

# Federal shutdown could leave locals in the cold

Future of money used to heat homes uncertain

BY LAURA E. CORLEY  
Laura@MaconMelody.com

Those seeking help paying a heating bill this winter may not be able to get it for the foreseeable future as the federal shutdown continues to delay the passage of a Congressional spending bill that includes funding for the heating assistance program.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, called LIHEAP, is a federal program that disburses money to states for heating and cooling assistance each year. The money is funneled through nonprofits, which make a one-time payment (between \$400-\$810) to utility providers on behalf of eligible households.

President Donald Trump proposed eliminating the funding altogether, but it is included in spending bills proposed by both the Republican and Democratic parties. The federal government shut down Oct. 1.

In Georgia, the state distributes its annual share of LIHEAP funds through the state Department of Human Services and the Department of Family and Children Services, which contract with 18 nonprofit "Community Action Agencies" across the state, according to the state's formal 2026 plan. Those nonprofits then pay utility providers on behalf of eligible households, which are helped on a first-come, first-served basis with cooling in April and heating in November.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**A Macon home sits powdered in snow as a truck passes by during a cold spell in Bibb County last year. As more winter weather approaches, some Georgians may not have LIHEAP funds to heat their homes.**

"Given the federal government shutdown, we are closely monitoring the federal appropriations process and will communicate relevant outcomes to Georgians as appropriate," DHS Spokesperson Ellen Brown said in an email to The Melody.

The Macon-Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council Inc., or EOC, administers the federal assistance program for eight Middle Georgia counties including Bibb, Crisp, Dooley, Macon, Marion, Schley, Taylor and Webster.

The nonprofit's leadership directed questions from news reporters to a Saint Simons Island-based public relations firm with which it contracts.

Katie Baasen, of 365 Degree Total Marketing, told The Melody the EOC provided assistance to more than 6,170 households last year.

"Generally, as soon as they have people sign up, they have more people sign up than the money that they are allotted," Baasen said of the Macon-Bibb County Opportunity Council's annual LIHEAP program. "The longer the shutdown prolongs is going to change some of the circumstances with the programs that the community service organizations have."

It is unclear how much money, if any, remains in the nonprofit's

See LIHEAP  
Page A3

# Johnson shares struggles, triumphs in new book

BY ED GRISAMORE  
Gris@MaconMelody.com

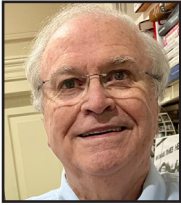
Tom Johnson may not recall every Christmas Day of his life, but he remembers where he was and who he was with on December 25, 1991.

He was in a room at the Kremlin in Moscow, a few feet away from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and at the threshold of history.

Johnson, who was then-president of CNN, watched as Gorbachev was about to dissolve the Soviet Union. With the stroke of a pen, he was transferring power of the government to a new leader, Boris Yeltsin.

As Gorbachev was poised to sign the documents, his pen would not write. It was moments before the television cameras were set to broadcast the historic event around the world.

The last leader of the Soviet



Tom  
JOHNSON

Union asked his press secretary to quickly find another writing instrument.

Johnson reacted by reaching for the Mont Blanc pen his wife, Edwina, had given him for their 25th wedding anniversary in 1988.

"He (Gorbachev) asked me if it was American," Johnson said. "I told him it was either French or German. He said in that case he would use it. The idea of signing away all of that with an American-made pen was more than he could handle."

After the signing, Gorbachev stuck the pen in his pocket. But Johnson, realizing the historical (and sentimental) significance of it, quickly asked for it back. (The pen was later displayed at the Newseum

in Washington, D.C.)

Fast forward 10 years to the summer of 2001. Johnson sat alone in a restaurant on Riverside Drive in his hometown of Macon. There were crayons on the table and paper tablecloths for children to draw on.

The man with the famous Mont Blanc pen picked up a green crayon.

He was contemplating retirement. He had been working since the days of helping his father sell watermelons out of the back of a truck and stocking shelves and pumping gas at Hoy's Grocery in Macon.

At the top of the paper tablecloth, Johnson scribbled the date: July 20, 2001. He listed the pros and cons of any possible decision.

Twelve days later, he retired. He was 60.

See JOHNSON  
Page A7



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIA MORRISON

**Guests cover their heads with copies of The Macon Melody while watching "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at The Piedmont Grand Opera House in October 2024.**

# Do the read warp!

Subscribe to The Melody and save

BY JOSHUA WILSON  
joshua@MaconMelody.com

*Editor's note: The Macon Melody is proud to provide print copies of its most recent edition as props for Macon Little Theatre and The Grand Opera House productions of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." We love supporting our community in fun and meaningful ways. Shoot me a note if you have an idea for one of those partnerships.*

We're helping bring "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" to life right here in Macon — newspapers and all.

That's right: when the rain scene hits, those Melody pages you're holding aren't just props, they're a piece of your community story.

And if you want more where that came from, we've got a special subscription offer for "Rocky Horror" fans (and anyone else brave enough to do the "Time Warp" with us). The offer includes unlimited online access, the weekly print edition and exclusive subscriber events — all at a spooky-good discount.

To get 50% off a year's worth of The Melody, follow these steps:

— Go to MaconMelody.com/subscribe.

— Toggle to the "Yearly" subscription offers.

— Click the "Join" button under the "Member + Print" offer. (This subscription is usually \$149.99 a year, but you'll get it for \$74.99.)

— Create your account and enter your mailing information.

— Enter your credit or debit card details. Make sure you click "Add coupon code" and enter this code: HORRORIYR.

— Start receiving the print edition of The Melody and enjoy your online access, too.

Supporting The Macon Melody means investing in the heartbeat of your community. Local news isn't just something you read; it's something you live. Every subscription helps fund independent journalism, pay local reporters, and keep Macon's stories — from city hall to Cherry Street — playing loud and clear.

If you have any questions about the offer, give us a call at 478-200-7403 or email me at joshua@MaconMelody.com.

# MWA silent on 'dirt-tasting' water

BY LAURA E. CORLEY  
Laura@MaconMelody.com

More Macon residents are reporting dirt-tasting tap water online, but questions directed to the Macon Water Authority's leadership about it so far have been met with silence.

MWA CEO Ron Shipman and elected board chair Gary Bechtel did not respond to questions about what MWA is doing to identify the source of the dirt-taste. Shipman

also did not respond to a request The Melody made in writing last week for testing data from the initial six formal complainants.

The possible cause of the dirt-taste or what MWA is doing to trace the source of it remains a mystery.

MWA secretary Jannette Ramey said Shipman is out of town and unavailable.

See WATER  
Page A2

# Rep. Bishop: End shutdown, save health credits

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
Casey@MaconMelody.com

U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, used a stop in Macon on Oct. 24 to call for an end to the federal government shutdown and to urge congressional Republicans to immediately extend tax credits offered through the Affordable Care Act.

The congressman, appearing at the Buck Melton Community Center in the afternoon hours, was flanked by Macon-Bibb County commissioners Stanley Stewart and Elaine Lucas as he spoke to a handful of Maconites.

Bishop — who is the longest-serving member of the Georgia congressional delegation and has since 1993 represented the state's mostly-rural Second Congressional District, which includes Macon — said Georgians could see their premiums double without the health care premium

credits offered under the terms of the landmark 2010 federal legislation.

If the tax credits expire, small businesses won't be able to cover premiums for their employees, and the state's hospitals will see greater numbers of people unable to afford care, he added.

"If the Republicans in Congress rip away the tax credits, its negative impact will cascade throughout our health care system and throughout our economy," he said.

The federal government shutdown started Oct. 1 and resulted from partisan battles over health insurance subsidies and other items, including foreign aid and overall government spending.

More than 900,000 federal workers have been furloughed as a result

See BISHOP  
Page A7



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Congressman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., D-Albany, hosted a press conference outside the Buck Melton Community Center to talk about the federal shutdown and to highlight the healthcare crisis.**





## WHAT’S YOUR MOOD? SENIOR WORKOUT ROUTINES TO MATCH



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

No matter how you woke up this morning — energetic, crabby, stressed out, or bored — there’s a workout routine that’ll put your brain and body in the right place today.

As you get older, maintaining mobility and movement is a crucial way to help prevent falls and stay strong. Still, there are lots of days when movement feels impossible or you have no idea what kind of exercise will work for you.

That’s why we’ve compiled this short and sweet guide to finding your ideal exercise routine no matter how you’re feeling. These routines are designed specifically for seniors, so no matter your current level of mobility (even if standing out of a chair is hard for you), there’s something for you here.

### Sunny & Outdoorsy

Let’s say your mood matches the weather — it’s a beautiful, mild day, the sun is shining, and you’re ready to soak up some rays and get in some movement. Nature isn’t just for younger bodies and joints, though if you’re up for hitting the trails, you’ll want to prepare yourself accordingly. If you want to get outside but need a lower-impact routine, it may be a good time to hop in your local pool, where you can catch some rays and build strength. Here are some resources that may appeal to your nature-loving side:

- **Find a Hiking Trail Near You**
- **Find a Nature Preserve Near You**
- **A 20-Minute Cardio-Interval Workout You Can Do in the Pool**  
[www.silversneakers.com/blog/20-minute-cardio-interval-pool-workout](http://www.silversneakers.com/blog/20-minute-cardio-interval-pool-workout)
- **10 Tips for a Better Lap Swimming Workout**  
[www.silversneakers.com/blog/swimming-workout](http://www.silversneakers.com/blog/swimming-workout)

### Stressed or Anxious

For some people, the only thing that sets an anxious mood right is some intense movement (we’re not just making that up — if you’re dysregulated, some types of movement can help you calm those feelings). Harvard Health recommends repetitive, meditative movement like walking, though more strenuous exercise like rowing or kickboxing can work as well. Here are some movement ideas for the next time you want to work out your mood, whether at home or at the gym:

- **Walk at Home**
- **20-Minute Treadmill Workout**
- **20-Minute Rowing Cardio and Strength Workout**  
[www.everydayhealth.com/workouts-activities/rowing-workout-over-50/](http://www.everydayhealth.com/workouts-activities/rowing-workout-over-50/)
- **Cardio Kickboxing Workout for Beginners & Seniors**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZXCoFukaKE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZXCoFukaKE)

### Sleepy & Stiff

As you age, this mood may be hitting you more and more. You’ll wake up still a little groggy and a little tight in your joints and muscles. The feeling may make you want to lie in bed all morning, but fitting in some movement can be extremely beneficial. Aging naturally shortens your muscles and decreases their elasticity while restricting your range of motion in your shoulders, spine, and hips, but yoga, stretching, and mobility routines can help you stay limber and reduce your risk of falls. Here are some good places to start:

- **5 Exercises to Help Morning Stiffness (You can do these in bed!)**  
[www.surreyphysio.co.uk/top-5/top-5-exercises-to-help-morning-stiffness/](http://www.surreyphysio.co.uk/top-5/top-5-exercises-to-help-morning-stiffness/)

- **Standing Strength, Stretch & Mobility - 24 Minutes**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2kcucJAPIQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2kcucJAPIQ)
- **Yoga For Seniors - Slow and Gentle Yoga**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFhG-ZzLNN4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFhG-ZzLNN4)
- **8 Simple and Important Stretching Exercises for Seniors**  
[www.onemedical.com/blog/exercise-fitness/stretching-exercises-for-seniors](http://www.onemedical.com/blog/exercise-fitness/stretching-exercises-for-seniors)

### Inside & Restless

When you’re stuck inside — whether it’s nasty weather or lack of transportation keeping you there — it can be easy to exhaust all your usual pastimes pretty quickly. Movement is a great way to work out some excess energy and even help yourself sleep better when it’s time for bed.

If you’re already experiencing some cabin fever, you probably want a workout that’s going to mix things up and hold your focus, so we’ve rounded up some dance and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) routines that’ll fully engage your brain and body:

- **Cardio Dance Workout for Beginners & Seniors - Oldies/Motown**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=51HTZeilr4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51HTZeilr4)
- **20 Minute Dance Workout for Seniors**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6lsGDntAEM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6lsGDntAEM)
- **Beginner Seated HIIT Workout For Seniors**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5FnlEuux4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5FnlEuux4)
- **Senior Fitness - Beginner HIIT Workout For Seniors**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gT9W094knPg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gT9W094knPg)

Prioritizing movement is key as you age. With this guide, you can arm yourself with the tools to stay active no matter your circumstances.

## Ahead of SNAP pause, shelves are empty at food banks in Macon



PHOTO BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP / GPB NEWS

**Workers navigate the partially empty racks at the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank warehouse in Macon on day 7 of the federal government shutdown.**

### BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP GPB News

It was cold and drizzly when 69-year-old Cassie Collins arrived at First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon and started down a series of slick steps, looking for the church food pantry.

"I live alone, and my SNAP benefits help me out a lot," Collins said. "I'm a widow. I lost my husband like four or five years ago, and they really helped me."

Now Collins is among the estimated 42 million people around the country (that includes about one and a half million in Georgia alone) who are preparing to go without their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for the month of November, thanks to the ongoing federal government shutdown, which began Oct. 1.

The program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will be paused after Oct. 31 if the shutdown doesn't end.

Collins said the threat has her worried about more than her own wellbeing.

"I have a neighbor that has about four children, and she's just—" she said, then paused.

"You know, it's sad, especially with the people with the children that's going to suffer through this thing."

This was Collins' first time at this food pantry.

As she carefully made her way to the church basement, she said making the rounds of pantries like this is how she's planning to make it through November.

"That's why I'm out here in the rain now," she said. "I have no business out here like this. Trying to get me some groceries."

The groceries in the church's pantry came from the warehouse of the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank, where most days trucks and forklifts are busy moving food in and out through the loading dock to 161 food pantries in the region.

Not far from the loading dock are floor-to-ceiling shelves (here they are called "racks") where the food bank's CEO Kathy McCollum said most of the food supplied by the USDA would normally sit. But on this recent day, there was more empty space than food.

"You're seeing more empty spaces now than certainly we've had," McCollum said. "Back at the end of January, every rack in here was full. That hasn't been the case."

What changed is that in March, the Trump Administration cut about a billion dollars in funding to USDA programs that used to steer food to community food banks like this one. That's why so many of these shelves are empty.

"For example, a few weeks ago, we realized that we didn't have peanut butter," McCollum

said. "We typically get that from USDA, but that was one of those gaps."

That meant that a food bank in Georgia, the state that according to the USDA leads the nation in peanut production, had no peanut butter.

McCollum said the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank has shifted to buying more food on the open market. That's why she welcomes help in the form of money over food donations.

"Money goes farther than canned food," she said. "We are good at taking money and turning it into food because we can buy what we need."

This was on Oct. 7: Day 7 of the shutdown, before any federal paychecks had been missed and before anyone was yet talking about a pause in SNAP benefits.

The USDA has over \$5 billion set aside in a contingency fund for SNAP recipients to be used during emergencies. At a recent press conference, Georgia's U.S. Rep Sanford Bishop said this pause in SNAP benefits is just such an emergency.

Bishop's 2nd District runs from Bibb County southwest to the Florida border and is one of the poorest in the country. Bishop said he and other Democrats asked the USDA to free up the contingency money.

"We are urging the Secretary of Agriculture to utilize that \$5 billion to extend those SNAP benefits so people won't go hungry," Bishop said to a small crowd outside Macon's Head Start center, which provides early childhood education to children from low-income families, and is currently closed.

The USDA issued a memo saying releasing the SNAP contingency funds would only be legal in a weather emergency and, "If not for Congressional Democrats blocking government funding, November SNAP benefits would be paid on-time."

Now, attorneys general from a number of Democrat-led states are suing the USDA, saying the suspension of SNAP benefits is unlawful.

At the First Baptist food pantry, Cassie Collins was greeted by a volunteer at the table just inside.

"Can you fill out one of these, please?" the volunteer said as she handed Collins a short form.

"Yes, ma'am," Collins replied.

Collins got one of the last bags available. This pantry won't have food to offer for another month, per its schedule. But there are 52 others in the county. She said she'll visit some of them, too.

"That's what I got to do," she said. "And pray."

### WATER

Continued from Page A1

Reports are widespread and range from downtown, south of Wesleyan, Vineville, Ingleside, South Macon near the mall and Presidential Parkway.

"Several, several people have called me and said that their water didn't taste right," MWA board member Elaine Lucas said. "Those issues have been made known to the staff at the water authority, to Ron Shipman and Gary Bechtel, and I am just shocked and surprised and disappointed that there hasn't been more information shared or more information that's come out to the public as to what the procedure should be when you have foul tasting water. As board members we need to know what we should tell our constituents when they call us."

Lucas said she, too, has noticed a foul taste to the tap water at her house in recent weeks.

Some have speculated the foul tasting water could be related to fire hydrant flushing.

In a phone call from Ohio, Macon-Bibb

Deputy Fire Chief Michael Williamson said the hydrants are owned by MWA but the fire department maintains them.

"Pretty much the only time we flush hydrants is when people are out there doing maintenance," Williamson said. "They'll flush it just to make sure they're running."

The maintenance is regularly scheduled and the flushes done by the fire department are usually short-lived and twice each year, he said.

"Flushing for long periods of time and stuff, that goes through water authority," Williamson said. "As for the funny tasting water, that's another question you'd have to ask them."

The fire department is required to notify MWA any time it flushes hydrants. Williamson said MWA has a list of hydrants it flushes and plans to flush, "but they don't put the list out to the public. They let us know and their groundcrews know."

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

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

To schedule a visit or learn more:  
478-845-6899  
[carlyleplaceinfo.org/military](http://carlyleplaceinfo.org/military)

**Carlyle Place**

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



**Atrium Health**  
Navicent

5300 Zebulon Rd. | Macon, GA 31210

5077\_3



# Ghost at Grand Opera House still reigns

BY ED GRISAMORE  
Gris@MaconMelody.com

The late Randell Widner worked at the Piedmont Grand Opera House only four months in the summer of 1971, but there are some who believe he never clocked out.

For the past 54 years, he has been the house ghost at 651 Mulberry Street.

He doesn't have tenure. Paranormal tales have been passed down at the Grand for more than a century.

Yet Randell is the default resident ghoul. He gets blamed for every backstage bump in the night, mysterious tap on the shoulder and unexplained wisp of air that floats through the auditorium.

There are 986 seats at the Grand, but the chair on the end 11 rows back to the left facing the stage is unofficially reserved for Randell. It's where he sat with his sack lunch every day while he watched the theatre renovations.

"He has been my constant companion for 31 years," said Bob Mavity, the senior technical director at the Grand. "I've been dealing with

him almost since the beginning. I speak to him on a daily basis and have to deal with all his shenanigans. He has been known to make his point on more than one occasion."

Mavity said he has witnessed light racks levitating 10 feet above the stage. On surveillance video, he has seen washes of light sweep from corner regions of the stage and seep from side doors along the west wall.

A black Steinway grand piano is used for musical performances, but Mavity said he has heard piano music from an unknown location after he has sealed up the building for the night.

"It's like an apparition is saying, 'I'm going to play this piano,'" he said. "Sometimes, I don't come out of my office. I just say, 'Enjoy the piano, Randell.'"

Before he became phantom of the Opera House, Widner was a theatre director and classical pianist. He entertained troops with the U.S. Marines during World War II and once performed for Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

He came to Macon as director at

the Macon Little Theatre. In May 1971, he was named managing director at the Grand to oversee the theatre renovations.

"A group of community leaders came together with money and a petition to save the theatre and return it to its original glory," Mavity said. "It was down to the wrecking ball. We were due to be that parking lot next door."

Although he never met Widner, Mavity said he has done some research on his life.

"He put a lot of energy into restoring this theatre," he said. "He had a great deal of love and passion for it. He considered it a great honor and privilege."

That's why Mavity has long been suspicious about some of the details surrounding Widner's death at the theatre on September 9, 1971. It was first ruled a suicide but later concluded to be an accidental overdose.

Widner was 47 years old. After an arts council meeting that night, he climbed a spiral staircase to the "Thunder Room" at the top of the theatre. It was called the Thunder Room because lead balls were rolled



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Bob Mavity, senior technical director at the Grand Opera House, sits in the theatre seat unofficially reserved for the ghost of Randell Widner, who was found dead at the theatre in 1971.**

across the wooden floor to replicate the sound of thunder during theatre performances.

"He went up there with sleeping pills, whiskey and a pistol," Mavity said. "His death has always been suspicious to me. There are a lot of gaps in the story."

Mavity said Widner was reportedly estranged from his wife. His body was not found for four days. The gun was never fired. It was reported that he apparently took the pills and

See GHOST  
Page A5

## LIHEAP Continued from Page A1

coffers for the program.

A flyer on the EOC's website states the nonprofit is currently out of LIHEAP money and no appointments are available to book online. But Bassan said the nonprofit was unaware of the flyer on its website and "they have funding available for their programming, but still it is a concern that the longer the shutdown goes."

Annual tax filings for previous years show the nonprofit has received yearly disbursements for LIHEAP that range from \$939,000 in 2015 to \$4.3 million in 2022.

### 'On pins and needles'

As the weather continues cooling with autumn, calls for heating assistance are already pouring into Community Action Agencies across the state, said Georgia Community Action Association Executive Director Consuela Thompson.

The association provides training and technical assistance to 20 Community Action Agencies including the Macon-Bibb County EOC and three public entities. Thompson said she calls the state Department of Human Services almost daily to ask about the latest information on the state's plan to deal with the indefinite delay of federal money including LIHEAP and SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that provides food benefits to low-income families.

"The community is already on pins and needles about what this is going to look like," Thompson said. "I mean, look at SNAP. Come November 1st, that's it. ... We're just going to have an escalating situation as it relates to the needs of children and families in our state."

The LIHEAP heating assistance program typically opens Dec. 1 for seniors and Jan. 1 for others.

On a recent call with a national organization for Community Action Agencies, Thompson said someone suggested the nonprofits call state offices and ask for any money remaining from the previous year's program. A question arose about whether the state or nonprofits would be reimbursed with federal money if either has to dip into cof-

fers to roll out the heating assistance program in the absence of federal money.

Last year, 180,537 households in Georgia received some \$81.5 million in LIHEAP assistance, Thompson said.

The Georgia Community Action Association is urging residents to write letters to congressional representatives relaying the importance of funding for the LIHEAP program and other federal funding including Community Services Block Grants.

"What we're hoping is — trying to be optimistic — is that the people that we have elected in these positions work it out and get us back up and running," Thompson said. "Then we won't have to worry about how we're going to pivot if

this does not happen."

In an emailed response to The Melody, Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, said he supports LIHEAP because it is "crucial for covering home heating and cooling costs for households with limited or fixed incomes."

Sen. Jon Ossoff said in an email to The Melody that "Georgia families continue struggling with high power and gas bills. This attempt to destroy LIHEAP would make it even harder for Georgians to make ends meet." Messages left for U.S. Reps. Austin Scott, R-Tifton, were not returned.



# DIA DE MUERTOS Cultural Fest

**November 1 & 2, 2025**  
**Saturday - 3:00-9:00 PM**  
**Sunday - 1:00-5:00 PM**

**North Houston Sports Complex**  
**900 North Houston Road**  
**Warner Robins**

VISIT  
**WARNER  
ROBINS**  
GEORGIA





BETWEEN THE NOTES

The helpers need our help, now it's time to offer a hand

Here’s the thing about generosity: it doesn’t happen in the abstract.

It happens in warehouses that hum with forklifts and chatter, in fellowship halls lined with folding tables, and in car trunks packed tight with grocery bags. It looks like neighbors sorting cans, sealing boxes and checking expiration dates by hand — and it looks like the folks quietly footing the bill to make all that possible. It’s regular people doing what they can so others don’t go hungry.

With a government shutdown dragging on, that ordinary work is about to get a lot harder. When federal aid sources evaporate, the lines at food banks and community pantries get longer. Shelves empty faster and phones ring more. The folks on the frontlines don’t complain; they just show up earlier and leave later. But showing up takes energy, and that’s where we can help.

Last week, I wrote about faith in each other — the kind that powers “chainsaws and casseroles” after a storm. This week, that same spir-



Joshua WILSON

it takes another shape: helping the helpers. Local nonprofit organizations — like the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank — are bracing for a heavy holiday season. More families will need help, and the need won’t end when the festivities do. Come January and February, donations slow down, but the bills keep coming.

Food bank leaders will tell you: money stretches the farthest. They can make a dollar do what most of us couldn’t by buying in bulk, filling exact gaps and keeping food moving where it’s needed. But dollars only go so far without people. We can help — and sometimes it’s as simple as asking what’s needed and meaning it.

The people running our nonprofits need steady volunteers, donors and neighbors who keep on caring. They need to know their work matters

and that the community they serve is standing with them and not just watching.

Helping the helpers isn’t charity; it’s maintenance. It’s how we keep the engine running when times get tough. These are the people holding the community together. When we show up for them, we make it possible for them to keep showing up for everyone else.

If you’ve got a little extra — time, money, energy — send it where it multiplies. Call a local nonprofit giving folks grace, dignity and a fighting chance. Ask what they actually need this week and then do that.

Faith in each other isn’t a feeling. It’s something we practice. And right now, when the load is heavy and the helpers are tired, it’s our turn to show up for them.

Write Executive Editor Joshua Wilson at [joshua@MaconMelody.com](mailto:joshua@MaconMelody.com).

States consider insurance price controls, defy history

“There is nothing new under the sun,” according to the book of Ecclesiastes, and that’s especially true for bad public policy. Legislators love recycling old, failed laws and presenting them as innovative, forward-looking initiatives. We are in the midst of one of those vicious cycles, or to quote Yogi Berra, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.”

“America is in a cost crisis when it comes to home and auto insurance,” the Wall Street Journal recently noted. “A number of states have a controversial answer: price controls.” While insurance rates have been increasing, limiting insurers’ ability to turn a profit by implementing price controls is clearly a terrible—albeit not a new—idea.

“Illinois lawmakers are considering a ban on home insurers hiking rates because of catastrophes in other states,” the Journal continued. “Louisiana recently handed its regulator the power to strike down ‘excessive’ premiums [...] In Michigan, Democratic lawmakers this summer proposed a law to impose a 10% cut in auto-insurance rates.” Even in Georgia, a lawmaker not long ago proposed limiting insurance rate increases to no more than the inflation rate.

Since legislative session concluded, a Georgia House of Representatives study committee has been investigating market-based solutions to make insurance more affordable. Its chairman, Rep. Matt Reeves, R-Duluth, tells me, the committee “has held over 7 hours of hearings with dozens of informative speakers [...] and price controls have not been requested.” That is wonderful to hear. Even so, it’s important to expose the folly of price controls. Any student of history knows how these policies end.

Long before state lawmakers tinkered with the idea of insurance price controls, ancient Rome experimented with a similar kind of regulation: curtailing interest rates on loans. In 342 B.C., Lucius Genucius passed a measure forbidding lend-



Marc HYDEN

ers from recouping any interest. This was an abject failure. Ancient bankers saw only risk and no upside to lending, and the Romans simply ignored the law.

Otherwise the credit system would have permanently cratered.

With the rise of the Soviet Union a couple of thousand years later, communists decided to centrally plan their economy and establish price controls. This effectively prevented inflation, but caused regular, widespread shortages of basic staples, which were simultaneously widely available and cheap in our market economy.

Years later, California decided to apply the same principles to their insurance industry. Through Proposition 103, the state instituted regulations that made it virtually impossible for insurers to set rates based on actual risk, and thus insurance companies hemorrhaged cash and began to flee the state. California has since taken a less heavy-handed approach.

The lesson here is clear: Private enterprise and free markets are much better-positioned than governments to determine what goods and services should cost. Companies in competitive markets set prices to survive. Meanwhile, government officials who implement price controls have an incentive to artificially keep prices below market average. The cheaper, the more popular for most consumers at first, but this destroys businesses and creates scarcity in the process.

None of this makes consumers happier about paying increased rates, but it is important to know how insurance rates are set. In a healthy regulatory market, property and casualty insurance rates are largely based on the likelihood of

See HYDEN Page A8

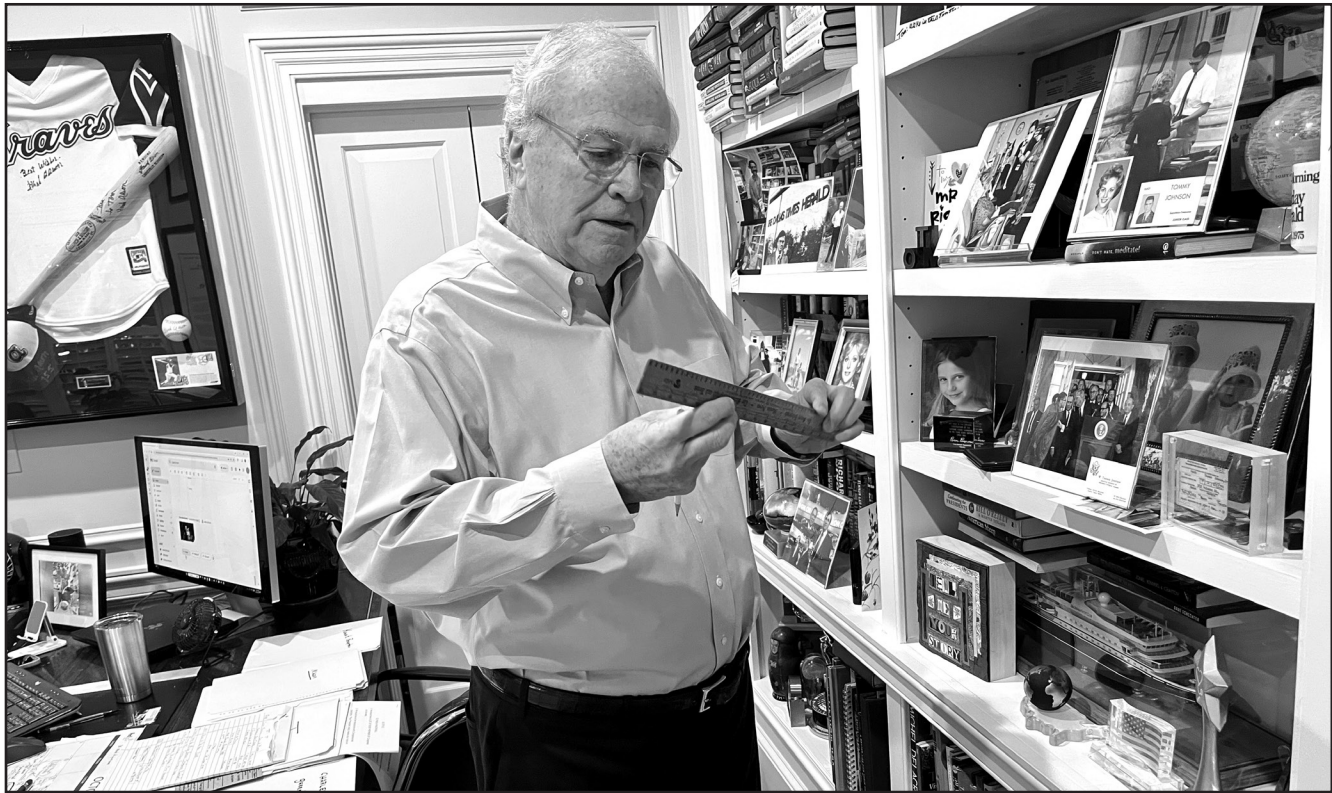


PHOTO BY ED GRISAMORE

Tom Johnson holds the pica pole he keeps in his home office in Atlanta. Johnson, who was once press secretary to President Lyndon Johnson and was the former president at CNN, got the pica pole when he was working part-time at The Macon Telegraph newspaper as a high school student in the late 1950s.

Johnson left Macon, but it never left him

Tom Johnson still has the pica pole from when he worked at The Macon Telegraph newspaper as a high school student in the 1950s.

If a wooden ruler can be a measure of a man’s success, Johnson can look back with a grateful heart. He carried it with him to every stop ... from Macon to the University of Georgia journalism school, Harvard Business School, the White House, the LBJ Ranch, Dallas Times Herald, Los Angeles Times and CNN.

It is 92 miles from Johnson’s home in Buckhead — not far from the Governor’s Mansion — to the modest, two-bedroom house where he grew up on Columbus Road in West Macon.

His new memoir — “Driven: A Life in Public Service and Journalism From LBJ To CNN” — is both a love letter and a thank-you note to the “town I still call home.”

“My story began in Macon, Georgia, and it may very well end there,” Johnson writes. “I have asked that my ashes be scattered by my son on a small tract of Macon land where I lived as a child.”

A few years ago, Johnson took his grandchildren to see the childhood home where his beloved dog, Sparky, is buried under a pecan tree in the yard. The graves of his parents, Wyatt and Josie Johnson, are



Ed GRISAMORE

a short distance across the road at Macon Memorial Park. Johnson also drove his grandchildren down Cherry Street, where he pointed out the old Telegraph building. It was where he learned to keep a scorebook and the importance of spelling someone’s name correctly.

It was where he earned his first byline and was taught the five-finger method of typing. At age 84, he still types that way — three on the right, two on the left.

“My mother always told me, ‘Tommy, if you work hard and do right you can do almost anything you want to do in life,’ ” he said.

Once, on a trip to India, Johnson was introduced to Mother Teresa.

But the real saint in his life was Josie Johnson.

He was her only child. She adored him. She had a number of miscarriages during the first 18 years of her marriage. Johnson was born at the Macon Hospital on September 30, 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor.

Josie was the embodiment of hard work. She was a clerk at Foy’s Gro-

cery six days a week. Johnson later got his first job there. He stocked shelves, bagged groceries and ran the cash register. He also pumped gas from the two Sinclair pumps, checked every car’s tire pressure and looked under the hood.

His father, Wyatt, drank black coffee, smoked Lucky Strikes and tried to make the most of his third-grade education. He was a free spirit who rarely held a full-time job.

Johnson would ride with his father to the Farmer’s Market in his red International pickup truck. They bought watermelons for 10 cents, then sold them for a quarter in Unionville. His father also purchased wood scraps to sell for firewood from a local company that made broom and shovel handles.

Ed Cagle, who was Johnson’s ninth-grade English teacher at Lanier Junior High, encouraged him to apply for a job at the newspaper. The Telegraph sports department needed “stringers” to cover high school games and answer the phones on busy Friday nights and weekends.

At the Telegraph, Johnson was mentored by a hall of fame of local journalists — Sam Glassman, Harley Bowers, Jim Chapman, Bill

See GRISAMORE Page A6

NEW SOUTHERN DAD

Memory to become growing business as digital expands

I can never remember my wife’s birthday. Not that I don’t try to or have a gift at the ready but keeping the date in the forefront of my memory is difficult. Now, before you start accusing me of being a bad husband, which on some days I’m sure I can be, I have a good reason for this problem, and like a lot of problems in our world today it is caused by a cell phone.

When my spouse’s now-dearly-departed mother set up mobile phones for her children she attempted to get birthday dates as phone numbers. Unable to do so, instead



Kyle DOMINY

I’ve looked quite the fool at pharmacy counters and other places where confirming birth dates are a part of conducting a transaction.

Memory is big business these days in the physical and digital world. Researchers have predicted that there will be huge gaps in our recorded history as storage media continues to change and become obsolete. I have a stack of old floppy disks and camera memory cards, whose contents will never be seen again. We all have photos and notes on cell phones that will be lost with a device crash or upgrade unless they are uploaded somewhere else for safekeeping or physical copies are made.

Our brains reportedly can’t retain information as well as previous generations could because we are always able to retrieve data with

See DOMINY Page A7

The Macon Melody

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

Joshua Wilson, Executive Editor • [joshua@MaconMelody.com](mailto:joshua@MaconMelody.com)  
Micah Johnston, Sports Editor • [micah@MaconMelody.com](mailto:micah@MaconMelody.com)  
Evelyn Davidson, Features Editor • [evelyn@MaconMelody.com](mailto:evelyn@MaconMelody.com)  
DuBose Porter, Executive Director, Georgia Trust for Local News

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

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



FROM OUR KITCHENS

# Secret is in the sauce: Old recipes keep family history alive

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
evelyn@MaconMelody.com

My friend from college visited Macon all the way from Williamsburg, Virginia, last weekend, so of course, I made sure to take her to all the good eateries and tasty spots around town.

We partook in delicacies from Layers bakery, H&H and Macon Bagels, to name a few. I’ve never had a visitor who hasn’t enjoyed eating their way through Macon.

We also traveled about 30 minutes outside of Macon to Juliette. Last time I drove through the winding roads of Monroe County, I was headed to an interview with a famous wiener dog — the Usain Bark of dachshunds and a three-time champion of the Cherry Blossom Festival wiener dog races.

We weren’t there to see a low-riding, four-legged running prodigy this time, though.

My friend, Zicky (college nicknames sure do stick sometimes) is a huge fan of the book “Fried Green Tomatoes” and its movie adaptation. As most locals know, the movie was filmed in Juliette, where folks can still enjoy a hot order of fried green tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe, just like Idgie and Ruth.

We arrived in Juliette coincidentally during the Green Tomato Festi-

val. Local vendors packed the street and a constant stream of visitors came in and out of nearby shops.

We took lots of pictures and visited a couple shops, packed to the brim with vintage knickknacks and souvenirs for fans of the movie and book.

The street, with its rows of wood buildings and big porches, offered a kind of whimsy that my friend said felt as if we had traveled back in time.

At an antique booth, a painted metal recipe tin caught our attention. It overflowed with hand-written recipes and old newspaper clippings and cutouts from the back of ingredient boxes.

We suspected the tin must have sat on someone’s kitchen counter for many years — collecting a lifetime of recipes from Watergate cake to pecan pie to meatloaf. Some of the recipes, pulled from a newspaper in Tennessee, dated all the way back to the mid ‘70s. We rifled through a lot of Jell-O and Cool Whip recipes to prove it!

Zicky and I decided to split the recipes in the box, so we could both try some old-school comfort foods in our kitchens.

The little tin with its hodgepodge of old recipes reminded me how often they become family heirlooms passed down from generation to

generation, a testament to the belief that taste and smell really are powerful senses of the memory.

In many families, the same food-stained and yellowed notecard written in a great-great grandmother’s swooping cursive makes an appearance every year on holidays or special occasions. My mother still makes her grandmother’s lentil soup, and we still use a holiday cheese log recipe that my grandmother once pulled from the back of a Kraft cheese container.

This week I’ll share one of those recipes with you — Deviled eggs are a hit or miss party appetizer. I find that a lot of recipes are too dry and mustard-y for my taste. I like mine to be creamy, doused in paprika and containing the most important secret ingredient: sweet pickle juice.

Perhaps this isn’t such a super secret ingredient, but Zicky is the only other person I know who makes deviled eggs this way. I think we can both agree it adds a touch of sweetness and a bit of needed moisture.

My grandmother and mother used to measure this recipe out with their heart, but I’ve written it down since then.

Hopefully you’ll give this recipe a try and let me know if the secret is in the pickle juice.



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
**Deviled eggs are a popular potluck dish that are easy to prepare and transport to any event.**

## DEVILED EGGS

- 6 hard boiled eggs
- 1/3 cup of mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon of sweet pickle juice
- 1 teaspoon of mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon of onion powder
- 1/4 teaspoon of garlic powder
- 1/4 cup of cider vinegar.
- 1/4 teaspoon of pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon of paprika

Halve each hard boiled egg the long way and scoop out the yolks. Set the whites aside and mash the yolks in a bowl with a fork. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix thoroughly. Use either a spatula or a frosting bag to fill each egg white with a dollop of yolk. Sprinkle with extra paprika for a pop of color and enjoy!

## BILLY LET'S EAT REVIEW

# Meet Billy: a foodie, adventure-seeking flight attendant, local restaurant explorer

BY BILLY HENNESSEY  
Special to The Melody

Hello, Macon! Allow me to introduce myself. In short: My name is Billy, and I really like to eat.

I think those are the two most important things to know as we embark on a culinary journey together. This new column, an exclusive to The Macon Melody, is called “Billy’s Let’s Eat Review,” and together, we’ll be visiting Macon’s restaurants.

You’re probably thinking to yourself: What’s the big deal? Another food critic? Another food blogger? Well, I’m not a food critic or a writer. I’m actually a flight attendant and have been traveling the world for 36 years.

My career has taken me across the globe. (Fun fact: Did you know that they deep fry spiders and snakes in China — and it’s considered a delicacy?! I’m happy to say I never tried it, and I’ve come to terms with that.)

When I come home, I’m all about quality comfort food in great environments — and food I actually recognize!

I moved to Macon from Orlando in April 2025. Orlando is the chain restaurant capital of the world (or so it seems). Imagine how excited I was to discover Macon has so many privately-run, family-operated restaurants.

I joined the “Support Macon Restaurants” Facebook group the same day I moved here — and I quickly discovered the breadth of Macon’s eateries and the passion



**Billy HENNESSEY**

Maconites have for their favorite restaurants. It didn’t take long before I followed the advice of my new neighbors and visited some outstanding spots. To show my appreciation for all the recommendations offered to me, I started writing reviews of my experiences.

My first “Billy’s Let’s Eat Review” was of Ole Times Country Buffet on Gray Highway, and it reached nearly 800 likes within the first day. People love talking about food spots, and I’m happy to oblige!

I hope my writing gives you a fresh pair of eyes on Macon’s eating and drinking scene. After all, you may have been born and raised here, but now, I hope to offer you a newbie’s point of view on dining in our fine city.

### Billy dines at Mercer Village Pizza

If you’ve ever wondered what it feels like to walk into an old-world pizzeria that somehow landed right in the heart of Macon — Mercer Village Pizza is that place.

The second you open the door, the aroma of fresh dough and smoky wings hits you like a warm hug from your Italian grandma.

Opened in April of 2024, Mercer Village Pizza is exactly what a family pizza joint should be ... rustic, cozy and spotless. Joe,

Maconites have for their favorite restaurants.

It didn’t take long before I followed the advice of my new neighbors and visited some outstanding spots. To show my appreciation for all the recommendations offered to me, I started writing reviews of my experiences.

My first “Billy’s Let’s Eat Review” was of Ole Times Country Buffet on Gray Highway, and it reached nearly 800 likes within the first day. People love talking about food spots, and I’m happy to oblige!

I hope my writing gives you a fresh pair of eyes on Macon’s eating and drinking scene. After all, you may have been born and raised here, but now, I hope to offer you a newbie’s point of view on dining in our fine city.

I hope my writing gives you a fresh pair of eyes on Macon’s eating and drinking scene. After all, you may have been born and raised here, but now, I hope to offer you a newbie’s point of view on dining in our fine city.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Mercer Village Pizza owner Joe, a Warner Robins native smiles with Melody columnist Billy Hennessey inside the popular local eatery in Mercer Village.**

the owner, runs the show himself. He’s a Warner Robins native who’s as hands-on as they come, greeting every single customer like an old friend.

Joe told me his favorite pizza is the MVP and his favorite wing sauce is the Bourbon Peach, though crowd favorites tell another story.

The top-selling pizza is the Peachy Keen (which also happens to be my personal favorite), and the number one wing flavor is Lemon Yaki.

Let’s talk about the real star of the show: the pizza dough. Joe makes his dough in small batches several times a day using a Neapolitan recipe, and you can literally taste the freshness in every bite. It’s light, flavorful and has that perfect chew that lets you know this isn’t some mass produced pizza base — it’s crafted.

Now, about those wings. I don’t say this lightly: these are the best wings I’ve ever had. They’re smoked in-house, perfectly crisp on the outside, juicy inside and packed with flavor. Whether you’re a sauce lover or a purist, you’ll find something to love.

Mercer Village Pizza sits right alongside Mercer University’s campus, which makes it the perfect spot to catch a football game, grab a cold beer and dive into a plate of pizza or wings. They’ve got indoor and outdoor seating,

and if you’d rather eat at home, they deliver and offer takeout too.

Joe isn’t just about running a restaurant, he’s about building community. He hosts field trips for local schools where he teaches kids how to make pizza, but he also slips in a little math and science to show them how it all works. As a dad himself, he knows exactly how to keep them engaged (and fed).

Before I left, I watched the kitchen team work, and it was like watching a perfectly choreographed ballet. Dough spinning, toppings flying, pizzas sliding into the oven with precision — it’s a dance, and everyone in that kitchen knows their steps.

Mercer Village Pizza isn’t just another pizza joint. It’s a neighborhood favorite, run by people who genuinely care about what and who they serve. Whether you’re a Mercer student, a local or just passing through, do yourself a favor and stop by.

*Billy Hennessey is new to Macon and excited to share his viewpoints on the city’s eateries. He’ll be visiting spots around Bibb County and highlighting them each week in The Melody. Send columnfeedback — or suggestions for places to try — to Billy through news@MaconMelody.com.*



PHOTO BY BILLY HENNESSEY  
**Pizza dough is made from scratch daily inside Mercer Village Pizza at 1635 Montpelier Ave.**

## GHOST

Continued from Page A3

passed out from the heat. The corpse had to be removed in pieces with ropes lowered from the upper windows.

The staff at the Grand often receives requests for “ghost” tours, and Mavity is happy to oblige. He said cast members of the annual Nutcracker performances sometimes ask to be guided around the haunts of the house.

“There have been occasions when I’ve taken 20 to 30 young ladies up the spiral staircase into the rafters,” he said. “It can be a little spooky. But, if you want to leave a lasting impression, something has to happen. So I will tell the story of Randall. I will show them the greasy spot on the floor that never traps dust.”

Does it frighten them? “They’re asking for it,” he said. “They know what they’re up there for.”

Randell apparently is not the only Casper in the building. One of the most enduring ghost tales is the “Lady in White.”

“I’ve never been able to find her name or a date,” Mavity said. “As with anything in theatre lore, things can get fuzzy as time goes by. The description originally given to me was that she was a performer and singer who passed away at the theatre. I’ve also heard she was a long-time patron here, and she could be seen sitting in the second box. She loved the arts, and no one knows why she haunting the theatre.”

He said he has had three encounters with a “female spirit” in the building late at night. Twice,

## "AS WITH ANY-THING IN THEATRE LORE, THINGS CAN GET FUZZY AS TIME GOES BY."

he heard a woman singing, but her voice faded out as he walked across the stage. Another time, he said he saw what appeared to be the silhouette of a woman walking through a curtain in the balcony box seats.

Mavity said he had an “active imagination” as a child and is often asked if he still believes in ghosts.

“Well, I’ve never had a disbelief,” he said. “The first thing you have to understand is that I am the perfect person to be involved in a place that has these spirits. There are a lot of disbelievers in this world. And who is to say who is right? I just know what I have experienced.”



# Simri Rose’s living legacy: The man behind Macon’s historic Rose Hill Cemetery

KATHLEEN O'NEAL  
Special to The Melody

Opened in 1840, Rose Hill Cemetery is a microcosm of Macon’s history. Buried among its 60 acres are approximately 16,000 people, and every headstone tells a story of someone who is part of Macon’s past. Many people think that Rose Hill Cemetery is named for the flower, but it’s actually named for Simri Rose, who designed the cemetery. Tasked by Macon’s city council with laying out the new cemetery in 1836, Rose chose land outside the

city limits. The first of its kind in the American South, Rose Hill is known as a rural garden cemetery. These cemeteries are intentionally designed to look like a park with winding paths, beautiful statuary and ornamental plantings. Garden cemeteries fulfill a dual purpose of providing both a tranquil place to mourn and a picturesque retreat. The story of Simri Rose starts in 1798. Born in Connecticut, his father selected his name by opening the Bible at random and choosing the first name he found, which happened to be Zimri. Zimri later

changed it to Simri because he said, “I prefer signing my name S. Rose to Z. Rose,” according to the Georgia USGenWeb Archives. Moving to Georgia in 1818, Rose settled near Fort Hawkins and established a name for himself by publishing a manuscript paper called The Bulldog. When Macon was founded in 1823, he established The Georgia Messenger, a forerunner of The Telegraph. A publisher by occupation, Rose was also a renowned hobby horticulturist, and his home on Beall’s Hill had gardens crowded with flowers and ornamental shrubs. When the city was laid out, he ensured that many parks and trees were included in the master plan. Rose was known to have gone into the swamps south of Macon to bring back a particular species of tree to plant downtown — if he thought its presence would add to Macon’s beauty. Rose Hill Cemetery is Simri Rose’s greatest monument and one of Macon’s greatest treasures. In appreciation for his design and work, Macon’s city council gifted him with a plot of his choosing. He chose to be buried in the Magnolia Ridge neighborhood on a bluff overlooking the Ocmulgee River. A week after his death, The Telegraph wrote, “Mr. Rose was one of the old landmarks of Macon ... he has been identified with almost every public interest of the city since it first took shape.” Tributes to Mr. Rose poured in from throughout the



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN O'NEAL  
**Simri Rose designed Macon’s walkable Rose Hill Cemetery and he is buried on a bluff overlooking the Ocmulgee River. His grave inside the historic cemetery is marked by a tall stone monument.**

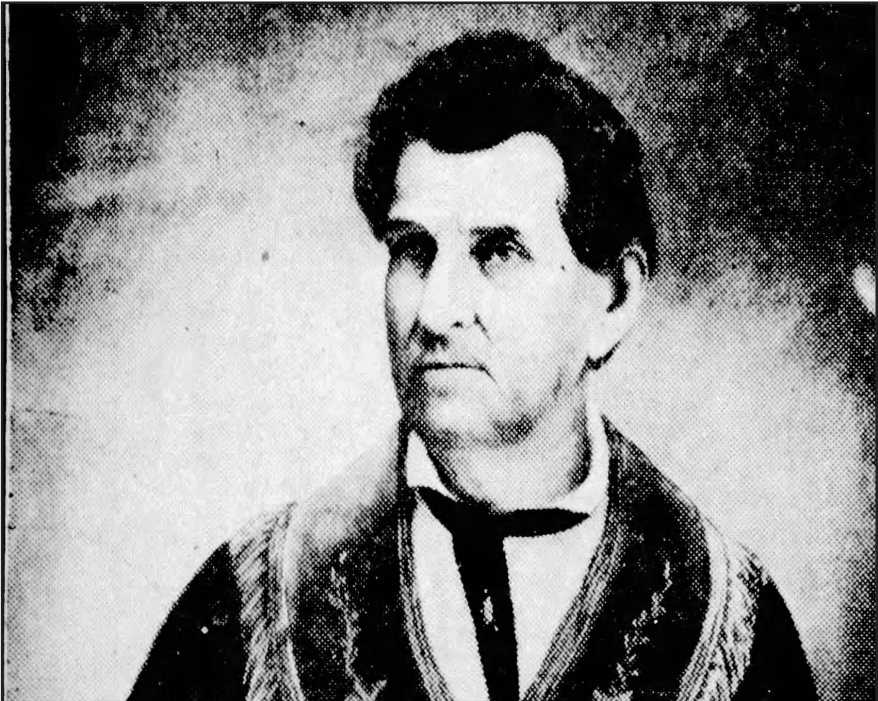


PHOTO FROM THE MACON TELEGRAPH  
**Simri Rose designed Macon’s walkable Rose Hill Cemetery, 60-acres of burials and monuments. The historic cemetery contains roughly 16,000 buried individuals.**

## GRISAMORE

Continued from Page A4

Ott, Joe Parham and Blythe McKay. They took a special interest in the hard-working young man. He worked on the school newspaper staff and became a leader in the ROTC program at Lanier — the all-white, all-boys high school. “Those of us who lived on the west side felt a certain sense that our wealthier friends lived a better life,” Johnson said. “I had a real insecurity. I was embarrassed my dad was not a doctor or lawyer. I used to have him drop me off in his pickup truck a block from campus.” Telegraph publisher Peyton Anderson once called him into his office and asked about his future plans. When Anderson learned

Johnson’s family didn’t have the financial means to send him to college, he offered to pay his way to the University of Georgia and later Harvard Business School. It was agreed that Johnson would return to Macon from college every weekend to work at the paper and full-time during the summers. Johnson was loyal. Anderson became a father figure. It was no secret the publisher was grooming him to take the reins of the state’s second-largest newspaper. Destiny had a different idea. At UGA, Johnson met his future wife, Edwina Chastain. She had dated Pat Dye, a Georgia football star who went on to become the head coach at Auburn. Edwina fell in love with Johnson, but she was lukewarm to a life of

hot summers in Macon. She could never get the smell of the paper mill out of her nose. As a young, married couple at Harvard, she encouraged him to apply to be a White House Fellow for the inaugural class in 1965. Johnson was one of only 15 selected. It changed the trajectory of his career. He soon had a front-row seat to history in the press secretary’s office. LBJ considered him the son he never had. They even shared the same last name. One of the first White House staff members Johnson met was Macon native Rufus Youngblood, who was in charge of President Lyndon’s secret service detail. (When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, it was Youngblood who pushed then-Vice President Johnson to the

floorboard in the second vehicle to shield and protect him.) The roads back to Macon were connected in other ways. Ted Turner, whose first job was working for his father’s billboard company in Macon, later hired Johnson as president at CNN, where he worked with Macon native Nancy Grace. I was honored when Johnson asked me to serve as moderator for the discussion at his upcoming book signing at Mercer on November 5. He called to congratulate me at every major step in my professional career. When I visited him last week, I asked if Peyton Anderson was disappointed he did not return to Macon. He showed me a framed photograph Anderson had inscribed: “To Tom Johnson: My greatest pride is

in your many outstanding accomplishments.” There are those in the world who go on to fame and fortune and never reach back to honor their roots. They forget all those shoulders they stood on. Tom Johnson left Macon, but it never left him. Ed Grisamore was the 2024 recipient of the John Holliman Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. Tom Johnson was the first to receive the award in 1975.

# Fall chores gardeners need to do to ensure healthier plants, soil

SUSAN FISHER  
Special to The Melody

Ahhh, fall. Crisp days, cooler temperatures, pumpkins everywhere and state fairs. This season means there’s no more experimenting with zucchinis and a sadness that comes with the final tomato sandwich — slathered in mayo (yes, mayo — I said it, and I’m not backing down). Believe it or not, this is one of the most important times of the year for your garden. Sure, you’re tired — but your garden is tired too! It’s been working overtime, baking in the sun, dodging bugs and fending off diseases to provide you with fresh fruits and vegetables. Now it’s your turn to give it a little TLC — a pick-me-up to help it thrive through the winter. Here are five tips: — Remove spent plants. Destroy diseased plant material so it doesn’t reintroduce disease to your garden next year. Remove weeds and debris so pests and fungal disease don’t have a place to winter. This will go

in the burn pile or trash. Don’t add diseased plant matter in your compost bin. — Give your soil a check-up! During the growing season did you think your plants struggled or didn’t perform as well as you thought it should? A soil test will tell you if you have the right nutrients and pH levels to help your soil and plants thrive. Fall is the best time to do the test, allowing ample time for any supplements to react with the soil before spring planting. The county extension office can help with testing. Once you get the results, you’ll know exactly what your garden needs to grow its happiest and healthiest. — Dig or till your garden to a depth of 6-9 inches breaking up large clumps. This lets the soil breathe and fluffs up compacted soil, which makes it harder for the roots to do their job. Add 2-3 inches of organic matter or compost and rake it in the top 3-4 inches. — Plant a cover crop! Cover crops help hold the soil and prevent erosion while adding organic



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
**Fall is one of the most important times of the year to care for your garden, according to Susan Fisher, a program assistant with University of Georgia’s cooperative extension service and garden manager of the Gardens at Brookdale.**

matter when they are tilled under in the spring. Cover crops can include a combination of a cereal grain — wheat, rye, or oats — with a legume plant, such as clover or winter peas. — Even if you decide not to grow a cover crop, you will need to cover your beds or garden area with mulch. Mulching will help keep your soil soft and moist throughout the winter and suppress weeds. Ex-

posed soil is a landing pad for every single weed seed within 5 square miles. Cover with 3-5 inches of wood chips, grass clippings, straw or raked leaves. What a great way to involve the whole family! What kid doesn’t love jumping into a pile of fallen leaves? Great exercise. Great price. Great for your garden. Susan Fisher is a Program Assis-

tant with the Bibb County office of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service and serves as Garden Manager of the Gardens at Brookdale. Readers with gardening or landscaping questions can call 478-310-5350 or email bibb.extension@uga.edu.







# Local designers, artists, stylists to showcase their work on the runway for first Macon Fashion Week

The first-ever Macon Fashion Week debuts Sunday, Nov. 2 bringing seven days of runway programs, workshops, panel discussions and other events showcasing the talent of local and Muscogee (Creek) Indigenous designers, student creators, area models, makeup artists and hairdressers.

Starting Sunday and running through Saturday, every Fashion Week event is free to attend, except Sunday's "Macon Shades of Fashion Day Party" for VIP Signature Pass holders.

The \$100 VIP pass helps support Fashion Week and offers perks such as a Macon Fashion Week T-shirt and tote bag, VIP seating/viewing, a chance to win a designer style session and boutique gift card, boutique deals, behind-the-scenes looks and designer access at main runway events. It also includes entry to the VIP area of the Fashion Week afterparty — plus a complimentary drink.

But the focus of Macon Fashion Week's free community-wide access to programs is on the designers and on fashion in Macon — past, present and future — with an eye toward sustainability, ethical entrepreneurship and the area's undeniable style.

Macon Fashion Week is being presented by Macon Magazine in partnership with Wesleyan College.

## A sampling of scheduled events

— Monday: Young Designers Night showcasing youth-designed fashion and styling with pop-ups by Macon-Bibb County students

— Tuesday: Fashion: Past to Future with presentations and discussions by Wini McQueen, Emily Allmond, Loretta Clayton and Lisa Sloben, along with a virtual session on Fashion and Artificial Intelligence

— Wednesday: A discussion on fast fashion and the ethics of design featuring local designers and a runway show featuring Wesleyan students' upcycled designs

— Thursday: An "Elevate Your Style" workshop with Andrea Cooke plus boutique pop-up, and an "Armor and Adornment," discussion with Tracie Revis and Christina León on indigenous ceremonial wear, drag and cultural influence

— Saturday: Community runway show closing and brunch fundraiser featuring styles from the week

Times, locations, additions, changes, VIP passes, information on store and boutique discounts and more can be found at [maconfashionweek.com](http://maconfashionweek.com) and [facebook.com/MaconMagazine](http://facebook.com/MaconMagazine).

## Friday is a standout MFW day

Nov. 7 is not only November's First Friday, it's a highlight day for Macon Fashion Week. Things begin at 5 p.m. at the Wesleyan Leadership Lab at 522 Cherry St. when indigenous designers Jamie Rol-



Michael W. PANNELL

and-Hill — one of the week's seven featured designers and an enrolled citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation with Yuchi, Seminole and Cherokee heritage — and Julia Hayden Wakeford, a Muscogee and Yuchi creator, are featured in a discussion of creativity, fashion and their indigenous culture.

Rolland-Hill said she finds inspiration in her family and community and that, with every stitch, she tells stories to keep her culture alive, preserve heritage, love and hope for future generations.

Wakeford's grandmother and great-grandmother were renowned seamstresses and artful creatives. From an early age, she was encouraged to sew, bead and create while questioning and pushing traditional definitions. This foundation shaped her interest in creating modern regalia and shaping how native people view their clothing and lives.

Following their discussion, things will move to Poplar alley, site of ongoing outdoor Bright City Photography Exhibits, for the unveiling of a new exhibit featuring the work of Muscogee designers and tribal wear.

Between 7-7:30 p.m., activities will move to the Poplar Street median for the week's top designer event.

## The premiere event:

### The designer runway showcase

The outdoor fashion show will highlight the work of all seven featured Macon Fashion Week designers: five from Macon and two from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma. In addition to Rolland-Hill, there is Jamie Bennett, also from Oklahoma, Ashley Monique, Quitman Alexander, Isiah Miller, Monique Nicole Pitts-Taylor and Diane Jackson. Each designer will show a collection of up to 10 designs.

Admission is free to all such events.

"Macon Fashion Week is committed to supporting local artists, amplifying diverse voices, supporting responsible fashion practices and to building bridges between designers, students and the Macon community and beyond," said Susannah Maddux, publisher of Macon Magazine. "We have great fashion designers right here in Macon that people need to know about. Macon is known for great music and art; it's time for our designers to shine."

"A lot of people feel fashion and style aren't for them; they're just not interested. We want to show how fashion and style intersect in everyone's life. It doesn't have to be high fashion or some imaginary idea of what style is. We're inviting people to come and see that fashion is an integral part of life and can be really interesting. Other people think



PHOTO BY JAVE BJORKMAN

**Macon Fashion Week organizers and fashion designers are set to debut a weeklong series of runway events, panel discussions, workshops and more. Macon Magazine's Susannah Maddux and Wesleyan College's Alexis Grieg will host this year's events, featuring designers such as Jamie Rolland-Hill, Ashley Monique, Quitman Alexander, Isiah Miller, Monique Nicole Pitts-Taylor, Diane Jackson, Jamie Bennett.**

Macon has no fashion history, but I challenge them to come to our panels and be surprised. I'll just say that I just learned that Oscar Wilde came to Macon and the reason will surprise you. There are a lot of stories about Macon and fashion that will."

Maddux said the week should hold a lot of important eye-openers.

"There is so much bubbling up in Macon from local designers," Maddux said. "Macon Fashion Week is an opportunity to highlight what we have here and to bring to light a representation of what is possible. We've had designers tell us that if they'd known earlier, when they were younger, what it meant to be a designer and what opportunities were out there, they'd have been doing much more — they'd have been designing more and pursuing it earlier as a full-time career. Hopefully, young people will be able to learn a lot during the week about how to practically follow their dreams."

## Three designers' thoughts

I've had a chance to talk to and discover what some of the featured designers are thinking about the show and their work. Here's a glimpse:

— Diane Jackson: "I'm excited because it gives participating designers the chance to show what a vital design community Macon has, and that you don't have to run to Atlanta to get custom-fit clothes. I do a variety of work, but mainly formal wear, bridal gowns and prom dresses. Then there's the custom vests or ties and whatnot to go with it for the men. No matter what you put on, someone made it. Why not make

that someone a Macon seamstress or designer? Even if you get something off the rack, it's going to look much, much better if it goes through someone's hands to make it suit you."

"There are so many in our line of work that feel, 'No one needs me.' I've felt that way. I hope they see the show, get inspired and become part of it next year. Fashion Week is a great opportunity for local designers and those in related fields to network and learn about and from one another. It makes a difference when you can share your work and network."

— Isiah Miller: "I'm a self-taught designer who started out in Macon, then moved to Charlotte, [North Carolina] where I created for Miss North Carolina, who competed in Miss America. I moved back to Macon a couple of years ago and have done a lot of fashion shows but never a fashion week like this. It's great. It's good getting to see where you started and how far you've come and look toward where you want to be. I usually do larger collections than 10 so I'm having to be very thoughtful about what I want to put out on the runway. I'll have a couple of men's fashions and the rest women's."

"I'm teaching fashion and sustainability at Wesleyan and students from there will get to show how they put things together this week on Wednesday. I believe in giving back and investing in young people and have a sewing academy at the Creative Alternative where my studio is. There are ongoing classes and after-school sessions where students just come to learn, maybe involving fashion or maybe just sewing skills."

I'm also working on a two- or three-month fashion course where, at the end, students will be able to put on a show. I think there's a future for designers in Macon and it's great to get to show that during Fashion Week. It's going to be dope."

— Jamie Bennett: "It's special to bring my Muscogee art to the homelands in Georgia. I've spent years researching and learning about the textile and pottery designs from pre-removal (from Georgia to Oklahoma) and worked out ways to incorporate those images and themes into a modern aesthetic. I absolutely love the stories behind the images. My way of telling stories is through my wearable art. I hope I'm able to spark interest in our history but also, I want to let people know we're still here and we're thriving."

"I admire native designers who have paved the way. Clothing is very important to us culturally, not just for ceremony but for pride in who we are. Sewing is a way for me to connect to my ancestors and tell new stories. It can be challenging to design honoring our traditional dress and patterns but bring them into a modern setting, but it's well worth doing. I believe in community — that's important in our culture. I like that bringing my work and taking part in fashion week, exhibits and the Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration helps build a bridge between Oklahoma and our homeland and the people of Macon."

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



# SHERIDAN

CONSTRUCTION

## We Build Relationships!

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

Creating spaces that transform communities for generations.

(478) 743-1578  
[www.sheridanconstruction.com](http://www.sheridanconstruction.com)  
Offices in: Macon • LaGrange • Athens



## HYDEN

Continued from Page A4

consumers making claims, the size of the prospective claims and to recoup losses from catastrophes, which have played an outsized role in Georgia.

In 2023 and 2024, hurricanes Idalia, Helene and Milton slammed into the Peach State—leading to massive losses. In 2024, Georgia homeowners insurers paid out \$1.42 for every \$1 they earned through premiums. Business, regulatory and legal costs are also baked into insurance rates, and understandably. After all, a business that cannot turn a profit does not stay in business, and if insurers leave

the state, then Georgians have no options for insurance.

Georgia lawmakers recently tackled the rampant lawsuit abuse that plagued insurers. It may be far too early to tell how successful it will be at curbing skyrocketing rates, but the initial results seem promising. "I expect reasonably [to see a] 3 to 5% decrease in rates in Georgia this year," Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John King said.

"State Farm, one of Georgia's largest insurers, has reduced its rates this year. Changes like that in the market, and a continued excellent small business climate [...] have all the right ingredients to deliver savings to insur-

ance customers in Georgia," Rep. Reeves told me. These are clear examples that there are methods to help insurance customers without resorting to business-killing price controls.

Even though ancient Rome, the Soviet Union and California learned firsthand of the dangers of price controls, the urge to revisit this policy seems irresistible to many officials. Instead of recycling yesterday's failures, Georgia policymakers should focus on innovative approaches to foster a thriving free market and competition.

Marc Hyden is the senior director of state government affairs at the R Street Institute. You can follow him on X at [@marc\\_hyden](https://twitter.com/marc_hyden).



# SPORTS

## FPD begins quest for three-peat



PHOTO BY JESSICA GRATIGNY

FPD quarterback Major Simmons goes airborne to evade Mount de Sales defenders during a game this year. With Simmons injured, backup Cash Walker has stepped up.

BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH  
Melody Contributor

Brett Collier can't wait to get back into the full routine of a game week.

And he's thrilled to not be in the full routine of a game week.

FPD is the third seed in the GIAA Class 4A playoffs and, like top seed Stratford, has a first-round bye this week. As ready as they are to play — FPD hosts Strong Rock next Friday — they're ready to be healthier when that kickoff rolls around.

"We've had a rough go with the injury bug

so far," said Collier, who is 27-8 near the end of his third season as head coach. "We're pushing through."

There was suspense about that on Friday. The 6-3 Vikings led 0-9 Tattnall only 3-0 at one point. Even with FPD down a number of starters, that was a surprise.

The Vikings got back in gear and pulled away for a 31-6 win, scoring right at about their average in the second half alone.

"I give credit to Tattnall," Collier said.

See FPD  
Page B4

## Bibb GIAA teams ready for tourney

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Micah@MaconMelody.com

The GIAA playoffs are set, and two Macon teams have a bye week home field advantage in the first two rounds of the Class 4A state tournament.

The Stratford Eagles secured the No. 1 seed in the 4A bracket with a win over Calvary Christian on Oct. 25. The 34-7 victory gave Stratford an 8-2 regular season record and a third-place Region 6 finish, though region placings do not impact playoff seeds in the GIAA.

The win was important for another reason: the Eagles showed they can still move the ball without their premier player. Running back Tyler Stephens, who had led all classifications of GIAA in rushing yards before sustaining an injury against Mount de Sales.

Stratford did not miss a beat filling the gap in the backfield. Freshman Aaron Jefferson stepped right in and tallied 131 rushing yards on 11 carries, with Sanford

Horne and Morris Butler chipping in for several yards as well. Jefferson also had a great performance the week before against Mount de Sales after Stephens left with his injury.

The Eagles get a week off before facing the winner of the No. 8 vs. No. 9 game on Nov. 7 at home. Stratford could face Calvary Christian again — the Knights are the No. 9 team in the tourney — or draw No. 8 Bethlehem Christian, which it did not face during the regular season.

The next-highest ranked team, No. 3 FPD, has its first playoff matchup set in stone with a bye week to prepare.

The Vikings will host No. 6 Strong Rock Christian on Nov. 7 after both teams get the first week of the tournament off. FPD, much like crosstown rival Stratford, will benefit from a week off to recuperate from injury. Star quarterback and defender Major

See PLAYOFFS  
Page B4

## High stakes for Macon in GHSA

BY MELODY STAFF

Macon's high school football teams will have a lot on the line the final week of the GHSA regular season. Here's a look at some of Bibb County's crucial games this week.

Northeast (7-2, 7-1 in region) vs.  
East Laurens (3-6, 3-5 in region)

Last meeting: Northeast won 32-7 in 2024. Last week: Northeast defeated Dodge County 33-14; East Laurens lost to Jefferson County 14-13.

Northeast has perhaps the most at stake in its final

game of the year. If the Raiders defeat the visiting East Laurens Falcons, they will win the school's first region championship since 2009 and secure home field advantage through at least two rounds of the playoffs.

It would be tied for the best regular season finish in Northeast history with last year's 8-2 record, though the Raiders did not come away with the Region 2-A Division I trophy last time around. A ringing 33-14 win over Dodge County last week helped them take control of the region. Now only East Laurens, which

See GHSA  
Page B4



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Northeast's Kortnei Williams tries to break free of two Dodge County defenders during their game last week. After defeating Dodge, the Raiders only need to win this week to claim the Region 2 trophy.

# TAKE OUR READER SURVEY- AND POTENTIALLY WIN A PRIZE!

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

The Macon Melody



Take the short survey at  
[bit.ly/maconmelody](https://bit.ly/maconmelody)



# Mercer sets records, tone against VMI

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Micah@MaconMelody.com

If the Mercer Bears were feeling good about their season before, they must be ecstatic after last week’s action.

Mercer practically rewrote its entire football record book Saturday, defeating VMI 62-0 and tallying 834 yards of offense in one of the biggest wins since the program returned in 2013.

The victory kicked off a crucial stretch of Southern Conference games in explosive fashion. The Bears led 31-0 in the first quarter and did not take their foot off the gas, maintaining the shutout and suffocating the Keydets for all four quarters.

Mercer head coach Mike Jacobs has talked at length about his attention to detail. He has said before that it’s probably impossible for his team to play a perfect game of football.

The blowout Saturday was about as close as it gets.

“In other games, there have been moments where I’m not happy about

something. I’d argue where this week was maybe the first time this season where there hasn’t been a lull, something I’ve gotten mad about how we handled stuff,” Jacobs said Monday at Mercer’s weekly athletics press conference. “I’m probably worse (during blowouts) than in the really big games that are close, but I thought our kids were really dialed in yesterday.”

Freshman quarterback Braden Atkinson had yet another incredible outing, passing for 538 yards to set a new Mercer single-game record. He also tied his own record of five passing touchdowns and, as he has done multiple times this season, gave credit to his offensive line for helping his performance.

“That’s a young man who’s wise beyond his years, right? And the cool thing is, his starting center was his center all through high school,” Jacobs said of his quarterback. “Those kids are both true freshmen playing two of the hardest positions on the entire football field, and doing it at an extremely high level. So they’re obviously in tune with each other.

He knows what it takes for those guys to have that type of work.”

Another Braden got in on the offensive action, albeit with his name spelled differently. Wide receiver Brayden Smith had a career effort as well, tallying 155 yards on nine catches — both career highs — and scored two touchdowns.

Just about everyone ended up getting in on the action, even with a 105-man roster. Reserves made an impact and kept the scoring rolling late in the contest.

“With the roster and us being banged up, we take the approach where I don’t cap it. If you are eligible, you dress out. That’s what you’ve earned through practicing really hard throughout the week. Your role in our victory is to prepare the other guys,” Jacobs said of his back-up squad. “When we get those opportunities where we’re up big and we try to get as many guys as we can into the game, they don’t always play well.

“They played really well. They maintained the shutout and scored some points. To see those guys,



PHOTO BY DONN KESTER  
**Mercer running back CJ Miller deals a stiff arm to a VMI defender during Mercer's dominant 62-0 win at home on Oct. 25. The game set the tone for the Bears' upcoming stretch of conference matchups.**

some young guys or players who toil all week and do hard work on that scout squad — seeing them get in the game and maintain the standard, the guys on the sideline love it.”

Now the Bears look to carry that momentum into two of its biggest

Southern Conference games in the coming weeks. Mercer travels to Furman on Saturday for a conference tilt at 2 p.m., then travels again Nov. 8 to face Western Carolina, which is currently tied with Mercer in the conference standings.

# Mercer basketball coaches ready for new season

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Micah@MaconMelody.com

The Mercer basketball teams begin their seasons next week, and both head coaches showed optimism when chatting about the expectations for what should be an eventful 2025-26 season.

Both squads open with one difficult power-conference foe and one more manageable opponent, though the men play their tougher game on the road while the women host their Power 5 game.

Regardless of home or road status, the non-conference schedules for both squads looks intimidating from the get-go. Here’s what you need to know about each roster and schedule as the season begins.

**New look, same philosophy**  
Mercer men’s head coach Ryan Ridder found success at every coaching stop he made prior to Mercer. Transfers have always been a big part of that success, and the coach is leaning into that strategy again in his second season at the helm for the Bears.

“When you look at non-returners, what did we target in the portal ... what did we target in freshmen? We targeted high-trust, low maintenance guys who are tough and have a high IQ,” Ridder said Monday at a press conference. “That was a non-negotiable for everyone we brought to the table.

“We have 11 new guys on the roster. It’s gonna take a little time to

mesh like any organization or team would, but I know we got the right guys in this building.

Part of that is out of necessity. Many of last year’s stars, who were also transfers, ran out of eligibility or transferred out again.

The new group consists of guys from several levels of play ranging from junior college to high major, and several of them could be key contributors. Ridder noted Baraka Okojie, a junior guard, as one of the most notable transfers. Okojie hails from Canada and starred at George Mason two seasons ago before seeing limited action at Memphis last year.

“He was on the all-freshman team at George Mason. He’s got a chance to be a premier player (in the South-

ern Conference), we think we have one of the best guards in the league,” the head coach said.

Other potential standout transfers include Armani Mighty, a red-shirt-junior with two seasons at Boston College and a year at Central Michigan — “I mean, his name is Mighty,” Ridder quipped — along with Zaire Williams out of Wagner and Kyle Cuff Jr., a former Syracuse and Kansas player.

There are still some returning players, though, and several of them should be key contributors. The most notable player back for another year is Brady Shoulders, who got significant playing time as a freshman last season and was voted a team captain this season.

“It’s my 18th year coaching. I

don’t know if I’ve had a time in my coaching career where they voted a sophomore a team captain. You don’t see that so much,” Ridder said.

The players coming back likely remember Mercer’s campaign last year, which saw the Bears struggle to finish games in conference play despite flashes of brilliance at times.

“I think if you really summarize last year, I think we had a lot of ‘what ifs’, a lot of ‘almost’ finishes,” Ridder said of the 2024-25 season, which Mercer finished with a 14-19 overall record and 6-12 conference mark. “I think we had four, five or six losses by one possession (in conference play). Finding a way to turn those close games into Ws is a lot of

See **HOOPS**  
Page B3



PHOTOS BY JASON VORHEES  
**LEFT: Mercer men's basketball coach Ryan Ridder gestures and shouts to his players during a game last season. RIGHT: Mercer women's coach Michelle Clark-Heard totes a dry-erase marker as she breaks it down in the huddle during a game last year. Both coaches are hoping for growth in their second season at the helm of the basketball teams.**



# After bruising home opener, Mayhem hockey is back

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Micah@MaconMelody.com

Any sports fan knows there is more to a contest than its final score.

The Macon Mayhem lost their home opener 3-2 against the Huntsville Havoc on Oct. 26, certainly. The team played a close game, matching the Havoc blow for blow until they ultimately came up short in the final few minutes.

What the box score and statistics might not reflect was the atmosphere.

The fans showed out for Macon’s hockey team at the first in-town game of the year. What they got on the ice was something special, a physical game filled with momentum swings, slapshots, saves, scuffles and sequences of intense back-and-forth action.

It felt like an entirely new brand of Mayhem hockey.

There were many chants of ‘Let’s go Mayhem’ — at first they were

prompted by the arena announcer, but eventually they started on their own as spectators grew more invested — along with penalties, broken sticks and even a hit laid on a goalie.

The Macon squad appeared transformed. The offense, while it could not match Huntsville’s shot count on the night, looked born anew. Even after a scoreless first period, the fans could sense that the tension in the Coliseum was rising.

Then the Mayhem gave up two goals in about three minutes, and the air threatened to leave the building.

A momentum turn like this, had it stayed that way the rest of the game, would not have been entirely unexpected. While the Mayhem had a solid enough defense last season and quality goaltending, they struggled to score and finished last place in the league in goals.

It became clear that this team would not be so sedentary on offense when the Mayhem scored their first home goal of the year, a

sweet slapshot off the stick of Alex Cohen, with about 11 minutes left in the second period.

As the piped-in goal horn sounded and the lights shut off again in the Macon Coliseum, an already riled-up audience got louder.

The energy only got better from there. It was a bruising second period, with more than 10 penalties between the two teams and even an ejection. Across the dingy bleachers of Macon’s classic sports venue, you could feel it — the fans knew that this game was turning into a real battle.

Then Connor Witherspoon netted his second shot of the season with about five minutes left in the period. The Coliseum went nuts again with the game tied, lights flickering and Chuck Norris gifs — references to the team owner, who shares a name with the iconic “Walker Texas



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH  
**Macon Mayhem center Jake Goldowski bows up against a Huntsville Havoc player in a fight for the puck during Macon's home opener Oct. 25. The Mayhem played a great game but gave up a back-breaking goal in the third period to lose 3-2.**

See **MAYHEM**  
Page B3



HOOPS

Continued from Page B2

hard work.”

The Bears had a tough non-conference slate last season, but this year’s should be even more strenuous. Games against UCF, Clemson and Washington State loom down the stretch, but Mercer’s toughest challenge might be its first one — a game against No. 18 Tennessee will serve as the season opener Monday.

“Opening night is going to be great. There’s 18 or 19,000 people there, it’s gonna be an experience,” Ridder said. “For a lot of our guys

it’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but for (transfers) they’ve played in a lot of environments like that. They won’t be surprised by the physicality, they’re not going to be bewildered by the situation or anything like that ... you just go in there and compete the best you can.”

Beyond those difficult opponents lies the Southern Conference, a league Ridder acknowledged is highly competitive and often produces memorable NCAA tournament teams.

The head coach was extremely confident in Mercer’s guard play, something he thinks is the base for

a great team, and noted the team’s ability to run with several defensive schemes and rebound well.

“I think the thing we have to get better at is the unknown commodity — we don’t have a lot of proven shotmakers. I think we have a lot of guys who can shoot the ball ... but at the end of the day it’s just about finding more consistency doing that.”

The Bears open the season against Tennessee in Knoxville at 7 p.m. Monday before their first home game against LaGrange at 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Depth and development

Mercer’s women’s team will be a bit more balanced in terms of transfer-to-returner ratio, though they will also have plenty of new faces on the roster.

Head coach Michelle Clark-Heard, also in her second season at Mercer, will have a lot of building to do after last year’s 8-22 overall record and 3-11 conference mark.

She said Monday that the team should have the talent to do it, noting depth as a strength.

“If we can stay healthy, I think we have the opportunity to run some different lineups on the floor and do a lot of things to wear other teams down,” Heard said. “Things we need to work on, our consistency and playing hard all the time, every single day and every single quarter. I try to simulate that in practice, we practice in quarters.”

Heard mentioned a recent scrimmage against Jacksonville where the Bears played well in the first and fourth quarters but struggled in the second and third as an example.

“Then defending and rebounding, those are things we’re harping on every day,” she said. “When you get in conference play, I think there was a stretch where we lost three games by one or two points. We want to make sure we’re still guarding that way but also being able to finish the other way.”

As for key players, Mercer has two freshmen that should make an impact in Remi-Hope Drantmann from Belgium and Rania Curry from Augusta. Micah O’Dell, a player Heard described as a “three-level scorer,” notched 26 points in a pre-

season scrimmage. Returners Nahawa Diarra, Ariana Bennett and Talia Harris should be crucial players.

“Everybody. I think just being honest, across the board, this is going to be a team that people are going to have to guard us all across the scouting report,” Heard said. “I think last year, there were one or two players people could circle on the scouting report. Now they’re gonna have to make sure they’re guarding all over the floor.”

The women have something of a “flip-flopped” version of the typical early schedule. Instead of playing a difficult power-conference opponent on the road and playing a somewhat weaker team at home, the Bears will travel to UNC Asheville on the road in Monday’s season opener before hosting Clemson at Hawkins Arena on Nov. 6 at 6 p.m.

The Tigers have struggled in ACC play in recent seasons, going 6-12 last season and 5-13 in the 2023-24 season against conference opponents. Rachael Rose, who is on some preseason lists as a top point guard this year, will be a player to watch for Clemson against Mercer.

Heard said the Bears should be more prepared for the Tigers after scrimmaging in the preseason as well.

“I think they took a lot of great things from (the preseason scrimmages). We scrimmaged against UAB, who shoots a lot of threes, because that’s what Clemson does. We just wanted to prepare for that differently,” the head coach said.

Mercer will play UNC Asheville at 6:30 p.m. Monday before hosting Clemson at home on Nov. 6.



PHOTO BY JESSICA GRATIGNY

Mercer's Alex Holt goes up for a layup against an East Tennessee State defender during a game last season. Holt and other key contributors have since moved on, leaving the men's roster filled with transfers and freshmen ahead of the 2025-26 season.

ACE softball season ends with playoff loss to Banks

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Micah@MaconMelody.com

ACE had its softball season come to an end at home on Oct. 22, as the No. 10 Banks County Leopards defeated the No. 7 Gryphons 1-0 and 12-4 to sweep their second-round matchup in the GHSA Class A-Division I state tournament.

Head coach Andrew Claxton, in his first year at the helm for ACE, commended his players on an impressive season in which the Gryphons won the Region 2 championship over rival East Laurens and won a playoff series over Berrien County.

“I think we established a culture my first year here with these girls. That’s what we’re trying to do going forward,” Claxton said. “It was definitely a really successful year.”

The first game of the series, a 1-0 loss for the Gryphons despite Giselle Giles’ stellar pitching performance, was the fourth consecutive one-run playoff game for ACE after a barn-burner three-game series against Berrien in the first round. The team showed its wear in the second tilt of the day, allowing the Banks County lineup to tag them for 12 runs in a mercy rule loss.

“Right, it does wear on you. We preached it all year, though, and we

scouted this team really hard. You saw it in that first game, that’s why we get games like that,” Claxton said of the first game of the series. “We were ready for ‘em, but we just couldn’t get the big time hit and just kind of ran out of gas at the end.”

It was a bittersweet ending for ACE’s senior class — the Gryphons had a particularly large and meaningful one stacked with players like Avery Stone, Reese Thames, Sophie Denney, Ella Allen, Ava Allen and Kinsley Lineberger.

“I told ‘em, I’ve been doing this for a while, and this is by far the best year I’ve ever had. Those seniors are so much fun,” Claxton said. “Those

girls have accomplished so much, not just on the softball field but academically. Softball is temporary. The attitude, the way they go about things? Their future’s bright.”

Claxton praised the entire team, which he thinks will bounce back and have another banner season next year. After all, the Gryphons lost impact players like Laney Bridges, Madisyn Hallar and the Yates twins — Karlee and Karsyn — after last season and still improved enough to win a region title. Key contributors like Giles, Avery Edalgo, Sydney Collins and others will return next season more experienced.

“Talent takes you so far, but the

rest of it is grit, perseverance and pushing through. That’s what these seniors have taught the younger girls,” Claxton said. “They have that valuable experience now, and there will be seniors to lead the way next year. It’s something where you keep rotating and moving forward.

“You have to give a shoutout to the parents, the school, the staff. They’re a big reason for that progress, too.”

The first game was the polar opposite of last week’s shootout series with Berrien County, as Giles and

See **SOFTBALL**  
Page B4

MAYHEM

Continued from Page B2

Ranger” star — flashing on the jumbotron.

The rest of the game was a nail-biter as well. Both teams threatened to score regularly, with the Mayhem appearing to get more quality looks than the Havoc. But it was Huntsville that got the last laugh, scoring with less than 10 minutes left and ultimately taking the win even after Macon rallied in the final minutes with several shots.

The clamor of the crowd fizzled with the loss, yes, but the fact remained — Saturday night felt different. Fans flocked to the Mayhem’s Facebook page after the game, discussing the team’s grit in the home opener.

“We did lose, but it was an amazing game. We played so well. Big difference,” one fan commented. Several fans commented on how much more physical the Mayhem looked. “An entirely different team from last year,” another fan wrote.

The newly-minted mentality of the Mayhem was visible from every seat in the arena, but it was perhaps on best display right next to the ice, where sticks shattered and slapshots stung goalie pads with shocking volume.

Goalie Josh Boyko made 36 saves, each effort somehow seeming more impressive than the last. He acknowledged fans on the glass with a nod and a raise of his gloved hand. Those same fans smacked on the glass with fervor whenever a

Huntsville player skated by.

More often, those Huntsville players did not skate by but instead flew by, or were pressed against the glass with intense force during body checks and fights for the puck. The only thing more abrupt than the bodies hitting the boards was the sound of the puck rocketing off the rink, a sound not unlike a gunshot that startled folks close to the ice even well into the third period.

“You get used to it, but even then sometimes it still gets you,” said a security guard who works down by the glass nearly every game. “Every now and then one pops and you’re not ready for it.”

For every thrilling occurrence on the ice, there was an equally endearing fan interaction. An adorable kid-do in an Elsa dress from “Frozen” dropped the puck before the game. Moms and dads hoisted babies for the jumbotron. Some lucky patrons played a game on the ice where they raced down the rink by repeatedly flopping onto air mattresses.

And, through all the in-between activities and comedic moments, the Mayhem put on a show — and the crowd knew it, matching the energy on the ice with raucous support. Even the aforementioned security guard agreed.

“They’re into it more than they were last year. This is a good one,” he said.

There’s little doubt, it seems — the Macon Mayhem found their footing Saturday as the new season began.



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH

TOP: Two players go at it in one of the many fights during the Macon Mayhem's home opener Oct. 25. It was a physical game that featured an ejection.

BOTTOM: Macon Mayhem player Connor Witherspoon controls the puck as he skates toward the offensive zone during Macon's home opener Oct. 25.



FPD

Continued from Page B1

“They had a great game plan. They played really well, especially on the (defensive) front. We’re always going to try to run the ball, and they did a great job stopping the run, really all night.”

The Vikings managed only 35 net rushing yards. As well as Tattnall played, FPD had its own issues, unsurprisingly.

The Vikings have lost six starters to season-ending injuries, some at the start of the year and some in the middle.

Quarterback and defensive back Major Simmons went out with a concussion late in the third quarter of the win over Stratford on Oct. 3 and he’s nowhere near ready yet, though he is progressing.

Defensive back and running back Brady McHugh suffered a shoulder injury a week later against John Milledge. He played sparingly last week.

GHSA

Continued from Page B1

sits at an unsteady 3-6, stands in Northeast’s way.

“Just want to get to next week and take care of business. You know East Laurens wants to come in and play spoiler,” Wiggins said after the road win against the Indians. “You just have to go back home and finish it.”

A region championship would give the Raiders a Top 8 seed in the A-Division I tournament automatically. If Northeast falls in an upset, it would likely fall to the mid-teens range.

ACE (5-4/4-4) at Washington County (4-5/4-4)

*Last meeting: Washington County won 17-14 in 2024. Last week: ACE lost to Bleckley County 48-9; Washington County defeated Southwest 21-14.*

The ACE Gryphons have a lot to play for as well. Despite a 48-9 drubbing at the hands of Bleckley County last week that put their record at 5-4, the Gryphons are very much in playoff contention and are within striking distance of getting the school’s first-ever home playoff game.

The GHSA’s Post Season Rankings have ACE at No. 29 following the loss to Bleckley County. The seven private schools ahead of ACE

FPD has lost starters at every position group. Combine that with normal injuries, and the Vikings have faced some suspense each week: How well will the replacements play? Who’s going down next, with what, and for how long?

With weekly personnel moves, pre-snap 5-yard penalties on offense aren’t going to be shocking.

“We made a lot of penalties (Friday),” Collier said. “A ton of false starts. We got behind the chains pretty quickly.”

But there were adjustments, with players making plays in place of injured players who used to make plays.

“When you’re playing some guys that at the beginning of the year were backups and then maybe a few other guys in new positions, there’s some growing pains,” Collier said. “We’re learning as we go. Credit to our guys. They never panicked.”

FPD couldn’t get out of the Tattnall game without an injury. Center Thomas Everett suffered a shoulder

injury, but he moved to tackle and all was well.

That wasn’t necessarily a surprise, because Collier and his staff have spent half the season moving players around. He listed four players who can back up Everett at center.

“We made the joke (Tuesday) about the offensive line,” Collier said. “We said, ‘OK, new week, new offensive line.’ That’s the way it’s felt all year.”

Still, the Vikings finished 7-3, with losses to 4A second seed Brookstone, 3A third seed Westfield and 3A top seed John Milledge. Collier is off to the best three-season start in FPD history after the Vikings won the 4A state title his first year in charge.

Each season has been markedly different, with this year’s team perhaps his grittiest. And by the time the season is over, it’ll probably be his most versatile.

How many different players have started this season?

ference was 32.7. Four losses have been 11 points or less.

Pike County went 5-6 last year, breaking a four-game losing streak with the win over Rutland. The Pirates’ defense improved this year, but the offense stagnated.

The Pirates are on the playoff bubble, barely on the outside, and are done with a loss and probably in with a win.

Jackson (3-6/2-2) at Westside (3-6/0-4)

*Last meeting: Westside won 29-23 in 2024. Last week: Jackson lost 47-17 to Callaway; Westside beat Rutland 16-14.*

The records aren’t impressive, and neither team has been a contender for a region title or runner-up spot. But the regular-season finale has plenty of meaning. For one thing, it’s the final home game for Westside head coach Spoon Risper, who announced his resignation from the program before the season. For another, it might be his final game with Westside, period.

The Red Devils and Seminoles are both on the Class AA playoff bubble. Westside enters game night as the No. 27 team (of 32) in the 32-team field, two spots ahead of Jackson. There are lot of games with bubble teams playing bubble teams, so it’s kind of a must win scenario for both teams.

Westside broke a six-game los-



PHOTO BY MARK POWELL

ACE senior Reese Thames, who ended the game behind the plate, tosses her catcher’s mask as the Banks County Leopards celebrate advancing to the Elite Eight after defeating the Gryphons in the second round of the GHSA Class A-Division I state tournament in Macon on Oct. 22.

SOFTBALL

Continued from Page B3

Gaylor were both in the zone from the circle. The Leopards managed to hit a bit better than the Gryphons early — ACE did not get its first hit until the fifth — but it was a 0-0 game through four innings and looked like it could stay that

way for a while.

That said, it felt like the first team to find a way to score would have all the momentum, and Banks County broke through first. In the top of the fifth, Marley McDaniel doubled and eventually scored on a base hit from Gaylor, who helped herself out.

“Oh man, there’s no telling,” Collier said. “I don’t know how many different people have started. New combinations of kids makes things tough, but that’s football. We’ve been learning to get through it.

“It’s been a conversation every week. How can we cross-train as many kids as possible? Just staying ready for what might happen.”

Losing Simmons was quite the double whammy, yet not necessarily a surprise. He plays quarterback with his defensive back mentality: the shoulder will be lowered.

But freshman Cash Walker has stepped into the pocket and thrived. His debut was against John Milledge, the best team FPD has played, and it didn’t look like a debut.

“He’s super poised,” Collier said. “He’s calm under pressure, and he’s handled the offense really well. He’s just been seamless.”

The Vikings are taking the “next man up” philosophy to another level, including with several young-



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH

Westside running back Kaleb Blount crosses in to the endzone for a touchdown against Rutland. The Seminoles held off a Rutland comeback for a key 16-14 region victory. Both teams finish their seasons this week with region games.

ing streak last week, a streak that included three ranked (at the time) teams and two of whom are still undefeated. Jackson had a four-game losing streak with two losses to still-undefeated Class A-Division I teams. And the Red Devils are off consecutive games against the top two teams in the region, Morgan County and Callaway.

Jaiden Stephens ran for 111 yards and a score against Rutland, but

sters.

“Like our offensive linemen,” Collier said. “People might not realize that there’s some ninth-graders on our team that could get in and execute our offense on the offensive line.

“There’s not many schools, I think, that could say that.”

Collier pointed out Harrison Keenan and Jacorey Burke as two who have thrived in multiple positions, and Marlon Kramer as somebody who has stepped up when necessary, like against Tattnall.

“He played outstanding,” Collier said. “He had two interceptions, blocked a field goal, made several really good tackles, and plays wide receiver also.”

Collier is trying to pace himself as well as his team this week.

“Our kids are resilient,” Collier said. “They practice really well. I’m impressed with that. They know how to practice hard, but take care of each other.”

PLAYOFFS

Continued from Page B1

Simmons missed the final two games of the season after getting hurt against Stratford. The Vikings have also been without standout linebacker Brady McHugh, who anchors the defense, since he sustained an injury against John Milledge.

Though they lost against a strong John Milledge team, the Vikings still looked solid enough against a contender and played well with freshman backup Cash Walker.

Strong Rock, which did not play FPD during the regular season, finished 6-4 with key wins coming against Calvary Christian and St. Anne-Pacelli. Running back Jake Johnson is the most eye-catching offensive threat for the Patriots, coming into the contest with 1,205 rushing yards this year.

Mount de Sales and Tattnall finished outside the Top 10, ending their seasons. The Cavaliers finished 2-8 and ranked No. 12. The Trojans finished 0-10 and No. 13, its worst finish since an 0-10 mark in 1974.

Windsor, CFCA earn playoff bids

Two more Macon schools made the playoffs as well, this time in the GIAA’s Class 2A tournament.

Windsor Academy will be the only Bibb County GIAA team to play in the first round of the playoffs Oct. 31, earning the No. 8 seed in 2A. The Knights will host No. 9 Augusta Prep at 7:30 p.m. to determine who will face top-seeded Brentwood in the next round.

Windsor got off to a sluggish start this year but caught fire in the tailend of the season, going 1-7 before reel-

ing off a pair of wins in their final two games including a 16-14 thriller over archival Central Fellowship to finish 3-7.

Knights quarterback Heath Woodard found his stride in that final stretch — Windsor and head coach Dylan Bass actually switched quarterbacks briefly midseason before going back to Woodard — when he formed a connection with star Dawson Sims in the passing game.

The team has now tallied more than 300 yards of offense in its last three consecutive games, the kind of hot streak that should be valuable as the postseason begins.

Augusta Prep comes into the playoff game 2-8 with a victory against Thomas Jefferson Academy in its final game and, back on Aug. 29, a win against Windsor. The Cavaliers defeated Windsor 22-14, though the Knights look very different on offense later in the year.

CFCA bounced back from that loss to Windsor with a 56-32 win over Cherokee Christian, bringing them to 5-5 on the season and the No. 6 seed in the playoffs. The Lancers get this week off before travelling to face No. 3 Southland Academy on Nov. 7.

Central Fellowship’s offense runs through tailback and jack-of-all-trades Judson Walls, son of head coach Jake Walls. Despite breaking his elbow and missing two weeks in the middle of the season, the younger Walls returned on Oct. 10 and ran all over Heritage in his first game back.

Southland is 6-4 this year and lost its final two games of the regular season in competitive games with RTCA and Southwest Georgia.



The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, October 31, 2025 • B5

THIS IS SO UNFAIR. I'M REALLY EXPECTED TO WAIT UNTIL THE HOLIDAYS FOR PRESENTS?

YOU KNOW... THERE MAY BE A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THIS.

SO, DAD, DID YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

GIVE IT UP. TEARING PAGES FROM THE FRIDGE CALENDAR WON'T MOVE UP CHRISTMAS.

©2005 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

© 2005 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

I'M BATTING A THOUSAND TODAY

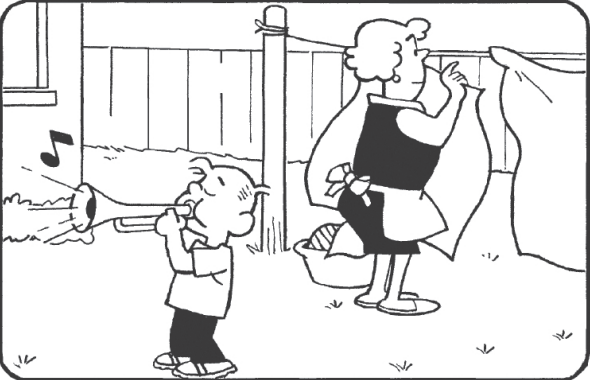
...UNFORTUNATELY THEY WERE ALL FOUL BALLS.

Price

© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

## A black and white cartoon illustration. On the left, a young boy in a t-shirt and pants is blowing a trumpet. Three musical notes are shown floating away from the instrument. On the right, a woman in a dark dress and apron is hanging a large sheet on a clothesline. She is holding a laundry basket. The scene is set outdoors with a fence in the background. The signature 'HENRY BOLTZHOFF' is in the bottom left corner.

Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Music note is moved. 2. Leg is moved.  
3. Clothespin is missing. 4. Sheet is longer. 5. Window is wider.  
5. Arm is not showing.

**Trivia Test Answers!**

1. Six (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Rhode Island)
2. District 12; 3. Sciatic nerve; 4. Vibrantium; 5. Sublimation; 6. 1979; 7. Cullen;
8. Opossum; 9. Jan; 10. Pennsylvania

- 1 Little lies
- 2 Theater  
award
- 3 Mani counter  
part
- 4 NASCAR  
sponsor

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15				16					17			
18				19				20				
			21				22					
23	24	25			26					27	28	29
30					31				32			
33				34				35				
			36				37					
38	39	40				41				42	43	44
45					46				47			
48					49				50			
51					52				53			

48 Flintstones' pet	5 Banal	31 Barbecue coating
49 Long. crosser	6 Grown-up nits	34 World Cup cheer
50 Skin care brand	7 Iowa college	35 Stated
51 Ollie's pal	8 Rear veranda	37 Pulsates
52 Corp. symbols	9 Hybrid fruit	38 Wanders
53 Conference leader?	10 Stagger	39 Send forth
	11 Earth sci.	40 Jazz singer
	16 Light beams	Simone
	20 Pouch	41 Baby carriage
	21 "Excuse me?"	42 Scrabble
	22 Deli bread	piece
<b>DOWN</b>	23 "So there!"	43 Slanted type (Abbr.)
1 Little lies	24 — -de-France	44 Ocular woe
2 Theater award	25 Speed (Abbr.)	46 Crunchy sandwich
3 Mani counter-part	26 Make lace	47 Soup cooker
4 NASCAR sponsor	27 Tic-tac-toe win	
	28 "— so fast!"	
	29 Retired jet	

## Rodriguez

1. GEOGRAPHY: How many U.S. states are part of New England?
2. LITERATURE: What district does Katniss Everdeen represent in “The Hunger Games”?
3. ANATOMY: What is the longest nerve in the human body?
4. COMICS: What is Captain America’s shield made of?
5. SCIENCE: What is the process called when a solid becomes a gas?
6. HISTORY: In what year did the Three Mile Island nuclear accident happen?
7. MOVIES: What is Edward’s last name in the movie “Twilight”?
8. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is the only marsupial found in North America?
9. TELEVISION: Which character on “The Brady Bunch” is famous for saying, “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!”
10. ENTERTAINERS: Pop singer Taylor Swift was born in which U.S. state?

© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

[illegible]

**Solution time: 23 mins.**

— **King Crossword** —

— Make a holiday cheese ball simply: Combine a package of cream cheese with a cup of finely shredded cheese and 1/3 cup sour cream or plain Greek yogurt. Form into a ball, roll in coating of your choice (chopped nuts, spices, etc.) and chill. Bring with pita chips, crackers or pretzels as a hostess gift.

**themaconmelody @  & **



# SNAPSHOTS

B6 • The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, October 31, 2025



**PHOTOS 1 AND 2** — Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation hosted the 2025 Annual Fall Festival & Trunk or Treat Oct. 24 at Carolyn Crayton Park. *Photo by Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation*

**PHOTO 3** — Nick Trivelas & the Aegeans perform during the 18th annual Central Georgia Greek Festival in Macon on Oct. 26. The three-day festival featured authentic Greek cuisine, traditional dancing, live music and a market. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTO 4** — Culinary instructor Chef Mark Robinson poses for a picture with student Debreon Felton during a Culinary Toque Ceremony Oct. 23 at W.S. Hutchings College & Career Academy. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*

**PHOTO 5** — Areti Dancers of Atlanta perform during the 18th annual Central Georgia Greek Festival in Macon on Oct. 26. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTOS 6 AND 7** — Students dance in the stands and rapper/singer Chino Cappin performs during a pep rally at Ballard-Hudson Middle School Oct. 28. Bibb County schools partnered with Tex James from Power 107.1 for the "I Believe N Me" attendance pep rally. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*