that Cobb County had attached a special form for the client to register as a homeless sex offender.

The form lists space for those offenders to declare homelessness. It also requires they provide a four-hour daily time block during which they can be located at the address.

That's not the case statewide.

"What it is is a county reacting to that decision and recognizing that we have to have some sort of different procedure" for homeless offenders, Brody said.

Houston County Sheriff's Sgt. Timothy Leonard has maintained the county's sex offender registry for eight years. Leonard said he verifies residency for offenders who are not on probation "at least two or three times a year."

The Georgia Department of Community Supervision verifies residency for sex offenders on probation.

At present, only two of the 280 registered sex offenders in Houston County are homeless.

Leonard said he knows exactly where to find them. One lives in a van parked at a shuttered fast food joint in Perry.

"If I don't think that they're staying there, I start an investigation and usually I can get something within a very short period of time," Leonard said. "Bibb County has a lot more homeless than I do."

Give Your Retirement Plan a Promotion Veterans Save 5% Off Entrance Fees

Since 2001, veterans and non-veterans alike have come to Central Georgia's only Life-Plan Community to live, learn, laugh and play on our amenity-rich campus in Macon. We call it crafting your happy.

To schedule a visit or learn more:
478-845-6899
carlyleplaceinfo.org/military

Carlyle Place
A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



Atrium Health
Navicent

5300 Zebulon Rd. | Macon, GA 31210

46087_13

Amid flag drama, ACE head retires

BY CASEY CHOUNG
casey@maconmelody.com

Academy for Classical Education Principal Lara Relyea retired Monday, according to a news release from the north Macon charter school.

Relyea's retirement comes after ACE received backlash for not lowering its American flag Sept. 11 following a declaration from President Donald Trump.

The order directed public buildings and grounds to lower American flags to half-staff through Sept. 14 in memory of Charlie Kirk, the right-wing media personality assassinated Sept. 10 in Orem, Utah.

The board held a closed-door meeting at 8:30 a.m. Monday with one personnel item on the agenda. At 10:36 a.m., officials emailed a letter to parents announcing Relyea's retirement.

Relyea will be replaced on an interim basis by Laura Perkins, who co-founded ACE and served as its principal from 2014-24.

ACE is a state-approved charter school that opened in 2014. The school receives federal and state funding but has its own independent governing board and does not abide by Bibb County School District policies.

At the ACE board's regular meeting Sept. 15, a number of parents showed up to express their dismay over the school's failure to lower the flag.

Witt Gaither, ACE board chair, later said the flag policy was amended to address "confusion surround-

ing ACE's obligations" as a state charter school.

"Going forward, we shall comply with Presidential Proclamations and Gubernatorial Executive Orders," Gaither wrote in an email to The Melody.

According to minutes from the Sept. 15 meeting, Relyea told the board there was "no political motivation" behind not lowering the flag.

"Looking back, I wish we had lowered the flag this year," Relyea's statement said. "The executive order to lower flags applied to government buildings and we do not yet have a board policy guiding our response to such orders."

Jami Conover, whose children have attended ACE since its opening, said Relyea's office had been emptied and her name was removed from its door mid-Monday morning. Conover claimed the governing board asked Relyea to retire, a detail The Melody has not independently confirmed.

Gaither wrote in an email to The Melody that Relyea requested to retire and the governing board had accepted her decision. As of press time, Relyea had not responded to The Melody's request for comment.

Conover said she thought not lowering the flag was a political statement and "a really bad time to make one." She also added the absence of an apology from Relyea at last week's board meeting left people unsettled.

"This was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back — this has kind of been mounting," Conover said.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

The Macon-Bibb County Commission plans to expand the Bibb County Jail on Oglethorpe Street. The board selected Georgia-based Jericho Design Solutions to design the jail expansion, which will add 150 beds to the facility. Expansion-related costs are estimated to be up to \$32 million.

Commission hires companies for jail expansion, new arena

BY LAURA E. CORLEY
laura@maconmelody.com

Following a lengthy meeting behind closed doors Tuesday, the Macon-Bibb County Commission approved two companies to design the planned Bibb County Jail expansion and the new arena.

Georgia-based Jericho Design Group was chosen to design the jail expansion, which will add 150 beds, including 96 maximum-security beds and 24 beds for inmates with mental health issues.

Commissioners also approved PBK Architects to design a new arena to be constructed next to the Macon Coliseum near the Second Street exit on Interstate 16. The design firm was recommended to commissioners by Memphis-based MFA Program Management, a company the board voted to hire in June to oversee construction of the arena.

Miller said the county is set to break ground on the new arena in

July 2026 and construction could be completed in about three years. The Coliseum will remain open and operating during construction.

A cost was not mentioned for design work related to the arena, but county documents show PBK will not be paid more than 7.25% of the total cost of the arena plus 4% of the total cost of a parking deck should one be needed.

Both architectural firms were unanimously approved with Commissioner Seth Clark absent.

A temporary fix
Drafts of the expansion design show jail cells that are built off-site then shipped to Macon.

"Each one goes together like a Lego set," Clay Murphy, the county's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax manager, said of the cells, which can be relocated in the future if the county decides to build a new jail elsewhere. "It won't be an eyesore. It will be a metal building."

The jail also features doors with

hinges that cannot be jammed and a raised control from where officers will "be able to see every cell in the jail," Murphy said. "This is a temporary fix that needs a long-term solution."

Mayor Lester Miller said the designs, locations, number of beds and price are subject to change, but the expansion could be completed in 14-16 months. The county may demolish one of the office buildings and a parking lot to help keep down costs, which are estimated between \$28-32 million.

Sheriff David Davis told the commission he is looking forward to groundbreaking.

"I think we are a significant step in the right direction because we have cells that will help those who are chronically ill and chronically mentally ill," Davis said. "I like the technology that this company brings to bear."

See JAIL
Page A6

Macon water customers may see higher bills under proposed changes

BY LAURA E. CORLEY
laura@maconmelody.com

Water in Bibb County may get more expensive next year as the Macon Water Authority board considers a rate increase.

The authority needs to complete about \$250 million in upgrades to its facilities by 2030. The bulk of it relates to deferred maintenance. A consultant recommended the authority board increase rates to help pay for the upgrades.

In an hourlong work session Tuesday, Jason Bodwell of Jacobs Solutions, a professional services firm, presented options to the board, including proposed rate increases of 9%, 5% and 3%.

The authority will use cash and

bond money to complete the work, but the ratio of how much it will finance and how much it will pay outright with cash is something the board will have to decide. That decision will impact rates.

Bodwell recommended the au-

thority increase the current rate by 3% and use debt funding from a \$161 million bond plus \$88 million in cash to pay for the upgrades.

See WATER
Page A6

THIS IS A TOUR ABOUT...

RELAPSE, LIES, & BETRAYAL

WARREN ZEIDERS

+ CHAYCE BECKHAM

OCTOBER 30

ATRIUM HEALTH AMPHITHEATER

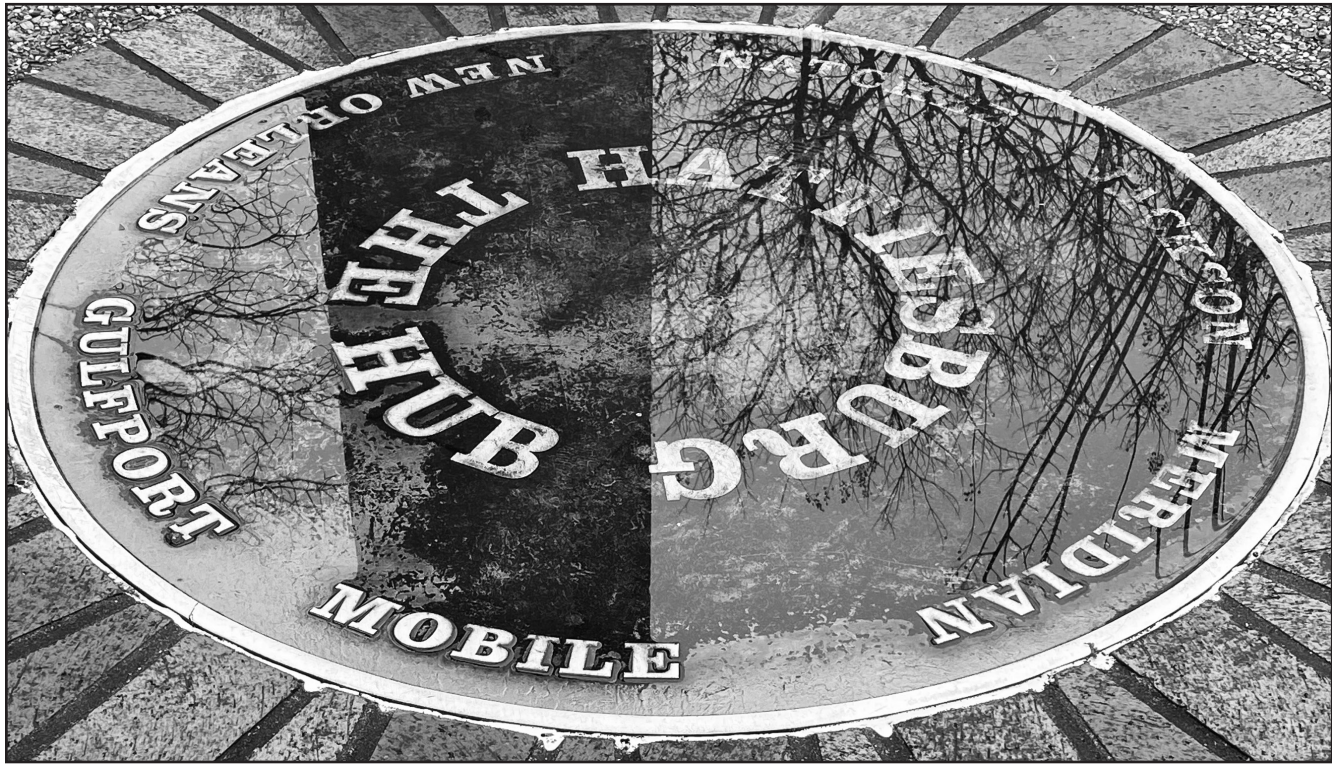


PHOTO BY JOSHUA WILSON

A “Hub City” marker in downtown Hattiesburg, Mississippi, reflects the nickname given to the city for its central role in rail and highway connections. Joshua Wilson, executive editor of The Macon Melody, lived in Hattiesburg from 2010 to 2025 before moving to Macon in late August.

BETWEEN THE NOTES

To uncover the world, start with Mississippi

As novelist William Faulkner put it, you must first understand a place like Mississippi to truly understand the world.

For me, that truth runs deep: I spent 35 years in the Magnolia State before finding echoes of home here in Macon.

I was born and raised in Mississippi. For most of my life, I lived in rural Lincoln County in the southwest corner of the state. Our community, East Lincoln, was about 15 minutes away from the “big city” of Brookhaven (BROOK-hay-vuhn) and its population of around 11,500. We were about 10 minutes away from Monticello (mon-tih-SELL-oh) and its population of about 1,400.

East Lincoln was a great place to grow up. My family’s land covers a few hundred acres and includes a fishing pond and Perch Creek. The creek’s rolling waters once powered a grist mill, and the remnants of its wooden infrastructure are still visible today.

After graduating from Brookhaven High School in 2008, I attended community college in the nearby town of Wesson (population of about 1,800), which is known for its early use of electricity. The town’s Mississippi Manufacturing Co., which produced a fine cotton fabric known as “Mississippi silk,” put light bulbs to use only one year after Thomas Edison perfected their design. That was in the early 1880s.

After graduating from Copiah-Lincoln Community College in 2010, I moved to Mississippi’s “Hub City” of Hattiesburg. While Brookhaven was always the “big city” in my eyes (after all, it had a



Joshua WILSON

to live. I was there for 15 years.

Hattiesburg received its “Hub City” moniker because of its location on a number of important rail lines. Later, major highways were built and intersected in and near the city. The state capital of Jackson is within easy driving distance, and Hattiesburgers (the official nickname for residents, chosen in 2016 as part of a tourism gimmick) often make the short drive to the cities on the state’s Gulf Coast, to New Orleans and to Mobile, Alabama.

I was recruited to Hattiesburg as the editor-in-chief of the William Carey University student newspaper. William Carey, which is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention, had about 2,800 students then. Its osteopathic medical school was in its startup stages, and the university had just rebuilt and relocated its Hurricane Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast campus. I went on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees there and ended up working for years in the university’s marketing and public relations office and as an adjunct professor.

William Carey had 4,100 students — known as Crusaders — when I left full-time employment there in 2016. I saw a report a few months ago saying the university now had more than 5,600 students. This is despite an EF3 tornado destroying six of the Hattiesburg campus buildings, including the historic administration building, and damaging over 40 others in January 2017.

Explosive growth is kind of the name of the game in Hattiesburg, which is also home to the Golden Eagles at the University of Southern Mississippi, major health care

Walmart), Hattiesburg was the “big big city” (it had two Walmarts). The city, with its population of about 49,000, was full of possibility and a great place

and manufacturing hubs, a zoo and its affiliated water park, and Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center, a major mobilization station for the U.S. Army.

I spent the last few years working at Southern Miss, where I taught journalism classes and helped stand up the Roy Howard Community Journalism Center. The journalism center is funded by the Scripps Howard Foundation and, like The Macon Melody, is one of the many enterprises forging sustainable paths forward for local news. I still have newspaper ink in my veins and all over my fingers, but I sure am excited about our opportunities for digital innovation.

I moved to Macon in late August to serve as executive editor of this newsroom, and I quickly felt at home. Macon is bigger than Hattiesburg in terms of physical footprint and population, but it feels the same. Southern hospitality abounds in both places, and growth opportunities are everywhere. Of course, both areas have challenges, but people are rising up to meet them and embrace a bright future. I guess that’s the southerner’s way. I love it.

It took me about a day to start finding people with connections to my home state. I would have found those connections sooner but was busy unpacking. In my first meeting as Melody editor, I was chatting with Larry Brumley, chief of staff at Mercer University. He once lived in Hattiesburg and was public relations director at William Carey, the same role I held some years later. The world is never as big as you think it is.

I’ll always say Mississippi sits at the center of the universe. My upbringing there was humble but truly wonderful. I understand the Magnolia State and thus Macon and the world.

Joshua Wilson is this newsroom’s executive editor. Send him a note at joshua@maconmelody.com.

TRUE GRIS

Coming soon to a yard near you

I’ve never aspired to have my name on a fancy building or a street sign along a busy avenue.

My ego and bank account aren’t large enough to buy myself a stadium, with G-R-I-S in big, block letters. I don’t even have a boulevard budget.

I probably could afford to write a check for an alley or make payments on a conference room. I guess I will have to die to have a park or a parkway named after me, and I’m not ready for that. Besides, there is a long list of folks far more deserving.

Once upon a time, I had a sandwich bearing my name at Molly’s Cafe downtown. Owner Betty Mock honored me when she renamed the “Monte Cristo” the “Monte Gristo.”

I was proud. I told folks about my yummy sandwich. When the restaurant closed, it made me sad to think I might be a one-bite wonder.

I made a comeback in the “name” game earlier this year. In January, I met with Matthew Israel at the headquarters for the American Camellia Society at Massee Lane Gardens south of Fort Valley.

Matthew is the executive director of the organization, which has more than 3,300 members. Although I have known Matthew for a long time, I had only recently learned he had a variety of camellia named after him.

The “Matthew Israel” is a deep rose pink, reticulate hybrid. Congratulations were in order. I felt as if I were in the company of a king.

Then I popped the question. “I once had a sandwich named after me,” I said. “What would it take to get a camellia?”

I was half-joking, but Matthew grinned. He could have been laughing at me, since he knows I come from a family of brown thumbs.

Although we have camellias and sasanquas in our backyard, we inherited them from the previous owners. We are more designated caregivers than propagators. We are trying not to let them die on our watch.

Eight weeks later, my wife and I found ourselves deep in the woods near Cairo, Georgia. We strolled through the gardens at Pat Johnson’s “Woodland Manor.” Camellias are the love of her life, and she has thousands of seedlings and hundreds of varieties growing on her property.

She is not a matchmaker. She does not hybridize her camellias. She lets God do the work.

“Pick out one,” she told me. She was a tiny bundle of energy. We could barely keep pace along the footpaths.

There was pressure, too. I couldn’t tell many of them apart. They were all gorgeous.

“I want a red one,” I finally said. “Red has always been my



Ed GRISAMORE

favorite color.”

After browsing through nature’s showroom, we discovered my special camellia under a canopy of pines. It was love at first sight. The species is Japonica, and its color is described as “dark, shiny, brilliant red with yellow anthers and light red filaments.”

It was an established plant that first bloomed in 2010, so it had been waiting for me all this time, aging like fine wine.

After the paperwork was completed, Matthew submitted the registration on May 1, which would have been my late mother’s 97th birthday. She would have been a proud mom.

A panel of seven members from the cultivar registration committee made the selections. About 20-30 are chosen nationally each year.

Matthew shared the good news with me on May 8.

My camellia is named “True Gris” — coming soon to a yard near you.

There are more than 30,000 varieties of camellias in the U.S. They are named after some famous people — like First Lady Rosalynn Carter — but mostly ordinary folks like me.

I was thrilled with the news. I wanted to wait and announce it to the wider world at the end of September. The timing was intentional, since next week marks the 80th anniversary of the American Camellia Society. It was founded on Sept. 29, 1945, at the Dempsey Hotel in Macon.

Willie Snow Ethridge, a newspaper feature writer and author of 16 books, attended the first public camellia show in the U.S. when it was held in Macon in February 1932.

“Camellias are not just flowers,” she wrote. “They are antiques. They have histories and legends and romances twined about them. They have genealogies.”

I am humbled. It’s more about digging rights than bragging rights.

The next step will be for the staff at the American Camellia Society to grow and nurture “True Gris” seedlings in the greenhouses at Massee Lane. By next year, I will be able to plant them. I’m saving a spot in my yard.

In the meantime, Matthew has granted me full visitation rights at Massee Lane. I can go down there any time and whisper in the ears of my new horticultural family.

Mostly, I want to say thank you.

Send Ed Grisamore a note at gris@maconmelody.com.

THE MELODY VOICE

Politicians cross a line when they play doctor with the public

Politicians play an important role in shaping health policy, but they do not belong in the exam room.

When elected leaders make sweeping claims about diagnoses,

treatments or cures, they step outside their expertise and risk real harm.

Medical advice should come from physicians, nurses and pub-

lic health professionals — people trained to study evidence and care for patients.

Politicians who substitute opinion for science confuse the public,

erode trust and endanger lives.

It is one thing to debate hospital funding or access to care. It is another to declare which treatments work or what conditions someone

might have. That is not public service. It is irresponsible. On matters of health, the voice we should hear loudest is the doctor’s — not the politician’s.

The Macon Melody

1675 Montpelier Avenue • Macon, GA 31201
478-200-7403 • maconmelody.com

Joshua Wilson, Executive Editor • joshua@maconmelody.com
Micah Johnston, Sports Editor • micah@maconmelody.com
DuBose Porter, Executive Director, Georgia Trust for Local News

The Macon Melody was founded in 2024 and is proud to serve Macon and the surrounding areas as a community newsroom. Explore our content on our website, maconmelody.com, and subscribe to our social media channels, Facebook and Instagram, for ongoing updates. We are proud to publish a print edition every Friday. We invite you to support our work by subscribing at maconmelody.com or by calling or visiting our office. Subscription tiers include digital-only access (\$69.99 per year), a print-only subscription (\$99.99 per year), or a print and digital bundle (\$149.99 per year). Print editions are delivered to your home via the U.S. Postal Service. The Melody is part of the Georgia Trust for Local News, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Local News. The Georgia Trust serves 1 in 10 Georgia residents through its 20 newspapers. Learn more at gtln.org.

The Melody (ISSN 93-4710374) is published with periodicals postage paid at Macon, GA 31201. All content is the copyright of The Macon Melody, 2025.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Step into 1925 and see what Maconites bragged about then

BY ED GRISAMORE
gris@maconmelody.com

Ah, 1925. It was a busy year. Mount Rushmore was dedicated. Johnny Carson, Margaret Thatcher, Paul Newman, Dick Van Dyke, B.B. King and Richard Burton were born. And lest we forget the Scopes Monkey Trial in the summer of 1925. A science teacher named John Thomas Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution in a nationally

publicized trial in Dayton, Tennessee. I feel a kinship with the Scopes trial. My wife was born in Dayton. (I should probably point out it was many years later.) And part of my assigned reading in high school was the play “Inherit the Wind.” (I have committed Proverbs 11:29 to memory ever since.) But what was going on in Macon in 1925? “Local Knowledge” takes a century-long step back in time to test you this week.



PHOTOS BY JASON VORHEES

Completed in 1925, the Macon City Auditorium in downtown Macon is known for its stately architecture. The building, designed by New York architect Egerton Swartwout, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It seats 2,700 and regularly hosts big-name artists and popular community events.

- 1. The world’s first crop-dusting company, Huff-Daland Dusters, was founded in Macon in 1925 and formed the foundation for a company that would later become what?**
A — Tesla.
B — Dust Busters.
C — Delta Airlines.
D — Nike Air.

2. Which of the following is not true about the Macon City Auditorium, which opened in 1925 and has been a venue for graduations, proms, concerts, sporting events and funerals?
A — It has one of the largest copper domes (152 feet in diameter) in the world, giant Doric columns on three sides and a mural above the stage that depicts Macon’s history from Hernando de Soto’s visit in 1540 to World War I.
B — It provided shelter for Macon residents during the solar eclipse of 2017.
C — Oprah Winfrey taped her TV show there when she visited Macon in November 2007.
D — The two largest funerals in Macon history were held there, including services for heavyweight boxer W.L. “Young” Stribling in October 1933 and singer Otis Redding in December 1967.

3. The autobiographical novel “Plume” was written by Laurence Stallings, who was born in Macon. It was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1925 and adapted later that year for the silent film epic, “The Big Parade.” The movie is considered one of the greatest films about World War I and later influenced other war films, including “All Quiet on the Western Front.” It was MGM’s top-grossing film for 14 years until what movie classic was released in 1939?
A — “The Wizard of Oz.”
B — “Wuthering Heights.”
C — “Gone with the Wind.”
D — “The Hunchback of Notre Dame.”

4. This week marks the 100th anniversary of the first game Mercer played in its new 12,000-seat Centennial Stadium on Sept. 26, 1925. The Bears lost to Georgia 32-0. The stadium was torn down in 1995 and is now the site of the Hilton Garden Inn. It was renamed in 1941 after what local philanthropist?
A — James Porter.
B — Peyton Anderson.
C — William Fickling.
D — Jesse Mercer.

5. In December 1925, Macon announced plans for what to be installed on Cherry Street — a first for the city?
A — Roundabout.
B — Traffic signals.
C — Parking meters.
D — Zip line.

6. A polio patient rehabilitating at Warm Springs, Georgia, contributed nine guest columns to The Macon Telegraph in the spring of 1925. He used the columns as a platform to introduce ideas he would later enact as the governor of New York and President of the United States. What was his name?
A — Calvin Coolidge.
B — Harry Truman.
C — Teddy Roosevelt.
D — Franklin D. Roosevelt.

7. Veterans of three wars gathered for a centennial celebration of the Macon Volunteers at the Armory in Macon in the spring of 1925. Because of Prohibition, what beverage was served at the event?
A — Red Bull.
B — Green tea.
C — Soft drinks.
D — Juice boxes.

8. The winter of 1925 received 23.34 inches of what substance, the highest amount on record?
A — Rainfall.
B — Junk mail.
C — Cicadas.
D — Leftover holiday fruitcake.

9. Macon is home to the International Cherry Blossom Festival. But in 1925, it was touting itself as what?
A — Kudzu Capital of Georgia.
B — Rose City of the South.
C — Camellia Corner of Central Georgia.
D — Ginkgos ‘R’ Us.

10. Which of the following is a true statement about Macon in 1925?
A — A protest was held at Macon City Hall demanding that Mayor Luther Williams raise property taxes on senior citizens and approve the construction of a data center in Shirley Hills.
B — There were five bridges and 14 Waffle Houses.
C — There were 73 downtown hotels and 57 streets named after trees.
D — There were 89 churches and 11 denominations.

ANSWER KEY:

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

On driverless cars, D.C. Republicans ditch free-market roots

It wasn’t that long ago that Republicans championed themselves as the party of lower taxes, free trade and innovation and took an unflinching stance on unions — but then something curious happened. A populist movement upended the political right’s long-standing order. While you can still see traditional Republican principles in action at the state level, many Republicans in Washington, D.C., seem pleased to abandon them, and their populist policies unfortunately trickle down to the Peach State — often to our detriment. The White House has picked trade fights with some of America’s closest allies, sought to end free trade agreements and levied hefty tariffs on imported goods, which is a tax on American consumers. After years of grappling with inflation, Georgians don’t need the White House to make prices even higher. The latest example of Republicans eschewing their long-held principles comes from Sen. Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, who apparently takes umbrage with autonomous vehicles, which are being slowly deployed across the country. Driverless vehicle company Waymo has even



Marc HYDEN

partnered with Uber to launch robotaxis in Atlanta, and self-driving pods are coming to Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson airport. This emerging technology is poised to break into other markets around the state, too, but Hawley wants to slam the brakes on this progress. “I think we ought to ban autonomous vehicles,” he complained, and he plans to introduce legislation called the “Autonomous Vehicle Safety Act” to effectively prohibit driverless vehicles. So, what’s the source of his beef with these machines? It’s twofold: He asserts that they are “not safe” and “would be terrible, terrible for working people.” He even added, “If [autonomous vehicles] became the norm, the Teamsters won’t exist anymore.” Hawley may be the first prominent, self-identified Republican in recent memory to express this level of concern for the labor union’s health, but never mind that. Hawley’s claims raise some eye-

brows. To begin with, autonomous vehicles come stocked with a host of sensors, cameras and AI technology to enable them to operate in a safe and efficient manner. Are they perfect? Of course not, but then again, human drivers are dangerously far from perfect. Insurer Swiss Re decided to look into driverless cars’ safety record, and its findings undermine Hawley’s complaint. “Compared to the overall driving population [Waymo’s autonomous vehicles boasted] an 88% reduction in property damage claims and a 92% reduction in bodily injury claims,” reads the report. In other words, Swiss Re found Waymo’s fleet much safer than human-driven cars, and the reasons are obvious. Autonomous vehicles don’t drive intoxicated, distracted or tired. So, adding more of them could make roads safer, but Hawley doesn’t seem supportive of this. Even if he conceded his flawed point on safety, he maintains that autonomous vehicles will hurt unions and put people out of work. This places him squarely in the neo-Luddite movement. Luddites were “ear-

ly 19th-century British textile workers who vandalized modern looms and other innovative, time-saving machinery that they feared would put them out of business,” writes my R Street colleague Steven Greenhut. Standing in the way of technological progress for this reason is ridiculous. Imagine if cavemen opposed the introduction of the spear because it would eliminate the need for larger hunting parties to take down woolly mammoths. This is the philosophy that Hawley is endorsing, and I can hear Neanderthals groaning in disgust at Hawley’s suggestions. That aside, while Hawley thinks autonomous vehicles will steal human jobs, they may help supplement our workforce. The American Trucking Associations reported in 2021 that the industry had a shortage of 80,000 drivers — and by 2030, that number could double to 160,000. Moreover, restrictions exist that greatly limit the number of hours truckers can drive. Faced with this reality, it is clear that autonomous vehicles could help fill some of these vacancies, and since driverless big rigs don’t get tired, they can drive so long as they

have gas — thereby easing complex and overburdened supply chains. It remains to be seen what might be in Hawley’s draft bill, but Business Insider claimed to receive an advanced copy of it and described its content: “The bill, as drafted, would effectively ban driverless cars nationwide by requiring the presence of ‘human safety operators’ in any autonomous vehicles driving on a public road.” If passed, this would be bad news and adversely impact Georgia’s position as a leader on autonomous vehicles. Many Republicans in D.C. are in the midst of a transformation, and Hawley is the latest example of how elements in the GOP are evolving. They now support unions and economic protectionism and oppose competition and innovation. At this rate, Republicans may find continued success elusive if they reject the principles that long defined them and the emerging technologies that will define tomorrow.

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



PHOTO BY ED GRISAMORE
Jeff Wood, general manager of Longleaf Distilling Co., enjoys couscous salad and a “love potion” drink made with blueberry gin and peach liqueur.

FROM OUR KITCHENS

Couscous and creativity

BY PAIGE MCFATE
Special to The Melody

I feel like I have been having this kind of food or something like it for most of my life. I adore cooking and trying out new things — from comfort foods to trying to see what I can make with what I have or going all out to try something new. What I enjoy about this couscous salad is that it’s so adaptable. The one Longleaf Distillery is currently serving is light, fresh and comforting. This little pasta is mixed with fresh cucumbers and sweet peppers, with brightness from the dill and lemon dressing and a salty creaminess from the feta — an understandably Mediterranean influence. But when it comes down to it, it is taking a base starch and putting in what was in the fridge. I think a lot of people can relate to trying

to figure out what you want to eat. The fun and satisfaction of it comes when you take what you have and make something that satisfies and makes your body and heart feel good. While this particular dish is not what we would typically call a “struggle meal,” most good food comes from when we have to be creative. While one of my favorite things to eat and modify, this dish is not unique. It does what all food does: it gives anyone the ability to create. We all have to eat, and being able to express yourself through necessity is a one-of-a-kind thing. Paige McFate has lived in Macon for around three years. The Woodstock native works at Longleaf Distilling Co. on Second Street. She credits her grandparents, Fred and Francis, for her love of cooking.

COUSCOUS SALAD

- 2 boxes garlic and olive oil couscous*.
- 4 cucumbers, quartered and diced.
- Pint cherry tomatoes, halved.
- Sweet tricolored peppers, diced.
- 1 cup of feta.
- Fresh dill.
- 1/4 bunch of parsley.
- 1/4 cup olive oil.
- 1/4 cup lemon juice.
- Lemon zest.
- 2 tbsp. dijon.
- Garlic.
- Salt and pepper.

Cook couscous according to box instructions. Cut all veggies while the couscous is cooling. For the dressing, add lemon, olive oil, zest, crushed garlic, dijon, and salt and pepper. Taste and adjust. Toss veggies, feta and couscous together, with a little bit of the dressing. Garnish with fresh dill and dressing to taste.

* Use whatever couscous you like; I put the boxed because that is what is quick and accessible.



PHOTO BY LAURA E. CORLEY
A conceptual drawing of a new arena, set to be built next to the Macon Coliseum, sits on display at the Sept. 23 meeting of the Macon-Bibb County Commission.

JAIL

Continued from Page A3

Terry McGhee addressed the board during public comment and said the county needs a new jail, not an expansion. McGhee asked commissioners if they are “blind, deaf or just don’t care.” “We’ve been doing CPR long enough on this jail, and it’s a dead body,” McGhee said. “How bad does that jail have to be before you finally put a new jail in?” Deaths in the county jail and inhumane conditions prompted public outcry earlier this year that included a march to city hall. More recently, U.S. Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, Democrats from Georgia, penned a letter to

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi calling for the Justice Department to investigate the jail for possible violations of inmates’ civil rights. In other business The board also approved \$7.7 million for Piedmont Mining to build a runway extension at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport. The board also voted to accept some \$3.6 million in Federal Aviation Administration money for airport improvements and match it with \$2 million from the county’s general fund. Also Tuesday night, the board approved additional contracts for the mayor’s paving initiative, including: — A contract with McLe-

Roy for paving at a cost of \$781,537.47 to be paid with 2025 state road improvement money and 2018 SPLOST money. — A contract with Professional Paving Services for paving at a cost of \$968,685.23 to be paid with state road improvement money and 2018 SPLOST money. — A contract with Professional Paving Services for paving at a cost of \$1.2 million to be paid for with 2018 SPLOST money and state transportation grant money. — A contract with Atlanta Paving & Concrete Construction for paving at a cost of \$717,715.12 to be paid for with 2018 SPLOST money and state transportation grant money.

WATER

Continued from Page A3

The other options he presented included funding the upgrades with a 5% rate increase plus a \$136 million bond with \$113 million in cash. A third option was to increase the rate by 9% and use a \$199 million bond with \$50 million in cash. Even with the proposed rate increases, Bodwell said Macon is “still on the bottom end of the scale” for rates when compared with similar municipal water authorities in Georgia. “I want to make sure that we’re looking at all sides of this,” MWA board member Elaine Lucas said. “For a lot of people, just those few little dollars make a difference.” Board members Desmond Brown and Valerie Wynn were absent. As Bodwell presented a history of the authority’s rates, MWA CEO Ron Shipman noted the authority has increased rates seven times over the past 15 years. This year, the base charges for water and sewer service each increased from \$9.75 to \$10.73. When Melody reporters

requested water and sewer rates in April, the authority responded it would take between 15-20 hours to gather that information and estimated it would cost the newsroom between \$375-\$500. Rate structure changes considered The authority board is considering a change to how it calculates water usage that could also mean higher bills for industrial customers. “We treat our business just like we do our residential customers,” Shipman said. “We don’t treat anybody any differently.” At present, residents and industries are billed at the same rates; however, the authority is looking to restructure its rate schedule so that large users pay more for using more water. “I like the idea of the tiered system,” board member Bill Howell said. “I only want to have to go through this one time with the general public talking about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. They’re going to see a rate increase either way. Some won’t see a rate increase.” In addition to a tiered struc-

ture for customers based on water usage, the authority is looking to change how it measures units of water. Bodwell explained most municipal water authorities define a unit of water as 1,000 gallons, but MWA uses centum cubic feet, or CCF, which equals 748 gallons. Shipman said he and Bodwell decided to “put a pin in it” and take it up later, but some on the board, including Howell, expressed interest in changing from CCF to gallons concurrently with the rate increase. “I think that switch from 748 gallons to 1,000 gallons is not going to be much — it’s just a systematic issue,” Shipman said. “We’ve got to make sure it works properly.” Shipman described the water system as “a car or an airplane that never stops — that has to be maintained, that operates 365 days a year. And it’s the only car we have or it’s the only airplane we have. We have to fix it while we’re driving, and we have to fix it while we’re flying.” The next MWA meeting is set for Oct. 2 at 4 p.m. in the second-floor board room at 790 Second St.

LINEAGE

Continued from Page A1

Their efforts are a race against time as weeds take over the land and aging headstones deteriorate. The last official map of Rose Hill, containing numbered plots, came from the city’s engineering office in 1959. Records are outdated and incomplete, O’Neal said. She called the existing documentation a “mishmash” of information available in the form of books, publications and government records. Rose Hill has 16,000 recorded burials. The cemetery is divid-

ed into 2,500 plots, or parcels of ground that can hold multiple burials. That number does not include sections that remain unplotted. O’Neal’s husband, a surveyor, created a map of the cemetery that organizes the plots into nine grids. O’Neal and Riley visit each grave with a pen and a sheet of paper, documenting the name, location, dates and military information contained on each headstone. O’Neal carries a pair of pruners for when she needs to cut through a tangle of weeds to read the faded engravings on certain memorials. The process can be tricky when the number of graves in a plot don’t

match existing documentation or when records contain misspelled names and incorrect dates. They must also document any graves not previously recorded. “We’re writing down and starting an inventory of all of these monuments — before they fade away,” O’Neal said. She keeps a separate record of the companies that produced each marker. Some gravestones were made by the Artope family of Macon, who once owned a marble business located at Plum and Third streets. There’s even a monument in Rose Hill made by Tiffany & Co. — one of just three of the luxu-

ry jewelry house’s monuments in Georgia, O’Neal and Riley noted. “The symbolism on these monuments is incredible,” Riley said. The stone designs aren’t just aesthetic. They often hold a deeper meaning. A flying hourglass represents how time flies, and a pair of carved hands reach up to heaven. O’Neal and Riley also trace the history of those buried in the cemetery through newspaper clippings and census records. O’Neal traced an engraved bench placed in memory of a man lost at sea in 2007 to a matching monument in a Rhode Island state park — where the man lived before his disappearance.

The two even created a Facebook group to document and keep these stories alive. They began their work in March and have cataloged 600 plots so far. O’Neal and Riley said they expect the project to take another year. Visitors frequently mistake the pair — donning brightly colored vests with notebooks, flashlights and gardening tools in hand — for cemetery employees and ask for directions to a specific grave. “What good is it knowing that they’re in here if you can’t find them?” O’Neal said, noting the importance of remembering and honoring the thousands of stories buried within the cemetery.

TAKE OUR READER SURVEY AND POTENTIALLY WIN A PRIZE!

Our Reader Survey will help us understand what matters most to you, how you read The Melody, and how we can improve both our weekly paper and our online coverage. After completing the anonymous survey, you have the option to enter a drawing for an Amazon gift card.

The Macon Melody



Take the short survey at
bit.ly/maconmelody

Empty Bowls fundraiser shines light on hunger

BY CASEY CHOUNG
casey@maconmelody.com

People lined up inside Middle Georgia State University’s College of Arts and Letters Tuesday to pick up colorful, irregularly shaped ceramic bowls and get a bowl of soup.

Tuesday’s gathering was the first Empty Bowls fundraiser, which was organized by Middle Georgia State University and the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank to raise money to combat food insecurity.

Kathy McCollum, president and CEO of the food bank, said the empty bowls act as a reminder of the hardships of food insecurity.

Nearly 117,000 people in Middle Georgia are food insecure, McCollum said, meaning they don’t have access to sufficient amounts of food. One in six Middle Georgians are food insecure, and 1 in 4 children in the region face food insecurity.

For every dollar raised, the food bank is able to feed eight people, she said.

The Trump administration recently canceled an annual food insecurity report after rescinding hundreds of millions in national funding for food banks back in March.

“We’ve certainly seen ups and downs in federal funding levels through the years,” she said. “To date, this year has been particularly challenging for us.”

Similar fundraisers have been done around the state, McCollum said.

Billy Wooten, dean of the College of Arts and Letters, initially brought the idea up to professor Kimberly Riner before approaching the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank.

Starting in January, the ceramics professor and three of her classes made nearly 300 bowls that students from across the arts college painted. The fundraiser is part of a service-learning project, Wooten said, which lets students use their skills to get real-world experience through a number of community partnerships.

Working to combat food insecurity and housing has been a “pet project” of his, he told attendees.

“[Students] learned about hunger in the Macon region, and that really got them pumped up and into the project,” Wooten said.

Sagan Thompson, a senior at MGA, volunteered to help students paint their bowls. He said handing out the bowls was like running an orphanage and seeing all the kids get adopted — a “full-circle” moment.

He said the bowls brought together professors and students from across the college.

The bowls were a product of a lot of hard work and determination, he added.

“A lot of the people who made the bowls are back here today seeing them be taken, so it’s a lot of satisfaction going around,” he said.

Wooten said he’s already spoken about bringing the fundraiser back next year with even more bowls, especially with the new studio being built at the school.

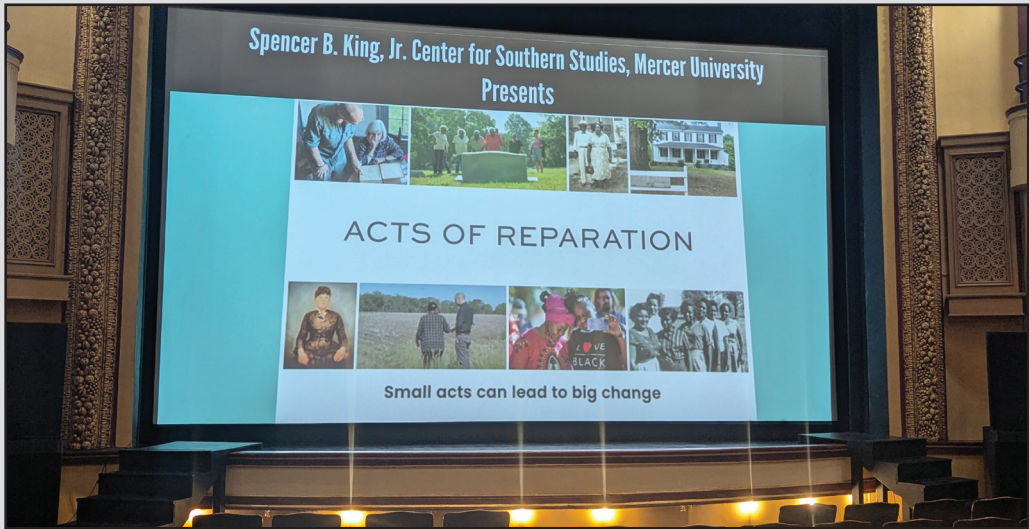


PHOTO BY EVELYN DAVIDSON

An opening screen for “Acts of Reparation” is displayed at its Macon premiere at the Douglass Theatre on Sept. 19.

‘Acts of Reparation’ traces family history, opens door to healing

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Filmmakers Selina Lewis Davidson and Macky Alston sparked discussions of family history, reparations and generational healing with their documentary “Acts of Reparation,” which premiered at Douglass Theatre Friday, Sept. 19.

The documentary follows Davidson and Alston’s journeys as descendants of enslaved individuals and slave owners.

“We are in conversation together across race, across history, during both journeys,” Davidson said.

The filmmakers’ partnership dates back 30 years. Their first documentary focused on the legacy of slavery.

Their newest work is “like the other shoe dropping,” Alston said — a continuation of the conversation on repair, equity and healing from “historic harm.”

Part of the film follows Davidson, who grew up in West Oakland, California, and her exploration of her family’s hometown of Monroe, Louisiana.

What fosters storytelling, according to Davidson?

“Boots on the ground, feet in the dirt and sitting around the kitchen table,” she said.

Davidson interviewed members of her extended family to piece together her family tree.

Eventually she purchased the house her ancestor lived and worked in as a domestic worker.

The “Pink House,” as she calls it, is now a community center for others to pursue and preserve their family’s stories.

While Davidson delves into her family history, Alston reconciles with his family’s role in enslavement.

His story begins with his great-great-grandfather, the first president of Mercer University, and continues with visits to his family home and plantation in Penfield.

The film recounts how Alston donated his share of the money from the house to a Black-led organization as an act of reparation.

He also worked with a Greene County resident to open a museum focusing on Black history.

Alston also played a part in unearthing a long-forgotten Black cemetery containing more than 1,000 graves and situated just a brick wall away from the cemetery where Mercer’s founders are buried.

Throughout the documentary, both film-

makers grapple with the question of what reparations look like to them.

Reparations aren’t just about monetary value, Davidson said. It can also be about coming to terms with one’s personal history and initiating hard — and often — uncomfortable conversations.

“Telling the truth about American history and teaching Black history is more controversial than it used to be,” Alston said.

He added that individuals have the responsibility of keeping their own family histories and sharing them with future generations, their communities and schools, and even their houses of worship.

“That’s a way that we can keep this history alive,” he said.

Those tough conversations don’t end with the rolling credits of the documentary, either, the filmmakers said.

“We feel like the film is a catalyst,” Davidson said.

“Acts of Reparation” is part of a film series organized by Mercer’s Spencer B. King Jr. Center for Southern Studies.

“There is a power in relationship and family storytelling — even if your backgrounds are different,” said Douglas Thompson, center director.

A day of family history workshops followed last Friday’s film premiere, including what Davidson has dubbed “Pink House Pop-Ups.”

Attendees learned about genealogy and resources for ancestry research. They also heard from Muriel Jackson, head of genealogy at the Washington Memorial Library.

Macon native Linda Anderson Bivins and several of her cousins attended the Saturday morning workshop. Her interest in family history dates back to 1987 when she met an unknown relative from another county.

With little information on her grandparents and her family’s records destroyed by fire, she connected with a 99-year-old relative who helped Bivins trace her family history all the way back to her enslaved ancestors.

Bivins said she hopes to take some of Jackson’s tips on tracing family members by cemetery records through online services like Find a Grave.

The family history weekend also included story swapping and wider discussions about the meaning of reparations.

Family history isn’t always pretty, Davidson reminded filmgoers Friday evening — but, “you are here because they were there,” she noted.

Despite outcry, Twiggs skips review, approves data center

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Twiggs County commissioners faced an uproar of boos and shouts from residents Thursday evening after approving a data center proposal that would rezone nearly 300 acres in Dry Branch for the multibillion-dollar data center project.

The facility is set to be built on Adams Park Road on land owned by the Weyerhaeuser Co., a timberland company. It owns nearly 12.4 million acres of timberland across the United States and manages 14 million acres in Canada.

The commission’s decision comes a day after several Q-and-A sessions offered the public an opportunity to learn more from Eagle Rock Partners, the developers of the data center.

The meeting lasted more than two hours. Attendees packed the meeting room, with crowds also in the hall.

The center will bring 600 jobs to Twiggs County, said Ken Loeber, founding partner of the North Carolina-based development firm.

Terri Howard, president of Oconee Electric Membership Corporation, told attendees and commissioners construction and operation of the data center would have no effect on local electric bills.

The utility company leader, along with Twiggs County Public Schools Superintendent Mack Bullard, were among those who spoke in support of the project.

Loeber addressed concerns about the data center’s water usage by holding up a plastic water bottle to represent the daily amount needed with

the center’s planned “closed-loop” non-evaporative cooling system.

He said “forward-thinking” people embraced the development of a train depot in Twiggs County in 1900 and the addition of power lines in the 1940s. He encouraged the community to support the data center as a “very large opportunity to move forward.”

During public comment for those opposed to the project, Wilkinson County resident Elizabeth Tyre gave the commission a petition against its construction.

The petition was signed by more than 360 individuals.

“My family’s always lived here,” she said before the commission meeting. “I au-

See TWIGGS
Page A8



PHOTO BY ED GRISAMORE

Rev. Bob Veazey, head of the Bible Department at First Presbyterian Day School, teaches students in his Family Life class.

SKILLS

Continued from Page A1

someone close, but the majority have not.”

During the time the class spends on the unit, students are assigned to write their own obituary. Veazey also discusses how to write a eulogy — what and what not to include.

“As a pastor, I’ve been doing funerals for 35 years,” he said. “But over the last 20 years, I’ve been seeing more and more family members involved and speaking at funeral services. Many times, they know the person better than the minister.”

The students take a field trip to Hart’s Mortuary downtown, where owner and funeral director Milton Heard IV meets with them in the chapel, discusses the history of funeral services, talks about the roles of the coroner and funeral home staff, and shows them caskets and cremation urns.

Veazey said a former student’s mother died while the young lady was taking the class two years ago. When the “Death and Dying” unit came up, he asked if it would make her uncomfortable.

“She even wanted to add some things,” he said. “She shared some of her feelings

and emotions. The class was in tears.”

While there is structure to his lessons, Veazey said he strives to give his students as much freedom as possible. He has some pastoral rules, some “Do’s” and “Don’ts.” He makes suggestions on how to dress appropriately when they attend a funeral or memorial service. He assures them it is OK to cry and be sad.

“One of the biggest questions they ask me is what to say to people who are grieving,” Veazey said. “I tell them they don’t really have to say anything. Just be there.”

SHERIDAN
CONSTRUCTION

We Build Relationships!

At Sheridan Construction, we don’t just build structures—we build relationships, trust, and a foundation for the future. As a leading commercial construction firm in Georgia, we specialize in education, healthcare, corporate, and industrial projects, delivering top-quality results with integrity and precision.

Creating spaces that transform communities for generations.

(478) 743-1578

www.sheridanconstruction.com

Offices in: Macon • LaGrange • Athens



GABBA unites Allman Brothers fans for 33rd year

The Georgia Allman Brothers Band Association (GABBA) Fest is underway for its 33rd year, bringing multitudes of faithful Allman Brothers Band fans to Macon for a weekend of music and camaraderie.

“It’s amazing having folks come from Australia, England, Norway, Sweden, Japan — from all over the world — as well as all over the U.S.,” said Kyler Mosley, GABBA president and co-founder. “The first one was a bunch of us in the old Hilton Hotel ballroom.

“Fans wanted more and it’s just grown ever since with more bands in more venues and headline concerts at the Piedmont Grand Opera House. The music is great, of course, but what makes the weekend special is fans getting together, renewing friendships and making new friends year after year.”

On the bill this year are the Randall Bramblett Band with the MegaBlaster Horns, the Restless Natives, Macon Music Revue, Anthony Rosano and the Conqueroos, Bonnie Blue, the Garrett Collins Project, Willis Gore & Greg Kearney, and the Jesse Williams Band.

Besides concerts at the Grand, there are afternoon meet-and-greets at Fresh Produce Records, afterparties at Grant’s Lounge and free, outdoor concerts at The Big House Museum, including the annual GABBA members’ jam. There’s also a tree dedication at Rose Hill Cemetery, where several ABB members are buried.

Scheduling and ticket information are at gabbafest.net.

Bramblett, ABB and Capricorn

“We’re real excited about having Randall Bramblett this year,” Mosley said. “He was central to so many things that happened in the early days as a side man and then a solo artist. He’s an amazing writer and he and his band have such energy live. It’s always a great time.”

Multi-instrumentalist Bramblett was part of Gregg Allman’s first solo tour after he came to Capricorn as a session musician and worked extensively with Tommy Talton and Scott Boyer’s band, Cowboy. Sought for his musicianship and ability to arrange music and improvise, he worked on projects with ABB’s



Michael W. PANNELL

Dickey Betts and Jaimoe and others like Wet Willie and the Marshall Tucker Band.

When Chuck Leavell formed Sea Level in 1977, Bramblett was a founding member. When Sea Level ended, a near-endless list of studio, tour and songwriting credits began piling up. A brief list could include Steve Winwood, Traffic, Bonnie Raitt, Widespread Panic, Warren Haynes, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Bettye LaVette, Deep Purple, Rick Nelson and more.

His first solo album, “That Other Mile,” came in 1975. After 12 other albums, he released “Paradise Breakdown” in 2024.

From Jesup to Athens with Macon thrown in

Jesup, Georgia, is about 150 miles from Macon as you head toward Jekyll Island. It was there that Bramblett started piano lessons at 4, played alto sax in middle and high school, and began playing in bands. It was there that the rudiments for playing other instruments were established: flute, guitar, mandolin, harmonica and so forth.

After high school, Bramblett headed to North Carolina for college and learned enough guitar to play folk music. Leaving there, he headed to Athens to play music with his good friend, guitarist and sometime co-writer, the late Davis Causey. For the most part, he’s lived in Athens since, aside from the short while he pitched his tent in Macon and New Orleans.

I sought the chance for a phone conversation with Bramblett while he was at home in Athens.

The week before, his band had played backup for his old friend Leavell at the Blind Willie McTell Festival in Thomson, Georgia. As we talked, he had to move around to find a quiet spot since they were grinding tree limbs in his neighborhood.

For all the acclaim Bramblett rightly gets as a musician, and as hard as he can rock out delivering his eclectic “modern roots music” repertoire, I find his craftsmanship

as a songwriter and the artfulness of his lyrics and storytelling most striking. He creates memorable, poetic and literate lines that are clever without being self-conscious and heartfelt without being melodramatic. You know, the sort of thing that makes you nod and go, “Oh yeah, I feel ya, bro.”

And he ties it all together in arrangements where everything really does fit and work to serve the song.

Where did that come from?

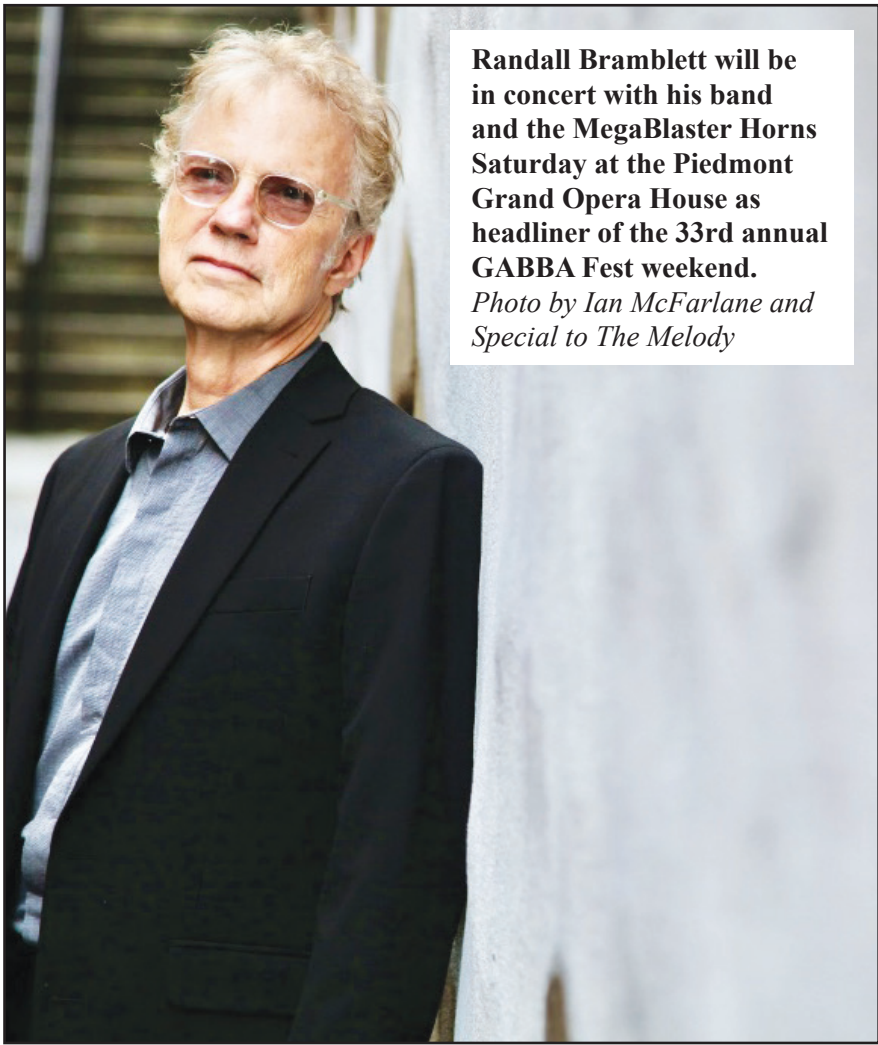
I came to the conversation with a list of questions, topics and lines from songs, one being simply the phrase, “Hiding in a whisper tree,” from “Dead in the Water,” a swampy, funky tune off the 2015 “Devil Music” album. Right off the bat, I asked if there really was such a thing as a whisper tree?

“That idea came from reading a lot of the Beat Generation writers of the ‘50s, like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs,” he said. “Burroughs used to live near where I lived for a while in New Orleans and the story is, they would put Benzedrine swabs from inhalers into coffee and get crazy on speed. Anyway, his wife was hooked and once thought there were lizards in a tree and they were whispering, I guess talking to her. She tried to knock them out with a broom. A whisper tree became something I thought was a cool idea, some mystical tree with lizards.”

Because of his poetic turns of phrase, I was going to ask Bramblett if he was much of a reader. Obviously, though, if he’d been reading the Beats, that question was pretty well answered. It was further cemented when we were talking about something — I think it was Carl Jung’s autobiography — and he said, “Wait, I’m in my library now, let me find it.” When I mentioned a book even later on, he said, “Text me the name of it when we hang up.”

That clinched it. And yes, he does journal and keep a notebook to tuck away bits and pieces of ideas, words and images, and yes, he does spend a lot of time on his writing when there’s writing to be done.

“The music part is easier than the lyrics to me,” Bramblett said. “A lot of times I hear things; I’ll hear a phrase or part of a story somebody’s



Randall Bramblett will be in concert with his band and the MegaBlaster Horns Saturday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House as headliner of the 33rd annual GABBA Fest weekend. Photo by Ian McFarlane and Special to The Melody

telling. ‘Devil Music’ came from a story I read in Howlin’ Wolf’s biography about how his mother closed the door on him because of the music he played. ‘Throw My Cane Away’ off ‘Paradise Breakdown’ came from something somebody told me Dr. John said.”

The line in that bluesy, funkish, horn-laced song is, “I feel so good I’m going to throw my cane away,” and “I hope some day you get to throw that cane away.”

There are too many more lines and stories surrounding Bramblett’s music; it’s best you see a show or buy some tunes and discover your own.

GABBA Fest, ABB and Gregg

With GABBA Fest in sight, I asked Bramblett about recollections from younger days.

“First of all, the Allman Brothers were revolutionaries to me,” he said. “I used to hear them play for free in Piedmont Park and couldn’t believe the energy they had or what they were doing with blues and jazz — it was just revolutionary ... two great guitar players, two drummers and Gregg’s voice and songwriting,

just amazing. When Gregg asked me to head up the horn section on his first solo tour, that was the first time I’d been on a national tour, including a gig at Carnegie Hall. It was a lot of fun and there I was out in the big rock and roll world playing places I never dreamed I would.

“I loved hearing Gregg sing. When he’d do ‘Oncoming Traffic,’ which he did alone, I’d be off stage just listening to him. Man, he could deliver. What a voice. What a talent. And his organ playing — I’d go over and look at his settings and try to remember them.”

You can hear for yourself how all this plays out Saturday at the Grand — how reading all those books has informed hard-hitting, deeply felt songs — and maybe catch how those nights checking out Gregg Allman’s organ settings can still be heard today.

I imagine he’ll spin a pretty good story or two as well. Bramblett’s website is randallbramblett.com.

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

NEW SOUTHERN DAD

Tap dancers, tattoo artists cross paths at Savannah center

Tap dancing is as American as baseball and apple pie.

The expressive dance form, named and set apart from other forms of expressive arts for the rhythmic sounds created by the performers specific to genre footwear, rose in popularity along with jazz music, another distinct American art.

The story of tap dancing ebbs and flows along with the history of entertainment, as well as the racial strife, of our country.

But through the good, bad and ugly of it all we’ve seen the talents of such performers as Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers and, my personal favorite, Sammy Davis Jr., extenuated through tap dancing.

The art form remains a standard



Kyle DOMINY

practice for anyone pursuing a hobby in dance or a career on stage, and there are few people in the world that don’t recognize the sound of the metal toe tips and heels of tap shoes clicking against the floor.

It’s a sound I didn’t fully appreciate until my own daughter started dancing, and the noise has been a near-constant soundtrack to my life for nearly eight years. My only girl child has developed quite a knack for style.

Like tap dancing, tattoos have a rich history that spans different eras

and cultures. From the identifying markings of ancient tribes to inked up characters in early 20th century side shows, tattoos have been a part of the human experience for as long as humans have formed societies.

The permanent skin decorations have been embraced by some cultures, like the native Hawaiians, whose tattoos are a living record of an individual’s life and lineage, while others stigmatized them. In ancient Rome, only prisoners and slaves had tattoos, and anyone with such a mark was ostracized from society.

Now, it’s difficult to find someone without a little ink, visible or hidden away by a sleeve or trouser cuff. Tattoos have become the ultimate form

of self-expression, and advancements in the tools of the trade have made it where the human body can be the canvas for anything from a cartoonish figure to a landscape that would make Monet shed a tear of joy.

The worlds of tap dancing and tattoos collided recently in dueling conventions at the Savannah Convention Center.

The iconic facility, which seems to always be under construction, simultaneously hosted the Surge Tap Fest and the Villain Arts Tattoo Convention. The massive center, which overlooks River Street from its island in the Savannah River, not only decided the two were a good fit for a late summer weekend but also pro-

vided space for the two events adjacent to each other.

To access the tattoo show, many folks had to go through the tap-dancing crowd. I, for one, thought it was a great juxtaposition and thoroughly enjoyed watching heavily tattooed artists making their way to the show floor through a crowd of toddler tap dancers. It was a great reminder that we’re all just trying to get by in this world, and you must navigate with a little tolerance and understanding.

My daughter left with a new pair of tap shoes; I left with a new tattoo. It was a great weekend that I hope is already rescheduled for next year.

Kyle Dominy is a reporter based in Dublin.

TWIGGS

Continued from Page A7

thored the petition to just let everybody’s voices be heard.”

Twiggs County resident and Warner Robins-based attorney Rob Fricks questioned the legality of granting project approval without regional review. He was supported by many attendees in calling for the commission to review the project as a development of regional impact, a classification from the state’s Department of Community Affairs.

According to the department’s website, that classification means the development would have wide-ranging effects — with some of those outside of the local government’s jurisdiction.

Regional review is “common sense,” Twiggs County resident Julia Asherman said, comparing the commission’s decision to forgo that process to purchasing a house without hiring an inspector.

“If the developer is so sure that this project is a benefit to us, then I would think he would welcome that opportunity to prove it with a DRI that gives a favorable assessment,” she said before the start of the commission meeting.

Asherman is an organic vegetable farmer who parked her red tractor outside of the courthouse with a sign with a Nike logo and the inscription “Just Due Diligence.”

Although she said she opposed the rezoning of agricultural land for development purposes, she said her

main concern is that the commission’s approval process “has been really rushed.”

“The question of the data center itself is not what I’m here to address,” she said. “I’m here to address the process — whether or not this has been democratic, whether or not it’s been transparent.”

County Attorney Kerry Howell told the commission “there are no applicable threshold criteria” for a DRI study for a data center, and it is not mandatory by the county’s ordinances.

He noted the community affairs department might pass some proposed rules for data centers on Nov. 20, but they wouldn’t go into effect until Dec. 20 — if passed at all.

Howell also recommended com-

missioners avoid designating the property as fully industrial. Instead, he urged officials to approve a commercial zoning with conditional use — allowing only a data center to be built.

When Commission Chair Ken Fowler asked about the potential impact of delaying project approval and initiating the regional review, Loeber said such a hold-up would kill the project.

A few residents spoke in support of the data center, saying it would bring jobs and financial stability.

“It is time for Twiggs County to grow,” said Claudia Fitzpatrick, a resident of the county for five decades.

Another attendee urged residents to not “stand in the way of progress.”



PHOTO BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
Elizabeth Tyre of Wilkinson County speaks before Twiggs County commissioners Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025, in opposition to a proposed data center in the county’s Dry Branch community. She presented a petition she authored with more than 360 signatures.

Physicality pays off for 5-0 Eagles



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH
Stratford head coach Paul Carroll claps his hands in anticipation during an Eagles game earlier this season. Carroll has the team off to a 5-0 start while aiming to be title winners.

BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH
Melody Contributor

From the time Paul Carroll took over the Stratford football program last year, one thing topped his list of priorities and goals.

“They’re just not physically ready — weight room-wise and stuff like that,” he said during that first pre-season in 2024, noting a freshman class of about 20 players.

The same went for the older players.

“They have been working, since I got hired, in the weight room,” he continued. “They’ve gotten stronger, but a lot of them haven’t developed yet. You got to go from weight room muscles to football muscles.”

Throughout that first season, it remained an issue, with steps — not big ones but steps nonetheless — of progress. And it remained the priority through his first offseason with the Eagles.

“The physicality of all of it, that’s what I worry about,” Carroll said in July. “Like I said before, all the freakin’ time, we got to get a whole lot tougher. It’s more mental toughness than anything.”

The old-school former linebacker at Georgia Southern is like every coach around: not ready to declare any goal having been achieved.

But Carroll came pretty close last Friday night, admitting that his squad was the more physical team in Stratford’s 41-14 thumping of higher-ranked Brookstone to improve to 5-0 as the lone undefeated team in Bibb County.

See EAGLES
Page B2



PHOTO BY MARK POWELL
Northeast running back and defensive back Kortnei Williams darts toward the outside and evades an ACE defender during the Raiders’ win over the Gryphons last week. Northeast played its biggest game of the season Thursday when it faced Dublin.

FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Week 7: Northeast’s test and Stratford’s road trip

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
micah@maconmelody.com

Titans clashed in Week 6 of Macon’s high school football season, as one local school lost its undefeated status while another maintained it in blowout fashion.

As Bibb County’s teams breeze past the midpoint of the schedule, more important matchups loom this week. Here’s a rundown of last week’s games and previews of key showdowns slated for this week.

Last week’s action

Northeast and ACE met in the marquee game of Friday’s lineup, and the contest was a close one at first with the Raiders taking a 10-0 lead into halftime. The Gryphons could not keep pace with Northeast’s speed and athleticism as time went on, though, and the Raiders eventually pulled away for a 29-0 victory.

The win kept Northeast tied for the lead in GHSA Region 2-A Division I with Dublin and showcased

their talents. While it was a tough loss for ACE, the 10-0 score at half-time was cause for optimism for the Gryphons during one of the school’s best seasons yet.

Across town, Stratford proved itself with a blowout victory over fellow undefeated team Brookstone to remain unbeaten and become a bonafide GIAA Class 4A state championship contender. With a rushing game as good as anyone’s, the Eagles have a chance to keep dominating for the rest of the regular season and into the playoffs.

Other games across Bibb County featured showdowns between two Macon teams. Southwest got a much-needed victory when it defeated Central 36-0. Mount de Sales notched its first win of the season when it defeated Central Fellowship 21-3. Westside faltered in what it hoped would be a bounceback effort, losing 27-14.

With some schools getting into their region schedules at long last this week, these key games highlight Week 7.

Northeast (4-1)
vs. Dublin (4-1)

Last meeting: Dublin won 17-7 in 2024. Last week: Northeast defeated ACE 29-0; Dublin defeated Jefferson County 42-13.

After a ringing 29-0 win over region rival ACE last week — though Northeast head coach Jeremy Wiggins would just as soon bring up his team’s propensity for illegal shift penalties as he would bring up the final score — the Raiders have an even bigger challenge.

The Dublin Fighting Irish come to town this week in what could be the game that eventually decides the Region 2-A Division I championship as it did last year when Dublin defeated Northeast 17-7 at the Shamrock Bowl.

That was a ranked matchup, and both teams are in the Top 10 again this year according to Georgia High School Football Daily, which ranked Northeast at No. 7 in Class A-Divi-

See PREVIEW
Page B3

FPD beats Tattnall in extra-innings victory

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
micah@maconmelody.com

After FPD third baseman Addison Arnold struck out for the second time in the early innings of the Vikings’ crucial road game against Tattnall, head coach Shaun Bridger took one of his best hitters aside.

“I came to her and told her, ‘You’re gonna come up in a spot in this game that’s gonna be big,’” Bridger said. “I said, ‘I believe in you. I know you’re gonna do something special, you’ve done it for us all year.’”

Even Bridger might not have known how right he was.

Arnold heeded her coach’s words in her next three at-bats, smacking a huge three-run homer in the fifth and delivering the go-ahead base hit in extra innings to give FPD a thrilling 11-8 win in nine innings Tuesday night.

The victory, which puts FPD in a three-way tie with Tattnall and John Milledge atop the standings of GIAA Class 4A District 6, came after the Vikings lost a 6-1 lead in the bottom of the seventh and a 7-6 lead in the eighth inning.

“We’re resilient,” Bridger said simply when asked about his team. “This team’s battled all year long. We started (the season) out slow, evened off in the middle and now we’re back on track with our hitting ... this team is just tough.”

FPD moved to 13-3 overall and 5-2 in district play. Gracyn Fuller, who pitched six stellar innings before losing her lead in stunning fashion in the seventh frame, got right back on the horse and finished the complete game. She tossed nine innings and struck out 16 Tattnall batters, working through some location problems with grit.

“Gracyn’s just got that stone-faced mentality,” Bridger said of his ace pitcher. “Nothing phases her, nothing bothers her. She knows that it’s gonna be a battle; she knows that’s a great team over there. We had a hiccup in the seventh where we gave up the five runs, but this team didn’t give up.

They have her back. She’s a big reason for where we are.”

The Trojans fell to 12-5 overall and are also 5-2 in District 6 play.

While the loss was heartbreaking, Tattnall did anything but roll over. The seventh-inning comeback, which was capped by a Mercer West two-run homer that elicited raucous cheers from a solid Tattnall home crowd, was a notable offensive effort for the Trojans.

“I just told them to find a way to pass it on to the next person. You’re not going to hit a six- or seven-run home run. That’s exactly what they did, and I’m super proud of our girls and the way we fought and competed,” Tattnall head coach Jordan Brooks said. “We weren’t at our best, but we played well against a great pitcher. Gracyn is tough, and she’s been tough for three years. Hats off to her for keeping us off balance — for the most part.”

Both teams scored one run early before the bats went quiet for a few innings, but FPD eventually got its five-run advantage with two scores in the fourth followed by Arnold’s long ball in the fifth to make it 6-1. Tattnall had a hard time hitting Fuller until it manufactured its comeback in the seventh.

The Vikings scored a run in the eighth when Tattnall tried to throw a baserunner out stealing second, which allowed FPD’s runner on third to come to the plate. The Trojans equalized in the bottom of the eighth — even after Reese Covington was, much to the dismay of Tattnall’s players and fans, called out trying to score on a wild pitch — to send things to the ninth.

FPD’s bats got going again in that final frame, as Jessica Jones laid down a bunt and Fuller walked before Arnold came through yet again with a two-RBI knock on a hard grounder to the left side.

“We just gotta be better with the little things. We’ve always done a

See FPD
Page B3

After Citadel win, Mercer set for ETSU road game

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
micah@maconmelody.com

After dominating The Citadel, Mercer set for ETSU road game

Is it possible for the Mercer Bears to play a perfect football game?

When someone asked Mercer head coach Mike Jacobs that question at a press conference Monday, he laughed.

A perfect game isn't possible, Jacobs said — although Mercer's game against The Citadel last week was pretty close.

The Bears defeated the Bulldogs 38-0 on the road in what was a sorely-needed blowout, dominating on both sides of the ball for their second win of the season to move to 2-1 overall and 2-0 in Southern Conference play.

There was plenty to be excited about after such a big victory. Freshman quarterback Braden Atkinson continued his hot streak, throwing for more than 300 yards on 29 of 35 passing for four touchdowns without turning the ball over like he did against Wofford in his first-ever collegiate appearance.

"It was certainly our most complete game of the season," Jacobs said Monday. "Braden did a tremendous job; I think he completed nine straight passes to start. He was able to do that because of our offensive line. They protected him well. We only had one sack on the day, and it was sort of on a scramble."

With that passing performance came a pair of great receiving days from Kendall Harris (96 yards) and

Adjatay Dabbs (100 yards). Dabbs scored two touchdowns in the first half, showing his talent similar to the uptick in production he provided down the stretch for the Bears last season.

"He's been great — he's significantly improved his hands, his route running. On that first touchdown he got a great throw from Braden and then just made a great grab. On his second score, he just ran a great route," Jacobs said of Dabbs.

Nine different Mercer receivers made at least one catch Saturday. Because of that, the running game did not have to provide much — but it did anyway, thanks largely to CJ Miller's 79-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter.

The jaunt to paydirt, which Miller took up the sideline after escaping the line of scrimmage through a gaping hole on the left side, was the longest rushing score in Mercer history.

"It took us a little to get the running game going. We slipped a few times on plays where I thought we had a chance to have some big runs. But then CJ finally broke loose," Jacobs said. "They were also kind of loading the box ... we took what they gave us in that department. Pleased with the offense and how they performed."

Mercer's defense played just as well, holding The Citadel's option-heavy run game to just 118 yards and limiting the Bulldogs to 3-of-18 on third downs and 0-for-5 on fourth downs. On the rare occasion The Citadel passed, the Bears were there to shut things down.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MERCER UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS
Bears quarterback Braden Atkinson winds up to throw a pass during Mercer's 38-0 trouncing of The Citadel last week. He finished with more than 300 passing yards, four touchdowns and no interceptions.

"For a team like The Citadel, that's when you have to work on your eyes. They'll run-run-run and then run a double move, or they'll run-run-run and then have a trick play," defensive back Carmelo O'Neal said. "It's just having good eyes all game and not taking a play off out there, not getting caught sleeping."

Sophomore linebacker Julian Fox notched eight tackles and an interception in a standout effort. The Bears tallied five tackles for loss as a team.

It was, by far, Mercer's largest

margin of victory after it narrowly defeated Wofford 22-21 last week and lost to Presbyterian College 15-10 in its home opener.

The way the Bears cruised to the win bodes well for impending Southern Conference play, which they will continue this week with another road game — this time a night game Saturday at 5:30 — against East Tennessee State.

"They're a very well-coached team, I have a lot of respect for Coach (Will) Healy," Jacobs said. "They have a veteran staff. They've

probably been as aggressive as they've been in the portal because they've had to. Roster-wise, from top to bottom, they're probably one of the most complete rosters in the conference. Their quarterback is a guy who's played at two different Big 10 schools that seems to be settling in."

Said quarterback is Cade McNamara, the former Michigan and Iowa signal-caller who began his

See **MERCER**
Page B3



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH
Stratford running back Tyler Stephens (9) shakes loose of a Brookstone defender as he rushes forward during the Eagles' 41-14 win over the Cougars at home last week. Stephens is a driving force for Stratford's prolific offense this season.

EAGLES

Continued from Page B1

"I thought we were," he said, needing no cajoling. "I really did."

A further embracing of what Carroll and his staff have preached was displayed a week earlier when Tyler Stephens went for 219 rushing yards in the Eagles' 28-13 win over Frederica.

"What we're trying to do — we're trying to get physical up front," Stephens said after that game. "First half, they came out physical upfront, defensive-wise. We had to make a lot of adjustments, getting in the 'I' formation, and we got physical backs."

Carroll's summary of the Brookstone game was fairly similar.

"We got back in our 'I' formation there for a while," Carroll said. "Just really ran it right at 'em."

Now, Carroll admits that the Ea-

gles might have progressed more than he realized.

"I think we showed the other night what we were," he said. "We're still not where we need to be."

"Our coaching staff and myself, I'm never going to probably be satisfied until we win that last game of the season."

This year, there's a legitimate chance of that satisfaction being realized.

The progress in Carroll's priority area, physicality, has the Eagles at 5-0 for the second straight year, a number that matches Stratford's win total for all of 2023.

This is the first time since 1999-2000 under Rodney Collins that the Eagles have gotten off to consecutive 5-0 starts.

The 1999 Eagles won that region and dumped Tattnall 24-6 in the GISA Class 3A state championship to end a perfect season.

Stratford did it again a year later, topping the Trojans 14-7 in the final to finish 12-2.

The good start last year — with a slightly different schedule, as Game 2 against Calvary Christian last year is at the end of the season this time around — was stopped by Brook-

stone in overtime en route to a 2-3 finish followed by a 33-28 loss to Brookstone in the first round of the playoffs.

Against the same five opponents, Stratford is scoring 39.6 points a game compared to 29.4 last year — and giving up less than a point more. The margin of victory against those five is 23 points this year, 10 more than a year ago.

Carroll is pretty much getting what he'd hoped for from the Eagles across the board, with weekly improvements from a group loaded with two-way players.

"On the offensive line wise, I didn't think we were going to be able to move a lot of people off the football, and we've done that," he said. "The biggest thing is we've enjoyed it. They have gotten to that mentality a little bit, you know, of 'Hey, Coach, let's go to 'I,' let's go to let's run the ball right at them.'"

That's music to his ears.

"It becomes just like anything else," Carroll said. "You get a little momentum going and you get a little confidence in yourself. I think that's the main thing with this group was getting some of those kids to get some confidence in their self."

Tucker Johnston has settled in and progressed at quarterback after starting the preseason in a battle with Morris Butler, who also plays defense.

Offensive lineman and linebacker Maddox Whitehead, as well as guard, H-back and linebacker Ja'Lon Smith, have handled two-way duties and remained physical.

Freshman defensive back Aaron Jefferson, also Stephens' understudy at tailback, leads with 8.4 tackles a game, just ahead of Whitehead's 7.7. Seven defenders get at least five tackles a game.

And some of them help the offense run for 276 yards each week.

As happy as Carroll was with last week's game-day focus, he's still trying to figure out this year's group. The Friday night Eagles tend to be a little different than the Eagles on the other four nights of the week on the practice field — like before the Frederica win.

"We didn't have any good practices," Carroll said. "But (the week before), we had good practices and then we showed up not ready to play on Friday night."

And then against Frederica: "Biggest improvement, we lined up and

got a little toughness about us. Lined up and then we ran a play over and over and over again and we just decided we were going to not be denied."

It was better leading up to Brookstone — but not necessarily a clinic each day of sharpness consistently in practice. But Carroll does see a more consistent tone and attitude.

"I think we took a big step the other night playing in a big game, a crucial game for us," he said. "Our kids focused a lot more before the game."

"I hadn't seen that this year."

He hopes it's contagious week to week and knows it needs to be. This week, Stratford heads to 4-1 John Milledge and then hosts FPD, who appeared in the last two GIAA Class 4A championship games and won it all in 2023.

But the Eagles enter that stretch closer to being on point in the areas that have concerned Carroll from the start.

"I think we've played with confidence amongst the team, trusting each other," he said. "We are getting better each and every week as far as the physicality and changing the minds of these kids to play like they're six-four, 300 pounds."

"I think we showed the other night what we were."

— Paul Carroll, Stratford Head Coach



PHOTO BY DONN KESTER

Rutland receiver Troy Lester makes a one-handed grab during a showdown with rival Howard. The Hurricanes, in search of their first win, will host Jackson this week.

PREVIEW

Continued from Page B1

sion I and gave Dublin the No. 8 spot. Both are 4-0 in region play thus far.

The Fighting Irish do not appear quite as unstoppable as they did last season when they went undefeated until the semifinals of the playoffs. Dublin suffered a loss to now-No. 6 Swainsboro to open the year, and while the Irish have won every game since, they’ve had some close margins of victory over teams it swept away with ease last year (like Washington County).

Middle Georgia coaches like Wiggins know better — there’s no such thing as a “down” Dublin when the Irish still have longtime head coach Roger Holmes at the helm.

“I wouldn’t believe that. They’re still running the ball well, (Roger’s) just playing mind tricks with me,” Wiggins quipped of Dublin and its head coach after Northeast’s win over ACE last week. “We still just wanna make sure we do what we do. There’s a lot of little things to work on.”

The Raiders’ season has had a similar trajectory, as they suffered a loss against Class 3A No. 2 Peach County to open the year but dominated every opponent since then. Freshman quarterback Jordan Wiggins has put up gaudy numbers on a few occasions.

The home field advantage could be key for the Raiders, as last year’s game in Dublin was a close one. Northeast failed to score an offensive touchdown in that contest and will look to rectify that in search of its first win against the Irish since 2017.

In three games since then — all with Holmes and Wiggins as the head coaches — Dublin has beaten the Raiders with relative ease.

Northeast and Dublin met Thursday night after The Melody went to print. For full game coverage, visit MaconMelody.com/Sports.

Stratford (5-0) at John Milledge (4-1)

Last meeting: Stratford won 42-7 in 2024. Last week: Stratford defeated Brookstone 41-14; John Milledge defeated Brentwood 31-28.

John Milledge head coach J.T. Wall is 2-2 against Stratford — and head coaches Rodney Collins, Chance Jones and Paul Carroll and the Eagles have outscored the Trojans 97-96 in those four games.

Expect that margin to change by only a little in a game pitting two of the top teams in the GIAA.

John Milledge is back on track after last year’s surprising 2-9 season, including a 42-7 loss to Stratford at Mercer. Notable in that loss was that John Milledge was down 42-0, the score coming late after a 23-play drive that took up more than 15 minutes.

Tyler Stephens has emerged as one of the top running backs in Central Georgia regardless of organization. The Stratford senior has above-average speed and has developed into an impact player on defense as a rookie defensive

back. He’s 75 yards from 1,000 and has 15 rushing touchdowns.

John Milledge’s Asa Wall, son of the head coach, is a power-4 prospect at linebacker and tight end and is an impact player in an H-back role, with 70 rushing yards a game and six TDs.

Wall leads the defense with 9.5 tackles a game, with Bradyn Harrison adding three sacks.

The Trojans’ Lewis Cheney is a major playmaker at quarterback, while the Eagles’ Tucker Johnston is progressing as a passer and manager of the offense with each game.

Stratford got healthier last week with the return of wideout/defensive back Jett Johnston, which helped expand the passing game.

The head coaches bring serious player resumes.

Walls, who turned 46 on Sept. 12, went from John Milledge to a small college in Missouri to starting at fullback for two years at Georgia and helping the Bulldogs go 8-4 and 13-1 in 2001-02.

Carroll went from Hardaway to Georgia Southern and embarked on an Eagles’ hall of fame career at linebacker. He has the third-best single-season tackles total (127 in 1994), which helped add up to the program record for tackles with 375, a lead he has by 10 over Marques Watson-Trent (2020-24).

Both teams are locks for high seeds in the split GIAA playoffs despite being in the same region, so good performances put them in the role of a strong state championship favorite in their playoff class.

ACE (4-1) at East Laurens (1-4)

Last meeting: ACE defeated East Laurens 27-21 in 2024. Last week: ACE lost to Northeast 29-0; East Laurens lost to Dodge County 34-14.

Though both programs lost last week, the Gryphons and Falcons remain on decidedly different trajectories so far this season.

ACE’s loss to Northeast, while not close on the scoreboard, proved that the Gryphons could compete with what many believe is the best program in Region 2-A Division I, even with a somewhat sluggish offense and five turnovers.

Those mistakes are the key focus for ACE heading into a road matchup with region foe East Laurens, head coach Keith Hatcher said.

“I just told the team that when we executed, we were right there with the best team in the region and one of the best teams in the state,” Hatcher said. “We did that at times, but we just made too many mistakes on both sides of the ball. A lot of those mistakes were self-induced and not inflicted by Northeast. We have to learn how to eliminate those mistakes.”

East Laurens, on the other hand, is still trying to find its footing during the second season of longtime Middle Georgia coach Jesse Hicks. Aside from a 58-0 trouncing of Central, it’s been a struggle for the Falcons so far to score points consistently.

The Gryphons should have the advantage in that the department as long as starting quarterback Ace Hatcher and running back Bryson Vincent are fully healthy, as both have been a bit banged up in recent games.

The Falcons do have three different rushers over the 100-yard mark this season, but ACE’s improved work in the trenches this season could prove crucial in stopping that running attack.

Rutland (0-4) vs. Jackson (1-4)

Last meeting: Jackson defeated Rutland 26-7 in 2024. Last week: Jackson lost to Westover 46-35; Rutland had a week off.

After a week off, the Rutland Hurricanes will again try for their first win after a barrage of close losses against talented teams so far this season. The Hurricanes lost to Hawkinsville 23-12 before their bye week, their third straight loss by 11 points or less. Rutland nearly knocked off Howard in Week 2.

The Hurricanes host Jackson, which is also struggling this season with a 1-4 record and a four-game losing streak since winning its opener against Hardaway. It will be the first region game of the year for both teams.

If Rutland wins, it will be its first victory since October 2023.

The Hurricanes are 0-12 against Jackson all-time dating back to 2003. A key matchup to watch will come between Rutland’s secondary, which has made some key plays this season, and Red Devils receiver Jaison McCall, who is averaging just under 100 receiving yards per game this year, according to MaxPreps.

Other games

FPD will attempt to bounce back from its second loss of the regular season last week against Westfield. The Vikings, back home after the road trip to Perry, will face a depleted Mount de Sales team, though the Cavaliers did snag their first win of the year against CFCA last week.

Tattnall (0-5) will search for its win, though they must host a talented Bulloch Academy team coming off a convincing 38-13 win over Strong Rock this week. Bulloch’s only loss of the season came against John Milledge.

The Southwest Patriots face a tough task on the heels of their romp over Central as Dodge County comes to town for another region game. The Indians are 4-1 and bounced back well after losing to ACE earlier this year, defeating Vidalia and East Laurens soundly in their next two games.

Westside may face the toughest test of all, as the Seminoles travel to Morgan County for a region game after losing to Lamar County at home last week.

The Bulldogs are the No. 4 team in Class 4A, according to Georgia High School Football Daily, though Westside almost knocked them last season before losing 35-32.

Covenant and Windsor both have the week off.

MERCER

Continued from Page B2

I think it’s a pretty complete roster.”

The Buccaneers are 2-2 overall with wins over Murray State and Elon and losses against nationally-ranked Tennessee and FCS-ranked West Georgia.

Jacobs’ coaching staff and a handful of his players will see a familiar face as well.

Former Lenoir-Rhyne wideout Hakeem Meggett, who played for Jacobs when he coached there, is now a Buccaneer.

“They run around, they play hard defensively, bring a fair amount of pressure and provide a bunch of different looks,” Jacobs said of ETSU. “You see the same talent level show up in special teams.

“Any time you’re the defending conference champion, you’re the preseason No. 1, that target remains no matter what’s going on in your season. People want to show up and play well against you,” Jacobs said. “They made it a night game. They’ll have a bunch of people there ... we expect a great atmosphere and a really great game Saturday.”



PHOTOS BY MICAH JOHNSTON

FPD third baseman Addison Arnold (7), along with her teammates and coaches, celebrate a score in extra innings during FPD’s win over Tattnall. The Vikings took control of GIAA 4A District 6 with the thrilling 11-8 victory.



Tattnall’s Mercer West (1) is greeted by her teammates at home plate as the crowd looks on following her clutch, game-tying homer in the Trojans’ home game against FPD. Tattnall ultimately lost the game 11-8.

FPD

Continued from Page B1

good job of fighting and not giving up, and we did that, but there’s just so much to learn from this one,” Brooks said. “If you just clean up a little bit, errors, baserunning stuff, you win the ballgame. You win it. You just have to do the little things right, that’s always been our motto.”

With the three-run win, the Vikings have the run differential tiebreakers over both Tattnall and John Milledge in the district.

Tattnall lost to John Milledge on Sept. 16 but will get another shot at them Oct. 2 in what will likely determine second and third place in the district.

GIAA’s playoff seeds are determined by MaxPreps rankings, however, and both coaches are already considering the tournament down the road.

“Whatever happens happens in the region. That’s definitely a goal, but going to the playoffs and winning state is our long-term goal. Our girls have worked hard for that,” Bridger said. “Hats off to Tattnall, and we might see them again.”

Brooks, disappointed as he was with the loss, had a similar thought.

“Hopefully, we’ll see her and them again. If we play our best and they play their best, they’ll go out there and compete,” Brooks said. “It would be another great game.”

Premier Screens, LLC

CUSTOM MADE WINDOW SCREENS & RESCREENING SERVICES

SERVICING CENTRAL GEORGIA

MOBILE SERVICE

We Come to You!

premier-screens.com | (478)244-3885

NOTEPAD

ACE volleyball rolls, Mercer’s Padio stuns foe

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
micah@maconmelody.com

The ACE volleyball team is cruising in area play as the season comes to a close, notching a 19-10 overall record and an 8-0 mark against GHSA Area 2-1A opponents as of Tuesday.

The Gryphons have played a tough non-area schedule to give them 10 losses but made up for the difficult scheduling with a stellar performance in Area 2 thus far. ACE has not lost a single set against an area opponent, even with Lamar County and Central both having solid seasons.

The Chargers are the other Macon team finding success in Area 2, playing to a 10-4 record overall and a 4-2 showing in area play so far. They played Central and Lamar, the area’s top two teams, earlier in the season and lost, but the Chargers now have a relatively straightforward schedule and should finish the regular season in third place.

GHSA volleyball operates with the same “Post Season Ranking” system as football, basketball and other sports in which a formula is used to calculate the rankings of teams in each classification. The top two teams in each region each earn priority seeding by their power rankings, while the third- and fourth-place schools are put together and ordered by PSR ranking.

The system also takes private schools out of the rankings and gives them their own playoff bracket, meaning some at-large spots are available.

ACE does not fare as well in GHSA’s PSR formula as they do in the region standings, largely because the formula uses winning percentage prominently in its calculations.

The Gryphons are ranked No. 23 in Class A as of Tuesday, one spot below region rival Lamar even after ACE defeated the Trojans in early September. Central is No. 26 in the rankings. Both teams are squarely in the playoffs since they are in the Top 32, though the volleyball region tournament will likely impact seeding after the regular season ends.

The areas across Georgia must report their area champions and standings to the GHSA by Oct. 14,

the day the state playoffs are set to begin.

Stratford volleyball in region race

The Stratford Eagles lead the pack of Macon teams in GIAA’s Macon volleyball scene at the Class 3A level, though District 6 is one of the weaker districts of the classification.

Stratford ranks second in District 6 with a 4-1 region record and a 16-11 total record on the year. Only Piedmont Academy has a better region mark at 6-1, though the Eagles recently defeated Piedmont 3-2 in an intense match Sept. 18.

The Cougars defeated Stratford in their first meeting back on Sept. 4, and their two extra region wins mean they hold the lead for now. The Eagles could tie them down the stretch, as Stratford has three region games remaining while Piedmont has only one.

Neither team is ranked highly in the Class 3A MaxPreps table, which is used for playoff seeding. Stratford is No. 12, with Piedmont right behind at No. 13.

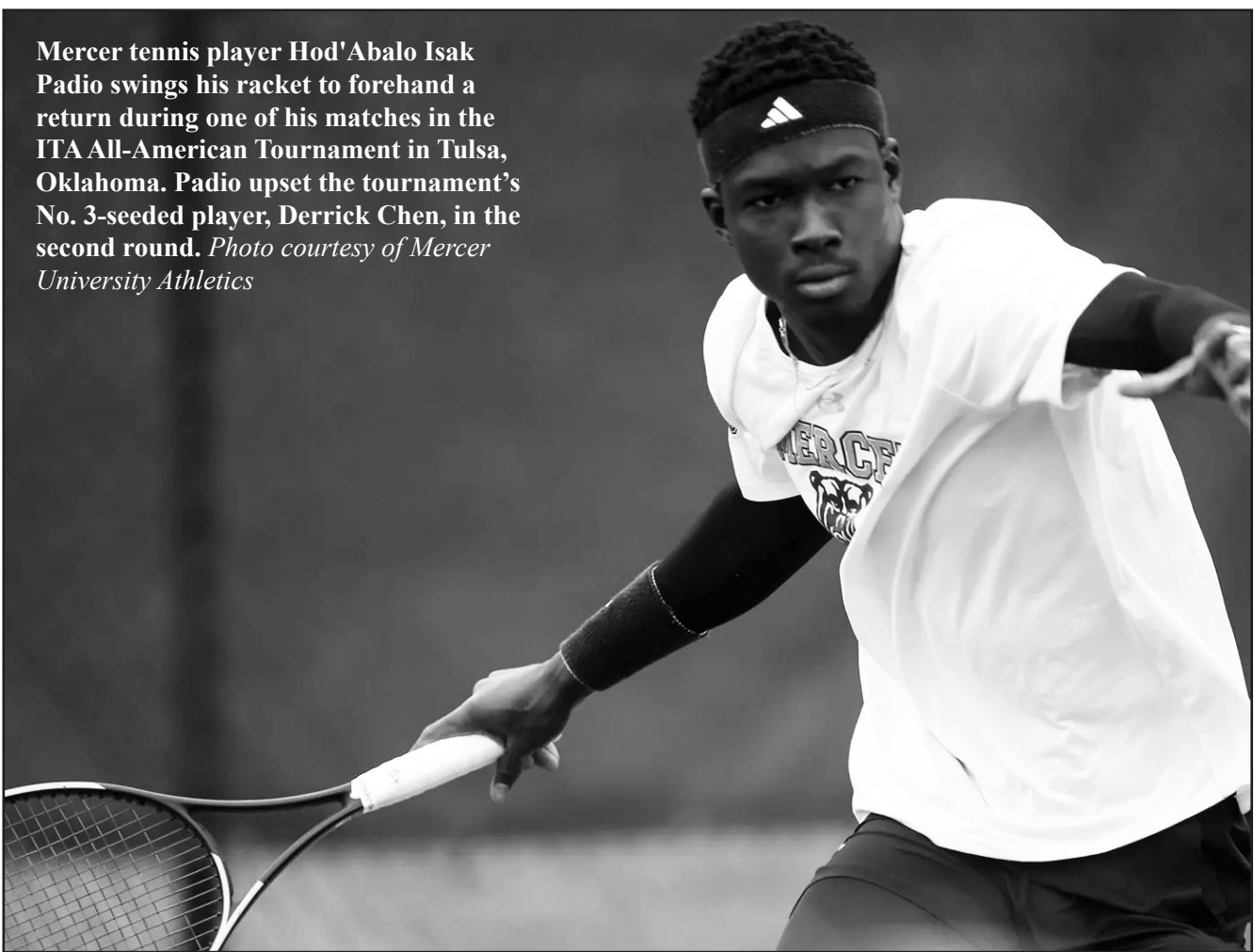
The FPD Vikings, who are 10-14 so far with a 3-3 record against District 6 competition, are No. 16, just on the brink of playoff contention. They have two tough non-district matchups against Northside and Warner Robins before they face Mount de Sales and Stratford to round out the season starting Sept. 25.

Mount de Sales has a 10-9 mark overall but has struggled a bit in district play, going 2-4 against league-mates so far. Tattnall is 2-12 overall and 0-6 in region play. In Class 2A, both Central Fellowship (0-7) and Covenant (2-13) have struggled.

Mercer tennis player gets upset win

Mercer’s Hod’Abalo Isak Padio got a key victory in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association’s All-American tournament this week, toppling Georgia player Derrick Chen to reach the third round of the national tournament.

Chen, who transferred to Georgia this year after spending several seasons with California, was the No. 3 seed in the 256-player tournament and won more than 60 matches last



season. Padio defeated him soundly in straight sets, 6-4 and 6-4, for his second win of the tournament after he defeated Memphis player Obrad Markovski in the opening round.

Padio lost in the following round of 64 to No. 21-seeded Julian Alonso Vivanco.

Mercer’s team tennis season begins Friday at the North Florida Invitational in Jacksonville.

Macon schools perform well at recent meet

Mount de Sales hosted the 2025 Cavalier Classic Sept. 18 with multiple Macon schools in attendance, and several local runners performed well at the event.

Stratford’s Ellie McMahon won first place in the girls 5K run with a time of 21:33.20, while fellow Eagle runner Annie Garner finished in third with a time of 22:46.46. Stratford also had three other runners — Blair Christie, Stella McIntyre and Amelia Christie — finish in the top 10.

Brenna Tarpley finished fourth in the girls 5K for Mount de Sales, while Megan Casey of FPD finished 11th. The Vikings also had the 14th,

15th and 16th place times in the event. Tattnall’s Addison Cook finished 22nd, the only Trojan to compete in the girls event.

Stratford’s team won the event overall thanks to its solid finishes, earning a team score of just 25. Mount de Sales finished third with a 72. FPD and ACE finished fourth and fifth.

The host Cavaliers got a great finish in the boys 5K, as Mount de Sales’ own Ethan Sevigny finished first with a 17:56.08 time to beat the next-closest in the field by 17 seconds. Central Fellowship’s Holton Morgan finished second with a time of 18:13.68.

Stratford still showed its overall dominance as a team, however, as three runners — Joshua Dreher, Ramsey Harley and Jon Emory Hall — finished in the fourth, fifth and sixth spots, respectively.

Stevie Prettyman finished ninth for FPD, while ACE got its best finishes of the day from Leo Mendoza in 10th and Jarius Pitts in 11th.

Though the Eagles had several solid placements again, the win in the boys 5K instead went to Central Georgia Arts and Athletics, the

team for home-schooled and other non-traditional students. Stratford placed second, with Central Fellowship snagging third and Mount de Sales in fourth. ACE and FPD placed in fifth and sixth, respectively, while Tattnall finished ninth.

Mercer quarterback earns national award

Bears freshman quarterback Braden Atkinson was named the Stats Perform FCS National Freshman of the Week following his performance in Mercer’s dominant 38-0 win over The Citadel last week.

Atkinson, who stepped in as the Bears’ starter against Wofford earlier this season and was starting only his second game against the Bulldogs, completed 26-of-35 for 305 yards and four touchdowns with no interceptions.

Atkinson was the first Mercer quarterback to throw four touchdowns in a game since Fred Payton did it against VMI in 2022. He finished the game with an 82.9% completion percentage, the highest such mark in a game by any Mercer quarterback since the school revived its football program in 2013.

The Macon Melody

WEEKLY

Classifieds

Employment

Critical Care Physician (Multi Openings). Health Services of Central Georgia, Inc. DBA Atrium Health Navicent Medical Group. Macon, GA. Diagnose, treat & supp crit ill & injured patients. Supv NPs/PAs. Reqs M.D. from accred U.S. med school or foreign equiv or ECFMG. Reqs 5 yrs of training (3-yr int med rsdncy & 2-yr crit care fellowship). Must have active GA med lic; must have passed all parts of USMLE. Must be board eligible in int med. Apply: Send resume to: jenny.willis@advocatehealth.org & ref #118803.

FIND...
SELL...
BUY...

PLACE YOUR AD IN THE CLASSIFIEDS!

CONTACT US TODAY!

classifieds@maconmelody.com

The Georgia Trust for Local News is looking for an experienced journalist to join our news staff as a general assignment reporter covering Bleckley and Twiggs counties.

The ideal candidate will have a passion for accurate and timely local journalism that serves Middle Georgia. The reporter will need to work collaboratively with news and advertising staff while also owning their beat, balancing long-term projects with daily reporting.

Experience with InDesign, utilizing a CMS, shooting photos and recording video is preferred, but not required.

GTLN offers employee benefits including insurance options, paid vacation, holidays and mileage reimbursement. More detail will be provided to applicants meeting minimum qualifications. Salary commensurate with experience.

This is not a remote position. Our office is based in Dublin, Georgia. Reporters are required to have a valid Georgia driver’s license, reliable transportation and vehicle insurance.

Applicants send a resume, cover letter and clips to kyle@courierheraldtoday.com.

Job Type: Full-time

Benefits:

- Health insurance
- Dental insurance
- Life Insurance
- Paid time off

Schedule:

- 8 hour shift
- Evenings as needed
- Weekends as needed

The GTLN, which also operates 18 newspapers across Middle and South Georgia, is a subsidiary of the National Trust for Local News, a nonprofit committed to conserving, transforming and sustaining vibrant community news enterprises across the country. The Macon project is made possible by a \$5 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

SPORTS QUIZ

1. Former NFL quarterbacks and brothers David and Derek Carr both played football for what college team?

2. American biophysicist, biochemist and inventor Britton Chance won a gold medal at the 1952 Helsinki Summer Olympics competing in what sport?

3. What forced the cancellation of the 1919 Stanley Cup Final series after five games between the Montreal Canadiens and the Seattle Metropolitans?

4. Name the NBA player with the Seattle SuperSonics (1973-78) who was known for his shaved head and his off-center headband.

5. Sepang International Circuit, site of a Formula 1 Grand Prix race from 1999-2017, is located in what country?

6. Who became the first (and still only) American man to win an Olympic gold medal in the javelin throw when he did it at the 1952 Helsinki Summer Games? (Hint: He shares a name with a baseball legend.)

7. First presented in 2015, the annual award given to the best power forward in men's college basketball is named after what Basketball Hall of Famer?

ANSWER KEY:

1. The Fresno State Bulldogs.

2. Sailing.

3. An outbreak of Spanish flu.

4. Slick Watts.

5. Malaysia.

6. Cy Young.

7. Karl Malone.

The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, September 26, 2025 • **B5**

by Dave T. Phipps

by BUD BLAKE

by Jeff Pickering

© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

Trivia Test Answerst

© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc

Answers

— King Crossword —

— For troublesome-to-open jars (pickles, honey and more), use a pair of standard dishwashing gloves. It's a great gripper, especially if your hands are the least bit moist.

themaconmelody @  & 

SNAPSHOTS

B6 • The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, September 26, 2025



PHOTO NO. 1 — U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff, Democrat of Georgia, speaks to the Rotary Club of Macon Monday, Sept. 22. Ossoff discussed, among other topics, Robins Air Force Base, Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park and Trump administration budget cuts. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*

PHOTO NO. 2 — Libba Fleming is announced as Stratford Academy's 2025 homecoming queen during the Eagles' win over Brookstone School Friday, Sept. 19. *Photo by Donn Rodenroth*

PHOTO NO. 3 — Howard High School cheerleaders cheer on the Huskies as they face Hephzibah High at Thompson Stadium Thursday, Sept. 18. Hephzibah defeated Howard 54-34. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

PHOTO NO. 4 — Nya Jenkins of Macon, the first graduate of Atrium Health Navicent's "Rise to Success" program, works as a surgical technologist at The Medical Center. Jenkins earned an associate degree from Central Georgia Technical College through the program, which covers tuition and provides job experience for local high school graduates. *Submitted Photo*

PHOTO NO. 5 — Racers compete in the 2025 Heart of the Dragon Boat Races at Lake Tobesofkee Saturday, Sept. 20. The annual event supports local Big Brothers Big Sisters of America programming. *Photo by Donn Rodenroth*

PHOTO NO. 6 — A father-daughter duo enjoys ice cream during the Ice Cream with Dad event at Carolyn Crayton Park Saturday, Sept. 20. The gathering, hosted by MVP: Macon Violence Prevention, Macon Mental Health Matters and Book 'Em, celebrated fatherhood, family and community. *Submitted Photo*

PHOTO NO. 7 — Author and television personality John T. Edge signs copies of his new memoir, "House of Smoke: A Southerner Goes Searching for Home," during a book signing at the Hay House Tuesday, Sept. 23. Edge also gave a lecture as part of his 24-city book tour across the South. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*