The Macon Melody

Friday, Sept. 5, 2025 | Bibb County's local source for community news | Vol. II, No. 11



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

Former Macon-Bibb County commissioner and Macon Water Authority board member Elaine Lucas goes over student orientation in the classroom at her school, E.L. High School Academy, which offers non-traditional students the chance to earn their high school diplomas.

Higher ed looks to adult learners for enrollment

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

Inside a strip mall in east Macon, students at E.L. High School Academy find the tools for a better life, said school director Elaine Lucas.

The school is open only to students 16 and above who haven't yet earned a high school diploma.

The academy held its new student orientation last week, where a handful of students sat around a table in the school's office and learned more about the program.

Ahmad Harden, educational advisor at the Mercer University Educational Opportunity Center, shared resources with students for college and career preparation, which include admissions assistance, financial literacy courses and travel reimbursement.

The resources are offered for free to many adult students — 19 and above — as well as high school seniors.

"A lot of people say it's to get students to go to Mercer, but honestly it's an opportunity for them to get to any school," Harden said.

Nontraditional learners like the ones coming out of the academy are becoming increasingly sought after to bolster university enrollment as colleges grapple with a phenomenon experts are calling the "enrollment cliff."

According to those experts, the cliff is the gradual decline in high school graduates caused by lower birth rates after the Great Recession of 2007-09.

The number of high school graduates is expected to decrease 13% by 2041, with the dropoff beginning next year, according to the nonpartisan, nonprofit compact known as the Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education.

Stephen Schultheis, vice president for enrollment at Middle Georgia State University, said the public university is beginning to feel the effects of a shrinking pool of high school seniors, even as MGA reported a record-high enrollment of 8,409 students in fall 2024.

While schools in the northeast U.S. have been dealing with the cliff for several years, higher education institutions in the South now face greater competition and a larger number of students choosing to study out of state, he said.

Diana Faircloth, Mercer's vice president for enrollment management, said the private university draws from a diverse population of students, including transfer students, graduate students and professionals.

She said the university aims to enroll a yearly freshman class of 950-1,000 students.

Mercer works at "staying nimble" by offering a wide array of programs, she said.

"Mercer won't see a large impact," Faircloth said. "But it is something that we have to keep a pulse on, because we know that that is the reality out there with that population decline."

E.L. High School Academy enrolls about 30 students a year, and more than 2,000 students have graduated from the program since it was founded in 2011. Tuition costs $100 a month and, instead of an entire day of classes, students take one class over a single month.

Students learn through home study with a mentor, working through a curriculum designed by Lucas, a former longtime county commissioner who currently serves on the Macon-Bibb County Water Authority board. The program also requires students to do community service and vote.

"Most of our students are very highly motivated because many of

See ENROLLMENT, Page A3

Commissioners approve tax on vacation rentals

Laura E. Corley
Accountability Reporter
laura@maconmelody.com

Macon-Bibb County commissioners voted Tuesday to change the county code to tax short-term vacation rentals, a measure expected to rake in $2.5 million in revenue each year.

The tax on Airbnb and Vrbo rentals is $3 per night but only $1.50 per night for people who book reservations for a week or longer, assistant county attorney Michael McNeill said. The tax will not apply to long-term hotel residents, and revenue will be "paid generally by out-of-town folks," he said.

Visit Macon President and CEO Gary Wheat told commissioners tourism has grown 29% in the four years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Obviously we want to see that investment continue in our community," Wheat said, adding the money collected will be used to "enhance that infrastructure" and help grow tourism.

Commissioner Valerie Wynn wanted to know how the county would go about ensuring people are paying taxes in accordance with the updated county code.

Wheat said Georgia law requires all short-term rental platforms to collect the tax from the visitor

See COMMISSION, Page A2



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

An MTA Paratransit bus makes its way through downtown Macon. MTA CEO Craig Ross recently announced his intention to further enforce the boundaries of the paratransit coverage area.

MTA to enforce rules on paratransit radius

Evelyn Davidson
Community Reporter
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority CEO Craig Ross recently announced plans to crack down on riders who live outside paratransit service's coverage areas.

Paratransit services offer non-emergency transportation to those with disabilities or medical conditions that prevent them from riding on the authority's other bus services.

The Federal Transit Administration requires local transit services to provide these services to and from locations within three-quarters of a mile of existing fixed bus routes.

For instance, a Macon-Bibb resident living within this distance of a fixed route can schedule a paratransit bus — for $2.50

See MTA, Page A3

Periodical — Mail Label

Hendley's love story is more than just love of the game



Photo courtesy of Bobby Hendley

Former MLB pitcher and Macon native Bobby Hendley takes a photo with his wife, Runette, in a photo from the holiday season in 2020. Hendley is writing a book about the love of his life, who died about a year ago.

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

Bobby Hendley can't help but talk about "the" game.

People still ask about the fine print in the box score. They want to hear the story. Again.

For 60 years, it has defined his baseball career. It's nice to be remembered. Sometimes, you can lose and still win.

Sept. 9, 1965. It was the day Hendley, pitching for the Chicago Cubs, threw a one-hitter against the Dodgers in Los Angeles.

History has not shoved it to the back pages.

It was a different kind of one-hit wonder.

The left-hander from Macon picked the wrong day to paint his masterpiece. He lost the game, 1-0, when the Dodgers scored an unearned run.

The opposing pitcher was Sandy Koufax, a future Hall of Famer whose nickname was the "Left Arm of God."

Koufax pitched a perfect game. No runs. No hits. No errors.

After six decades, the game is revered by baseball enthusiasts and duly noted in the hall of fame at Cooperstown. The Society for American Baseball Research voted it the "greatest game ever pitched." It remains the only game in major league history in which two teams have combined for only one hit.

Ron Wildman, a veteran TV journalist from Macon, calls Hendley every year on Sept. 9. He was married that same afternoon in 1965 in Springfield, Illinois. He and his bride had no sooner left the chapel when he turned on the broadcast of the Cubs-Dodgers game from the West Coast.

Wildman was so caught up in listening to the historic game, he kept driving. He didn't want to get out of the

See HENDLEY, Page A2

7 32388 05034 5

$2.00

Commission, A1:

upon booking. The payments are collected by the websites and remitted to each county in the state, he said.

McNeill added that noncompliance "is a misdemeanor under state law, which is unusual" because ordinance violations are typically prosecuted in municipal court instead of state court.

No one showed up to speak at the public hearing on the ordinance change.

In other business, Mayor Lester Miller announced the county is interviewing architects for the Bibb County jail expansion and upgrade work. The county requested proposals from architects in June. A contract manager is set to be announced at a meeting Sept. 23, he said.

Several recent deaths of people in custody and yearslong poor conditions in the county lock up prompted public outcry this summer. In July, Senators Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock penned a letter to U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi urging the Department of Justice to investigate and determine whether the rights of incarcerated individuals were violated.

The DOJ told The Melody last month Bondi received the letter but declined to answer questions that included whether Bondi planned to respond to the senators' request.

Roads, runways

The county voted to approve two more contracts for road repaving at a cost of $5 million. Atlanta Paving & Concrete Construction was awarded a contract for $2.2 million, and McLeRoy was awarded a contract of $2.3 million.

The county also approved spending more than $4 million on work at its two airports. Part of that work is a $1.5 million contract with Apaxx Roofing to replace the roofs of WWII Hangar B and the Embraer Hangar at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport.

It also includes a $2.9 million contract with Sheridan Construction to relocate the airfield electrical vault at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport and a $200,000 contract with TBI Airport Management to operate and maintain both airports for five years. The vault controls the airfield lighting systems.

'The nicest thing I could do'

George Clay sat with his grandson, Cade Morris, on the front row at city hall Tuesday, waiting patiently for county commissioners to reach the last item on the agenda.

The 92-year-old had a story to tell and a gift to give the county.

"I ran over myself with an International 444 tractor," Clay said from behind the podium.

It was April 21, 1980. Clay was hanging on to life by a thread when the fire department arrived at his property on Rogers Avenue.

The tractor "went up the side of a bed and pinned me down. Left me on the ground, laying with [the blade] spinning in my face," he said. "It broke every bone, punctured my lung, broke my ribs, almost cut my leg off because I had a 16-blade harrow in the back with a tree trunk on top of that.

"The fire department got there before the ambulance did because they were a little closer," Clay said.

Recovery took years. He lost his eyesight and his collar bone is still broken.

"I had 27 doctors when it was all over with, putting me back together," Clay said. "I wondered what in the world I could do and if I wanted to live."

Clay said he kept thinking about the fire department and what would have become of him had their personnel not responded so quickly.

"Without the fire department's manpower and knowing what to do, I wouldn't be here today," Clay said. "When I found out they needed to put a fire station in the neighborhood of Thomaston Road and Estes Road, I thought, 'Gosh, the nicest thing I could do is give them some land to build this fire station.'"



Laura Corley / The Melody

George Clay, age 92, shakes hands with Macon-Bibb fire chief Shane Edwards at Tuesday's county commission meeting after announcing that he would donate a plot of land to be used for a fire station in Macon

Clay donated four acres at 8221 Thomaston Road to the county. Commissioners voted unanimously to accept it. Commissioner Donice Bryant was absent.

The donation stipulates the county must build a fire department on the land within the next decade. The resolution also requests the new station be named after Clay.

Clay asked commissioners to "please, please hurry up. I'm 92-and-a-half and I haven't got many more days to live and I sure would like to see that fire station."

The mayor thanked Clay for the contribution.

Hendley, from A1:

car until it was over.

To mark the game's 50th anniversary in 2015, the New York chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America honored Hendley, Koufax and Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully with the prestigious "Willie, Mickey & the Duke Award."

Hendley faced Koufax six times in his career, but that night at the Roosevelt Hotel was the first time he had officially met him off the field. Koufax told the audience he and Hendley had shared something special.

"But there's a possibility I may have enjoyed it just a little bit more than he did," Koufax said.

The former Lanier High star had a comeback line when he stepped to the podium. He gently reminded Koufax of their rematch five days later at Wrigley Field, when he tossed a four-hitter and won 2-1. Each pitcher allowed two runs and five hits in the two games combined. In his career, Hendley finished with a 3-1 record with two no-decisions against the pitcher many consider the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time).

Hendley is now 86 years old and looks like he could still pitch. His mind is sharp. His handshake is strong. He stays in shape by walking and exercising at Amerson River Park.

He spent seven seasons in the major leagues with four teams — the Milwaukee Braves, San Francisco Giants, Chicago Cubs and New York Mets. His career record was a modest 48-52 with 12 saves, 25 complete games, six shutouts and a 3.97 ERA. (His minor league mark was 62-47.)

Those numbers didn't punch his ticket to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum at Cooperstown, but he has been inducted into three others, including the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, the Macon Sports Hall of Fame and the Stratford Academy Sports Hall of Fame.

Hendley grew up on the sandlots of Macon. His father taught him how to throw a knuckle curve, but he developed a reputation as a flamethrower in high school. The scouts certainly knew where he lived.

He turned down a scholarship offer from the University of Georgia and signed a professional contract with the Milwaukee Braves. He played in what he calls baseball's "greatest era." He was teammates with Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Ernie Banks. He said the greatest player he ever faced was Roberto Clemente of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

He has no regrets. Well, maybe one. He hurt his elbow at the beginning of his big-league career.

"I never played a day with a good arm in the major leagues," he said. "So I wonder what might have been."

He had been sent to the minors in Salt Lake City during the 1965 season to work on his mechanics. After a turbulent, six-hour plane trip to Oklahoma City, when everyone on the flight got sick, he "reached down and found something I didn't know I had."

He pitched on guts that night in 100-degree heat and lost 2-1 on two unearned runs. His perseverance paid off. He was recalled to the big leagues. No one could have predicted what would happen next.

The Cubs were struggling, 11 games under .500. Manager Leo Durocher sent him to the mound to face Koufax in front of a crowd of 29,139 in Los Angeles.

Both pitchers were perfect until Hendley walked "Sweet" Lou Johnson, who became the game's first baserunner in the fifth inning. Johnson moved to second base on a sacrifice bunt by Ron Fairly, who was born in Macon in 1938 when his father was playing for the minor league Macon Peaches.

Hendley later admitted he allowed Johnson to get too big a lead at second base. When Johnson took off to steal third, Cubs catcher Chris Krug made a wild throw, the ball sailing past third baseman Ron Santo.

The unearned run proved to be decisive. Johnson also broke up Hendley's no-hitter in the seventh on an opposite-field double to right. He was the only baserunner of the game, reaching twice.

"I remember standing on the top step of the dugout watching Koufax throw," Hendley said. "He was coming out from under his cap on every pitch. His fastball was rising, and his curve was like it was falling off a tabletop. I was hoping we could do something to break it open or at least get somebody on base. But it didn't happen."

He never blamed Krug for the throwing error. Krug retired and lives in his hometown of Los Angeles. They are the same age and stay in touch. Krug later served as a coach for the San Diego Padres and was a manager in the Mets' minor league system.

Krug started a company, Athletic Turfs, that was involved in building the baseball field for the movie "Field of Dreams" starring Kevin Costner.

"He once told me in the movie there's a tractor moving along the edge of the cornfield," Hendley said. "That's him."

For all the notoriety Hendley has received over the years from the game with Koufax, there is another game he cherishes even more. In his second year in the big leagues, he was pitching for Milwaukee against the Philadelphia Phillies on the night of Aug. 4, 1962.

His girlfriend, Runette Harris, made the trip from Macon to Milwaukee with two friends to watch him pitch. She and Hendley would talk for more than an hour every night on the phone when he was away on road trips. This time, she was there to see him in person at County Stadium.

The Braves won 6-2 behind Hendley's complete game. He hit his only career home run in the second inning, a two-run blast off future Phillies manager Dallas Green.

The next day was Runette's 20th birthday.

He had known her since she was a skinny, 14-year-old blonde who lived three doors down on a dirt street in Macon called Grand Avenue. He was three years older. They would talk on the porch. His senior year at Lanier, he asked her if she would wear his Junior ROTC company colors, a sign of going steady.

"That was the beginning," he said. "She became the love of my life."

They were married on Jan. 26, 1964 — after baseball season and before spring training. Their sons, Brett and Bart, came along in 1967 and 1971. The "Mavericks," as the boys were often called by family members, played baseball for their dad, who coached for 30 years at Tattnall Square, River North and Stratford.

The Hendleys were blessed with four grandchildren — Blake, Brooke, Mia and Ty. Blake and Brooke were fraternal twins. Brooke was a kindergarten student at Stratford when she was diagnosed with a mitochondrial disorder called "Leigh's Disease."

She died 20 years ago this summer. The pinwheels behind the preschool at Stratford were dedicated in her memory in April 2017.

The pinwheels dance in the breeze across from the baseball field named for her grandfather. Her brother spoke at the dedication, the month before he graduated.

Runette Hendley was diagnosed with cancer in 2022. For two years, Bobby Hendley was her devoted caregiver in the small, brick house where they had lived since 1970.

She never complained. She was the rock of the family.

They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2024. She died nine months later. On Oct. 21, it will have been one year.

"For almost 70 years, we were always together," Hendley said. "We were inseparable. That's why it's so difficult."

Hendley is proud to have served his country in the Army National Guard. And although it took him 13 years, he received his degree in English from Mercer in 1970, the year after he retired from pro baseball.

He laughs about majoring in English. He never taught it in the classroom. But he is putting it to use now. After his wife's death, he started writing a book.

For as much as he loves baseball, this will be a different kind of love story.

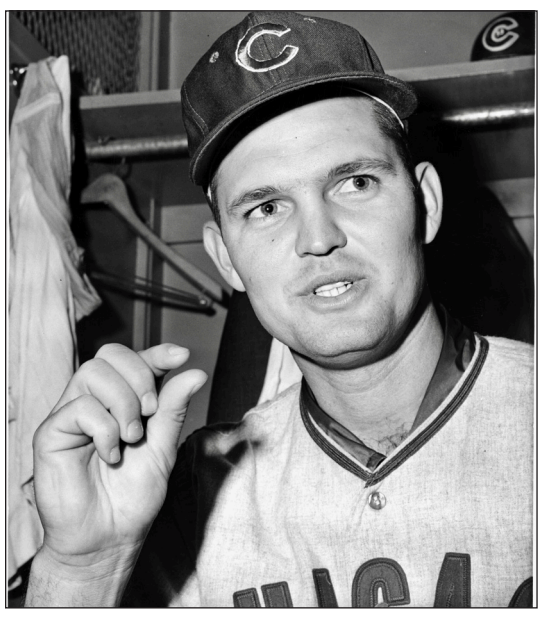
He keeps a framed photograph of Runette on an end table in his living room. It is next to the chair where she always sat.

The photo will be on the cover of the book. The title will be "Runette: A Love Story." It will be a tribute to her.

For now, he is writing it in longhand. Sometimes he can't read the words for all the tears in his eyes.

In the late innings of his life, he wonders if he will have time to complete it.

"Don't worry, Dad," his son Bart told him. "If you don't finish it, I will."





State floating new rules on data centers

Dave Williams
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA – The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is proposing new rules aimed at allowing the state agency to resume its reviews of new data center projects.

The DCA called a temporary pause to state reviews of Development of Regional Impact (DRI) proposals for data centers back in July. Environmental advocates complained the move would let data centers – which have a huge impact on energy and water supplies – win approval without sufficient scrutiny.

"In recent years, there has been a rise in developments that have large and potentially adverse effects that are not currently accounted for in the DRI rules," DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn wrote in a memo last week.

"There has been a stated concern by (Atlanta) Regional Commission staff that the rules be amended to include such developments to ensure that the purpose and mission of the DRI rules are met."

The proposed rules would require developers of data centers to disclose information about each project's energy and water needs. Proposed data centers would be divided between those located in urban or suburban areas and those in rural parts of the state.

In cities and suburbs, the rules would apply to data centers covering more than 300,000 square feet. Data centers in rural areas would not come under the rules unless they cover more than 500,000 square feet.

The rules would create a new category of DRIs called "technological facility," which would include data centers, as well as a second new category for solar power generating facilities.

The DCA will hold a public hearing on the new rules Sept. 9 at the agency's board room at 60 Executive Park South in Atlanta. Public comment via email is being accepted through Sept. 12.

The DCA board will act on the proposed rules Nov. 20 at a meeting in Savannah.

New bass species found in Macon



Photo courtesy of Georgia Department of Natural Resrouces

The Altamaha Bass, pictured above, was identified in a paper published in August as a new species of bass native to the Ocmulgee River in Macon. It was one of two new species named in the paper along with the Bartram's bass.

Casey Choung
Melody Reporter

Scientists have identified two new species of bass in Georgia's waterways, one of which can be found in the Ocmulgee River near Macon.

Researchers at the University of Georgia, Emory University, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the University of North Georgia published a paper Aug. 19 naming the species, which were informally dubbed as Bartram's bass and the Altamaha bass.

Macon is home to the Altamaha bass, which can be found above Georgia's fall line in the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers.

Georgia is now home to 12 different species of black bass, the most in the country and the world, said Hunter Roop, fisheries biologist and regional supervisor for fisheries in Region 3 of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

While anglers and local biologists knew something was different about these bass, scientists determined physical, genetic and morphological — structural — differences to formally identify them as a separate species, Roop said.

"There is no place on earth where you can find more of a combination of native and non-native black bass species than the state of Georgia," he said.

The Altamaha bass can be differentiated by its darker tail with orange on the tips. The bass usually grows between 9-10 inches and is considered a sport fish, Roop said.

The Altamaha bass can be primarily found in smaller streams and rivers around the Altamaha River Basin, where the Oconee and Ocmulgee meet and flow out into the Atlantic. The Altamaha bass is "more like a trout" in terms of habitat preference, opting for small creeks and streams with lots of "rocky substrate," riffles and shoals, Roop said.

"As a top predator, some would regard them as a keystone species, or a species that would disproportionately affect its environment," he said.

To protect these two species of bass, Roop said the public needs to respect streams and habitats so they can support biodiversity. Overdeveloped, eroded banks cannot support the habitat for these fish.

Roop also said the Altamaha bass is threatened by non-native species of bass, including Alabama bass and shoal bass, which can breed with the Altamaha bass and dilute the species' gene pool, eventually to the point where it no longer exists.

"The Altamaha bass is the only one that is endemic to the state of Georgia, meaning it doesn't cross any border water with any other state," Roop said. "It doesn't occur anywhere else in the world. It really is special for the Altamaha bass in particular that it can't be caught or found in any other location in the world."

Claire Houser-Dodd

February 9, 1933 - August 29, 2025



Houser-Dodd

Claire Houser-Dodd, 92, of Fort Valley, passed away on Friday, August 29, 2025. Family will greet friends for a time of visitation on Monday, September 1, 2025, from 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM at Rooks Funeral Home, 213 West Church Street in Fort Valley, with a graveside service immediately following at 12:00 PM at Oaklawn Cemetery, 720 South Camellia Boulevard in Fort Valley. Tim Wilson will officiate.

Claire was born in Fort Valley on February 9, 1933, to the late D.K. Houser and Emily Anderson Houser. She attended Wesleyan Conservatory, graduating in 1953 with a degree in English, Speech, and Drama. She would later earn her Master's Degree from Mercer University.

In her early years, she taught speech in the Perry school system and later she would teach speech in the Monroe County school system. After leaving Forsyth, Claire taught English at Fort Valley State University. She later wrote articles for the Leader Tribune called "Peaches and Screams" and for the Senior News called "Let Us Entertain You".

Claire was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Dr. William A. "Billy" Dodd in 2008, her parents and a sister, Mary Killen Houser. Survivors include her daughter, Emily Griffin (Mike) of Fort Valley, grandson, Eli Turner of Perry, granddaughter, Denver Payne (Blake) of Forsyth, great-grandson, Matthew Turner of Perry, and great granddaughter, Huntley Payne of Forsyth.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the charity of the donor's choice. Rooks Funeral Home in Fort Valley is in charge of arrangements.

Enrollment, from A1:

them were pushed out of an education," she said. "They didn't just leave."

Last year, 16% of the new undergraduate class was made up of adult learners. This year, that number has bumped up to 19%, Shultheis said.

The university uses dual-enrollment programs to attract high school students from local school districts, and it partners with companies to bring adults back to school.

"A big part of that [plan] was where can we get new pockets of students to almost make up for this possibility that we may see decreases in high school seniors coming here," Schultheis said.

Schultheis said MGA is the most affordable state university in Georgia, and he expects to see breakthroughs with its nontraditional enrollment this fall.

"Adults really just want to get their degree done," Schultheis said. "Adults want speed."

MTA, from A1:

one way — to pick them up at their home and drive them to a doctor's office if it is also within three-quarters of a mile from a fixed route. They can also schedule paratransit pickup from locations within the radius that are not their home address.

Ross told board meeting attendees on Aug. 26 that more than 80 residents who live outside of the coverage area but still ride paratransit buses will be cut off from using the service in the near future.

"We gotta stop some of this bleeding, now, that is costing us so much money," Ross said in an interview with The Macon Melody.

Paratransit bus drivers complete the trips listed on their manifests and are not necessarily aware of or responsible for enforcing the distance requirements, he explained.

Data analyzed from TripSpark — a $1.3 million tool meant to boost the authority's route optimization and performance — brought the oversight to the CEO's attention a couple months ago.

He said some of the more than 80 individuals flagged as potentially beyond coverage once resided within the acceptable radius but have since moved and failed to update their home address with authority officials.

"They signed the application, so they knew what their responsibility was and they didn't follow through," he said. "They moved."

He noted one individual using the paratransit service has fallen outside the range because the authority has since discontinued a nearby fixed bus route, thus terminating the approved radius in the area.

"There's gonna be some people that this really affects," he said. "I can't be everything for everybody."

Ross likened the sudden reinforcement of the existing federal rule to being pulled over for speeding.

If a police officer pulls someone over for speeding, he said, they won't try to tell the officer they've always driven that fast but haven't been caught before.

At the meeting, Ross also said residents will receive 30 days notice prior to being cut off from paratransit usage. He later told The Melody he plans to extend it to 60 days.

The notification letter will include information on the federal rule and on the authority's "ride on demand" rapid transit system, which launched in early July and costs $5-8 a ride.

Paratransit rider and retired Macon-Bibb sheriff's deputy Wade Horton suggested that the roughly 80 individuals outside of the coverage area who are still receiving paratransit services should be grandfathered in and the rule should be enforced with new applicants moving forward.

Horton, who uses paratransit daily to go to doctor's appointments, the store, the gym and more, previously filed a lawsuit against the authority alleging wrongful denial of access to paratransit services. His 2020 suit was dismissed with prejudice by the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia in 2021.

Solutions

Before sending out notification letters to the affected residents, Ross said he is considering expanding the radius to eight-tenths of a mile — a policy change which he said does not require board approval — citing the arbitrary nature of the federal government's requirement.

"Why not a mile? Why not half a mile? Why three-quarters of a mile?" Ross said. "The government does a lot of stuff that we don't understand."

After reconfirming who falls outside of the service area and who doesn't, Ross said he wants to see if expanding the radius will benefit riders living on the edge of the coverage area. He said he will then send out the letters to those still affected.

Even though Ross could increase the service area to more than a mile, he said, the authority is limited by the cost of paratransit. He said paratransit trips cost the organization $46 each way.

"We could, but we won't," he said. "We got to work something out so we can come up to a medium without going so far overboard."

Ross also highlighted money losses from riders who don't show up or cancel late. In July 2024, 16% of all scheduled trips were canceled or no-shows. That amount decreased to approximately 13% in July of this year.

The federal government provides the authority with 80% of its funding. The Georgia Department of Transportation and authority monies cover the other 20%.

Ross said significantly increasing the paratransit coverage area would cost riders more.

"We haven't had an increase in years. We've got to raise our fares," he said. "The passengers have got to take responsibility for some of that."

Ross said the authority is also searching for a third-party company to further analyze their operations and help determine where more routes need to be added or trimmed.

The Macon Melody

Get a copy every week at one of these locations:

JENEANE'S at PINEBROOK
Publix
VILLAGE COFFEE
CIRCLE K
DOLLAR GENERAL
WALTHALL OIL COMPANY
MACON BAGELS
Walgreens
Walmart
Layers

Opinion

You can never make peace with a day like that


Ed Grisamore

You never forget where your boots were when Neil Armstrong stuck his foot on the moon and took a "giant leap for mankind."

Or who you were with and what you were eating for breakfast when a friend called to tell you Elvis was dead.

Time stands still in those moments.

So, of course, Brian Kunzelmann remembers where he was the morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

He was on the 61st floor of the World Trade Center, four times higher than any building back home in Macon.

Kunzelmann can still recall the details with precision, as if they were happening in real time. Whenever he hits the "rewind" button and pushes "play," it is like trying to wake up from a bad dream.

The smoke. The glass. The dust. The rubble. The blood. The fear.

Sept. 11, 2001. It's hard to believe, but next year will mark the 25th anniversary of a day that changed America.

You can never make peace with a day like that, the deadliest terror attack in history. It either swallows you like quicksand or smothers you like a weighted blanket.

Kunzelmann was attending a training seminar in the South Tower with 287 financial advisers for Morgan Stanley. He caught a taxi from his hotel that morning. He spent the first hour in a meeting, then took a short coffee break.

Looking out the window across Manhattan, shielded from a view of the North Tower, he saw paper floating in the sky. It was too high for a ticker-tape parade. He assumed a plane had been dropping flyers to promote an event or business.

Yes, there was an airplane.

When he returned to his seat, members in his group were told to evacuate the building. Nothing was said about a plane hitting the North Tower.

A man two seats down from him turned and asked if he smelled jet fuel.

"I couldn't smell it at first, but within a few moments I did," Kunzelmann said. "I didn't know it was jet fuel. I just knew it was some kind of petroleum product like gasoline."

They were instructed to use the stairwell. It was a long way down. A man in front of him was carrying a walkie-talkie. He told them the North Tower had been hit, but the South Tower was secure. Kunzelman and others followed him to an elevator — one of 99 in the building — and went back to the 61st floor. They then took a local elevator down to the 41st floor.

"I was milling around with a bunch of other people," he said. "We didn't know what was going on and whether we should continue our descent."

Within minutes, at 9:03 a.m., the second hijacked plane hit 40 floors above them. The 110-story building rocked.

"It was shaking, like there was a tremor," Kunzelmann recalled. "I guess you could describe it as like being in an earthquake. I've experienced earthquakes but never a big one like that. Stuff was flying out of the walls. Everybody knew we had to get out of there."

He prayed God would lead him to safety.

When he reached the ground, glass and debris were everywhere. They were routed to the east side of the building. He glanced up and saw the smoke and flames. People were leaping to their deaths in desperation. He tried to call his family, but there was no cell service.

It took him two hours to walk back to his hotel near Madison Square Garden. He spent the rest of the day shaking as he watched the horror unfold on TV.

The South Tower was the first to collapse at 9:59 a.m. The North Tower fell 29 minutes later. Both buildings were destroyed.

The death toll in New York that day was 2,753.

Brian Kunzelmann is a survivor. He is 65 now.

"I've been through a lot in my life from a very early age," he said. "I've fallen off a two-and-a-half story building. I've been run over by a boat.

"Thank God, I've survived, and He has brought me through. To me, it's just one more thing. Not everybody has had the experiences that I have or has necessarily had the same faith and approach to life."

He left Macon in 2019 and moved to the mountains of western North Carolina. He is a survivor there, too. This month marks the one-year anniversary of the flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Kunzelmann does not dwell on Sept. 11. He rarely looks at photographs or reads books about it. He doesn't give oxygen to all the conspiracy theories.

If someone asks him to share his story, he will. Many have told him they have never met anyone who had been at the World Trade Center that day. He understands there is a generation of young people who either weren't born in 2001 or are too young to remember it.

Never forget. That has become the mantra of Sept. 11.

An airline attendant once told him she had been a student in China during the demonstrations at Tiananmen Square.

"She said she was there when the tanks rolled through," Kunzelmann said. "I said, 'Thank God you got out,' and she said that's how she got to America ... because of God."

He told her he had also been on the front lines of history — a touchstone moment that had defined him and everyone around him.

Some fires can never be put out.

Ed Grisamore is the author of nine books and was the recipient of the 2010 Will Rogers Humanitarian Award from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists.

How a doom loop of outrage ensnares Americans


Marc Hyden

Circus showman P.T. Barnum famously said, "There's no such thing as bad publicity." Plenty of public relations professionals disagree, but if there is any truth to Barnum's statement, then a now-controversial restaurant is enjoying an embarrassment of riches. However, instead of proving there is no bad publicity, this demonstrates that a lot of people need to grow up and worry about more important matters.

The outcry centers around Cracker Barrel updating its logo.

"The chain replaced its longtime logo, featuring a man in overalls leaning against a barrel, with a streamlined version featuring just the chain's name," wrote the Wall Street Journal. "The move engulfed the restaurant in a culture-war firestorm, with commentators online and some customers accusing Cracker Barrel of eschewing its country charm and heritage for a sanitized image."

The redesign was admittedly underwhelming. I prefer the previous country-styled design, but I really don't care that much. Cracker Barrel can do whatever it wants. Companies update their logos regularly to keep things fresh, and that seems to be the case here. There's no evidence of any malicious intent.

Despite this reality, the change has especially offended conservatives who have labeled this some sort of unreasonable woke makeover that must be reversed. Donald Trump Jr. retweeted a message, reading: "Cracker Barrel's new logo isn't an accident — it's CEO Julie Felss Masino's project. She scrapped a beloved American aesthetic and replaced it with sterile, soulless branding [...] She should resign and be replaced with leadership that will restore Cracker Barrel's tradition."

Meanwhile, actor James Woods complained, "Cracker Barrel was the only place I'd ever stop. No mob fights, a fun corny atmosphere, and delicious food when you're hungry and tired. I'll never step foot in one again."

I honestly didn't know that so many conservatives had such a strong attachment to men in overalls, but the anger is palpable. "The fallout has shaved tens of millions of dollars from the public company's market value [and] spawned calls for boycotts," the Wall Street Journal continued.

In short order, Cracker Barrel reversed its logo decision thanks to the conservative outcry. Meanwhile, liberals rightly saw no reason to be particularly upset over this makeover, but before you crown them the voice of reason, they have also expressed outrage over advertising.

Many of them went into full meltdown over an American Eagle ad campaign featuring Sydney Sweeney. If that sentence doesn't mean anything to you, then don't feel bad. I didn't know American Eagle was still in operation and had no idea who Sweeney was until recently. That aside, American Eagle's advertisement shows Sweeney — a blonde haired, blue-eyed young woman — wearing a denim jacket and jeans. The advertisement is titled "Sydney Sweeney has great jeans," and she is promoting — you guessed it — jeans. The obvious wordplay subsequently offended the online liberal mob.

Before this, conservatives were once again up in arms over an advertisement. In 2023, Bud Light partnered with trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney and sponsored an Instagram post. The backlash against Bud Light for partnering with a transgender person was swift and fierce. "Conservative politicians including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis criticized the company. People posted videos of themselves pouring out the beer, and Kid Rock posted one showing him shooting cases of Bud Light with a gun," NPR noted.

Conservatives boycotted the beer company in droves, which proved effective. "Bud Light, an Anheuser-Busch brand, had been America's best-selling beer for more than two decades. But following outcry from the right over Mulvaney's sponsored video, Bud Light has fallen to second place behind Modelo Especial," NPR reported in 2023.

I guess not all publicity is great for sales, but what does this say about Americans? I'd venture to say that outrage culture is becoming ingrained across the political spectrum, keyboard warriors labor to find ways to be offended, and people increasingly have a juvenile worldview: If they are mildly offended by anything, then they kick and scream and demand companies that service millions of people conform to their personal views. It's an outrage doom loop that plays out with regularity on both sides of the political aisle.

By all means, shop wherever you want and boycott whoever you want, but I think being angered by relatively trivial matters might make you lose sight of more important issues. There's a war in Europe, Israel and Gaza are still at odds, the United States is so far in debt that our future is imperiled, elections are looming and so forth. Yet advertisements and logos continue to dominate Americans' attentions.

If P.T. Barnum were still alive, I think he'd be less interested over whether all publicity is good publicity. He'd instead attempt to figure out how large segments of American society have devolved into the kind of circuses he used to promote.

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

The Macon Melody

Bibb County's Community News Source

1675 Montpelier Ave., Macon, Georgia 31201
478-200-7403 | news@maconmelody.com

Executive Director — DuBose Porter | dubose@maconmelody.com
Executive Editor — Joshua Wilson | joshua@maconmelody.com
Sports Editor — Micah Johnston | micah@maconmelody.com | 478-200-7893

To submit a letter to the editor or guest column, email joshua@maconmelody.com, mail it to our office or drop it by our front desk. The Macon Melody is located in the Reg Murphy Center for Collaborative Journalism in Mercer Village (1675 Montpelier Ave.). Our office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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

The Melody is part of the Georgia Trust for Local News, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Local News, the nation's largest nonprofit newspaper company. We build stronger communities by protecting and growing community news across Georgia. Our 20 newspapers serve 1 in 10 Georgians.

To subscribe to The Melody, email suscriptions@maconmelody.com, call us at 478-200-7403, visit our website at maconmelody.com/subscribe or come by the office. Print editions of The Macon Melody are delivered via the U.S. Postal Service on Fridays.

Digital subscription..... $6.99/month, $69.99/year
Print subscription..... $9.99/month, $99.99/year
Print + Digital bundle.....$14.99/month,$149.99/year

THE MACON MELODY Volume 2, Issue 11, (ISSN# 93-4710374) is published weekly on Fridays for $99.99 a year by Georgia Trust for Local News. Periodicals Postage Rate paid at Macon, GA 31201.

© 2025 The Macon Melody, a product of the Georgia Trust for Local News

The wrong end of a baseball: a lesson on the merits of athletics


Kyle Dominy

This may come as a shock to some of you, but I was never much of an athlete growing up.

I tried out for the middle school basketball team one year (just because my friends did), but my aim was terrible, so I didn't make the cut. Who knew it was so hard to throw an orange sphere through a hoop? That probably worked out for the best because I've always had a problem with authority. I would have been a coach's nightmare. My mother warned me against playing football, due to my small stature and frame. I most likely would have been brutally murdered, albeit in a clean tackle, on the 50-yard line.

Baseball was always out of the question. A 5.95-ounce round, hard rocket headed to my head? No thank you. I was then, and remain, afraid of the ball. I can't risk getting hit in the face — that's how I make my money. I was convinced to join a recreation softball league once. Some of the guys apparently thought they had gone pro based on their in-game aggressiveness. I could be found deep in center field, taking cover. After a couple of games, they asked me not to come back.

I was neither athlete nor scholar, but I managed to get by on my wits, charm and good looks (not to mention humility). Then I discovered running, a solo activity that allows you to set your own pace and challenge level. And the rest, as they say, is history, and a pile of worn-out running shoes. Hanging in my kitchen is a collection of medals - badges of honor from completed marathons, half-marathons and 5Ks.

My children have inherited my lack of "skills to pay the bills," but that hasn't stopped them from trying. Recently I took a drive over to Montgomery, Alabama, to visit my brother. He has a son who is a fledgling baseball star. At 9 years old, my nephew has one season and zero base hits under his belt, but to hear him talk (and I would listen to him all day long) he is Hall of Fame bound. He's my favorite player to ever hit the diamond.

This up-and-comer took his cousin to the field with gloves and ball in hand. What started as a late-summer game of catch in the Alabama sunshine ended in a Night of the Living Dead-style sidewalk trail of blood and head goop. After only being gone a few minutes the two returned with the announcement "we have a situation."

In child speak "we have a situation" means something, living or material, is broken. What was broken was my son, whose nose and mouth looked like a pile of hamburger meat. A wayward ball caught him right in the face, his father's worst nightmare.

He shed not a tear as I helped him clean up, his years of martial arts training and taking roundhouse kicks to the head having paid off. A photo of his bloodied money maker was soon sent to all his friends.

The incident doesn't seem to bother him, but I think he should take up running.

Local nomenclature: What's in a name, how it came to be



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

The street signs on the corner of Tatnall Street and Tatnall Place still reflect the incorrect spelling of Josiah Tattnall who is honored in Georgia for serving in the Revolutionary War, as a U.S. senator and as the first native Georgian to serve as governor.

Mergers. Misspellings. Twisted nomenclatures.

They often become permanent markers on the landscape of language, written on sign posts, posted on marquees and chiseled on headstones.

Locally, here is how some came to be:



Ed Grisamore

Nu-Way 'Weiners'

George and Harry Andros wanted more than just a marquee for their Cotton Avenue hot dog restaurant in 1937, so they came up with a conversation piece folks would be talking about nearly a century later.

They put up a neon sign — one of the first in Macon — with a typographical error high above the sidewalk for all the world to see: "BEST WEINER IN TOWN ... NU WAY WEINER STAND."

Much to the chagrin of English professors and grammarians, their spelling of "wiener" ignored the rule of "I" before "E" except after "C."

And those misplaced vowels in "WEINER" have been intentionally misspelled ever since at Nu-Way, the second-oldest hot dog restaurant in the country.

Lizella

When construction of the Macon-Birmingham Railroad pushed through West Bibb County in 1891, the community of Warrior changed its name to Lizella.

James A. Eubanks was the town's first postmaster and was assigned the task of renaming it. He took the names of his daughters, Lizzie and Ella, and combined them.

A date with Del

Dolores Ward graduated from Miller High School and returned to Macon after college. She wanted to be a teacher but took a part-time job as a receptionist at the WNEX radio station.

Her charm and personality eventually led to her own show. Al Lowe, the station manager, thought Dolores was too long a name for radio.

He suggested "Pat," but her response was lukewarm. So he came up with "Del." He thought she spelled her name "Deloris," and she didn't have the heart to correct him.

The rest is history. Ward, who died in 2021, was a broadcasting legend whose career spanned 50 years.

She was the first woman disc jockey at WHOT (now WNDU) in South Bend, Indiana, and the first all-night female DJ at the legendary WGN in Chicago. (They adored her accent, and she was known as "Del from Dixie.") She also worked at stations in New York and St. Louis.

She returned to Macon in 1957 to work at WMAZ, just four years after the station went on the air in September 1953.

She became one of WMAZ's most popular personalities and her show, "Date With Del," was a mainstay on both television and radio. She did more than 10,000 broadcasts in the program's 40-year history. She ended each show with her trademark closing, "Trody Trow," and never revealed the meaning of it.

Fort "Fox" Valley

Don't bother including "fort" on your scavenger hunt in Fort Valley. You will be searching all day.

According to local lore, the town's original name, Fox Valley, was a victim of either poor eyesight or sloppy handwriting.

When the post office was established 200 years ago in 1825, the paperwork was sent to Washington. A slanted and illegible "x" was mistaken for an "r" and a "t." While you might spot a red or gray fox in rural areas of Peach County, alas, there is no fortress.

The sign that cares

Rev. Bob Moon was director of the Macon Rescue Mission in the 1960s when its address was 500 Broadway, at the foot of Poplar Street.

Moon contacted Raymond Rosson, who owned a local sign company, and asked him to construct a "JESUS SAVES" sign at the top of the four-story building.

Rosson had an editorial suggestion. Since the purpose of the Rescue Mission was to help people who were down on their luck, the sign should read "JESUS CARES."

There were an equal number of letters, and only a couple of consonants and vowels would have to be switched.

Rosson salvaged steel from an old sign at the Swift Ice Cream plant a few blocks away. He shaped a white background with 6-foot black letters and red neon.

See NAME, Page A6

Events

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

Blown Glass Pumpkin Workshop at stARTup Studios
Saturday, Sept. 6
1 p.m.
1055 Riverside Drive
Learn the basics of glass blowing as you choose your colors and use optic molds to make your very own blown glass pumpkin. All skill levels are welcome, but participants must be 12 years or older. All glass-blowing classes are provided by Blazing Paddles Studio, $105 per person. All glasswork must cool overnight to ensure it does not break. Your piece will be available for pickup after 3 p.m. the next business day.

Paint a Plate — The 567 Center for Renewal
Saturday, Sept. 6
4 p.m.
456 First Street
Try out pottery painting during the First Street Art & Wine Festival! You can paint your own cheese plate with colorful designs. After painting your plate, it will be fired in The 567's kiln and ready to be used at home 1-2 weeks later. Even if you're not feeling creative, that's OK — our instructor will show you some simple examples to inspire you. The cost is $25 and includes one plate and painting supplies. If you want, you can grab a glass of wine from Just Tap'd to sip on while you paint.

Level UP: Voicing the Dark
Tuesday, Sept 9
6 p.m.
522 Cherry Street
Georgia Poet Laureate Chelsea Rathburn will share insights into the power of poetry to voice our deepest truths. Rathburn is the author of three poetry collections, most recently "Still Life with Mother and Knife," which explores girlhood, motherhood and narratives about postpartum depression. Reading from her own work, she will offer strategies for working with difficult material. Attendees will receive writing prompts. This is one of a series at the Leadership Lab, Level UP — $10 ticket or become a member and register for the event online.

Macon Pride Ride
Thursday, Sept. 11
6 p.m.
830 High Street
Hit the streets for a pride-themed ride, highlighting LGBTQ+ landmarks and allied spaces around town. It's part bike ride, part Safe Space Meetup and all community love. Rainbow fits, flags and lights encouraged! Macon Bike Party is a free, slow-paced bicycle ride with music, friends and fun. All ages and skills are welcome. It's not a race; it's a party on two wheels! Participants will meet at Bike Walk Macon's office downtown at 6 p.m. Wheels are down at 6:15 p.m., and the ride ends at The Rose Room (378 Second St.) by 8 p.m. Bike Party attendees get a 10% discount on their tabs.

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

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

Artificial intelligence and the gridiron: How technology is changing the game for football players and fans alike



Joe Finkelstein

Football season has officially kicked off, and for many of us that means Saturdays full of college rivalries and Sundays dedicated to the pros. Whether you're rooting for the Bulldogs, Bears, Falcons or in my case the Eagles, there's nothing quite like the energy that comes with this time of year. But while players are putting in hours on the practice field and fans are gathering at watch parties, another player is quietly changing the game: artificial intelligence.

AI isn't just behind the scenes in Silicon Valley. It's now on the gridiron, in the stands and even on our phones. From the way coaches prepare for opponents to how fans track their fantasy teams, AI is shaping football in ways both obvious and invisible.

Smarter coaching and fewer injuries

Breaking down game film has always been a part of football, but AI takes it to another level. Instead of a coach or intern spending hours reviewing video, AI can analyze a game in minutes. It spots patterns in play-calling, predicts tendencies and even points out mismatches a coach might miss.

Player safety is another area where AI is stepping up. Systems can now study practice footage and identify risky movements that increase the chance of concussions or knee injuries. Some colleges and pro teams are even using AI-powered helmets and pads to track hits in real time, helping medical staff make quicker calls on when to pull a player. It's not hard to imagine this trickling down to high schools in the near future.

The fan experience gets an upgrade

For fans, AI has quietly become part of the broadcast experience. Those instant "win probability" charts you see on TV? That's machine learning crunching thousands of scenarios to tell you if your team's slim lead is really safe.

Highlight reels are also getting the AI treatment. Instead of waiting for SportsCenter, fans can get personalized clips sent to their phones within minutes of a big play. Some apps even let you build your own highlight package — say, every touchdown from Jalen Hurts or every sack from Georgia's defense.

And then there's stadium tech. From facial-recognition ticketing to AI-driven concessions that speed up the beer and hot dog lines, teams are experimenting with ways to make game day smoother. While not every fan may love the idea of more cameras, most don't mind skipping the 20-minute wait for a Coke.

Fantasy football meets machine learning

If you play fantasy football, AI may already be helping you without you knowing it. Platforms like ESPN and Yahoo use algorithms to suggest lineups, flag sleeper picks and project player stats. But newer apps go even further, simulating entire seasons to show you the ripple effects of every decision.

Want to know if you should start the rookie wide receiver or the veteran tight end? AI can run thousands of scenarios to give you the odds. Of course, no model can predict the chaos of a tipped pass turning into an interception or a star running back tweaking his ankle in the first quarter, but for fantasy managers, it's one more edge in the never-ending quest for bragging rights.

Broadcasting and announcing

AI is also starting to pop up in broadcasting. Automated camera systems can track the ball and players without a human operator. Some sports networks have tested AI-generated play-by-play commentary, especially for smaller markets or online streams.

As someone who's spent years behind a microphone, I can't help but wonder what it would feel like to have a computer replace me. Sure, AI can deliver stats and keep the action moving, but can it capture the thrill of a buzzer-beater or the sting of a tough loss?

For now, I think the human voice, with all its quirks and passion, is still safe.

Rivalries, trash talk and the human side

Of course, football isn't just about X's and O's. It's about rivalries, tradition and good old-fashioned trash talk. And yes, even here AI is sneaking in. Chatbots are being trained on team data and fan chatter to mimic the voice of die-hard supporters.

Imagine an Eagles bot roasting a Cowboys fan, or a Georgia bot talking smack to a Florida Gator. It's funny, but it also shows how AI is learning to copy our emotions, loyalties and habits. Whether that's entertaining or a little creepy depends on your point of view.

A game we still love

Football has always been about evolution. Rules change, strategies adapt and athletes get stronger and faster. AI is just the latest factor pushing the game forward. Some of its uses will make football safer. Others will make it more convenient or entertaining for fans. And a few might make us scratch our heads and wonder if we're losing something in the process.

As the season kicks off, one thing's certain: no matter how much technology is added, football remains football. It's the roar of the crowd, the smell of tailgate grills and the feeling of holding your breath during a fourth-and-goal play. AI may change how we watch and analyze, but it can't replace the heart of the game.

So whether you're watching between the hedges in Athens, sitting in 5 Star Stadium at Mercer, catching the Falcons at Mercedes-Benz or cheering on the Eagles with me at The Brick, know that AI is on the field too. It's just not wearing a helmet.

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

From Our Kitchens:
PB&J (with mayo), don't knock it until you try it

Ed Grisamore
Melody Columnist
gris@maconmelody.com

Once upon a time, when I used to sit at the fifth-grade table in the school cafeteria, my mother packed a Hostess Twinkie and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in my Flintstones lunch box every day.

There might have been an apple and some celery sticks in there, too, but Twinkies and PB&Js were considered two of the five major food groups.

Mama made PB&Js with love and out of necessity. She was once a home economics teacher. She also had to feed five kids for the day, so she was always in a hurry-up offense.

When I was old enough to make them myself, it was like learning a life skill. They provided sustenance in college, especially when the cupboard was bare at my apartment. They have always been a staple in the pantry for our children and grandchildren.

You don't have to go to culinary school to know how to make a PB&J sandwich: three ingredients, two minutes prep time ... one satisfying meal.

Although white is the bread of choice, you can substitute honey wheat or sourdough, if you wish. Peter Pan or Skippy? Smooth or crunchy? It's up to you. Welch's Grape or Smucker's Strawberry? Your call.

I realize I am tampering with a time-honored tradition, but may I suggest one other ingredient?

Mayonnaise – on the side.

Yeah, I know. Sounds repulsive. You must think I'm one of those weirdos who puts ketchup on his eggs and sugar on his grits.

My life changed at halftime of the Duke's Mayo Bowl on Dec. 30, 2021, in Charlotte. (You may remember that after South Carolina upset North Carolina, winning coach Shane Beamer had a vat of mayonnaise dumped on his head.)

Sponsors spend big money to promote their brand at bowl games. So, naturally, Duke's was touting its mayo. Throughout the game, different dishes prepared with Duke's were being sampled.

Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, with tablespoons of mayo on the plates, made the rounds in the press box during halftime. ESPN sideline reporter Taylor McGregor instructed broadcasters Anish Shroff and Mike Golic Jr. to lightly dip the PB&J in the mayo ... and bon appetit.

The taste buds of the guys in the booth were noncommittal. But, down on the field, McGregor dug in.

"Actually, it's pretty good," she said as she swooped the crust across the spread.

Hmmmmm. I was intrigued ... and in the mood for a snack. Before the second-half kickoff, I was in the kitchen creating one.

We already had the ingredients. And, of course, we had Duke's. At our house, it is considered sacrilegious to eat anything else.



Photo courtesy Ed Grisamore / The Melody

Melody columnist Ed Grisamore enjoys a homemade PBJ with mayo. Grisamore swears by this unique sandwich concoction and says, "don't kncok it until you try it." He is also the proud owner of the Duke's Mayonnaise Cookbook.

(There is a Duke's cookbook published in 2020. It was written by Ashley Strickland Freeman, with the foreword by Nathalie Dupree, so that's worth at least three helpings of credibility. The sandwich recipe is not in it. But it could be ... and maybe it should be.)

My first bite was delicious. The second bite was better. I won't say I loved it, but I have been telling folks about PBJ&Ms ever since.

When they turn up their noses, I tell them not to be judgmental. Don't knock it until they've tried it.

And, even if they don't, I love telling the story.

PBJ&M

Ingredients

- 2 pieces of white bread
- Peanut butter (smooth)
- Grape jelly
- Duke's Mayo

Directions

Remove bread from bag. Carefully place on plate. Open jar of peanut butter. Slap on with a knife. (It's all in the wrist.) Open jar of jelly. Smooth with spoon. Slice sandwich into diagonal or horizontal halves. Dip with Duke's. Don't be bashful. Write me a thank-you note.

Name, from A5:

"JESUS CARES" became a downtown landmark for more than 40 years. It was captured by national TV cameras and viewed by several U.S. presidents on visits to the city.

Photos of the sign appeared in The New York Times and Esquire magazine. The facade of the building was on display in the movie "Wise Blood," based on the book by Flannery O'Connor.

"JESUS CARES" followed the Rescue Mission when it relocated to its new facility at the corner of Telfair and Hazel streets in 2002 and later to 6601 Zebulon Road in the former Hepzibah Children's Home.

Tattnall vs. Tatnall

Josiah Tattnall was one of Georgia's most distinguished early citizens. He fought in the Revolutionary War, was a U.S. senator and became the first native Georgian to serve as governor.

Tattnall County in southeast Georgia is named in his honor as well as Tattnall Street, a prominent road in his hometown of Savannah.

He has been remembered in Macon in a number of ways, although it took more than a century to spell his name correctly at some venues.

Tattnall spelled his name with three t's, but Tatnall Square Park and Tatnall Square Baptist Church (now Newton Sanctuary at Mercer) originally spelled it with two.

Tattnall Square Academy has featured the correct spelling since it opened in 1970. But Tatnall Street and Tatnall Place – both near Tattnall Square Park – have stubbornly maintained the old version.

And the street signs reflect it. (Maybe it's time to upgrade.)

In the 1980s, a number of businesses went by Tatnall. There was a Tatnall Square Cleaners, Tatnall Square Bookstore and Tatnall Launderette on Montpelier Avenue in what is now Mercer Village.

The SoChi Story

Terrell Sandefur, one of the pioneers of the Macon Film Festival, used to tell the story of when he and his wife, Kim, moved to his hometown of Macon.

A real estate agent took them to houses on the market in several north Macon neighborhoods. They looked at big homes with plenty of elbow room, located near prestigious schools and country clubs.

But Sandefur wasn't interested and asked to see some houses in downtown and midtown. The realtor advised them to "stay north of Chi-Chesters," referring to the former landmark pharmacy across from Jim Shaw's Seafood restaurant on Vineville Avenue.

They ended up buying a home in Stanislaus, about a mile south of ChiChester's, and Sandefur came up with a clever name for the area he was told to avoid.

SoChi (pronounced Soh-shee) was short for "South of ChiChester's," which included all of downtown.

SoChi became the name of his marketing and public relations company, located in the old Yellow Cab building on Second Street. He later opened the SoChi Gallery, a multipurpose event and exhibition space.

It caught on to the point where some folks began calling themselves "SoChilites." Sandefur had a monthly radio program called "SoChilizing."

The Sandefurs have since moved to Palm Springs, California, so his businesses are gone. And ChiChesters is no longer in business on Vineville. SoChi isn't a buzzword like it used to be.

Resigned CDC officials say erosion of agency mission, staff is like 'death by a thousand cuts'

Alander Rocha
Georgia Recorder

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is in turmoil following the ouster of the agency's director, a series of high-profile resignations, and an attack on its headquarters that killed a police officer, said former CDC staff Tuesday.

The former employees, including ex-deputy director for program and science and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Deb Houry and former director of the National Center for Emerging Zoonotic and Infectious Diseases Dr. Dan Jernigan — who both resigned Thursday — described the current environment at the CDC as a "death" where science is currently being sidelined by political ideology. Houry and Jernigan joined Georgia House and Senate Democrats at the State Capitol Tuesday to discuss the current climate at the CDC.

"You can almost see this as death by a thousand cuts: we're cutting staff, we're cutting resources, we're undercutting science," said Jernigan.

Jernigan said during a roundtable discussion before talking to the press that there has been an overall lack of transparency between the Trump administration and the CDC, saying that he has seen a shift in the CDC's operations. Whereas past administrations, regardless of their political leanings, worked with scientists to let data guide policy, Jernigan said the current approach appears to start with a predetermined ideology and then attempts to find scientific justification to support it.



Alander Rocha / Georgia Recorder

Rep. Saira Draper, an Atlanta Democrat, speaks in front of former CDC employees and allies at the Georgia State Capitol on Sept. 2, 2025

"I recognize you really can't get politics completely out of public health. [Public health is] really a priority here. What are you putting first? And we're asking that science go first before the policy development, and not starting with an ideology and then backing into the science," Jernigan said.

The former CDC employees also tied the current political climate to the recent shooting at the CDC campus, which they said was fueled by years of misinformation about vaccines. Abby Tighe, who was fired from the CDC in May and is a founding member of Fired But Fighting, a coalition of terminated CDC employees and allies, said it's "tragic to not have a stronger condemnation of this act of violence" and warned that without officials speaking out against the attack, she fears attacks on the scientific community could continue to happen.

"That could look like more attacks, and with the vaccine misinformation being the driver for this, who's to say that this won't lead to attacks at pediatricians' offices or pharmacies or all of these places where vaccines are given and professionals who work in the vaccine space exist," Tighe said.

CDC employees on Thursday were told they have to return to the office by Sept. 15, according to an email obtained by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, just over a month after nearly 200 rounds of ammunition hit six separate CDC buildings. The building is still being repaired, but Lynda Chapman, chief operating officer who sent the notice, stated in the letter that an "alternative on-campus space" will be provided to those whose office "remains impacted."

Houry said she left the agency because she "could no longer fight on the inside." She expressed deep concern over decisions that she said were not being made based on data and science, as well as the loss of talented staff. She said that while she was tasked with sunsetting certain programs during her time, she did her best to archive data so that it could be "resuscitate[d]" if funding is restored.

"If there's a surveillance system that doesn't have funding or people, we cannot produce that data. But as we were facing sunsetting a lot of those programs, [we] did what we could to preserve it because we are hopeful that at some point we'll be able to rebuild our agency," Houry said.

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

Magnet manufacturer to build plant in Columbus

Dave Williams
Capitol Beat

ATLANTA – The U.S. subsidiary of a Korea-based manufacturer will invest $223 million to build a rare earth permanent magnet manufacturing plant in Columbus, Gov. Brian Kemp announced Wednesday.

The JS Link America project will create more than 520 jobs in Muscogee County.

"JS Link America strengthens Georgia's role in securing the U.S. supply chain in industries such as aerospace, mobility, and energy," Kemp said.

JS Link, founded in 2000, is a Korean biotechnology company specializing in research and development. Permanent magnets are a critical component in a variety of industries, including automobiles, wind turbines, elevators, home appliances, robotics, and consumer electronics.

"JS Link plans to be a part of a value chain focused entirely on Western nations to meet the growing demand for permanent magnets sourced from strategic allies such as Korea," said Jun Y. Lee, JS Link America's CEO. "This new chain will cover the entire process, from the procurement of essential rare-earth materials to the final manufacturing of the magnets."

The Columbus plant will occupy 130,000 square feet, with a projected annual production capacity of 3,000 tons. Operations are expected to begin in late 2027.

The company will be filling positions in engineering, production, construction, administration, and management. Interested individuals can learn more about JS Link America at en.jslink.co.kr.

The Georgia Department of Economic Development's Global Commerce team worked on the project in partnership with the Development Authority of Columbus, Georgia Power, and the Technical College System of Georgia's Quick Start program.

Don't wait until spring to tackle annual lawn weeds



Photo provided by UGA

Common Chickweed is a type of winter annual that is often considered a weed and can be discouraged using herbicides. The plant is identifiable by its smooth, oval or elliptic leaf shape and hairy stems.



Kathy Hensley

Every March the Extension office starts receiving calls asking how to get rid of weeds showing up like a sore thumb against the background of still-dormant straw-colored lawns. These homeowners don't get very excited about our typical answer to their question: In the spring, it is recommended to mow and catch the weeds to minimize future weeds.

However, fall is time to treat cool-season annual weeds. Henbit, annual bluegrass, chickweed, and Carolina geranium can be prevented with a preemergence herbicide application – even if you can't see them yet. Sometime in the next couple of weeks would be the target for that well-timed application to stop these weeds from littering next spring's landscape.

Here's why: A large percentage, though not all, of problem weeds in turfgrass are annual weeds because they complete their life cycle from seed to seed within one growing season. So, here in Central Georgia the seeds sprout in the fall and grow, often under the radar, during the winter. Warming temperatures in the early spring trigger them to enter into their reproductive mode, and they grow, bloom and produce seed before hot weather takes them out.

Preemergence herbicides interrupt that cycle by forming a barrier in the top layer of soil that kills the newly germinated seeds as they try to establish their first root into the soil. The key to their effectiveness is having that the barrier in place before the seed sprouts. Late applications are a useless waste of money.

Seeds germinate according to soil temperature, so there's not a magic date every September to apply herbicide. However, the saying goes, better early than late. In Central Georgia, the optimal time for preemergence application is often the second week in September.

These herbicides come in both liquid concentrate and granular formulations. However, the granular types are the easiest for most homeowners to apply. Regardless of the product you choose, apply it at the rate on the label. Only after it is watered in, either by rain or by a sprinkler, will it form the important herbicide barrier in the soil

The turfgrass scientists at the University of Georgia recommend that you NOT use a combination weed and feed product — either in the fall or in the spring. The reason is based on timing. All types of warm-season turfgrass we grow in the Macon area will go dormant for the winter and should not receive any fertilizer after August.

While chemical products can be useful in managing a lawn, do not neglect the priority of good cultural practices to promote vigorous turfgrass growth. Dense, healthy grass goes a long way in discouraging weeds. Good maintenance includes proper mowing technique, correct pH, right application of fertilizer and water. Do not underestimate the importance of how much sunlight your lawn receives, especially as landscapes mature and trees begin to shade out turfgrass.

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

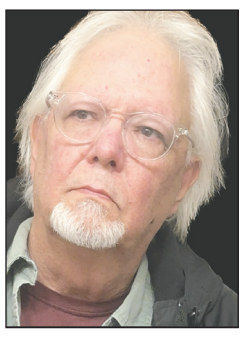
Macon musician releasing 'soul-stirring' debut album

You know from the short, opening track of Angel Ocasio Jr.'s debut album it's going to be a good ride.

The song, "Lone Road (Intro)," lopes along first with a simple dobro coupled quickly with a distorted synth bass growl and sweet orchestral fill, giving the feeling you're cruising a long, open stretch of sweeping highway.

Lonesome whistling comes in, making you wonder if, instead, you might be walking a solitary country road.

The minute-and-a-half tune is full of feeling and cinematic mood.



Michael W. Pannell

But that's what Ocasio said his playing is about: he said he plays by feel – though his technical prowess is extreme – and he said he's after the feeling he can invoke in his audiences – other humans traveling their own roads.

The name of the album is "The Road Home" and there's a release party Saturday at 9 p.m. at Grant's Lounge featuring Ocasio and his musical collective, Cash's Juke Joint.

Ocasio is a Macon multi-talented, multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter who shines on guitar and stands out playing pedal steel guitar.

He likes to call his music "soul-stirring, wrapped around the blues," and he rocks whatever he's doing, from blues to soul, spirituals, swing, funk, rock, even heartfelt ballads.

"The Road Home" is being called Ocasio's debut album, but he's been in studios recording since before his preteens and has played in front of people since he was seven.

Therein lies the tale, and it starts in church.

Early days

"There I was, a little kid sitting next to my mom in church like I always did, not thinking about anything, especially not thinking about music or playing it," Ocasio told me in a phone conversation. He was in Atlanta showing off the new album.

"I was just sitting there by my mom and my uncle, Uncle Big, who was a huge influence in my life, came over and told me to come up and play," Ocasio said. "Uncle Big played different instruments and he and my Uncle Harris were the only ones playing. He was on bass and my Uncle Harris was on drums. Uncle Big took me to the piano, showed me Middle C, and told me to just keep playing that. That was the start of my musical journey."

Uncle Big's actual name is Elihue Donaldson, Jr.; Uncle Harris is Harris Donaldson.

Uncle Big showed him more things, chords and whatnot, and young Ocasio started taking lessons. Considered a piano player at that young age, he played with church and gospel groups and later learned saxophone and how to read music in school. He was even a drumline drummer.

All that developed his interest in music, he said, but music wasn't his passion.

That passion was soon to come.

Sacred steel

We have to take a minute to talk about sacred steel, a worship tradition developed in a handful of Pentecostal denominations beginning around the 1930s. In those days, in popular culture, Hawaiian tunes and newfangled electric lap steel guitars with pickups were becoming the fad. I happen to

See ALBUM, Page A8

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SHOULDER SEASON WITH THESE 5 TRIP IDEAS



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

There are countless perks to retirement and the flexibility that comes with senior living, not the least of which is the opportunity to prioritize travel.

Without school schedules or the demands of a full-time job, empty nesters and retirees have the chance to take advantage of off-season and shoulder season travel. The shoulder season — the time between peak summer travel and the winter season — is now quite popular, but while destinations may be more crowded than they used to be, it's still a great time to catch some deals and avoid massive crowds.

Here are some perfect destinations for this September, when school is back in session and shoulder season is in full swing.

Cape Cod

This classic New England summer destination also happens to shine in September, when air and water temperatures stay comfortably warm and keep the beaches swimmable. Plus, many of the Cape's beaches are fee-free after Labor Day, making mid- to late-September the perfect time for a Massachusetts beach vacation. Cape Cod is also home to lots of beautiful trails (for walking and biking alike) and drives that will show off local autumn tree colors (trees should start to turn by mid-September and into October).

Hilton Head

This South Carolina island can get pretty packed during the peak months of June and July, but the September and October shoulder season offers a slightly quieter and cheaper time to visit. By September, Hilton Head's weather is still in the 80s, so you won't be missing out on summer warmth. The island features gorgeous beaches and water activities, top-tier golfing, biking, and so much more. Hilton Head is only about an hour from Savannah, Georgia, opening up more possibilities for exploration.

Rocky Mountain National Park

Colorado can get warm and crowded during the summer months, when families from across the region flock to the Centennial State. September marks the start of better weather and smaller crowds, a combination that makes it the perfect time to visit Rocky Mountain National Park. The stunning park — just an hour and a half from Denver — would be an ideal addition to your bucket list during any time of year, but September also happens to be prime leaf-peeping season. You'll want to keep an eye on conditions this year, but by mid-September, the park's vibrant aspens are usually showing off their autumn colors in a major way. While fall is less busy than summer, you'll still want to make a reservation for a park visit during peak hours.

Olympic National Park

This remarkable Washington park is full of wildlife, beaches, rainforests, mountain views, and old growth forests, making a visit to Olympic National Park more like multiple vacations in one (though a trip to Olympic can always be combined with the next recommendation on this list). Park staff actually recommends visiting in September, when there will still be other visitors around, but fewer lines and wait times for activities. Olympic is one of the top 10 most-visited national parks, so any chance to avoid peak crowds is valuable.

Seattle and Vancouver

Seattle tops multiple lists for prime shoulder season destinations, and it's easy to see why. While September in Seattle is getting close to the city's annual rainy season, visitors will get to experience incredible temperatures and far less crowds than summer months bring. Plus, September is still within the Pacific Northwest's annual whale watching season, which means you can still go on a whale-spotting expedition. If you have a car and a passport, it's worth the three-hour trip between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, where you'll also experience lighter crowds and pleasant weather while you hit tourist attractions.



Album, from A7:

own an old Oahu lap steel and amp that doesn't go back to those earliest days but was manufactured by a Hawaiian sheet music publishing company that made instruments alongside.

In that handful of churches, lap steel then pedal steel guitars took the place of organs as the main congregational worship instrument. In so doing, they opened the door for electric guitars in sanctuaries long before Jesus Music and Contemporary Christian Music showed up in the 1970s.

This long tradition produced modern sacred steel players who appreciated feeling and closeness to God above all else, though outstanding technical musicians emerged. Some popular musicians in the wider culture took note and were influenced by the soulful playing, akin to slide guitar playing. Some say it's true of Duane Allman. By the late 1900s, a few sacred steel players began leaking into the wider popular music scene, notably Chuck and Darick of The Campbell Brothers and Robert Randolph of Robert Randolph and the Family Band. The Campbells toured with the Allman Brothers Band. Randolph, aside from being in his own spotlight, was on stage and in the studio with everybody from Eric Clapton to Los Lobos to Ringo Starr to Dave Matthews to Ozzy Osbourne.

Randolph and the Campbells were from the House of God Church association, the same sacred steel-oriented church Ocasio's grandmother was pastor of in Nashville, Georgia, where he grew up and where he was taken by the hand to a piano when he was seven.

And where, just a few years later, his attention was drawn at church conferences to steel and electric guitar players, Darick Campbell in particular. It was then that a true passion was ignited, one that still burns.

A musical path

As a kid, Ocasio's path led him to playing in churches, at denominational gatherings and with gospel groups often connected to his uncle. He said he cut an album with The Gospel Travelers called "Mustard Seed" when he was eight or nine and many more followed. Whether playing steel guitar or keyboards, by his late teens, Ocasio was solidly a church musician, a music director and a well-connected musician with gospel groups. He always played what he felt and said at times that meant rocking a little harder than was the norm. That meant occasional scowls from pastors and others encouraging him to tone it down.

Randolph and the Campbells experienced the same, with the Campbells being ostracized from churches in the early 2000s after playing with rock bands.

Times change and Ocasio never suffered that fate and said even now he plays organ in Macon for Greater New Bethel Baptist Church.

"But when I was growing up, I never got to listen to music on BET or a lot of popular stuff," he said. "Of course I'm influenced by a lot of guitarists, but when someone tells me something I do sounds like Hendrix, I think of Henry Mable who was a great guitarist in church and an influence and mentor. He was my Hendrix."

As Ocasio's non-church music interests developed, five years ago he began what he calls the music collective known as Cash's Juke Joint, a revolving group of musicians that always includes Ocasio, or Cash as he's nicknamed, and near-life-long friend and drummer, JD Dunn.

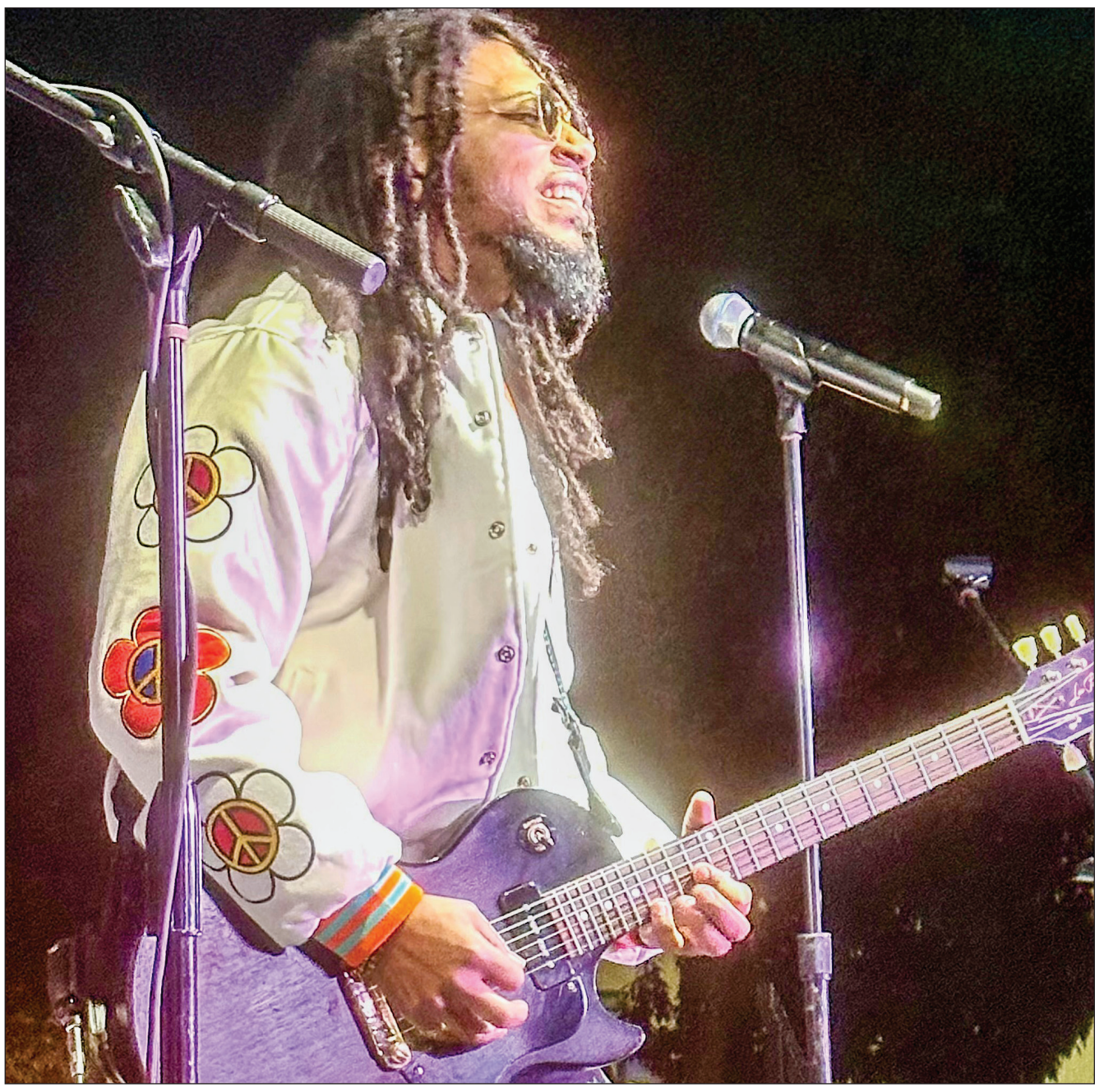
On the new album, Dunn plays drums, guest Blind Dog Mayer plays harmonica and Ocasio plays guitar, steel guitar, keyboards and everything else. And there's a lot of everything else. A whole lot.

Ocasio is 35 now, so do the math on how long he's been playing, though only a few of them in this new direction. In all that time, he's become what I call a phenomenal, well-rounded guitarist/pedal steel player who plays with ease and a oneness with his instrument.

I first saw him about three years ago at a show promoting mental health initiatives and I was doing double-take after double-take. The three-piece band was creating a firestorm of good music, first double-take, and he was playing hard rock and blues on a good ole' Gretsch guitar, second double-take, then there was the unbelievable way he incorporated a soaring pedal steel in a number of songs, third big double-take, and then just the good vibe from him obviously having a whole lot of fun playing and entertaining. I became a fan, and I think a fan for good reasons. I wouldn't be surprised if Ocasio is one of the next big things to come out of Macon.

The road home

Disclosure: I have, in fact, gotten to know Ocasio these past several years, but that hasn't colored my initial impression of his talent. It has shown me that he's, at heart, a surprisingly humble guy who doesn't boast about his abilities but says he's still learning, just trying to give his audiences the best music he can and hopefully make a connection. He said there's still a deep spirituality in his music and believes what talent he has "comes from above."



Michael W. Pannell / The Melody

Macon's Angel Ocasio Jr., shown at a recent New Year's Eve celebration, is releasing his debut album, "The Road Home," this week with a party Saturday at Grant's Lounge at 9 p.m.

Ocasio said the name of the album is significant because he doesn't remove it from where he's come from and all those who have poured into his life through the years.

"I still love to play after all these years and if I find I'm not enjoying it because of the business side and all that, I have to stop and adjust," he said. "I love going to the Sunday night jams at Grant's whenever I can and just playing with others for the fun of it. And maybe I can give back and teach something to the kids just coming up. I play my way, that's what I've always done it and what I have to do, not because I think I'm so great or that what I do is all that matters, but I just have to play what's in me and how I figure things out. If I don't, I do lose the joy."

Ocasio just won the International Singer-Songwriter Association's Musician of the Year Gold Award, an indication of where he's headed. I recommend going to his site and seeing other awards and his tour schedule and how he's getting more and more "impressive" gigs and how he's being invited to more and more "important" blues and other festivals. And also, how he's still happy to pop into Grant's, Crooked Finger Brewing over in Dublin and littler gigs for the enjoyment of playing for pretty much whoever wants to hear.

Ocasio is on social media and "The Road Home" is on streaming platforms. His site is cashsjukejoint.com and Grant's is historicgrants.com. There are links to tickets for Saturday's release party at both.

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



Experience the world without leaving Warner Robins! Enjoy cultural performances, delicious cuisine, and activities for the whole family. Celebrate our community's rich diversity and learn why we're Georgia's International City! For more information go to visitwarnerrobins.org







WARNER ROBINS

INTERNATIONAL CITY FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 6, 2025
11:00AM - 6:00PM
Perkins Field
105 Mulberry St. Warner Robins

Mercer stunned by Presbyterian in 15-10 loss

Michael A. Lough
For The Melody

Mike Jacobs looked at the stat sheet, ran his hands through his hair, spun and clicked a pen in his hand. None of it offered any clarity.

The Mercer head coach was clear on what he had just seen — he just didn't expect to see it.

Non-scholarship Presbyterian went toe-to-toe with Mercer and answered everything the Bears did, eating up clock and scoring the game-winning touchdown with 56 seconds left before holding off the Bears on their last drive for a stunning 15-10 win over the No. 11 hosts.

"Obviously just a massively disappointing loss this evening," Jacobs said, not expecting the quality performance in last week's no-contest game against No. 7 Cal-Davis to be all but erased a week later. "We did not do a good enough job as a coaching staff putting our young players in positions where they could execute at a high level.

"Presbyterian played really well tonight, and really, they did a great job on the critical downs and we did not, and that was the difference in the game."

So much for a relaxing long weekend. This one will fester for Mercer, which is off until Wofford comes to Five Star Stadium on Sept. 13.

And it will definitely fester for Jacobs.

"It's one of the more uncharacteristic losses of my career, to be honest with you," he said. "You're talking about a staff that's 85-20, 21 now. There's been far more good days than bad.

"It boils down to we as a staff putting them in positions where they can execute without overthinking, and we have to get that corrected.

The Blue Hose celebrated in bowl-win fashion on the same field they took a 63-10 hazing on a year ago. They started bouncing around on the sideline before the clock ran out, displaying the joy of a 9-year-old on Christmas Day. There were the hard hugs — and some tears — of players and coaches coming to grips with the program's biggest win in years.

Presbyterian is a member of the non-scholarship Pioneer Football League, Mercer's home for the first season upon reinstating football a decade ago.

The Blue Hose's last win against a top-15 team was in 2014 against another Southern Conference team, Furman, by a 10-7 margin. And the now-wide-awake Paladins are up next on PC's schedule.

Expectations were high for a Blue Hose team that returned eight starters on offense and the most players on the PFL's preseason team.

The same team that lost by 53 points to open 2024 closed it with

See MERCER, Page B3

NOTEPAD

GHSA fines Bibb football teams, Mercer XC wins

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Northeast and Southwest were each fined $1,500 and placed on "severe warning status" by the GHSA this week in the wake of a short scrum between the two teams that brought their game to a premature end Aug. 23.

The fines and warnings were issued by the GHSA and its Associate Director for Compliance, Carror Wright, according to GHSA documents. Wright described the events that took place as "a very toxic situation of coaches shouting accusations at each other," the letters to the schools' respective athletic directors read.

The brief scuffle between the Raiders and Patriots broke out early in the third quarter of their showdown when a Northeast player hit Southwest quarterback Chase Dupree hard after he released a pass.

The GHSA documents also included descriptions of the incident from one of the officials calling the game, who said they threw a flag right after the hit and that "within seconds a mass of coaches and players had left their respective sidelines and were on the field."

Some coaches were shouting at others, according to the official's report. Bibb County Schools Athletic Director Kevin Grooms eventually made the decision to suspend the game, giving Northeast the win by a score of 30-8.

The "severe warning status" means penalties or misconduct in the next calendar year could result in higher fines or more disciplinary action against the schools.

Chase Dupree was injured on the play and did not participate in Southwest's game against Dublin last week.

Tattnall and FPD clash on the diamond

Two of the area's top softball programs met Thursday when the Tattnall Trojans and FPD Vikings met at FPD's field Thursday, after The Melody went to print.

The Vikings took a stellar 13-2 record into the game, with losses against John Milledge on Tuesday and one against Westfield on Aug. 9 being their only blemishes.

See NOTEPAD, Page B2

2025 Labor Day Road Race



Photo Courtesy of Labor Day Road Race

Colby Smith (left) of Macon and Marina Sledjeski of Perry compete in the 10K class of the 48th annual Macon Labor Day Road Race, which they were the male and female winners. Sledjeski ran a 40:42 while Smith ran a 37:50. See more winners on page B3.

A peek at Week 4 of Bibb County HS football: FPD's first test, Rutland looking for first win



Jason Vorhees / The Melody

FPD's Breck Griffin (5) and Brady McHugh (15) battle for a reception during the Vikings' win over Pacelli Friday night. McHugh came up with the catch despite nearly running into his teammate and eventually ran in for a touchdown to put the Vikings up 14-7.

Micah Johnston
Sports Editor

Macon's high school football slate for Week 4 of the regular season will yet again feature lots of away games as some of Bibb County's premier programs will hit the road to play tough opponents.

Regardless, there are plenty of intriguing matchups to watch for. While lots of regions have yet to enter district play, the Macon schools in GHSA Class A-Division I have already begun a grueling nine-game region campaign.

ACE, Central and Northeast all travel to region opponents — the Raiders have it easiest with a game against Jefferson County, while the Gryphons have perhaps the most difficult matchup against Dodge County. Rutland, after taking Howard to the wire in last week's game, will have a tough game at Lamar County.

There are plenty of games with intrigue right here at home, too. Howard also begins its region schedule with a home game against longtime rival West Laurens, Mount de Sales will try to bounce back against Terrell Academy and Westside is set to host championship-caliber program Bowdon.

Here's a look at what to know before this week's action unfolds in Macon.

FPD (3-0) at Brookstone (3-0)

Last meeting: FPD won 6-3 on Sept. 6, 2024. Last week: FPD beat St. Anne-Pacelli 34-14; Brookstone beat Mount Vernon 28-13.

It'll take awhile for Brookstone to avenge the most painful loss in series history, when FPD took down the Cougars 44-24 for the 2023 Class 4A championship.

The Cougars have a new head coach in Ian Headley, who arrived from Florida to succeed Rance Gillespie, who went 22-13 in three seasons.

The Cougars are outscoring opponents by 24 points a game this season, while the Vikings have won by an average of 26.33 points, with two of their three wins coming against GHSA programs.

Brookstone is getting 374 yards a game on offense, led by quarterback Broughton Branch, who averages 204.3 yards a game passing.

The Vikings were efficient in getting past St. Anne-Pacelli, which had some success gaining yardage but couldn't convert them into points. FPD picked off three passes, Brady McHugh returning one for 67 yards and a touchdown.

This will be FPD's biggest test yet this season by far. Brookstone's last 3-0 start was in 2022, and the last one before that was in 2011.

Howard (1-1) vs. West Laurens (2-0)

Last meeting: West Laurens won 28-27 in 2024; Last week: Howard defeated Rutland 20-13, West Laurens defeated North Clayton 28-22

The Huskies bounced back last week from their gut-wrenching loss to Westside in the season opener, but it was not necessarily as thorough a statement as head coach Trey Porter

See FOOTBALL, Page B2

ACE softball defeats Dublin 8-0 in former head coach McLendon's return to Macon

Mark Powell
For The Melody

Some games just mean more, and Thursday night's softball matchup between ACE and Dublin was one of them.

The game marked former Gryphons athletic director Josh McLendon's — and the McLendon family's — first return to ACE as a visitor since McLendon left the program at the end of the 2024-25 school year. McLendon coached the Gryphons for eight years, leading them to a state championship in 2021.

ACE got the last laugh in McLendon's return, however, as the Gryphons offense rolled early and eventually defeated the Irish 8-0.

ACE coach Andrew Claxton has to walk past that state championship sign each time he enters the ACE dugout.

Dublin assistant coach Dickie Horton also coached at ACE last year. Nearly all the ACE players played for McLendon during their high school careers.

ACE and Dublin are region opponents, with both chasing Bleckley County and East Laurens in the playoff race.

So, yes, there was a lot on the line entering Thursday's matchup.

Giselle Giles pitched a masterful first inning for the Gryphons, striking out former teammate Jaymi Kate McLendon to start the game, then striking out Emily Maddox and coaxing Addy Bardell into a weak grounder. Shortstop Sophie Denney scooped up the ball and connected with first baseman Lizzy Gardiner for the final out.

Two of Dublin's starters were injured, which meant third baseman Bri Daniels took the circle for the Irish. Senior Avery Stone led off the bottom of the first for ACE, drawing a walk and then stealing second. Kinsley Lineberger lined out to short and Stone broke for third. The catcher's throw sailed into left field, the first of three errors for the Irish in the inning.

Reese Thames and Sophie Denney then singled for the Gryphons. Thames scored on another Irish error, while Thames advanced to second base. Kayleigh Kell then drew the second walk of the inning, putting two runners on base. Giselle Giles doubled for ACE, driving in the third run of the inning. Ella Allen popped up to Daniels for the second out of the frame.

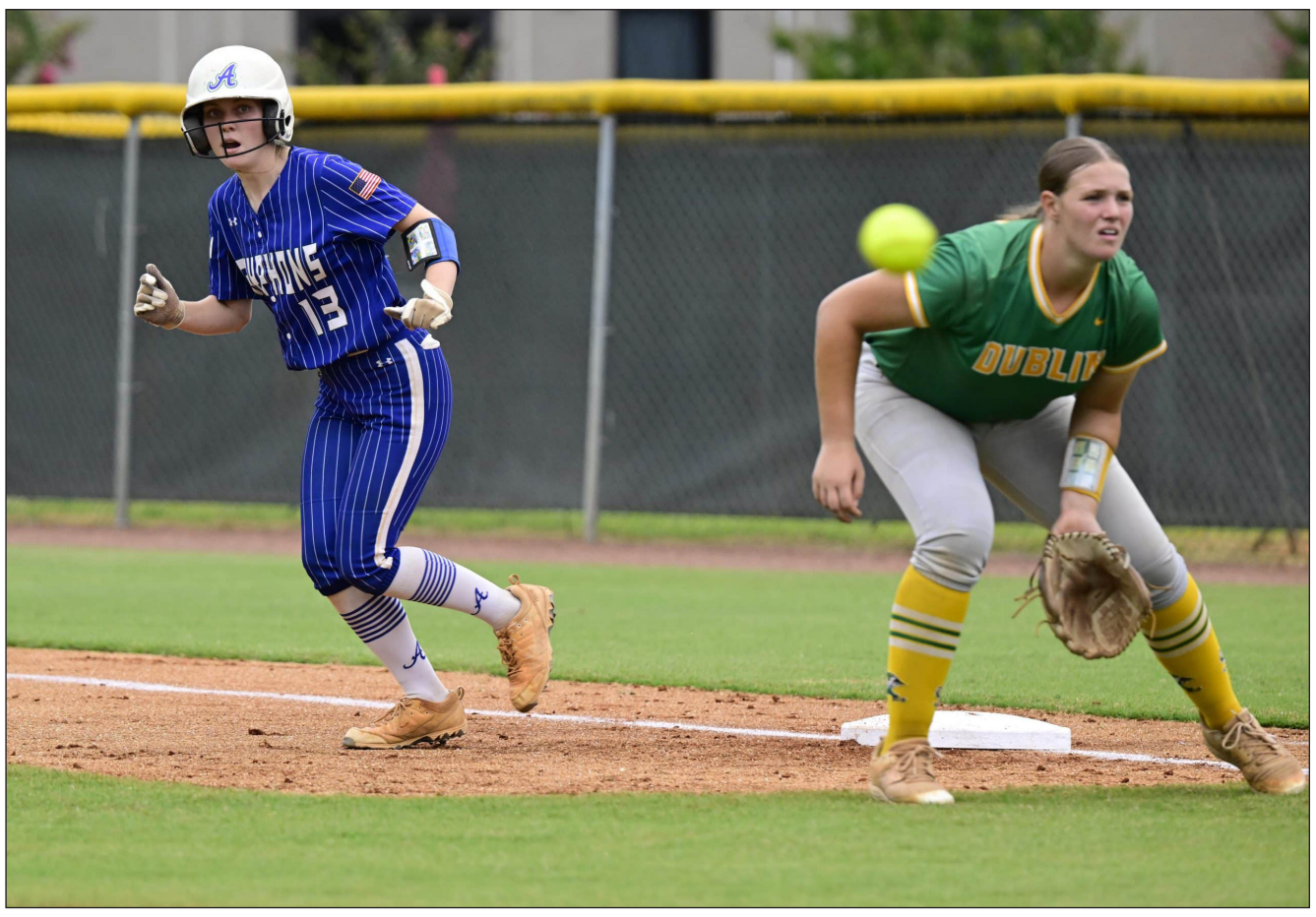
Emma Balkcom slapped a ball to short, but a throwing error allowed her to reach base and let the Gryphons plate two more runs, extending the lead to 5-0. Ava Allen drew the third Gryphon walk of the inning, bringing leadoff batter Stone back to the plate. Her slap hit attempt popped up and Dublin's catcher snagged the fly ball to end the inning.

Staked to a 5-0 lead, ACE coach Andrew Claxton went to his bullpen, bringing in junior Avery Edalgo. Edalgo walked opposing pitcher Daniels, then caught Anya Stanley looking on a called third strike for the first out. Lizzie Brantley connected for a deep fly ball to center field, but Stone easily made the catch for the second out. Another walk by Edalgo to Kendall Chapman put runners on first and second, but Edalgo rallied and struck out Mylee Wicker swinging to end the Irish threat.

Lineberger drilled a single down the left field line to start the bottom of the second inning and stole second, putting herself in scoring position for Thames.

Thames lifted a ball to center field, but the Irish centerfielder camped under it for the first out. Sophie Denney doubled to the left field wall, scoring Lineberger easily. A wild pitch allowed Denney to advance to third before Kayleigh Kell's keen eye and patience resulted in her second walk of the game. Another Irish error brought Denney home from third, putting the Gryphons up 7-0. Dublin's defense settled in, however, with Ella Allen flying out to short and Balkcom grounding out to third to end the inning.

Edalgo opened the top of the third with back to back called strikeouts and then coaxed Maddox into a fly ball to left field to set the Irish down in order.



Mark Powell / For The Melody

ACE senior catcher Reese Thames breaks for second, watching the pitch. ACE defeated Dublin in region play 8-0 during an Aug. 28 home game at ACE's softball field.

Allen then led off the bottom of the third for the Gryphons, but hit a comebacker to the mound that Daniels flicked to first. Stone then slapped the ball down the third base line for what appeared to be a single, but she was instead called out by the home plate umpire for being out of the box.

Lineberger reached first on another Irish error and then stole second as Thames batted. Thames lifted a ball to center field, but the Irish centerfielder misjudged the ball for the fifth Dublin error of the game. Lineberger raced home, extending the lead to 8-0. Denney then flew out to former teammate McLendon, who raced into foul territory to snag the final out of the inning.

The fourth inning was relatively quiet with neither team able to generate any offense. After Edalgo got Bardell to fly out, a walk and then ACE's only error of the game resulted in two Irish baserunners. Edalgo showed her resolve on the next two batters, however, with a groundout to the pitcher and another called strikeout.

ACE only managed a walk in the bottom of the fourth.

Edalgo continued her relief performance in the top of the fifth, needing three outs to secure the win for the Gryphons. Dublin needed one run to extend the game. Edalgo struck out Wicker for the first out, and then Rainna Wyatt popped out to second.

Former ACE player Jaymi Kate McLendon entered the batter's box as Dublin's last gasp. After a couple of strikes, McLendon lifted a ball over second for a base hit, Dublin's lone hit of the game. Emily Maddox connected on a long fly ball, but centerfielder Stone snagged it at the fence to end the game.

On extending the game for Dublin, Jaymi Kate McLendon said she was "happy to get that hit in her last at bat".

"I just wanted him to be proud of me and the work I'm putting in," Stone said of facing her former coach.

Coach McLendon said didn't think the game at ACE meant more due to his return, but that it meant more because it was a region game against a talented team.

With play concluded, players and coaches alike hugged it out. The camaraderie then moved to Your Pie with Dublin and ACE sharing a meal.

SEPTEMBER
FOOD TRUCK ROUNDUP



LIVE MUSIC | KIDS ZONE | FOOD TRUCKS

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



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





Big Brothers Big Sisters OF AMERICA



VISIT WARNER ROBINS GEORGIA

Mercer, B1:

and kept it close for four quarters, I think that we did enough to keep them uncomfortable," fourth-year head coach Steve Everhart said. "I told our guys that we're going to fire away, you know, we're going to go for it on fourth down. No, we're going to go for it on fourth down. I mean, we got pump fakes. I mean, whatever we got to do."

They also returned the league's top offensive freshman. Now a sophomore, Collin Hurst showed that was no fluke, turning in a huge performance.

The 5-10, 185-pound quarterback completed 25 of 38 pass attempts for a staggering 303 yards with one touchdown and one interception, getting sacked only once, too.

"He played more than half the season," Jacobs said. "He's an all-conference guy. He completed passes, he made plays with guys in his face. They executed."

He found eight different targets, led by Dominic Kibby's nine catches for 114 yards. Some of the targets were uncharacteristically open against an upper-level defense.

Mercer counterpart DJ Smith went 22 for 36 for 154 yards and a matching line of one touchdown, one interception, and one sack.

The Bears were outrushed at home 113-87. As he scanned the stat sheet, more things caught Jacobs' eye.

PC had four more first downs, had to punt only three times, and had a better night on third and fourth downs.

Mercer took the lead in the final seconds of the first quarter, with Adonis McDaniel taking a jet sweep pass of about a foot from Smith and cutting it up the middle from 11 yards out.

That was not a spark.

The Blue Hose promptly responded with an 11-play, 75-yard drive that included a 23-yard gain on third and 13 and concluded with a 29-yard flea flicker from Hurst to tight end



Donn Kester / For The Melody

Mercer's Jamari Freeman bows his head as Presbyterian College players storm the field in the background after their upset win over the Bears.

Nathan Levicki.

But the point-after kick doinked off the upright to make it a one-point game at the 9:37 mark of the second quarter.

Smith's pass a few minutes later was behind the target and picked off at midfield. PC was primed to take the lead with a first down at the 10.

But two plays at the 1-yard line got nothing, Drew Clare and Carmelo O'Neal coming up with the stop on an awkward fourth-down play.

Again, it was not a spark.

The Bears took over at their own 3 with 2:22 left, but punted with eight seconds left from their 41.

The inability to take advantage of anything continued in the third quarter, as a 29-yard punt return by Tattnall grad Brayden Smith set Mercer up at Presbyterian's 25. The Bears had to settle for a 23-yard field goal.

Presbyterian answered, after a re-spotting gave the Blue Hose a first down instead of a fourth down. But the Blue Hose also had to settle for a field goal, from 32 yards with 3:54 left in the third.

The back-and-forth continued, Mercer coming up with a frustrating possession in the fourth.

The Bears got it on their 21 with 12:04 left, and ran off 11 plays – also getting a re-spot- and ate up 5:29, a sack for a 7-yard loss forcing a punt from PC's 42.

Presbyterian took over on its 21 with 6:35 left, and proceeded to embark on the drive neither team would soon forget.

The Blue Hose opened with a 20-yard pass, and patiently mixed it up and ate up time. They got a pass interference call on fourth and 3 to keep going, then had a long run nullified by a penalty only to get a 14-yard completion on fourth and 4 a few plays later.

Mercer defenders argued it was incomplete, but the review was inconclusive.

Four plays later, Zach Switzer went in from 16 yards out with the game-winner, fairly easily.

Did Mercer let him score to save time?

"No, but at that point, we're kind of in no man's land, right?" Jacobs said. "Used a couple time outs, but then we couldn't get a stop, and so, is it better to potentially let them? We probably would have on the next play had they not scored there."

McDaniel's 40-yard kickoff return made it interesting. A 29-yard completion to Brayden Smith made it more interesting, but time was evaporating.

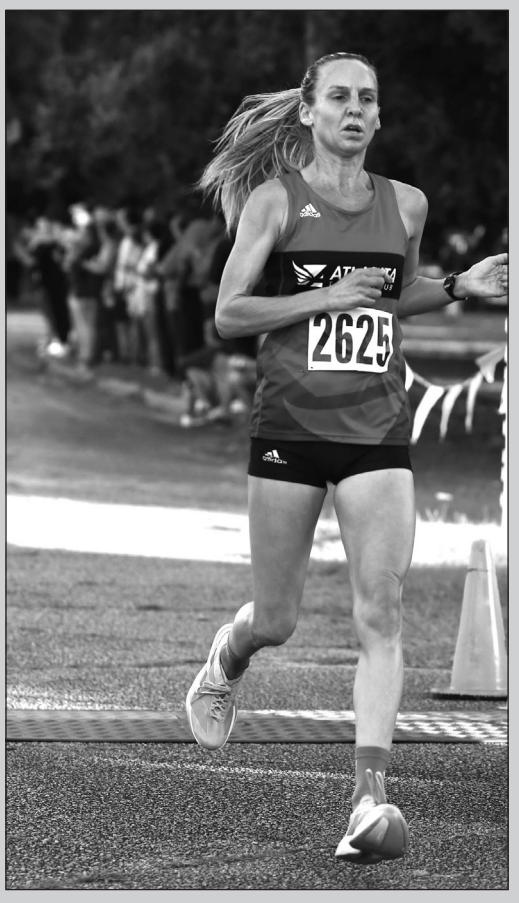
DJ Smith scrambled to eat up the final three seconds. His pass into a crowd in the end zone was almost caught by Adjatay Dabbs but knocked away.

"We'll evaluate everything," Jacobs said. "And we'll evaluate every position, and again, we'll work to get the best 11 guys in each of the three phases on the field. All we can do is go back to work."

2025 Labor Day Road Race Victors

Cameron Bensley (left) of Cartersville won the Men's 5K class of the Labor Day Road Race with a 14:46, while Jill Braley of Atlanta won the Women's 5K with a 17:33.





Notepad, B1:

Tattnall was 8-3 entering the contest, though they did defeat Westfield 8-7 at the end of August.

To read full coverage of the top-tier showdown, visit maconmelody.com/sports.

TD Club names Players of the Week

The Macon Touchdown Club named players from CFCA, ACE and Northeast as its best high school football players in Macon across the third week of games this season.

CFCA's Judson Walls earned co-Back of the Week honors with Northeast quarterback Jordan Wiggins.

Walls scored four total touchdowns — two rushing and two receiving — out of the backfield for the Lancers while rushing 16 times for 180 yards and catching a pair of passes for 90 yards in CFCA's win against St. Andrews Academy. Wiggins went 11 of 15 passing for 214 yards and tacked on additional 40 yards rushing in the Raiders' 32-0 win over Jefferson County.

ACE's William Winters won the club's Lineman of the Week award for his performance in the Gryphons' win over Jefferson County. Winters notched 20 tackles, four tackles for loss and three quarterback hurries on defense.

Mercer cross country teams win meet

The Mercer men's and women's cross country teams both won their respective sides of the MGA/Julius Johnson Invitational at Middle Georgia State University's cross country track Saturday.

The men's team dominated, with the Bears snagging all of the top 10 spots in the men's 6K meet. Buck Ledford had a personal best time of 19:06 for Mercer to finish in first, while Yianni Pothoulakis and Jake Peters followed in second and third place, respectively.

Mary Grace Parker crossed the finish line 23 seconds ahead of the rest of the field, as the freshman won the first race of her career with a time of 18:25 in the women's 5K. Mercer also had the second place finish — Chiara Belfico finished with an 18:48 for that spot — and had six of the top 10 finishers.

Mercer's next meet is Sept. 12 in Huntsville, Alabama for the Southern Showcase hosted by Jackson State.

High school volleyball to begin region play

Macon's high school volleyball teams began playing in their respective areas and districts last week, with some intra-Macon matchups providing intrigue.

Mount de Sales has the best winning percentage of Macon's private schools with an 8-4 mark so far, including a recent 3-1 win over crosstown opponent Tattnall. It was the Cavaliers' second win over the Trojans already this season.

Mount de Sales will be tested soon, as it is set to face Stratford and FPD this week. The Vikings are 6-11 thus far, but all six of those victories have come in their last nine matches against teams including Warner Robins, Mary Persons, Covenant and Tattnall.

Stratford, which earned the highest playoff seed of any Macon team in the GIAA last season with a No. 9 mark, is 10-11 so far but similarly earned all 10 of those wins in their past 14 contests, including a seven-match winning streak from Aug. 12 to Aug. 22.

The Eagles defeated the Vikings in a rivalry game Aug. 26.

In the GHSA, ACE is again one of Macon's most formidable teams.

The Gryphons easily lead the area with a 14-7 overall record and a perfect 4-0 mark in area play through Sept. 2. Area 2 of GHSA Class A-Division I consists of nine teams including the Gryphons, making for a competitive race for a playoff spot.

The Lamar County Trojans were ACE's nemesis in the area last season, and it looks as if that could be the case again. The Trojans are 2-0 in area play so far and an impressive 7-2 overall.

The Central Chargers have also shown promise early, going 3-1 so far with wins over Howard, Rutland and Baldwin County. Southwest and Northeast are winless thus far.

Football, B1:

would have liked.

Howard defeated crosstown foe Rutland but was hamstrung by its sluggish offense, instead relying on some special teams plays — a punt block returned for a touchdown and a kickoff return that set up another score — for two of its trips to the endzone.

Now the Huskies will host region opponent West Laurens for the 18th consecutive year. Howard is 4-13 against the Raiders all-time, though two of those wins came back-to-back recently in 2022 and 2023.

West Laurens is off to a hot start with a 49-0 blowout over Groves in its first game and a closer 28-22 victory against North Clayton last week. The wins continue a recent trend, as head coach Kip Burdette and the Raiders exploded for an 8-3 campaign last year after going 1-9 and 2-8 in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

If last year's showdown was any indication, the two teams could crank out a classic Friday. Howard went for all the marbles last year on the road with a two-point conversion on the final drive but ended up losing by one point.

The Huskies will need to figure out their pass game, as the normally run-heavy squad is banged up at the running back position. Star rusher Julius Ramsey played with a broken hand against Rutland.

Rutland (0-2) at Lamar County (2-0)

Last meeting: Lamar County won 62-7 in 2024; Last week: Rutland lost to Howard 20-13, Lamar County defeated Jackson 13-6

Don't let the Hurricanes' winless mark through two games deceive you. They kept things close with a skilled Bleckley County team through the first half in the season opener, then had a chance to tie or take the lead on their final drive against Howard last week.

Rutland's defense stepped up in both games, containing the Royals — if only for two quarters — before downright extinguishing a battered Huskies run game in its second contest. The Hurricanes are still a bit undersized on defense and have a lot of players featuring on both sides of the ball, but the defensive unit has some bite nonetheless.

Rutland's offense, on the other hand, got things going occasionally but could not fully find its stride. The Hurricanes have had explosive passing plays in both of their games thus far, but not enough to generate consistent scoring.

Lamar County will be Rutland's toughest task yet. The Trojans soundly defeated Telfair County 37-14 before a win over Jackson last week, and both wins came courtesy of a run-heavy attack. The showdown with the Red Devils ended with a 13-7 victory after four different Lamar County players tallied at least six carries.

It will certainly be a chance at revenge for the Hurricanes, who lost 62-7 at home last season in brutal fashion.

On paper, things line up. Lamar County relies on its run game while Rutland stuffed opposing rushers for Howard last week; the Trojans limited Jackson to negative rushing yards but also allowed more than 200 passing yards, which could lead to the Hurricanes passing more.

Stratford (2-0) at Wilkinson County (0-3)

Last meeting: Stratford won 28-12 in 2024; Last week: Stratford defeated Pinewood 40-5, Wilkinson County lost against Jasper County 42-12

The Eagles are off to a flying start for the second consecutive year, and this time the jump off the block is even more impressive. Stratford won by more than 35 points in each of their first two contests, including an unexpectedly dominant 49-17 showing against St. Anne-Pacelli.

With such lopsided tilts so far, the stats are gaudy for Stratford. Running back Tyler Stephens already has 318 rushing yards through two games with three touchdowns. Sophomore signal caller Tucker Johnston has thrown four 395 yards and four scores with no interceptions. George Dunn and Jett Johnston both already have at least 100 receiving yards.

Those numbers have a decent chance to get even more impressive against a struggling Wilkinson County team that has lost its first three games. The first two losses came by only one score each, while their most recent game against Jasper County was more of a struggle at 42-12.

The Warriors will have home field advantage, though they had trouble regardless of that in two games at home already this year. If Stephens and Johnston stay hot, the Eagles might have another blowout. Stratford is 7-0 against Wilkinson County all-time.

ACE (2-0) at Dodge County (2-0)

Last meeting: Dodge County won 33-28 in 2024; Last week: ACE defeated Jefferson County

The Gryphons are set to face their first serious challenge this season after beginning the campaign with somewhat easier matchups against Central and Jefferson County, both of which they won handily.

Dodge County also outplayed the Chargers but got a grittier win in Week 1, eking out a victory against longtime rival Bleckley County 31-29 after a roaring comeback attempt by the Royals.

The Indians were a top-three team in the stacked Region 2-A Division I last season when they finished 9-3 — it was their best season since a 10-2 mark in 2018 — but ACE gave them a run for their money early in the year.

The Gryphons took Dodge County to its limit, getting a shot to take the lead in the final minute of play but coming up short on a fourth-and-goal from the 8-yard line.

ACE will seek revenge for the heartbreaking loss from last season. To get it, they will need more crucial performances from brothers Bryson and Brayden Vincent in the backfield and fill-in quarterback Brady Balkcom.

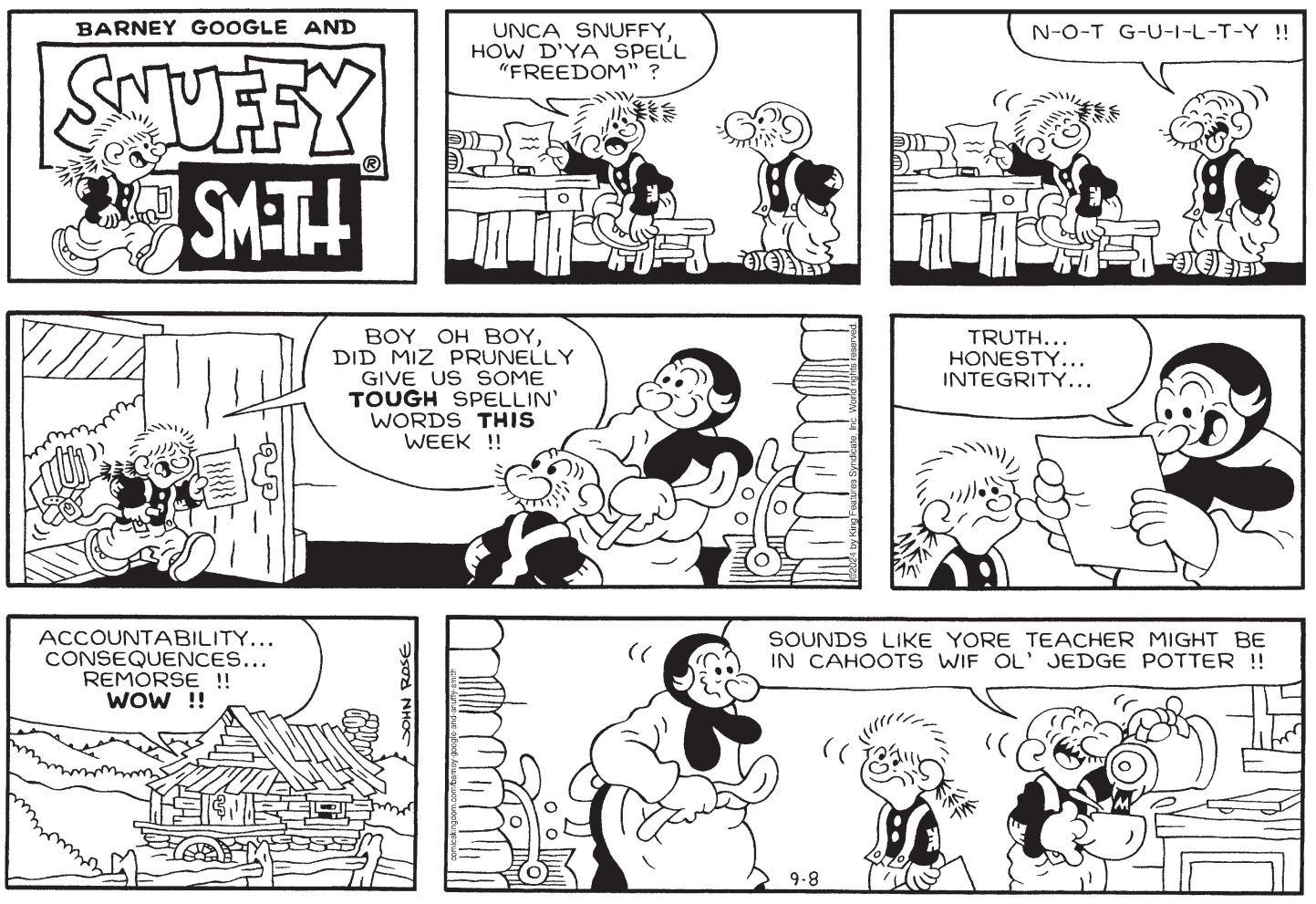
Other games

Westside has its third consecutive game against a highly-touted, non-region opponent this week, as they will this time play host to defending state champion Bowdon. While the Red Devils are technically two classifications lower than the Seminoles, they have still won the last three consecutive GHSA Class A-Division II trophies under head coach Rich Fendley. Bowdon defeated Westside 56-27 when they hosted last year.

Central will travel to face East Laurens with hopes to end their struggles that span all the way back to the 2023 season. The Falcons are struggling so far as well after losing their first game by one possession to Johnson County before a 40-0 loss against Bleckley County.

Northeast travels to Jefferson County, while Mount de Sales will stay at home against Terrell County. Covenant will try to stay hot after back-to-back blowout wins as it travels to Westwood.

Tattnall, off to a lackluster 0-3 start, travels to Columbus for the third time in the first four weeks of the season, this time to take on Calvary Christian. Windsor will try to end its two-game losing streak against Lakeview Academy at home.



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



MAGIC MAZE — VIEW

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

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally

Unlisted clue hint: A TREELESS GRASSY PLAIN

Aerial	In plain	Page	Private
Bird's eye	Million dollar	Panoramic	Side
Field of	Mountain	Pleasant	World
In full	Out of	Points of	

©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Just Like Cats & Dogs

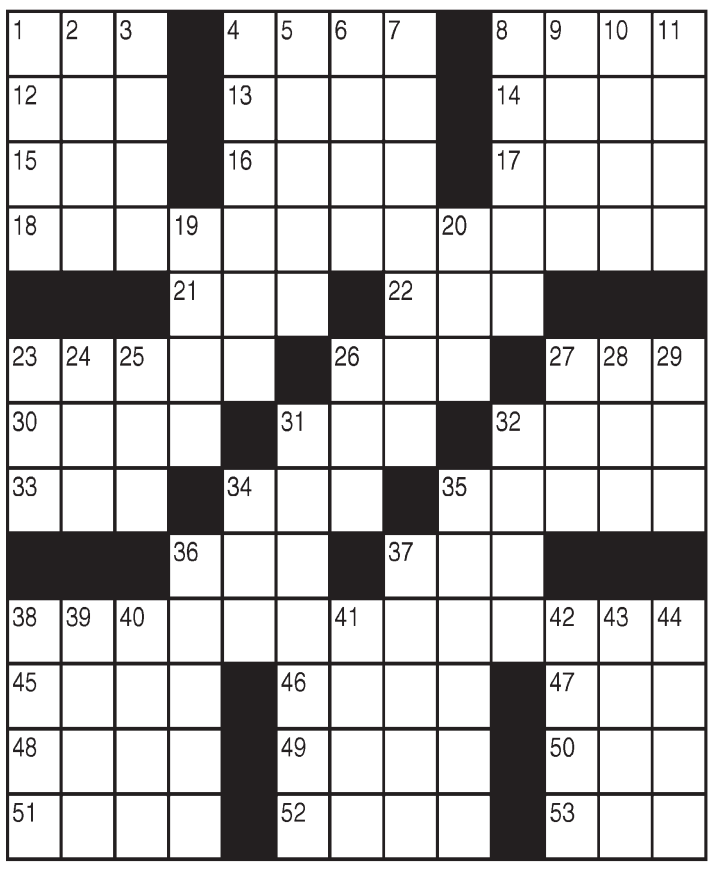
by Dave T. Phipps





"Ms. Figby, you were supposed to remind me not to be a jerk today!"

King Crossword



ACROSS

1 Pitcher's pride
4 Country great McEntire
8 Chew (on)
12 Singer Rawls
13 Holiday lead-ins
14 Peregrinate
15 Belief
16 Tide variety
17 Currier's partner
18 Dick Tracy's sweetie
21 Method
22 Gear tooth
23 Daisy part
26 "Incidentally," in a text
27 Lass
30 Crooned
31 Hosp. areas
32 Pizzazz
33 Boy king
34 Coach Parseghian
35 Used a stopwatch
36 "Exodus" hero
37 007 creator Fleming
38 Classic Hank Williams song
45 Dutch cheese
46 Ovid's 53
47 "A pox upon thee!"
48 Jeansmaker Strauss
49 Harrow rival
50 Mimic
51 Future atty.'s exam
52 Big rig
53 Scarlet

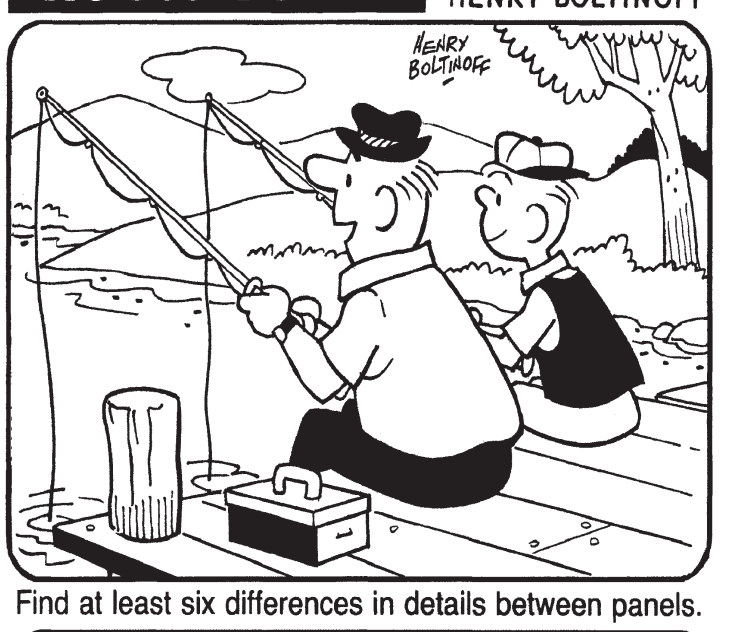
DOWN

1 Landed
2 Valentine flower
3 Fall bloomers
4 Tourist's car
5 Without exception
6 Suitor
7 Features
8 "Peer Gynt Suite" composer
9 Bright star
10 Say it's so
11 Compass point
19 Booty
20 Explanation
23 Calif. clock setting
24 Water (Fr.)
25 Blaster's need
26 Bikini top
27 Tiara jewel
28 Enzyme suffix
29 British "Inc."
31 Baltimore baseballers
32 Fan publication
34 Rainbow
35 Sesame paste
36 Fess up
37 Figure of speech
38 Prison room
39 Praiseful pieces
40 Volcanic flow
41 Low-calorie
42 Miles away
43 Ready for harvest
44 Ticked (off)

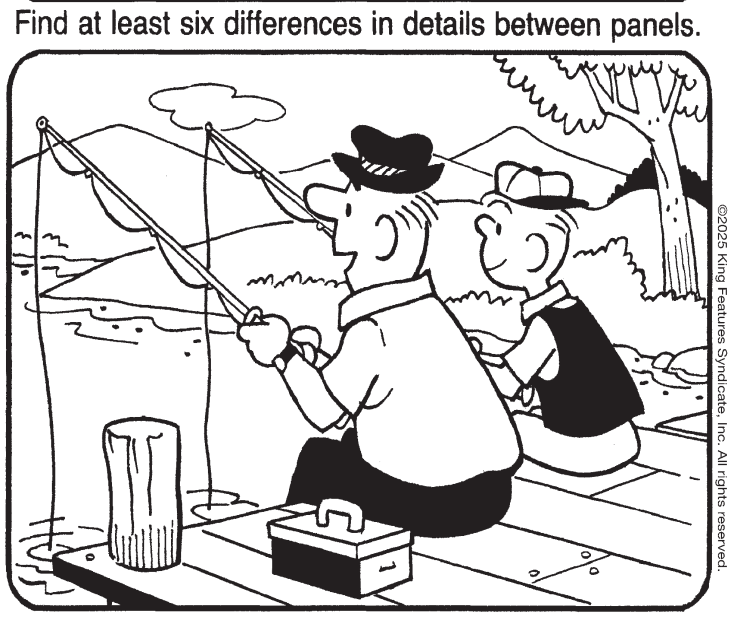
© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

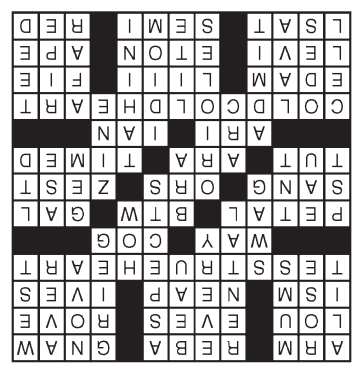


Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Box is moved. 2. Bush is taller. 3. Hat is larger. 4. Line is added to board. 5. Cloud is smaller. 6. Mountain is added.

It pays to advertise in your local newspaper!

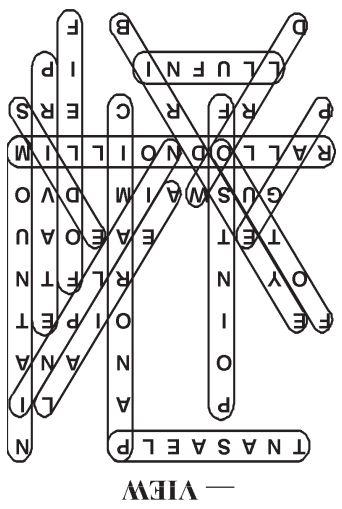


Solution time: 21 mins.

— King Crossword —

Answers

Crossword Key



— VIEW

Magic Maze Key

Almanac

Today is the 248th day of 2025 and the 78th day of summer.

TODAY'S HISTORY: In 1774, the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia.In 1836, Sam Houston was elected the first president of the Republic of Texas.

In 1882, the first U.S. Labor Day celebration was held in New York City. In 1975, President Gerald Ford survived an attempt on his life when a Secret Service agent tackled would-be assassin Lynette Fromme. In 1986, Pan Am Flight 73 was hijacked at Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, Pakistan.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Jesse James (1847-1882), legendary outlaw; Arthur Nielsen (1897-1980), market researcher; Darryl F. Zanuck (1902-1979), film producer; John Cage (1912-1992), composer; Bob Newhart (1929-2024), comedian/actor; Raquel Welch (1940-2023), actress/model; Werner Herzog (1942-), filmmaker; Freddie Mercury (1946-1991), singer-songwriter; Cathy Guisewite (1950-), cartoonist; Michael Keaton (1951-), actor; Rose McGowan (1973-), actress; Elena Delle Donne (1989-), basketball player.

TODAY'S FACT: In 1957, Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," a defining novel of the postwar generation, was published by Viking Press.

TODAY'S SPORTS: In 1960, boxer Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) won the gold medal in light-heavyweight boxing at the Olympic Games in Rome.

TODAY'S QUOTE: "I certainly don't delude myself that there aren't certainly more important things to do in life than make people laugh, but I can't imagine anything that would bring me more joy." — Bob Newhart.

TODAY'S NUMBER: 12 colonies represented at the First Continental Congress in 1774. Georgia declined to send delegates.

TODAY'S MOON: Between first quarter moon (Aug. 30) and full moon (Sept. 7).

Community Briefs

Suspect in deadly shooting killed in gunfight with deputies

A man accused of shooting two people and killing one at an east Macon discount store early Tuesday morning was killed in a shootout with police later that night, the Bibb County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

Deputies wheeled in at the Dollar General on Jeffersonville Road just before 5 a.m. and found Regina Darleen Smith unresponsive with a gunshot wound inside a Nissan Rogue with a 79-year-old man who was also wounded.

Smith, 56, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Witnesses told deputies the shooting could have stemmed from "an altercation as the result of a prior motor vehicle collision," according to the sheriff's office.

Investigators identified the suspected shooter as 43-year-old Catrell Tywan Ford.

Later that evening, Bibb County deputies who are assigned to the U.S. Marshals Southeast Regional Task Force spotted Ford outside the Chevron gas station at Spring Street and Riverside Drive. Ford ran away after the deputies told him to stop, the news release said.

Deputies chased Ford about 300 yards into a wooded area and exchanged gunfire with him. Ford was fatally wounded.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the sheriff's internal affairs officers were called in to investigate the shooting incident.

Ford was released from Valdosta State Prison in March 2019, according to the Georgia Department of Corrections. Ford was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in Fulton County in 1999 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. In 2015, Ford was convicted of possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Homeless man killed near west Macon encampment

A homeless man was shot and killed early Sunday morning in a wooded area near a west Macon gas station, Bibb County Coroner Leon Jones said.

Bibb County sheriff's deputies responded to a 911 call about 9:30 a.m. and found Nelson Reynolds Crenshaw unresponsive with a gunshot wound. Crenshaw was not far from the Murphy USA gas station on Harrison Road, the site of a known homeless encampment.

Crenshaw, of Fort Valley, was pronounced dead at a hospital at 10:17 a.m., Jones said.

The sheriff's office said no arrests had been made as of Wednesday.

Anyone with information related to this incident is urged to call the Bibb County Sheriff's Office at 478-751-7500 or Macon Regional Crimestoppers at 1-877-68CRIME.

Hit-and-run driver kills woman

The Bibb County Sheriff's Office is asking for the public's help with identifying a driver who hit and killed a 23-year-old woman then drove away.

Investigators found Ronni Nykole Abbott lying on the side of Rocky Creek Road in the 2200 block shortly before noon on Aug. 28. Abbott appeared to have been hit by a vehicle, and she was pronounced dead at the scene.

Anyone with information related to this incident is urged to call the Bibb County Sheriff's Office at 478-751-7500 or Macon Regional Crimestoppers at 1-877-68CRIME.

More school zone speed cameras installed

New school zone speed cameras were activated at five schools on Wednesday.

Drivers passing Bruce, Porter, Lewis and Martin Luther King elementary schools and Northwoods Academy at 10 mph over the speed limit or more will be issued warnings for the first month before beginning to issue citations Oct. 4.

The cameras will only be operational during school hours when the lights are flashing. Tickets are already being issued outside more than 20 other schools across the county.

Documentary reckons with Mercer's history of slavery

Mercer University's Center for Southern Studies is set to screen "Acts of Reparation," a documentary that reckons with the school's legacy of slavery, on Sept. 19 at the Douglass Theatre.

The documentary follows two friends — Selina Lewis Davison, who is Black, and Macky Alston, whose ancestor was the university's first president and an enslaver — who travel to the university's original campus in Penfield where Mamie Hillman, founder and director of the Greene County African American Museum, is restoring a once-lost Black cemetery.

The documentary recently won the 2025 best feature film award at the Atlanta Film Festival and "offers a warm and personal approach to the question of how we reckon with the history of slavery in our families, institutions and communities," according to a news release.

Family history workshop aims to help trace Black lineages

Washington Memorial Library and Mercer University are set to host workshops designed to help Black people recover, preserve and share their family histories and stories at the library all day on Sept. 20.

The workshops are designed to equip families with the tools and information needed to find their ancestors, record oral histories and preserve historical records to benefit current and future generations.

White community members are encouraged to learn how they can support the research of Black families because, often, Black genealogists can discover records of lost ancestors in the archives of white families.

The event, in the library's genealogy department, will feature people highlighted in the "Acts of Reparation" documentary airing at the Douglass Theatre on Sept. 19.

What to watch

FRIDAY

September 5, 2025

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

College Football

BTN, ESPN2 & FS1, beginning at 7 p.m. Live

James Madison at Louisville (ESPN2), Western Illinois at Northwestern and Northern Illinois at Maryland (BTN), and Eastern Washington at Boise State (FS1) are on Friday night's college football slate.

Zillow Gone Wild

HGTV, 9:30 p.m.

Off to find more wild homes, Jack McBrayer climbs up to a treetop oasis made from salvaged materials in the new episode "Bottle-ottle-ottle," Then, he tours a property made of glass bottles and visits a 19th-century home that turned three structures into one unexpected residence.



DISCOVERY, INC.

Mysteries From Above

History, 10 p.m.

Tonight's episode, "Extraordinarily Out of the Ordinary," shares the stories of a floating, spinning island in Argentina, a giant triangle in the Arizona desert, mysterious multicolored pools in Northern Ethiopia and the giant figure of a man hidden in the Australian outback.

CATCH A CLASSIC

Interracial Romance — Part 1

TCM, beginning at 8 p.m.

Tonight and next Friday, Sept. 12, Turner Classic Movies presents films featuring interracial couples, many of which were produced during times when onscreen portrayals of these loving pairs were considered socially unacceptable at best, if not outright shocking, to many people — and when such real-life relationships were even illegal in some places in America. Tonight's lineup leads off with the first adaptation of the stage musical **Show Boat** (1936), which, among its characters, features Helen Morgan as a part-Black actress "passing" as white who is married to a white man. Next is the drama **Island in the Sun** (1957), led by Harry Belafonte (who performs the title song), Joan Fontaine, Joan Collins, James Mason, Dorothy Dandridge and Stephen Boyd, which caused controversy with its tale of race relations and interracial romance on a fictional Caribbean island. Belafonte also leads the next title, **The World, the Flesh and the Devil** (1959), a postapocalyptic sci-fi film in which he plays one of three survivors (along with Inger Stevens and Mel Ferrer). Then, Sidney Poitier and Elizabeth Hartman, earning a Best Actress Oscar nomination in her film debut, headline the 1965 drama **A Patch of Blue (pictured),** about the increasingly close friendship between an educated Black man and an illiterate, blind, white 18-year-old girl. The lineup concludes early tomorrow with **The Grasshopper** (1970), a drama led by Jacqueline Bisset and Jim Brown.



MGM STUDIOS

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



MARVEL

National Treasure (2004, Adventure) Nicolas Cage, Diane Kruger **AMC, 6 p.m.**

White House Down (2013, Action) Channing Tatum, Jamie Foxx **BET, 6 p.m.**

Bad Boys (1995, Action) Martin Lawrence, Will Smith **E!, 6:30 p.m.**

Jurassic Park (1993, Adventure) Sam Neill, Laura Dern **TNT, 7 p.m.**

Old School (2003, Comedy) Luke Wilson, Will Ferrell **IFC, 7:30 p.m.**

Creed III (2023, Drama) Michael B. Jordan, Tessa Thompson **TBS, 8 p.m.**

Guardians of the Galaxy (2014, Science fiction) Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana **FX, 8 p.m.**

Santa Tell Me (2024, Romance) Erin Krakow, Daniel Lissing **Hallmark, 8 p.m.**

Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015, Action) Robert Downey Jr., Chris Hemsworth **FX, 10:30 p.m.**

Lethal Weapon 4 (1998, Action) Mel Gibson, Danny Glover **VH1, 10:30 p.m.**

The Goonies (1985, Family) Sean Astin, Josh Brolin **Paramount, 10:30 p.m.**

The Replacements (2000, Comedy) Keanu Reeves, Gene Hackman **Bravo, 10:30 p.m.**

From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com







Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody

1: Former UGA receiver and Super Bowl Champion Malcolm Mitchell read his children's book "My Very Favorite Book in the Whole Wide World" to elementary students at Stratford Academy on Wednesday morning.

2: Stratford Academy elementary school students hold up the books written by former UGA receiver and Super Bowl Champion Malcolm Mitchell before Mitchell read the book to them Wednesday morning.





Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody and Courtesy Macon Tracks Running Club

3-4: The American Jet Sport Association hosted both amateur and professional racers in the inaugural U.S. Open of the Southern Summer Series at Lake Tobosfokee over the weekend. The event held at Sandy Beach Park was the “season finale" for the association’s series of summer competitions. The competition consisted of races and freestyle events, with approximately 100 racers from across America.

5: Runners take off from the 5K starting line during the 48th Annual Labor Day Road Race. Over 1,100 runners competed in the 5K race which started at the corner of Pierce and Vineville avenues and finsished at Carolyn Crayton Park. **6:** Racers pose for a photo in Carolyn Crayton Park after finishing the Labor Day Road Race Saturday morning. **7:** Marissa Walton of Fort Valley runs toward the finish line during the 48th Annual Labor Day Road Race. Walton finished with a time of 23:21.51. **8:** Runners make their way through downtown Macon on Saturday during the Labor Day Road Race. **9:** Andrew Strickland of Macon runs through downtown Macon during the 10K race wearing a patriotic chef's outfit.

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





