



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
**Carl Tims will take over as the new president and CEO of United Way of Central Georgia in January 2026.**

## Tims to lead UW

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
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Carl Tims, the current chief operating officer of United Way of Central Georgia, has been announced as the new president and CEO of the charitable organization.

He takes office on Jan. 1 and replaces George McCannless, who served for more than a decade as head of the nonprofit, which coordinates community resources while also directly addressing issues ranging from affordable housing to literacy and child care.

Tims said his first act will be embarking on a 30-day “listening tour.” He said he wants to build up the nonprofit’s existing infrastructure and continue expanding internal program offerings instead of just facilitating aid through the organization’s partner agencies.

Tims said he plans to examine community needs to determine the need for other United Way program offerings. He mentioned potentially launching programming for child care and transportation in the future.

The organization’s future programs will be determined by Macon’s needs, he noted — and “not by folks sitting in this office.”

One of United Way’s largest local programs is Read United, which aims to increase reading literacy. As part of the initiative, Tims and his team recruit and coordinate volunteers who tutor area students.

Tims said the organization also recently tested a child

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Periodical — Mail Label

# Acts of Love, Gifts of Life

## Macon advocates push to grow organ donation

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
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The depiction of a heart — and the words “Organ Donor” — can go unnoticed on a Georgia driver’s license, but the designation means the world to people who benefit from its meaning.

Denisetrice Goodrum Cook of Macon is one of those individuals. She was diagnosed with chronic kidney failure two years ago. She received treatment at area hospitals and at Emory Healthcare in Atlanta, traveling to those spots with her husband Bennett.

She joined the national transplant list in January as — according to LifeLink of Georgia data — one of more than 3,000 individuals in Georgia awaiting a new organ.

The human body has two kidneys — and Bennett, living up to the “in sickness and in health” wedding vow — was willing to donate one of

his to the love of his life. One of his bean-shaped organs turned out to be a near-perfect match for Denisetrice.

Organ matchmaking depends on factors like blood type, height and weight, illness intensity and time period, and more, said Tracy Ide with LifeLink. The group, part of a national network, helps area hospitals procure organs. They also offer education services to donors and transplant recipients.

Ide has worked for the group for nearly 19 years, and she said its mission is personal for her. Various family members, including her mother and uncle, have received organ transplants.

Her mother’s transplants — a new kidney, a new heart and then another new heart — forced young Ide to grow up “faster.”

Her work today helps her to hon-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**A model of a human kidney illustrates the organ’s structure, including arteries and veins. Two Macon women who received kidney transplants now advocate for awareness and work to dispel common myths about organ donation and transplant procedures.**

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PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Bethel AME Church trustee Leroy Bundrage watches as Fire Inspector Sgt. Adam Barber with the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department checks a smoke alarm at the church on Oct. 9 as part of local Fire Prevention Week activities.**

## Residents get new smoke alarms, fire safety tips

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
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Walter Ridley was surprised when a fire truck and three other fire department vehicles pulled up to his home — and even more so when a squadron of firefighters knocked on his door to ask if they could go in and check his smoke alarms.

Ridley obliged, and the firefighters installed and tested two new alarms in Ridley’s Villa Avenue home — one in the hallway and another in a bedroom.

When asked about the last time he had replaced his smoke alarms, he let out a sigh and said it’d been “years.”

Firefighters stopped at Ridley’s house and at other residences within Macon-Bibb County on Oct. 9 to in-

stall new alarms and share safety information as part of Fire Prevention Week.

The yearly event, held in the U.S. and Canada, is sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association.

The fire department partnered with the American Red Cross to knock on about a hundred doors in Macon’s Bellevue neighborhood.

In addition to new alarms, Red Cross volunteers distributed handouts with prevention tips and other information.

Firefighters checked smoke alarms, concentrating on ones near sleeping areas and in second stories, and installed new alarms — with 10 years of battery power — if needed.

Red Cross volunteers and fire department officials last conducted an

operation like this in the Macon area in 2018.

“We’ve had quite a few fires in this general neighborhood — and, also, the age of the houses creates a situation where you need to be more aware,” said Virgil Watkins Jr., a Red Cross community disaster program manager and former county commissioner.

Fire Prevention Week started Oct. 5. This year’s focus was on safe use of devices powered by lithium-ion batteries.

Those batteries power common devices like smartphones — and one safety tip provided by Jeremy Webb, the Macon-Bibb fire and life safety educator, is to avoid charging those devices on non-solid surfaces.

As part of local festivities, the

fire department also provided scholarships for an essay contest held at Macon Mall and set up presences at the Georgia National Fair and at local eateries like Firehouse Subs and Texas Roadhouse.

Webb said prevention and community education efforts aren’t just limited to the annual Fire Prevention Week observation.

He urged the public to check their smoke alarms — even those with a supposed long battery life — and make sure they have a plan in case of a fire.

“We hope that people have working smoke alarms and fire escape plans,” Webb said. “We install smoke alarms free of charge, and people can give us a call at the fire prevention line.”

That number is 478-751-2700.



PHOTO BY ED GRISAMORE

**Gerald Carper sits at the pipe organ at Highland Hills Baptist Church, where he has served as organist for more than 30 years. The 76-year-old musician has spent more than six decades filling Macon sanctuaries with hymns and harmony, finding his life’s calling behind the keys.**

## JOYFUL NOISE

### For church organist Carper, every note is an act of faith

BY ED GRISAMORE  
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Somewhere between all the verses in the Baptist hymn book and the first few notes of another wedding processional, Gerald Carper believes he has a book in him.

He hasn’t started writing his memoirs. His fingers have been busy playing the organ for the past 62 years.

Last year marked his 50th year as an organist at three Macon churches — Ingleside Baptist, Bloomfield Methodist and Highland Hills Baptist.

That’s a lot of “Amazing Grace” on holy, holy, holy Sunday mornings.

“I need to write these stories down before I forget them,” he said. “I have two working titles. The first is ‘There’s No Business Like Church Business.’ The other is ‘The View from the Organ Bench.’”

Carper is 76 and has played the organ at Highland Hills for exactly half his life. He teaches piano lessons at his Ingleside home, goes for morning walks around the neighborhood and faithfully peruses the weekly bulletins from other churches to see what hymns are making joyful noises across the city.

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## HOW LEARNING NEW SKILLS AFTER 60 IMPACTS YOUR BRAIN AND



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

When creativity, talent, tenacity, or sheer will combine with the human brain's ability to adapt and learn new information, many people have proved age is just a number and have done amazing things after 60.

Renowned American folk artist Grandma Moses is a stellar example. She began painting to cope with her husband's death and crippling arthritis that impeded her ability to continue her beloved hobby of embroidery. The creative turn launched a successful art career at 76 years old.

Cancer survivor Harriette Thompson started running marathons at 76 and became the oldest woman to finish a marathon in 2015 at 92 years and 93 days old. Legendary author Laura Ingalls Wilder published the first book in her iconic autobiographical "Little House" series at 65.

Whether you're dreaming big and reaching for the stars at 60 and beyond, or simply curious or enthusiastic about learning something, enjoying a new pursuit has many benefits, including being good for your cognitive health.

Let's explore the concept of neuroplasticity and how learning new things later in life impacts your brain and enriches your life.

### What Is Neuroplasticity?

Billions of neurons collect, process, and send information throughout your brain, which also has a "complex network of electrical circuits that allow these neurons to 'talk' with one another," notes the Mayo Clinic.

Neurons also send messages to other parts of the body via the nervous system. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to form and adapt this vast network of neural connections.

Mayo Clinic expert Prashanthi Vemuri, Ph.D., explains that an abundance of neurons in young people enables their brain to take in new information quickly and form neural connections (increased plasticity), which is why children can learn new languages more easily than adults.

The brain develops through the mid-to-late 20s and then slowly shrinks — and shrinks more after age 60. However, research shows

neuroplasticity helps the brain adapt with fewer neurons and essentially allows a person to retrain their brain and acquire new skills, like learning a new language, regardless of age.

### Ways to Maintain Your Brain Health

Maintaining your brain health is a critical part of healthy, active aging. Dr. Vemuri notes that getting enough sleep is essential for cognitive health, because as you sleep, your brain expels toxins. Other brain health strategies include:

- Exercise regularly.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Don't smoke.
- Do brain puzzles like Wordle and Sudoku.
- Play an instrument, read, or learn a new skill.
- Maintain strong social connections.

Learning something new might seem daunting at first, but with practice and consistency, you may be surprised how much you enjoy it.

### Cognitive Benefits of Learning New Things

Learning new things later in life has multiple benefits, including positive cognitive impacts.

For example, a three-month Scientific American intervention encouraged a learning environment for 33 older adults between 58 and 86 years old, testing cognitive abilities (including working memory and attention) before and after the program.

The study offered courses in singing, drawing, music composition, photography, learning Spanish, and iPad use. Participants attended three different two-hour classes every week to learn three new skills.

Results showed participants had significant improvement in memory and attention cognitive scores after completing the courses.

Central Connecticut State University explains that "each and every time we learn something new our brain forms new connections and neurons and makes existing neural pathways stronger or weaker."

In this sense, learning also increases the brain's plasticity. Learning and experiencing new

things also:

- Transfers learning from short-term to long-term memory
- Triggers dopamine release
- Promotes myelin growth — and myelin makes neuron signals move faster

### Learning Something New Enriches Life and Broadens Horizons

In addition to enhancing cognitive health, learning something new after 60 enriches your life and broadens your horizons. If you enroll in courses with others, it also offers an opportunity to meet new people and establish new friendships and social connections.

Road Scholar surveyed 1,000 retirees about the hobbies they tried in retirement, and some respondents mentioned the positive rewards they experienced.

For example, one participant discussed the benefits of joining four different book clubs, saying, "I enjoy the reading and the insights, friendships, and other viewpoints that come from club discussions." Joining a book club in retirement can also encourage you to read books you otherwise wouldn't read and can open doors to new experiences!

Another talked about taking up photography, saying, "Photography has enlarged my 'mental eye' to see beyond the photo. It's a constant learning process."

Yet another is a volunteer docent at the National Underground Railway Freedom Center and enjoys conveying a message about how mostly unsung heroes used courage, cooperation, and perseverance to cause positive changes.

Whether you begin writing your novel, take a cooking class, travel and learn about different cultures, join a chess team, or start doing stand-up comedy, learning (and experiencing) something new after 60 will not only benefit your brain health but also enrich your life with fun, adventure, and other intangible rewards.

# Group pushes for special 1% educational sales tax

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
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Although no concerned citizens showed up to the Bibb County School District's sales tax presentation Oct. 13 at Howard High School, members of an independent campaign committee urged voters to adopt the penny on the dollar sales tax on the November ballot.

The Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is a 1% sales tax for the school district to make capital improvements that would otherwise not fit within the general budget.

If the sales tax is passed, the district would be allowed to collect \$250 million over five years, according to a Macon-Bibb County Board of Elections notice. Bibb County residents can vote for the ESPLOST on Nov. 4 — and early voting started Oct. 14.

Also on the ballot are candidates for two state Public Service Commission seats. That group regulates public utilities throughout Georgia.

According to the district's proposal, funds from the 1% sales tax will be allocated toward a number of capital projects, including:

— Safety and security improvements to cameras, metal detectors and radio systems.

— Modernization efforts at Bernd Elementary School.

— Developing and acquiring land.

— Technology purchases

— Heating, ventilation and air conditioning improvements.

— Roof renovations.

— New and energy efficient school buses.

Sam Kitchens, the district's assistant superintendent of operations, said funds will be utilized on items ranging from inclusive playground equipment required by new state laws to updated HVAC units.

"This is not a new tax," he said. "This is a continuation of an existing tax, a 1-cent sales tax where everyone that purchases something in Bibb County contributes something to the local schools."

Members of Keep Building for Bibb Students Inc., a ballot question campaign committee, brought flyers to the Howard High School cafeteria to promote the ESPLOST.

Roy Bibb, Horace Braswell and Amy Morton make up the committee.

All of them are all just

"concerned citizens," Braswell said.

The committee seeks to inform voters on what the tax is and its benefits, he said.

"We feel like if the community really understands it and is informed, it's not a hard decision," Bibb said.

Only 6% of voters turned out for the county's most recent sales tax vote in March, when voters passed a special tax to finance various improvement projects in Macon-Bibb.

The education special tax has been collected since 2000 and has been renewed four times by voters. The 2021 version netted \$185 million for the district and went toward facility renovations and technology upgrades.

Bibb noted the majority of proceeds from the ESPLOST come from people who live outside the county.

Municipalities sometimes implement a sales tax to make up differences in property taxes when forgoing rate increases.

The Bibb County Board of Education voted to raise property taxes over the summer after reducing a larger budget proposed by Superintendent Dan Sims.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

A pedestrian walks across a busy roadway in Macon on Oct. 1. Macon-Bibb County officials are finding ways to better serve people and not just cars, according to Traffic Safety Manager Weston Stroud.

## Gray Highway upgrades hit red light in federal shutdown

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
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A continuing federal government shutdown has postponed the approval of a federally funded project to add streetlights, multiuse trails and sidewalks to parts of Gray Highway, according to Macon-Bibb County officials.

The project would add sidewalks from Shurling Drive to Walmart and to the intersection of Woodlawn Drive and Gray Highway, Traffic Safety Manager Weston Stroud said.

Additionally, a planned multiuse trail for bikes and walkers would follow Clinton Road and connect to the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, North Highland Park and Camellia Garden.

The county is currently in the grant agreement process, Stroud said.

He added that, when the

federal government reopens, the mayor and county commission will receive a finalized grant form to vote upon and sign. That form will then be returned to federal officials for a final OK.

The project is funded by a \$7 million Safe Streets and Roads for All grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Those grant funds were allocated in 2024 under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and with the approval of the Biden presidential administration.

There is a five-year window of completion from time of approval, Stroud said.

He shared project updates during a Pedestrian Safety Month summit Oct. 1, noting that while Gray Highway carries about 40,000 vehicles a day, county officials are focused on finding ways to better serve people and not just cars.

### Traffic calming requests redirected

Stroud also outlined a new process for residents reporting potential traffic-calming concerns.

The county's online SeeClickFix portal, which residents use to report issues from code enforcement to animal welfare, has seen an influx of duplicate reports and large-scale requests — such as speed humps — that require traffic studies and additional review before installation, he said.

When Stroud became traffic safety manager in 2024, he added traffic-specific categories to SeeClickFix to help prioritize smaller issues, such as signal timing, that could be addressed within 48 hours to one week.

To prevent system overload, Stroud asked that requests for larger projects be sent to jross@maconbibb.us.

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

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# PSC hopeful criticizes rate hikes in stop

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
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Early voting for two state Public Service Commission seats kicked off Oct. 14 in Bibb County — and one candidate recently appeared in Macon to rebuke an incumbent commissioner’s record and tout his own plans.

Peter Hubbard, the Democratic candidate for the commission’s District 3 seat, spoke about his plans for making power more affordable, bringing in new energy solutions, and data center growth and regulation.

A small crowd of community members, local Democratic officials — including state Rep. Miriam Paris and state Sen. David Lucas — and party members gathered in Carolyn Crayton Park around Hubbard as he

made remarks and took questions from the audience.

Hubbard is facing off against Republican Fitz Johnson, who has held the seat since 2021. The Democratic nominee said Johnson and his commission colleagues are responsible for several rate hikes over the past two years. He added that the hikes added up to about \$600 for the average Georgian’s electric bill.

Hubbard — who founded the Georgia Center for Energy Solutions, a nonprofit organization advocating for green energy — also said he wants to limit building expensive fossil fuel infrastructure and instead turn to clean energy sources.

“There’s so much sun here in the state,” he said. “Right now, the thumb is on the scale for fossil fuels, with respect to this data center build-out and all of that.”



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Pete Hubbard, Democratic nominee for the Georgia Public Service Commission District 3 seat, speaks with reporters at Carolyn Crayton Park Oct. 14.**

Twiggs County commissioners approved plans for a data center in

the rural county in September, and officials in Jones County are discussing approving a center in that area.

Hubbard said the state utility regulator has set up a “sweetheart” energy deal for data centers.

“They could contribute and help to lower our power bills by paying their fair share, but that’s not what’s happening,” he said.

The other commission seat up for grabs in the November election — District 2 — is currently held by Republican Tim Echols.

He has held the seat since 2011 and is being challenged by Democrat Alicia Johnson.

Hubbard’s press conference took place near the Elaine Lucas Senior Center at 132 Willie Smokie Glover Drive, one of three early voting locations in Bibb County. Registered

voters can also complete early ballots at the board of elections office — 3661 Eisenhower Parkway, Suite MB101 — or at the Theron Ussery Park Community Center at 815 North Macon Park Drive.

As of Oct. 15, 558 residents have voted, according to a board of elections report.

Lucas, a Democrat who has represented Macon in the state Senate since 2013, said members of his party will mitigate rate hikes, and locals need to vote and exercise their “precious right.”

“I don’t care if you’re laying in bed — put on some overalls and go vote,” he said.

View a sample ballot or learn more about your polling place by visiting the board of elections website at [maconbibb.us/board-of-elections](http://maconbibb.us/board-of-elections). Call the board at 478-621-6622.

# RESIDENTS SUE TO STOP DATA CENTER

## Developer says timeline for multibillion-dollar project unaffected

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
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A group of Twiggs County residents are suing the county’s governing board following its decision to approve the development of a multibillion-dollar data center.

The lawsuit, filed Sept. 25, challenges commissioners on their Sept. 18 decision to rezone nearly 300 acres of agricultural land for data center construction and use on Adams Park Road in the Dry Branch community

“This is not what the people moved out to these areas for,” said Nancy Lubeck, one of the plaintiffs. “We moved out here for nature and for how peaceful it is ... we didn’t want to live in the city and around industry.”

Lubeck and her fellow plaintiffs said they own properties near the

approved data center land and “will suffer irreparable injury” from the commission’s decision, according to the lawsuit. It was filed in the county’s Superior Court.

Lubeck and her husband — Twiggs County residents for nearly 30 years — live less than 2 miles from the approved data center’s location.

She said she was also concerned that the project would expand beyond the roughly 291 county-approved acres, but developer Ken Loeber of Eagle Rock Partners, a North Carolina-based development firm, confirmed the project will not go beyond its designated zone.

The lawsuit argues that county-approved procedures surrounding rezoning public notices were not upheld. Plaintiffs also allege commissioners failed to seek regional review for the project, which would

have prompted a state survey of the project’s potential multi-county impact.

The lawsuit also states that the county approved the project’s zoning application — which includes access to State Highway 96 — without permission from the Georgia Department of Transportation.

As a result, the board engaged in “abuse of its police and zoning powers,” according to a copy of the lawsuit.

“We voted them into office, and they are not listening to the people,” Lubeck said.

Commission Chair Ken Fowler declined to comment on the litigation.

Developer Loeber said the case will not delay the data center’s projected development timeline.

A Facebook group coordinating local activity against the data

center’s development has attracted more than 600 members. A petition to put the matter on a public ballot has also been launched.

Residents like Lubeck have voiced concerns about the environmental impact of the data center. She said she is specifically worried about the center depleting the county’s aquifer — a layer of underground rock that holds groundwater — and any effects the development may have on local wells.

Philip McCreanor, chair of environmental and civil engineering at Mercer University, said residents are right to question the impact of the center even beyond the county line.

He said rural communities around the U.S. need to start having similar discussions — and begin deciding if local governments should shoulder infrastructure expenses for a for-profit data center.

He said that, in addition to other concerns, data center development will burden local roads and add to a county’s expenses.

He likened the current discussion around data center development across the country to “Not In My Backyard” protests surrounding landfills.

McCreanor said that, although the construction of data centers creates jobs, he has not seen significant employment upticks after a project is built out.

Despite these matters, the professor said he believes data centers, which store vast amounts of digital information and are crucial for internet services, are inevitable and “critical to America’s future.”

“We need to figure out a way to be on board with this — while respecting community rights, environmental rights,” McCreanor said.



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Emily is a mental health therapist in Macon, specializing in anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

“I have always been the helper,” she said. “I have never been the one who needed the help and support.”

All that changed on a summer day three years ago when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

From the beginning, she was determined to overcome the physical, emotional and financial challenges ahead.

She was confident in her superpowers. Her faith. Her inner strength. Her independence. Her motivation to lace her boots and give cancer a swift kick in the rear.

She has never felt the limitations of life. She has always believed she could do anything.

“Except I can’t draw,” she said, laughing. “I can’t paint. I’m terrible at art.”

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It’s the second-most common cancer in women, behind skin cancer. Almost



Ed GRISAMORE

317,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer in women will be diagnosed in the U.S. this year, according to the American Cancer Society.

The odds of a woman in the U.S. developing breast cancer in her lifetime is 13%, a 1 in 8 chance.

Emily’s situational awareness evolved as her journey progressed. After she read an article about how to “get through chemotherapy when you live alone,” she checked all the boxes.

She realized she was alone — but not alone.

“I am a therapist. I raised two strong kids. I went through a difficult divorce. But nothing will prove your strength like going through cancer treatments,” she said.

When she was diagnosed, she warned her oncologist that she was going to be her “worst patient ever.”

“She asked me why, and I said it was because she was about to make me very sick,” Emily said. “And I wasn’t the ‘worst’ patient. I did everything they told me. I took care of myself. But I got sick because I am

very sensitive to medications, and I had every side effect. Every one of them.”

The tests, the biopsies, the surgeries, the radiation treatments and the more than \$1 million in medical bills were almost tame compared to the gut-punching rounds of chemotherapy.

Chemo is a body slam, a wrecking ball to your spirit. Every three weeks, the brutal cycle would knock her flat and pin her down. Then, as she would start to feel better, it was time to climb back into the ring for another three weeks in the torture chamber.

She lost her hair, of course. She wore hats and wigs and tried to smile through the pain. But every bone in her body hurt. The cumulative effect took its toll, as it does with most cancer patients.

There was brain fog. There were the usual stomach issues. Sleeping was uncomfortable. Her tongue and the inside of her mouth turned raw. She developed neuropathy. She had a horrible skin rash and itched all the time. She could hardly walk from the sofa to the kitchen without getting winded.

“I kept going because I didn’t want to be the person in the bed

feeling sorry for myself,” she said. “I did my best. I really don’t know how I did it, but I did. I kept working through the whole thing. I was very sick, but I never stopped working.”

And she was blessed to have people in her life who wanted to help her.

All she had to do was ask. So whenever she found herself in low moments and dark places, she closed her eyes and told herself she needed to follow the same advice she gave her clients in therapy.

“I was going to do whatever it took to take care of myself,” she said. “But if I needed help, I was going to ask for help. And if someone offered help, and I needed help, I was going to say yes.”

Her parents drove from Arkansas to help her through a difficult stretch of chemo. Her sons — one living in Little Rock and the other in Charlotte, North Carolina — were only a phone call away and did whatever they could to help from across the miles.

Others stepped to the plate. Her friends. Her church. Her Bible student group. United in Pink. Her co-workers. Her clients. Folks from her old neighborhood. Folks from her new neighborhood.

“I had no idea how big my support system was until I had cancer,” Emily said. “If I left the house or went to work, I would come home and there would be something on my front porch. Flowers, food, cards and letters. People would go to the grocery store for me.”

Two months of radiation followed her six rounds of chemotherapy.

When the sun came out from behind the clouds, her health started to trend upward again.

After more than a year of rarely leaving the house except for her treatments, she was cleared to travel. The man she is now dating took her to Oregon and Chicago to celebrate. She also went to visit her son, Matt, who was finishing up a semester of studying abroad in Spain.

“I turned 50, too,” she said, “and was glad to be alive.”

On an autumn day in 2023, as football season arrived at the door and the air turned crisp, she had her final treatment.

She rang the bell and declared herself cancer free.

Columnist Ed Grisamore writes about daily life in Macon and Middle Georgia. Send him a note at [gris@maconmelody.com](mailto:gris@maconmelody.com).

NEW SOUTHERN DAD

In Charleston’s Duelers Alley, history met me in the dark

Philadelphia Alley is a long brick-paved corridor connecting Church and State streets in Charleston’s French Quarter.

The pathway appears on maps in the Holy City as far back as the 18th century.

A lot of feet have walked along the slight serpentine trail that is now fern- and shade-loving plant-lined and protected by moss-covered walls. The place has become a popular tourist spot.

Legend has it that the passage was originally called Cow Alley because people used it to move and keep their livestock. Yes, even city folks needed a cow or a goat or two. It wasn’t until the 1800s that that the stretch of bricks was dubbed Philadelphia



Kyle DOMINY

Alley for the City of Brotherly Love after some aid was rendered in the wake of a massive fire that left Charleston charred and smoldering.

Renaming the place you keep your cows doesn’t seem like much of an honor to me, but what do I know?

To the locals, though, the area is known as Duelers Alley and was the scene to at least a dozen or more duels.

Though we now look at the practice as barbaric, dueling was a popular way for gentlemen, if you can call them that, to settle their differ-

ences and defend themselves when their honor was at stake.

The art was prominent up until the Civil War. Even Abraham Lincoln was challenged to duel by one of his critics, allegedly to be settled “bare-chested with broadswords in a pit.” I guess they didn’t have alleys in Illinois.

Maybe we should reintroduce dueling. People are always kinder if there’s a chance of getting punched in the jaw or shot at 50 paces.

How many people died on the bricks of Philadelphia Alley has been lost to time. But some say, at least the city’s robust tourist industry, that the blood-soaked soil is haunted by at least one ghost.

The stories of Charleston’s duels

are public domain and can be found all over the internet, so I won’t bore you. I usually don’t put much weight into ghost stories, but I’ve spent a lot of time in Charleston over the years and on almost every trip I walk through Philadelphia Alley.

I like to walk through in the dead of night, after the tourists and the tour groups have passed through, but before the bars let out, so there is nothing but silence and solitude and the darkness is only broken by the pale-yellow beams of the staggered security lights.

Usually I’m armed with a camera, cellphone or otherwise, to snap a few pictures.

One night more than a decade ago I was walking along the alley with

some friends. As usual I was stopping intermittently to take photos of the shadows cast on the brick when a chill ran down my spine.

For several moments I was frozen in time, unable to move.

When I regained control of my faculties I was overcome with a sense of uneasy fear. I looked at my friends and said: “Let’s get out of here.”

I don’t put much weight in ghost stories, but I believe in ghosts enough to know I don’t want to mess with them. I never looked at the pictures I took that night and I haven’t been to Duelers Alley since.

Kyle Dominy is a reporter based in Dublin.

Regulating social media won’t do what good parenting can

The Georgia Senate has been grappling with one of society’s only bipartisan issues: How to protect children from the dangers of social media.

Even after the legislative session ended earlier this year, senators have continued studying the matter.

The Senate Impact of Social Media and Artificial Intelligence on Children and Platform Privacy Protection Study Committee has already met three times to learn about the scope of the problem and recommend legislative solutions. Yet despite broad bipartisan agreement that a problem exists, settling on a fix has been difficult.

Lawmakers have already debated a number of government-imposed answers, but nearly all of them are critically flawed.

While there is a modest role for the government to play, the debate often sidesteps and diminishes pa-



Marc HYDEN

rental responsibility on an issue that has become increasingly concerning.

“While social media may have benefits for some children and adolescents,” reads a 2023 U.S. Surgeon General’s advisory, “there are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.”

Cyberbullying, seeing inappropriate online content and so forth can result in heightened anxiety, depression or worse for youths.

While social media allows many of us to keep in touch with loved ones, catch up on the news and share information, it can undermine our well-being, too. Anyone who has spent any time online knows that it is peppered with content unsuitable for juveniles and perhaps for adults too.

To borrow a quote from Star Wars and apply it to social media, “You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”

Lawmakers have recognized this problem, and in 2024, the Legis-

lature attempted to tackle it. They passed Senate Bill 351, which restricted the use of social media on school devices and networks. This makes sense, given that children are there to learn and not play on social media, but the measure also altered school curriculum for the better.

It requires that public schools offer courses to help students better cope with social media, and I appreciate this. Many of us learned how to dissect a frog and use advanced algebra, but we never employed that knowledge as adults.

Unlike these experiences, social media education can be a valuable real-world application to help kids navigate a complex and dangerous world.

However, part of this landmark bill is gummed up in the courts. The law’s text prohibits minors from having social media accounts unless their parents consent. This may sound promising in theory, but there are serious concerns surrounding this provision.

The courts have even placed it on ice since there are First Amendment implications, and it may also expose Georgians’ private information to hackers. It will be some time before the courts decide on the case.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, legislators approved House Bill 340, which effectively banned children’s use of cellphones in K-8 schools. Again, this seems like a common-sense approach to keep children engaged and is well within the government’s purview, but what else can policymakers do? That’s what the study committee wants to find out.

Some suggestions have revolved around more heavily regulating social media’s business practices, including curtailing the auto-play function, altering proprietary algorithms, determining what kinds of ads are displayed and banning kids from using social media. All of these take a government-first approach, and that might be a mistake.

Parents are responsible for their children in the real world and digital world. Parents can prohibit their kids from owning electronic devices and limit their access to various kinds of content, and they should. The internet provides a host of societal benefits, but there is also a hazardous underbelly. If parents decide that their kids are mature enough to join social media, then there are numerous free tools available that filter out inappropriate content.

Instead of focusing on empow-

ering parents, there seems to be an urge to empower the government to act in their stead. This is a curious strategy. The government tends to support one-size-fits-all solutions that aren’t always well-tailored to the complexities of family life, and let’s be honest: the government is imperfect. Do you want the same government that struggles to fill potholes to make these parenting decisions for your kids? Of course not.

I’d rather see the government work with nonprofits to create a voluntary curriculum for parents to learn more about social media’s risks and how they can mitigate them. This approach along with some previously enacted legislation is not a silver bullet, but they are giant strides toward solving the problem without unduly meddling with private enterprise and parental responsibility.

Whatever lawmakers decide, it is clear that the government is a poor substitute for good parents, and electronic devices are terrible babysitters.

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).

The Macon Melody

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# Doctors say cost cuts threaten independence

**BY TY TAGAMI**  
**Capitol Beat News Service**

An initiative by insurance companies to reduce high-cost doctor visits could cause physicians to abandon private practice and work for big hospital chains, independent practitioners are warning. They say the trend could drive up patient costs.

Cigna implemented a policy last week to flag bills that appear to be too high.

The insurance company may reduce payouts by one billing level “when the encounter criteria on the claim does not support the higher-level” payment code, the new policy says.

**All of a sudden, that doctor that you’re used to seeing is now in a health system.**

— DR. DAVID EAGLE, AIMA

Dr. David Eagle, vice president of the American Independent Medical Practice Association, expects the new cost containment approach to erode income for private doctors, with long-term consequences for their patients.

Providers will be able to appeal downgraded billing claims by sending detailed medical records, but it is a labor-intensive process, said Eagle, a blood and cancer specialist in New York.

He suspects such “downcoding” decisions will be made using algorithms that rapidly assess claim forms containing few details.

Small doctors’ offices won’t be able to keep pace, he said: “Basically, they’re going to be underpaying the doctors based on information on the claim form.”

Cigna said only about 1% of providers in its network will be affected by the new policy, which “aims to reduce overbilling.” A one-level claim downcode will result in an average \$50 reduction in payment, the company said in a written statement.

But \$50 per visit adds up for a practice that runs on thin margins, said Dr. Bradley Sumrall, a blood and cancer specialist in Macon.

“I see 25, 30 patients a day. If you take out fifty bucks a patient, that’s \$1,500 a day. That’s several employees,” he said. “We run on thin margins. We need money coming back to us in a timely manner, and anything that erodes that or slows it down puts more pressure on us to stay afloat.”

Aetna has had a similar downcoding policy for at least a couple of years.

A spokesperson responded in writing that the company is obliged to monitor payment claims for its clients and members and to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse of Medicare and Medicaid.

Independent providers worry that such cost-saving policies will erode their income and drive more of them to work under the umbrella of big businesses with robust billing departments.

Independent doctors’ billing of-

fices typically lack the firepower to push back as effectively as a hospital’s or a health system’s, Eagle said.

The proportion of physicians who left independent practice for employment under hospitals and health systems doubled over the past dozen years, rising to 55% in 2024, according to a study by the Physicians Advocacy Institute.

Independent doctors say downcoding policies could accelerate that trend, with long-term consequences for patient costs.

Dr. Elizabeth Burns, an Atlanta dermatologist, said she understands the motivation of the insurance companies, adding that it conflicts with a provider’s mission.

“They’re trying to save money. That’s their main objective,” she said. “The majority of doctors, their main objective is for the patient to get the best care.”

Some “outlier” physicians might overbill and should be audited, Burns said. “But it shouldn’t affect all the other people who are correctly coding and whose medical visit

notes justify the codes that they’re submitting.”

Eagle predicted that this money-saving maneuver will drive up costs for patients. He said he was previously in an oncology group in North Carolina that joined a hospital system to cope with expanding administrative burdens and decreasing reimbursements.

His patients then encountered new facility fees and increased co-pays, he said.

“So, I’ve lived it. This does have an impact when physicians move from the private setting to the independent setting,” Eagle said. “Everything else was the same. I was the same doctor, it was the same patient, they came to the same building, they got the same service. And many of them, because of the facility fees, paid a lot more for their co-pays. And some of my patients just said, ‘Look, I can’t keep seeing you anymore.’ So, it can have an impact, no doubt about it. All of a sudden, that doctor that you’re used to seeing is now in a health system.”

## ORGANIST

Continued from Page A1

He had ulna surgery on his left arm last month and returned on cue two weeks later. He took his familiar seat at the German-made Moller pipe organ, which was installed when the sanctuary was built at the Shirley Hills church in 1967.

“I never married, so music has been my life,” he said. “I have never lost that drive for playing the organ, and that’s why I’m still here. But I also want to know when it’s time to stop. I don’t want to be that old man up there trying to play.”

If he turns back the clock, he can hear the old piano in the dining room at his family’s restaurant in Tifton.

He learned to play on that piano, his fingers moving up and down the ebony and ivory.

Carper was the oldest of Sidney and Antoinette Carper’s four sons. They owned the Alpine Restaurant near the intersection of Highways 41 and 82 in Tifton. Their home was next door to the restaurant.

When he was a child, Carper woke up from his nap one afternoon to find the piano in the living room. His parents had purchased a new one for the restaurant and had the old piano moved to the house.

“I remember being upset that there was no piano bench,” Carper said. “So our maid got me a kitchen chair. I played by ear until I started taking lessons. I played that piano all the way through high school.”

His mother died when he was 11, a few years after he began taking piano lessons from his third-grade teacher. He would sometimes skip Sunday school at the First United Methodist to watch the church organist practice the hymns she would play during the service.

In junior high, he took advanced piano lessons from a woman who lived across the street from the school. He also began learning to play the organ from a college stu-

dent when she was home for the summers.

“It was extremely difficult getting my hands and feet to work together,” he said. “She didn’t have a lot of teaching experience, and I think she wanted me to go faster than I could. By the next summer, I had learned to coordinate my hands and feet, and I began to work on playing hymns.”

Carper was only 14 when the music committee at St. Anne’s Episcopal Church in Tifton approached him about being their organist. The pay was \$5 a week. The congregation was small. There was no choir. He was not old enough to drive himself to church.

He played for the Christmas Eve service five months before he graduated from high school. That night was an affirmation that music would be his life’s calling.

He was accepted into the music program at Shorter College in Rome. But three weeks before classes started, his father suffered a massive heart attack, and Carper returned to Tifton to help his family care for him.

He had to enroll at nearby Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. While he had no aspirations of becoming a farmer, the seeds were being planted for his future in music.

He asked St. Anne’s if he could have his old job back.

He took classes in music theory and began taking organ lessons from the organist at First Baptist Church in Tifton.

When First Baptist later asked him to serve as its interim organist, he walked a block down the street and got a pay raise to \$25 a week.

He received his Bachelor of Music degree from Georgia Southern, where he continued his growth under the tutelage of Lavinia Floyd.

“She was like a mother,” he said. “She was very good to me.”

Carper earned his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Georgia. He purchased his first car and was

hired as acting director of the music department at Middle Georgia College in Cochran.

While attending an organ recital workshop at Mercer University in 1974, he asked one of his UGA classmates, Chris Hornsby, if he knew of any music opportunities in Macon. Hornsby and Ernest Penley owned Baldwin Piano and Organ on Riverside Drive, which later became Georgia Music.

“Well, there’s a church out here with a pipe organ and no one to play it,” Hornsby told him.

That church was Ingleside Baptist, now one of the largest in Macon. Carper was there for 12 years. He offered private piano lessons at his home, served as a part-time instructor at Macon Junior College (now Middle Georgia State) and taught weekly classes as an adjunct professor at UGA.

He left Ingleside and served as the organist at Bloomfield Methodist for one year before finding a permanent home in the choir loft at Highland Hills in 1987.

“Highland Hills is a church with a historically strong emphasis on good music,” he said. “I’ve been here longer than anybody.”

Carper keeps notes on every wedding — when and where it was held and what music was played. A woman recently reintroduced herself to Carper at a funeral and told him that he had played for her wedding 46 years ago.

He has participated in the organ concerts at Mulberry Street United Methodist during the Cherry Blossom Festival.

He also serves as treasurer of the Macon chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

He often reflects on his role in the ministry.

“I don’t walk in thinking I have all this power, but the organist has more power than anybody in the church,” he said “There may be a music director, but they’re listening to you.”

## TIMS

Continued from Page A1

care initiative in partnership with Atrium Health Navicent.

That program was promising but needs some tweaks, he noted.

The CEO-in-waiting said he looks

forward to building the nonprofit’s relationship with business and community leaders.

United Way grants and programs are funded through a mix of local donors and grants, and Tims said he wants to explore pulling in more grant funding.

Tims joined United Way about two years ago. Before that, he worked for insurance provider GEICO for three decades. He said his corporate background helps him bring a strong focus on results to the nonprofit space.

“We have to be more flexible and

adaptive than ever before ... the way people want to contribute is changing,” he said.

Younger generations are passionate about causes, and their giving is tied to trust in the organizations to which they donate. Those donors also want to see where the money

goes and its direct impact, Tims noted.

He said his organization will continue to build trust with local donors — and will aim to build up the local United Way brand with younger generations by offering more volunteer opportunities.

## ADVOCATES

Continued from Page A1

or those who choose to donate their organs. She supports a growing network of transplant recipients and helps boost organ donor numbers. In Macon-Bibb County, 36% of adults are registered donors, according to LifeLink data.

Ide said her work also includes dispelling common misconceptions about organ donation. She said people often think it costs to be a donor — it doesn’t — or that there’s an age limit (there’s not). People also think, she said, that the organ donation process desecrates one’s body, but it doesn’t, she noted.

Ide admitted that the process can be confounding to those who haven’t experienced it. That was the case for Macon native Candice Stephens, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disease where the body’s immune system destroys the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas, at 7.

Wanting to “be normal,” she said she “broke up” with the disease in college — stopping her regular doctor’s visits and failing to properly manage her condition.

“I was really tired of the blood sugar sticks ... the insulin shots ... the portion this, portion that,” she said.

Her condition worsened, and she

soon developed chronic kidney failure. She was at stage 3 of 5 — indicating mild to moderate kidney loss — and in need of a transplant. She said it was a “sobering” time for her — especially when her doctors told her improvements were unlikely if she did nothing.

Her husband stepped in as her organ donor match. With the transplant complete, the couple recovered together — and Stephens later received a pancreas transplant, which allowed her to cure the insulin-depleting disease.

Stephens said her experience inspired her to help others throughout their transplant journeys. She founded the Day After Foundation

in November 2024. The group offers advocacy and support services for those involved in the donation process. She also hosts a monthly support group through the Georgia Transplant Foundation.

Stephens, who is Black, said community education efforts are necessary, especially for minority communities. More than 60% of residents on Georgia’s organ transplant registry are Black, according to LifeLink data.

She said harmful medical experiences have “conditioned” Black Americans to be fearful of the transplant process, but advocacy and support work are breaking barriers and stigmas.

Denisetrice said that Macon’s Black community does indeed lack awareness of the organ transplant process and needs more education regarding availability and procedures. Like Stephens, she’s working to tackle the issue.

She said she’s planning an organ donation seminar for an upcoming women’s conference at her church and will continue awareness efforts at the grassroots level.

She urged members of the public to register for organ donation.

“It’s important to give if you can give,” Denisetrice said.

Visit [mystorycontinues.com](http://mystorycontinues.com) to register. You can also sign up when applying for or renewing a license.

## “PRAISE, MY SOUL, THE KING OF HEAVEN”

*Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven;  
To His feet thy tribute bring!  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me His praise should sing?  
Praise Him! praise Him!  
Praise the everlasting King!*

*Praise Him for His grace and favor  
To our fathers in distress!  
Praise Him still the same for ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless!  
Praise Him! praise Him!  
Glorious in His faithfulness.*

*Fatherlike He tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame He knows.  
In His hands He gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise Him! praise Him!  
Widely as His mercy flows!*

*Frail as summer’s flower we flourish;  
Blows the wind, and it is gone;  
But while mortals rise and perish,  
God endures unchanging on,  
Praise Him, praise Him!  
Praise the high eternal One!*

*Angels, help us to adore Him;  
Ye behold Him face to face:  
Sun and moon, bow down before Him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise with us the God of grace!*

Words by Henry F. Lyte, 1834  
Music by John Goss, 1869

**Among church organist Gerald Carper’s favorite hymns are “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven,” a triumphant piece he says lets him “build the organ to full sound.” He also treasures “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” for its introspective lyrics; “The First Noel,” which he says “tells the whole Christmas story,” and “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” which he calls “a wonderful hymn — the resurrection.”**



FROM OUR KITCHENS

# Tailgating a tasty Southern tradition

BY DAVID PRIM  
Special to The Melody

It all starts with the love of college football and, in my case, a love of the Georgia Bulldogs.

I remember as a youngster grabbing a blanket on the railroad tracks to watch the Dawgs play at Sanford Stadium in the early 1970s.

Once I had season tickets, it was on. I just loved being between the hedges to watch the Dawgs.

My game-day tradition starts at sunrise. We grab our tent, chairs, tables and tailgate spot, talk football and fire up the grill for a full day with friends who share my passion for UGA football before heading into the stadium for kickoff. Who couldn't love that?

You can't tailgate without good, old slow-smoked southern BBQ, and I soaked up as much knowledge as I could to perfect the "art" of barbecuing.

I had help from friends like Jake Fincher, the third-generation owner of Fincher's BBQ. Also, Lonnie Smith with Bubba Grills took me under his wing and shared his techniques for the perfect smoked butt and ribs while building me my first smoker.

I took my grandmother's world-famous Brunswick Stew recipe — well, maybe not world famous but definitely "slap yo mama good" — as well as many amazing recipes over the last 40-plus years to try and improve each tailgate.

Lifelong friendships and bonds are my most cherished memories of years of tailgating. Whether we are in Athens, Jacksonville or Baton Rouge, each game has a special tailgate theme — from "gator tail" to "Gamecock chicken" or just good old smoked BBQ.

Jim Cole took over the athletic director position for Mercer University Athletics and, along with President William Underwood, built an amazing athletic program, bringing



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
**Longtime Georgia and Mercer fan David Prim has spent years perfecting his tailgating tradition — from slow-smoked barbecue to game-day camaraderie.**

back football and putting Mercer on the map as not only an elite academic school but one with an elite athletic program.

I grilled for Jim's political campaign fundraisers before he came to Mercer, and he told me I would be the cook for Mercer Athletics. While I've enjoyed UGA tailgating, Mercer tailgating also means a lot to me. Mercer — with coaches like Bobby Lamb, Drew Cronin and Mike Jacobs — just feels like a family.

Cooking for these coaches and meeting them and their players has been a great experience.

Mercer just does it better. We were there when Coach Bob Hoffman's Mercer team knocked off the Duke Blue Devils in the NCAA tournament, and we were there to see Coach Susie Gardner's multiple women's basketball championships.

Being a grillmaster or tailgate fanatic has given me so much joy over the years — and I love it as much today at 69 going on 70 as I did in my younger days.

So, I'm hungry; let's fire up the grill!

## BULLDAWG GAMEDAY BRUNSWICK STEW

- 6 cans of cream corn.
- 4 cans of Le Sueur peas, drained.
- 12 cans of diced tomatoes.
- 2 bottles of ketchup.
- 2 onions, cut fine.
- 1 bottle hot sauce (minimum).
- One-fourth cup of brown sugar.
- 1 teaspoon of minced garlic.
- One-half gallon to 1 gallon of chicken broth.
- Smoked, grilled meat: 3 pounds pork butt, 3 pounds chicken, 1 pound pork sausage, 1 pound ground beef.
- Herbs; salt and pepper to taste.
- Add, if you like, vegetables (mushrooms, okra, etc.).

## BULLDAWG CAVIAR

- 2 15-ounce cans of black-eyed peas, drained.
- 1 15-ounce can whole shoepeg corn, drained.
- 1 10-ounce can of Rotel tomatoes.
- 2 cups of chopped red bell peppers (orange if for Mercer).
- One-half cup of fresh jalapeno peppers.
- One-half cup of chopped red onion or sweet onion.
- 1 8-ounce bottle of Newman's country-style Italian dressing.
- 1 4-ounce jar of chopped pimentos, drained.

Mix and refrigerate.

# Take steps now to stop grass disease

BY SCOTT NASH  
Special to The Melody

Now is the best time to prevent one serious problem for your lawn.

As temperatures drop and daylight decreases, warm-season turf grasses — including bermudagrass, St. Augustine grass, centipedegrass and zoysiagrass — become vulnerable to Large Patch disease.

In fact, Large Patch is the most common and problematic turf grass disease in Georgia.

In our area, centipedegrass and zoysiagrass are especially susceptible.

Large Patch creates areas of dead grass that form a rough circle ranging from 2 to more than 20 feet in diameter.

The outer rings of the patches may appear orange, yellow or sometimes gray, and the centers sunken or bare.

The culprit behind the damage is a fungus called *Rhizoctonia solani*. This fungus lives in the soil and thatch layer of the grass and attacks the grass in the fall, when its growth slows and the lawn moves toward winter dormancy, and again in the spring as the grass begins to green up.

It is especially active when ground temperatures range from 50-70 degrees and when the grass stays moist for at least 48 hours.

Large Patch thrives in thick thatch and overly-watered lawns. Poor drainage, soil compaction and too much shade also encourage its spread.

Fertilizing too early in the spring (generally before May 1 in Middle



PHOTO COURTESY UGA

**Large Patch disease is the most common turf grass disease in Georgia, but it can be prevented with intentional action and care, according to gardeners at the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.**

Georgia) or too late in the fall (after Sept. 1) also contribute to Large Patch's success.

Getting a soil test through your local University of Georgia extension office will help you learn what nutrients your grass needs.

There are several steps to prevent Large Patch. Since turf grass requires full sun, start by trimming trees and shrubs to reduce shaded areas of the lawn.

Mow your lawn to the recommended height with a sharpened mower blade, and never remove more than one-third of the grass blade at a time. These practices will improve air circulation and help the grass to ward off fungal infections.

It may also be necessary to correct poor drainage by installing drainage tiles or alleviating soil compaction to increase soil porosity.

Above all, avoid overwatering your lawn. Grass only needs an inch of water, including rain, per week.

You can find calendars for proper maintenance practices for your turf grass type online at [turf.caes.uga.edu](http://turf.caes.uga.edu).

Finally, you can apply fungicides to combat Large Patch.

If your lawn has a history of turf grass disease, October is the ideal month to treat it with a preventative fungicide.

Several different chemicals are effective in Large Patch control, including those with the active ingredients myclobutanil, propiconazole and azoxystrobin. Both liquid and granular products for home use can be purchased from local retailers.

Remember to check the fungicide label for specific instructions, restrictions, rates, recommendations and proper follow-up and handling.

Carefully follow the directions.

The *Rhizoctonia* fungus is persistent, but if you treat it now, you can avoid more serious problems in the spring. However, should you see evidence of Large Patch as your lawn greens-up in the spring, a follow-up application may be necessary.

If you have any gardening or landscape questions, contact the UGA Extension's Bibb office at 478-310-5350 or at [bibb.extension@uga.edu](mailto:bibb.extension@uga.edu).

*Scott Nash is with the Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Program. The program connects University of Georgia Cooperative Extension employees with plant enthusiasts and community members across the state.*

# October events honor Middle Georgia cultural, civic icons

BY LIZ FABIAN  
The Macon Newsroom

October brings special honors for some local leaders who either broke racial barriers or are champions of the arts in Middle Georgia.

The James Wimberly Institute of Black Studies and History shifted this year's Racial Barrier Breakers Celebration to Saturday, Oct. 18, at 6 p.m. at the Anderson Conference Center in part to underscore that "African American and African diaspora history should be honored year-round," founder and President Henry Ficklin explained in a news release.

The celebration had its origins in February's Black History Month and last year moved to June, which is now full of Juneteenth celebrations.

"We enjoy the fact that so many celebrations are in place to honor the culture, history, and legacy of African Americans," Ficklin stated in the release. "We often hear that Black History — which is American History — should be celebrated all year, so we have added an additional month to the celebration."

He noted that England celebrates Black History Month in October and the Wimberly Institute joins in the growing international recognition.

This year, the institute honors State Sen. David Lucas' "record-setting legacy

of leadership and advocacy for Middle Georgia" in his 50th year serving in the Georgia General Assembly along with civil rights champion Myrna Davis Bell.

Additional honorees include:

— Alex Habersham, first Black tax assessor.

— Thelma Dillard, first Black member of the Regional Commission.

— Harold Young, first Black executive director of the Tubman Museum.

— Quintress Gilbert, first Black judge of Bibb County Juvenile Court.

— Zack Dozier, owner of first law firm to name Black partner.

— Troy Young, first Black real estate agent.

— George Muhammad, Ecleamus Ricks, Diane Hayes Scott, Walter Searcy and Judge Cheferré Young.

The banquet features former Georgia Commissioner of Labor Michael Thurmond as keynote speaker. Tickets are \$65, which includes live music from the LDM Band.

### Arts Alliance Cultural Awards

Co-founder of R.E.M. Mike Mills is slated to receive one of the Macon Arts Alliance's highest honors — the Zelma and Otis Redding Spirit of Community Award, which is "given to a person of tremendous talent who gives back to our community in a big way."



MILLS

Internationally-acclaimed violinist Robert McDuffie, who collaborated with Mills and keyboardist Chuck Leavell for the Emmy Award-winning "Night of Georgia Music," is the only other recipient of this honor in the alliance's 40-year history.

The alliance's Cultural Awards have honored dozens of individuals, organizations and businesses for their "significant contributions to the cultural life of Central Georgia through their work or philanthropic efforts."

The 2025 honorees are Grant's Lounge, Mercer University's Senior Vice President for Marketing Communications and Chief of Staff Larry Brumley, musician Newton Collier, and Big Hair Productions' owner Tabitha Lynne Walker, who also co-founded the Macon Film Festival.

The Cultural Awards at the Mill Hill Community Arts Center on Thursday, Oct. 23, begin with a 5:30 p.m. reception before the 6 p.m. ceremony.

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LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

# Testing your pigskin prowess

BY ED GRISAMORE  
gris@maconmelody.com

**1. It has been 50 years since a Macon public school won a Georgia High School Association state championship. Which school won the 1975 Class AAA title with Mike Jolley as quarterback?**

- A — Northeast.
- B — Southwest.
- C — Central.
- D — Dudley Hughes.

**2. The late Bill Yoast, a 1949 graduate of Mercer University, was a high school assistant football coach whose life was portrayed in what movie?**

- A — “Remember the Titans.”
- B — “Bad News Mercer Bears.”
- C — “Rudy.”
- D — “We Are Marshall.”

**3. Billy Henderson started the football program at Macon’s Willingham High in the fall of 1958. Which player did Henderson NOT coach in stints at Athens High and Clarke Central in Athens?**

- A — Brian Kemp.
- B — Derek Dooley.
- C — Herschel Walker.
- D — Fran Tarkenton.

**4. Mercer was the first opponent of what two schools when they started their football programs in 1892?**

- A — Duke and Wake Forest.
- B — Samford and Furman.
- C — Auburn and Alabama.
- D — Georgia and Georgia Tech.

**5. Macon’s Jeff Battcher is a former college quarterback at Utah. He later became sports director at Macon’s WGXA-TV, Ch. 24. What other former college quarterback preceded him as sports anchor at the station?**

- A — Georgia’s John Lastinger.
- B — Florida’s Tim Tebow.
- C — Tennessee’s Peyton Manning.
- D — Auburn’s Cam Newton.

**6. Macon’s Vernon Smith, a former star at Lanier High, scored all 15 points (two touchdowns, an extra point and a safety) in Georgia’s 15-0 victory over Yale in the first game played at Sanford Stadium on Oct. 12, 1929. Smith got his famous nickname for biting the**

**head off of what at Lakeside Park in Macon?**

- A — Salamander.
- B — Catfish.
- C — Cicada.
- D — Copperhead.

**7. Which of the following is NOT true about Jim Parker, who graduated from Macon’s Ballard-Hudson High School?**

- A — At Ohio State, he was the first African-American to win the Outland Trophy, annually awarded to college football’s top defensive player.
- B — He was a first-round draft pick in 1957, and helped the Baltimore Colts win two NFL titles.
- C — He was the first full-time offensive lineman inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
- D — He was a pass protector for quarterback Bart Starr.

**8. Another Ballard-Hudson standout, Julius Adams, played his entire NFL career (16 seasons) with one team, including its first appearance in the Super Bowl in January 1986. Which pro team did Adams play for?**

- A — Miami Dolphins.
- B — New England Patriots.
- C — New Orleans Saints.
- D — Detroit Lions.

**9. Chris Hatcher, the head coach at Samford University, was a star quarterback at Mound de Sales in Macon. In 1994, he won the Harlon Hill Award, the Division II equivalent of the Heisman Trophy, playing for which college team?**

- A — Valdosta State.
- B — Troy State.
- C — Wofford.
- D — Austin Peay.

**10. Bobby Bryant, who earned 13 letters at Macon’s Willingham High, was a star in football and baseball at South Carolina. He went on to play cornerback in four Super Bowls for what NFL team?**

- A — New York Giants.
- B — Pittsburgh Steelers.
- C — Chicago Bears.
- D — Minnesota Vikings.

**11. What does former Lanier High great Theron Sapp have in common with Herschel Walker, Frank Sinkwich and Charlie Trippi?**

- A — They all won the Heisman Trophy.
- B — They are the only four Georgia football players to

have their jerseys retired.  
C — The Bulldogs signed them through the transfer portal.  
D — They worked as curb hops at The Varsity on West Broad Street in Athens.

**12. Macon’s Kareem Jackson, who played at Westside High School and the University of Alabama, was a first-round draft pick of the NFL’s Houston Texans in 2010. As a child, he had a sweet tooth, earning him the nickname of what kind of candy?**

- A — Jaw Breaker.
- B — Pop Rock.
- C — Jelly Bean.
- D — Skittle.

**ANSWER KEY:**

- (1) C. (2) A. (3) C. (4) D. (5) A. (6) B. (7) D. (8) B. (9) A. (10) D. (11) B. (12) C.

**REPORT CARD:**

- (10-12) Head coach.
- (7-9) Star quarterback.
- (3-6) Scout team kicker.
- (0-2) SEC official for Georgia-Auburn game.



# INVASION OF THE GIANT SPIDER

*Black and yellow arachnids from East Asia continue Georgia growth*

BY ROSS WILLIAMS  
Georgia Recorder

On top of everything else that’s going on, now Georgia is being invaded by giant spiders.

If you live in north Georgia, there’s a good chance you’ve come face to cephalothorax with the Joro spider in the last few years.

The behemoth black and yellow arachnids hitched a ride to Georgia from East Asia around 2014. They have been growing in population ever since.

Last year’s count from the University of Georgia’s Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health turned up more than 2,200 spiders, up from around 1,900 the year before.

The actual population is likely much higher.

Female Joros, whose leg span can exceed three inches, lay up to 500 eggs at a time starting in mid-October.

The eight-legged critter’s bite poses no danger to people or pets, and they are inclined to flee rather than fight when disturbed, though that’s likely cold comfort to anyone

unlucky enough to wander face-first into their thick, sticky webs on a dark front porch or forest trail.

The little pests also don’t appear to pose any threat to Georgia crops or to its ecosystem, but the keyword is appear, said Rebekah Wallace with UGA’s Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health.

“We don’t know that at this time. They’re still being researched,” she said.

With some invasive species like the honeybee-killing yellow-legged hornet, researchers know ahead of time that they are bad news.

“With Joro spiders, it wasn’t on the radar for most of the people doing this type of research,” Wallace said. “And so they’re still trying to understand what impacts they could be having. Whereas something that came in that is going to be a known impact on some of our crop species, they know ahead of time, ‘OK, this is going to impact this crop species, which is potentially going to have these economic impacts.’ But we didn’t have that kind of head start for Joro spiders.”

Citizens can help researchers track the spiders’ spread at joro-

watch.org, which was developed by the University of Georgia, by filling out a form and attaching a photo. Peak Joro spotting season lasts from August through October.

Wallace said people often confuse Joros with a native species of spider called the golden silk orb weaver, but there are ways to tell them apart.

For Joros, the back of the adult female’s abdomen is yellow with bluish-green bands, and its belly is black and yellow with a reddish splotch. Their legs are usually black and yellow, but occasionally all black.

For golden silk orb weavers, the body is more orange with whitish, silvery spots, and the legs are yellow with brownish bands.

“And the bands have huge tufts of hair on them,” Wallace said about the orb weavers. “They look like they’re wearing leg warmers.”

Experts say some invasive bugs like the Spotted Lanternfly are too dangerous to be allowed to live and should be killed on sight, but the Joro is not in this category.

*This story was first published at georgiarecorder.com.*



PHOTO COURTESY UGA  
The Joro spider, which came to Georgia from East Asia around 2014, has rapidly grown in population. In 2024, there were more than 2,200 of the arachnids in the Peach State.

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Modern blues artists in Macon for revival fest

The All Blues Music & Arts Revival returns to Macon Saturday, Oct. 18, bringing to town modern blues artists from Chicago, Memphis, Tennessee, the Mississippi Delta and Alabama, alongside about two dozen Southeastern folk artists.

“This is the second All Blues Music & Arts Revival, the first being two years ago in 2023 as part of the Macon bicentennial celebration,” said festival organizer Johnny Mollica. “This year we have a slightly smaller footprint with one music stage instead of two like the original, but the music and the art couldn’t be better. There’ll be music the entire time with Brotha’ Rick Patton kicking things off at noon, Little Willie Farmer playing around 2 p.m., Alvin Youngblood Hart’s Muscle Theory at 4 p.m., and Lil’ Ed and the Blues Imperials finishing things off at 6 p.m.”

Mollica said Patton represents Alabama blues, Farmer the Mississippi Delta, Hart Memphis and Lil’ Ed Chicago blues.

Mollica has been a blues lover since his youth, but it was cemented when the Massachusetts native moved to Memphis to attend college.

“Music, especially blues music, was just in the air, man,” he said. “I was a young guy living in Memphis in the ’80s and it was everywhere all the time. You’d walk down the street and there’d be music and there were all these great little blues clubs you could go to. I just figured, ‘Hey, that’s the way it is. There’s always going to be a good blues band playing everywhere.’ But then, little by little, I started looking around and going, ‘Hey, where’d all the blues bands go?’”

He said the inspiration for the Revival came from wanting to preserve blues traditions and showcase musicians who still carry them.

“I figured Macon was a good place



Michael W. PANNELL

throw a party’ kind of thing. It’s actually an educational experience for people to come to and hear these bands and have a good time, but also learn something and get a greater appreciation for the blues and where the music comes from. It really is a music of the people with a lot of soul and heart to it.”

Mollica first came to Macon in the late ‘90s after working on the road with Kirk West, then tour manager for Gov’t Mule, an offshoot of the latter-day Allman Brothers Band. He later moved to Atlanta, then Boston, before returning to settle in Macon in 2015.

“I realized the reason I left in the first place was because I hate winter,” he said. “I always liked Macon, and when I came back in 2015 I couldn’t believe all the changes that made it even better. There were a lot of new things happening music-wise and art-wise.”

Mollica is himself an artist. For a season, his art took the form of T-shirts. Those skills led him to designing shirts, posters and album covers for the Allman Brothers, Derek Trucks, Susan Tedeschi and other bands, musicians and promoters.

His own work largely falls under the category of folk art, with some pieces reflecting what he calls absurdist art — a reaction to an often absurd world.

“There’s a strong connection between folk art and the blues,” Mollica said. “Folk art is partly defined as art produced by ‘untrained’ artists — artists who took to it because of a burning need to create without

to try to create a hub for whatever’s left of it. There’s a lot of blues music that came from this area. It’s culturally significant.

The Revival isn’t really an ‘Oh, let’s

having learned all about it or being trained in school. Same for early blues players. Folk artists work with all kinds of materials; they use what they find around them and have access to.

“Another connection is, when all these guys were opening these little country blues clubs and juke joints back in the day, they were doing it with little to no money — definitely no money for decorations. So, you find a lot of art in them made by people around them, folk artists, using what they had to go where their vision and heart and talent took them. That’s why I wanted to make folk art a part of the Revival.”

Mollica said the art side of the festival is being staged by artists Brandy Mohn and Rhonda Miller of Macon’s Mind’s Eye Connections and Casie Trace of ArtSpace Macon.

“Most of the artists are from Macon, a bunch are from Athens and a few others are from around Georgia and the Southeast,” Mollica said. “There’s going to be a Kids’ Art Zone where kids can create art on these big panels we have. We use these panels as part of the Revival. What the kids painted last year is up this year, and what’s done this year will be around for the next one. Adults can work on them, too. Of course, some of the artists who come will be producing work while they’re here and will have their masterpieces on display for people to buy. It’s an important part of the day and a lot of fun.”

Mind’s Eye Connections is a non-profit organization that explores the connection between creating art and mental health. A few times a year, including at the Revival, they host an “art hive,” where materials are provided for people to create works of their own. It’s a model of art promotion and awareness being adopted by a growing number of arts groups around the country.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**The All Blues Music & Arts Revival returns Saturday from noon to 8 p.m. on the grounds of the Mill Hill Community Arts Center. Back for its second year after a 2024 hiatus, the free event began as part of Macon’s 2023 bicentennial celebration and features renowned blues musicians from across the U.S. and folk artists from the Southeast.**

“There are such strong roots here,” Mollica said. “Blues music, other music, folk art and other kinds of art that grew out of Macon and the Mill Hill area. What we’re doing reflects those traditions and, hopefully, helps keep them alive. Macon is the kind of place where it feels at home. Even if I lived in New York City, I’d still probably want to put it here and just fly down every year because this is the kind of place it came from. But happily, I live here.

“The rest is just a matter of, if you want good things to happen in the city, show up when they happen — and in this case, it won’t cost you anything. All you have to do is show up.”

Online, you can find out more

about the festival at [allbluescops.org](http://allbluescops.org) and about Mollica, who’s often known by his nickname Johnny Mo, at [bluesweetness.com](http://bluesweetness.com).

There’s more on Mind’s Eye Connections at [mindsyeconnections.org](http://mindsyeconnections.org) and on ArtSpace Macon at [artspacemacon.com](http://artspacemacon.com).

The free, family-friendly festival takes place from noon to 8 p.m. at the Mill Hill Community Arts Center, 213 Clinton St. Also Saturday, don’t forget the Macon-Bibb Hispanic Festival with live shows, food, dancing and fun for the family at Cherry Street Plaza from 1-7 p.m.

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).

Georgia seeing more public college grads

BY TY TAGAMI  
Capitol Beat News Service

The number of students who earn a degree at a public college or university in Georgia keeps rising.

Enrollment has been rising, too, but that is not the only reason for the increasing graduation rates at the University System of Georgia.

Enrollment has gone up 12.8% since 2011, but the number of degrees awarded has far outpaced that, shooting up 50.6% over the same period, according to the Board of Regents.

The graduation gains coincide with USG’s decision to join the Complete College America program in 2011.

“Our focus on student success delivers real value — not just for the state, but for

every student whose degree opens doors to opportunity and long-term prosperity,” Chancellor Sonny Perdue said.

USG cited several initiatives, including the creation of a website (Georgia Degrees Pay) that informs families about college costs and value, with data about success rates, borrowing, debt and average earnings by degree for all 26 of the system’s colleges and universities.

The system also pointed to the Georgia Momentum Approach, which uses predictive analytics and targeted advising for students who are transitioning to college. Remediation and teaching practices were also updated.

The gains have produced all-time highs: the number of degrees awarded in Fiscal Year 2025 rose 7.9% over the prior year, for a record 82,607 degrees.

USDA shifts \$300M to keep WIC running amid shutdown

BY SHAUNEEN MIRANDA  
Georgia Recorder

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is infusing \$300 million into a key federal nutrition program to keep it running through October, while a government shutdown continues without an apparent end point.

USDA’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children — known as WIC — has relied on short-term funds amid the shutdown. That has worried advocates as states are left to fill the gaps when money runs out.

USDA is transferring \$300 million into WIC from its child nutrition programs account, which has long been funded in part by tariff revenue from prior years, according to a congressional aide familiar with the plan. The transfer does not require congressional approval and is expected to keep the program afloat through the end of this month.

A USDA spokesperson said in a statement to States Newsroom that the agency “will utilize tariff revenue to fund WIC for the foreseeable future,” though the spokesperson did not offer any specifics. President Donald Trump’s administration had announced the transfer last week but also did not provide much detail.

“Our hope is that that money can just get released really swiftly and provide funds to states by next week to prevent further disruptions to WIC,” Georgia Machell, president and CEO of the National WIC Association, told States Newsroom.

“Full funding for the program is still the priority here, and it’s great to have short-term solutions, but we need the long-term commitment from Congress to continue funding WIC on a bipartisan basis, which it’s done for decades,” added Machell.

Dependent on congressional approval

The program serves nearly 7 million people and offers “free healthy foods,

breastfeeding support, nutrition education and referrals to other services,” per USDA.

But as a discretionary program, WIC is subject to congressional approval each year — making it particularly vulnerable to the ongoing funding lapse.

With no funds so far congressionally appropriated for the program in fiscal 2026, which began Oct. 1, WIC has relied on several small pots of money in recent days to keep it running, including USDA’s \$150 million contingency fund.

States received allocations from that fund. Leftover money for the program from the prior fiscal year was also recently reallocated to states and was expected to keep WIC operating for several more days.

Senate rebuffs Trump budget cut for WIC

USDA’s decision to use the tariff revenue came as Trump has sought to slash part of WIC’s funding in his fiscal 2026 budget request, including taking away “more than \$1.3 billion in fruit and vegetable benefits from 5.2 million participants,” according to an estimate from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The Senate passed its bipartisan bill dealing with Agriculture Department funding, including WIC, back in August. The measure fully funds the program for fiscal 2026 at \$8.2 billion and “continues full funding for additional fruit and vegetable benefits,” according to Senate Appropriations Committee Democrats.

Meanwhile, the House Appropriations Committee’s version of the bill, which passed out of the Republican-controlled panel in June, provides \$7.5 billion for WIC and includes a “10% cut in the cash value vouchers for fruits and vegetables for women and children,” according to the panel’s Democrats.

This story was originally published at [georgiarecorder.com](http://georgiarecorder.com).

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# SPORTS



PHOTOS BY JASON VORHEES  
Northeast quarterback Jordan Wiggins (12) throws a pass downfield during the Raiders' win over Dublin earlier this season. Northeast is in position to secure a spot in the GHSA playoffs.



FPD quarterback Major Simmons (14) breaks through the Stratford defense for a long touchdown run during the Vikings' 21-10 win over the Eagles earlier this year. Both teams will likely be top-five seeds in the playoffs.

## Ultimate Guide: Macon Football Playoffs

*Learn which Bibb schools could make them, how selection works*

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
micah@MaconMelody.com

The Georgia high school football playoffs are only a few weeks away, and there's a lot still up in the air for even the most talented teams.

There are state title contenders in Macon for both the GIAA and the GHSA, but the two athletic associations have different playoff formats, different ways to determine who makes the playoffs and different schedules.

It can be a lot to keep track of. Here is a crash course on the playoff details for both public and private schools, plus a glimpse at the postseason picture as it stands about two weeks before the regular season wraps up.

### How is the playoff field selected?

While the GHSA recently voted to change its playoff format in the years to come, the 2025 postseason

will still use the guidelines that were put in place last season. The current system is split across multiple classifications.

Classes 4A to 6A and Class A-Division II use the standard system which has the top four teams from each of the eight regions make the playoffs.

First-place teams from each region face fourth place teams from another region in the first round, while second- and third-place teams meet. The region pairings are predetermined — there's no power rankings or "seeds," other than your region placing — and home field advantage is determined by region finish until a coin flip is used for the later rounds where first-place teams often play one another.

The only Macon school under this system is Howard, a 3A school.

For classes A-Division I to 3A, the format is a blend between a traditional "top four region teams

make the playoffs" approach and the more modern use of power rankings, which the GHSA calls its Post Season Ranking formula, or PSR.

The first key note is that private schools in those classifications that still play in regions with public schools and finish in the top four are pulled out into their own bracket for the playoffs though. That leaves open spots in the public school bracket that are filled with non-top four teams.

First-place teams get seeded first, ordered by PSR. That means as many as eight teams — though it will likely be six or seven teams, since at least one private school will be a region winner — get priority seeing to guarantee home field advantage through two rounds. Second-place teams are seeded next, again in order of PSR score.

After those teams are placed, usually the top 12-16 seeds, things get chaotic. The third-place, fourth-

place and any at-large teams which replace private schools are all grouped together and ordered by PSR.

This means that, while it's unlikely, a team that finished in fifth place in one region — a team that would usually miss the playoffs — can not only make the bracket, but earn a higher seed than a third-place team from another region.

The tournament games themselves play out normally from there, with the higher seed getting home field advantage. The GHSA playoffs are scheduled to begin Nov. 14 with the championships set for Dec. 15-17.

The GIAA's playoff system, which applies to Macon's private schools, is much simpler. Most of Bibb County's private schools are in Class 4A, which uses a 12-team bracket. Teams are seeded in order of MaxPreps ranking, which is updated each week and found on-

line. Region standings do not impact playoff seeding, though region champions are often higher in the rankings by happenstance.

Other classes have different sizes — Class 2A, which features Macon schools Central Fellowship and Windsor, has a 10-team playoff — but use the same MaxPreps ranking system. The GIAA's 8-man football bracket consists of 10 teams as well.

### Which Macon teams could make the GHSA playoffs?

On the GHSA side, not many Macon schools are in the playoff picture with three weeks until the season ends on Halloween. Of the seven Bibb County high schools in the GHSA, only two of them are above .500 and in the hunt for a postseason spot.

One of those teams is Northeast,

See **PLAYOFFS**  
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## ACE, private schools ready for softball state tourneys

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
micah@MaconMelody.com

The softball playoff field is finally set, and several Macon teams are in the hunt in both the GHSA and GIAA state tournaments as they kick off this week.

The ACE Gryphons were the lone public school in Macon to secure a playoff spot, as they won the region championship in Region 2-A Division I with a region record of 17-1 and overall record of 21-9. They are the No. 7 seed in the bracket, the lowest ranked of the region champions in the classification.

Regardless, ACE gets home field advantage through the first two rounds of the playoffs, including its first-round matchup against No. 26 Berrien County.

The Gryphons have a balanced lineup that can score in a variety of ways, as players across the batting order regularly put the ball in play and get knocks.

Avery Stone is a key piece of the lineup with a .500 batting average from the leadoff spot. Sophie Denney, Sydney Collins and Reese Thames all anchor the heart of the order after Stone with batting averages over .400.

In the circle, Giselle Giles has

been a revelation for ACE. The pitcher has tossed crucial innings down the stretch, including five innings of two-run ball in the Gryphons' de facto region title game against East Laurens. She hurled 4 and 2/3 innings in their very next game, another crucial showdown with region opponent Dublin.

Pitchers Avery Edalgo and Ella Allen also step up regularly, often in relief of Giles.

Berrien County looks like an easier opponent at first glance with an overall record of 10-20 and a 6-12 region mark good for fifth in Region 1 in the regular season, but the team hailing from Nashville, Georgia — that's about two hours south of Macon via Interstate 75 — should not be taken lightly.

The Rebels were in a stacked region in Class A-Division I, grouped with some top-tier teams including Bacon County, Brantley County and Jeff Davis, among others.

Berrien County did struggle against those top programs, going 1-11 against the top four, but kept it close with Bacon County — the eventual region champions and the No. 4 seed in the tournament — on multiple occasions, including a 2-1 loss back in August in the second leg of a doubleheader.

Cacie Hale is the star of the show for the Rebels, as she is hitting .380 with 80 plate appearances and a .930 OPS.

She is also the team's top pitcher, throwing more than 106 innings with a 3.95 ERA and an even more impressive 1.48 Walks and Hits per Innings Pitched.

The Rebels also have two other players hitting over .300 with nearly 100 plate appearances.

The best-of-three series started with a doubleheader Wednesday with the first game at 4 p.m. and the second at 6 p.m. If the two squads split the first two games, the winner-take-all Game 3 started at 5 p.m. on Thursday. The Melody went to press Wednesday afternoon, but updated coverage can be found on our website, MaconMelody.com/Sports.

Should ACE defeat the Rebels, it will be at home again and face the winner of No. 10 Banks County and No. 23 Chattooga.

The only other GHSA school with a fighting chance at a playoff spot in Macon was Central, which finished its campaign 11-13 with an 8-10 region record. The Chargers missed the postseason by one rank, finish-



PHOTO BY MARK POWELL  
An ACE softball assistant coach celebrates with Reese Thames after Thames slapped a hit to knock in the game-winning run during the Gryphons' victory over East Laurens earlier this season. The win was key in giving ACE the region championship, which gave them priority seeding for the playoffs.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
Tattnall's Anna Still (33) belts out a scream after smashing the decisive solo home run in the Trojans' 1-0 win over FPD earlier this year. While the Trojans eventually lost the region to the Vikings, Tattnall still has a top-5 playoff seed and hopes to repeat as the state champ.

See **SOFTBALL**  
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FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Week 10: ACE meets Southwest and South Bibb rivalry returns

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
micah@MaconMelody.com

As the high school football regular season winds down, the stakes are only ratcheting up. The playoffs are just around the corner, and some Macon teams are looking to snag wins to up their power ranking and earn higher seeds, while others try to fight for a spot. Here’s a look at what’s on the line in Macon during Week 10 of the season.

**Southwest (2-5, 1-5 in region) vs. ACE (4-3, 3-3 in region)**  
*Last meeting: ACE won 40-14 in 2024. Last week: Both teams were idle.*

Both teams come into a key region game well-rested, which could make a difference for two teams that have been banged-up over the last few games. ACE’s season went from a promising 4-0 to a more expected 4-3 after losses to Northeast, East Laurens and Dublin, as The middle of those three was easily the most concerning — the Gryphons were expected to dispatch of the Falcons in a relatively routine game but instead got outscored 28-7 after a first-possession touchdown.

The team’s last loss was a bit more encouraging, as ACE put up 27 points against a typically talented Dublin defense. Quarterback Ace Hatcher made noise on the ground despite dealing with leg injuries on and off this year, rushing 13 times for 82 yards. Bryson Vincent has also been a force on the ground. ACE’s offensive line has also been much improved from the 2024 campaign even with some injury trouble, though the bye week should help with their health.

The Gryphons will try to bring some of that offense into a game with a slumping Southwest, which has only one region win against bottomfeeder Central this year.

The Patriots have dealt with injuries as well, with quarterback being the most impacted position. Head coach Joe Dupree’s son, Chase Dupree, made an unexpected comeback at the beginning of the season but sustained an injury against Northeast and only returned in Southwest’s recent game.

While Dupree’s return to the pocket is a plus, it did not help the Patriots’ offensive woes. Southwest fell 14-0 to East Laurens prior to last week’s bye, reaching the red zone multiple times but failing to put any points on the board because of penalties and sacks near the goal line.

The Patriots should have a better offense working now that Dupree is back and has likely shaken off the rust, but ACE should still have the edge in this game with its rushing attack and solid — if sometimes exhausted — defense.

**Mount de Sales (2-6, 1-1 in region) vs. Stratford (6-2, 1-2 in region)**  
*Last meeting: Stratford won 56-13 in 2024. Last week: Stratford defeated Tattnall 49-0; Mount de Sales was off.*

The Eagles and Cavaliers meet in the last of the matchups between Macon’s “Big Four” private schools, and the tilt leans heavily in Stratford’s favor, as the Eagles have only a couple blemishes on their record thus far. Stratford started the season off 5-0 before a stunning 51-13 dismantling on the road at the hands of John Milledge. The Eagles tried to bounce back but could not quite keep up with key crosstown

nemesis FPD the following week in a 21-10 loss, though a completely dominant 49-0 victory over Tattnall last week set them back on track. Stratford should be able to carry that offensive momentum across town to Cavalier Fields, where a struggling Mount de Sales program has played with guts but tends to run out of gas due to a lack of bodies. The Cavaliers did notch their first victory against Tattnall since 2020 last week with a 10-0 win, but the Trojans are down this year. Mount de Sales may not have an answer for Stratford’s strong run game, led by Tyler Stephens and his 1,276 rushing yards — good for the most rushing yards of any player in all GIAA classifications this year.

**Windsor (1-7, 0-1 in region) vs. Central Fellowship (4-4, 1-1 in region)**  
*Last meeting: CFCA won 14-8 in 2024. Last week: CFCA defeated Heritage 52-19; Windsor lost to Flint River Academy 28-25.*

The Battle for South Bibb County is on this week, and the stakes are higher than last season’s showdown between these Macon rivals. Central Fellowship has more on the line this go-round, as the Lancers got back to .500 last week with a dominant win over Heritage out of Newnan. Running back Judson Walls returned from a broken elbow in explosive fashion, gashing the Hawks defense repeatedly despite his arm still being in a cast.

Windsor’s season has trended in the opposite direction. The Knights have lost seven straight games since getting their only win this season in the opener, though its offense has recovered somewhat after a more sluggish start on that side of the ball.

Even with the different trajectories, Central Fellowship coach Jake Walls knew better than to take Windsor lightly.

“It’s always a big game and it’s always fun to play a rival,” he said. “When you get this far in the season you’re not really adding anything new, you just try to take things from a game where you did a lot and try to make yourself better.”

With both the Lancers and Knights improving slightly on offense since the early going, the rivalry showdown might have more fireworks than last year’s 13-8 CFCA win in which a Windsor quarterback change did not work out.

**Other games**  
Northeast will look to get back on track on Thursday against Central after both teams had a week off. While the Raiders will undoubtedly be focused against an in-town rival, the underwhelming Chargers should be an easy opponent for Jeremy Wiggins’ talented squad. Northeast fans might cast their eyes elsewhere in the area as well. After a loss to Bleckley County earlier this year, the Raiders need the Royals to lose to Dublin to take back control of Region 2-A Division I — and those two teams meet this week at the Shamrock Bowl.

Howard will go on the road with a chance to get its first win since Week 2, as the 1-7 Huskies have struggled since starting in promising fashion with a close loss to Westside and a close win over Rutland. They face a fellow 1-7 squad, Cross Creek, on the road in Augusta.

Rutland struggled last week against Callaway, which is now ranked No. 6 in Class 2A by

GAME FRAME

Battle for South Bibb



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
Central Fellowship’s Judson Walls (7) rushes for a first down during the Lancers’ win over Heritage last week. CFCA will face rival Windsor this week.



PHOTO BY DONN KESTER  
Mercer running back Ty Doughty breaks free for a first down as a Samford player dives after him during a Bears victory earlier this year. Mercer will be off this week after defeating Princeton last week.

Mercer keeps grip on SoCon lead with win over Princeton

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
micah@MaconMelody.com

Mercer football got another outstanding performance from freshman quarterback Braden Atkinson on Saturday, defeating Princeton 38-14 on the road behind 507 total yards of offense and 347 yards passing and three touchdowns from the signal caller. It was Atkinson’s fourth 300-yard passing effort of the season already, a statistic that is particularly impressive considering the freshman only snagged the starting role three games into the season. “We’re finding a rhythm again. Our young quarterback continues to play pretty well and make good decisions with the football,” head coach Mike Jacobs said in the post-game press conference posted by Mercer Athletics. “He didn’t have any sacks, he took a couple of hits today. Our offensive line ... a lot of our success is because that group’s playing at a really high level. “Again, just proud (of the team). It all goes together.” Atkinson completed passes to 11 different receivers in the win over the Ivy League foe. He agreed with his coach’s assessment of his latest banner performance. “I think it really all starts up front. This is the third consecutive game not letting up a sack, so that talks a lot about just how the O-line is

working,” Atkinson said. “Rushing the ball second half, we’re starting to break something out there. Receivers, they’re doing their thing.” Mercer’s rushing attack gashed the Tigers as well, running for 156 yards and a pair of scores. The Bears moved to 5-1 with the win and remain tied atop the Southern Conference standings with Western Carolina. The Catamounts blew out Furman 52-7 to make it a two-way tie for first. Mercer gave Princeton no chance to get off to a hot start. The offense made things happen right out of the gate with a clean 72-yard drive and did not let up from there as they jumped out to a 21-0 lead midway through the second quarter. While Atkinson’s lone mistake of the day — an interception followed by a 55-yard Princeton return — led to the Tigers’ first points of the day, the momentum stayed with Mercer going into the break with a 21-7 lead. The Bears struck first coming out of halftime, using a turnover and a Brayden Smith touchdown to get back to a three-score lead before another touchdown in the third quarter made it 35-7 and more or less put things on ice. The extra point on that late third quarter score was also a milestone, as Mercer kicker Reice Griffith be-

came the program’s all-time leading scorer with the PAT. “He’s just great. His personal growth, his commitment to the weight room, you’re seeing it on his kickoffs more,” Jacobs told Mercer Athletics. “He’s just so stinking consistent for us, I can’t say enough ... Reice has done a tremendous job for us. He’s a massive weapon and we’re happy to have him back.” Another Griffith field goal rounded out the scoring for Mercer in the fourth quarter, while Princeton tacked on another score late to make it a 38-14 final. The win was also a milestone for Jacobs, who notched his 90th career victory as a college head coach. As the Southern Conference standings continue to solidify, the Bears will follow the non-conference win with a much-needed, well-earned week off. “We’ll probably practice three days next week, we’ll take a few days off to try to get healthy,” Jacobs said. “The first bye week (after losing to Presbyterian) was early, we were coming off a bad loss, we had a bunch of stuff. We got after guys, we (went) full tackle (in practice). “This week’s more about getting ourselves mentally prepared, starting our game prep for VMI and getting fully healthy going into that week.” Mercer will face VMI at home Oct. 25. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m.





PHOTO COURTESY MERCER UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS  
**Mercer's Junior Casillas (10) dribbles and darts past a defender during a match this season. Casillas scored two goals in a recent Bears win. Photo courtesy of Mercer Athletics**

NOTEPAD

# ACE, Central reach volleyball playoffs; Mercer soccer wins

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
micah@MaconMelody.com

The ACE volleyball team competed in the GHSA Class A state tournament Wednesday, after The Melody went to print.

The Gryphons finished the regular season 24-11 overall and 9-0 in Area 2 competition, a mark good enough to win them the region championship. ACE got revenge for last season's area result, which was a second-place finish after they lost only one region matchup to Lamar County.

This year the Gryphons defeated the Trojans back at the beginning of September and never looked back, finishing area play undefeated. They earned the No. 4 seed in the tournament and hosted No. 29 Jasper County at 6 p.m. Wednesday. ACE went 8-2 over its final 10 matches, a stretch that included a 2-0 win over Jasper County on Sept. 30.

Central was the only other volleyball team to make the playoffs this season, finishing the year 15-4 overall but going 6-3 against Area 1 competition to finish fourth in the region.

The Chargers played well but finished just one spot short of a home game, earning the No. 17 seed. They took a long road trip to No. 16 Dade County — about three and a half hours north of Macon, right on the Tennessee border and near Cloudland Canyon

State Park — on Wednesday night, after The Melody went to print.

### GIAA schools fall in volleyball playoffs

Macon had four schools appear in the GIAA state volleyball playoffs, but all three lost in first-round games Oct. 4.

The Stratford Eagles had the highest seed of any Macon school, finishing the regular season 19-13 overall and 7-1 in Class 3A District 6 play. They defeated all three of their rivals — Tattnell, FPD and Mount de Sales — twice and at one point won nine straight matches, finishing second in the region behind only Piedmont Academy to earn the No. 11 seed in the Class 3A state tournament.

The Eagles could not match No. 6 Calvary Christian in the opening round, however, falling 25-10, 25-17 and 25-16 for a 3-0 loss. Calvary Christian lost 3-1 to the eventual state champion, No. 3 St. Anne-Pacelli, in the next round.

FPD was the No. 15 seed out of 16 teams in the tournament after finishing the year 12-18 overall and 4-4 in District 6 play. The Vikings fell 25-12, 25-16 and 25-9 in a 3-0 loss to No. 2 Brookstone in the first round.

Mount de Sales rounded out the Macon schools in the Class 3A bracket. The Cavaliers netted the No. 16 spot, just squeaking into the playoffs with a 12-12 regular

season mark and a 2-6 region record. They lost 3-0 to No. 1 King's Academy to open the playoffs, losing 25-8, 25-13 and 25-7. King's Academy reached the semifinals before eventually getting upset by No. 4 Tallulah Falls.

Covenant Academy made a postseason appearance as well, finishing the year 3-12 overall but going 3-5 in Class 2A District 5 to earn the No. 13 seed in the Class 2A state tournament.

The Rams were defeated 3-0 by No. 4 Augusta Prep but put up the closest battle of any Macon school, losing 25-15 in the first two sets before a close 25-22 result in the final set. Augusta Prep reached the semifinals before losing to upstart No. 8 Grace Christian Academy.

### Mercer men's soccer tied for first

The Mercer men's soccer team defeated conference opponent Wofford 5-4 on Saturday to remain in a tie for first place in the Southern Conference.

The Bears scored twice inside the first 20 minutes of play and kept the momentum going for the rest of the night. Two different Mercer players, Junior Casillas and Fernando Arteaga, had two goals apiece in the effort. Wofford struck for two late goals to make it close but could not close the gap despite the furious comeback attempt.

Mercer is now 3-6-3 on the season and 1-0-1 in con-

ference play, good for a tie for first with Furman for first place in the SoCon. Two of those three draws came against teams ranked in the Top 25 of the NCAA's men's soccer national RPI.

After a matchup with Georgia Southern on Tuesday — the Eagles are ranked No. 18 in the RPI — the Bears will play conference opponent East Tennessee State on the road Saturday.

### Mercer women take two straight

The women's team remained in the middle of the pack in the Southern Conference standings with back-to-back wins over conference opponents last week.

The Bears first defeated VMI on the road 2-0 on Oct. 5, using goals from Kelsie Henton and Peyton Kreul to defeat the Keydets. Mercer then faced UNC-Greensboro at home Oct. 11 and got a key 1-0 victory thanks to a goal from Morganne Eikelbarnier in the 47th minute of the match.

The two victories moved Mercer to 7-5-2 overall and an even 2-2-2 in SoCon play. The scoreless effort against VMI was the first career shutout for redshirt freshman keeper Avery Parker, which she swiftly followed with the second shutout against UNCG.

The Bears now have eight points, good for a tie for fifth place in the conference standings.



FILE PHOTO  
**An electric vehicle charges at a station. Researchers say expanding electric vehicles — including freight and delivery fleets — could help further cut the state's greenhouse gas emissions.**

ENVIRONMENT

# Analysis: GA halves carbon footprint, but hurdles remain

BY EMILY JONES  
WABE and Grist

Georgia has cut its greenhouse gas emissions per person nearly in half in the last 20 years, mostly by replacing coal power plants with natural gas and solar.

But the state still has a long way to go to cut emissions enough to make a dent in climate change, according to a new analysis by Georgia Tech researchers in partnership with Drawdown Georgia.

Georgia's net emissions totaled 92 megatons in 2024, down from 141 megatons in 2005.

The state's carbon dioxide emissions per person dropped by 45% from 2005 to 2023, the third-largest reduction in the country according to the Energy Information Administration. The Georgia Tech analysis found a 49% drop by 2024.

Report author Marilyn Brown, a professor at the Carter School of Public Policy at Georgia Tech, said the decline is especially impressive because in the same period, the state's economy has boomed.

"What we're doing is proving you can grow your economy, you can grow your population and reduce your emissions," she said.

Georgia's net emissions — the amount of carbon dioxide put out minus what's absorbed by carbon sinks like forests and marshes — dropped by 33% from 2005 to 2024, while the state's GDP grew by 127%, according to Brown's analysis.

That means the carbon intensity of Georgia's economy, a measure of emissions per unit of economic output, dropped by 71%.

But the state still has a long way to go to further cut emissions, which is key to fighting climate change. Meanwhile, Georgia Power is extending use of its remaining coal plants and adding natural gas capacity, which produces less carbon dioxide than coal but does still generate greenhouse gases.

And residential use of natural gas has actually increased.

Electric heat pumps are popular in rural areas without access to gas, Brown said, but Georgia's cities aren't switching to them as quickly.

"Heat pumps pay for themselves rapidly, but people are afraid to retire an operating gas system," she said.

Transportation emissions — now Georgia's leading source of greenhouse gases — are about the same as in 2005.

Emissions from diesel trucks have increased, thanks to a booming freight sector and the increasing popularity of online ordering and deliveries, the report finds.

Delivery vehicles could be a potential bright spot in the years to come, though, according to another report by the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, looking at electric vehicle trends in the region.

Sales of non-passenger medium- and heavy-duty commercial electric vehicles soared in Georgia in the last year, leading the country with more than 3,000 vehicles sold.

The SACE report credited that trend largely to delivery and cargo vans.

The Georgia Tech report lays out recommendations for further cutting emissions, including expanding EV adoption and further electrifying freight fleets, further decarbonizing electricity with large-scale solar and storage, and electrifying buildings.

It also highlights the state's carbon sinks like forests, which go a long way to offsetting Georgia's emissions.

"We are sinking as much CO2 almost as the magnitude of our transportation sector's emissions," said Brown. "It's very big, so we need to protect that."

*This article originally appeared on thecurrentga.org, an independent, in-depth and investigative journalism website for Coastal Georgia. This coverage was made possible through a partnership between NPR member WABE of Atlanta and Grist, a nonprofit environmental media organization.*

WILDLIFE

# UGA: Coyotes rebound fast after removal

BY CHASE MCGEE  
GPB News

A new study from the University of Georgia highlights the difficulty of managing coyote populations in the South.

You might view coyotes as something of a pest predator — they seem to pop up in both urban and rural areas.

But researchers at the University of Georgia found that lethal removal of coyotes often doesn't do much to shrink

their population. Researcher Heather Gaya said coyote populations bounce back quickly and then stabilize.

"And then within two years of those efforts being stopped entirely, the coyote densities were back up to where they had been before any lethal control efforts had started," she said. "And now we found that they appear to be pretty stable at that level."

She also said the best thing you can do to control populations is to help them move

on — work with neighbors to make sure the coyote's have no food available, and work to create a better environment for them in the woods, away from your home.

*This story was provided to The Melody through a news partnership with the nonprofit newsroom at Georgia Public Broadcasting. The photo at right, of a coyote being fitted with a GPS collar in Augusta, was taken by GPB editor and reporter Grant Blankenship.*



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PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**FPD's Ava Spillers (10) snags a fly ball between teammates during the Vikings' 1-0 loss to Tattnall earlier this season. FPD got revenge with a win later in the year and ultimately won the region championship over the Trojans.**

**SOFTBALL**

Continued from Page B1

ing 32nd in the Post Season Rankings but getting bumped out because Putnam County, a fourth-place region finisher with a 4-15 record, had an automatic playoff berth.

**FPD wins region, earns No. 3 spot**

Three Macon teams secured spots in the GIAA Class 4A state tournament, with two teams earning seeds in the Top 5.

FPD won District 6 with a 19-3 overall record and 8-2 record in region play, good enough to be ranked the No. 3 team in Class 4A, according to the GIAA's MaxPreps system.

While they won't get homefield advantage in the literal sense — the GIAA holds its tournament in Columbus across three days from Thursday to Saturday — the Vikings will get the last at-bat privileges in their first round game against No. 6 Loganville Christian.

FPD got into a groove offensively in the stretch run of the season, scoring nine runs or more in its final 11 games in a row.

That prolific offense is led by players like Addison Arnold, Ava Spillers and perhaps most importantly the twins Lyric and Jessica Jones at the top of the order.

The Vikings' pitching is not so multi-faceted, as star player Gracyn Fuller — also a solid contributor on offense — has been the undisputed ace of the staff.

Fuller pitched in almost every Vikings game this year and often starts and finishes contests. She showed serious grit in FPD's 11-8 victory over Tattnall, pitching nine innings and finishing off the win even after allowing a Trojans comeback.

The Vikings did not face Loganville Christian during the regular season, but the Lions should be a challenging opponent regardless of FPD's higher seed. Loganville defeated Tattnall 11-8 back in August and finished the season 13-9.

The two teams met in the first round at noon Thursday at the South Commons Softball Complex in Columbus. For results and other coverage, visit our website.

**Tattnall slotted at No. 4**

While Tattnall did not win the region championship, it still easily made the playoffs as one of the stronger teams in the classification and will look to repeat after winning the state title in 2024.

The Trojans finished 16-6 overall and matched FPD with an 8-2 record in region play, but the Vikings took the tiebreaker by run differential because the two teams split their season series.

The strong campaign for Tattnall was fueled by a high-powered offense led by Anna Still, who hit a whopping .536 through more than 70 plate appearances with six home runs and a 1.509 OPS. Callie Still, Abby Baugh, Reese Covington all chipped in as well with averages over .360 and plenty of pop. Madison Malcolm was another key dif-

ference-maker for the Trojans, with the eighth-grader effortlessly hacking varsity pitching for a .429 batting average.

Callie Still led the charge in the circle, pitching more than 90 innings with a 3.02 ERA and 108 strikeouts. Bryton Tarver got the second-largest workload for Tattnall with 27 innings and a 3.88 ERA.

The Trojans did not face Bethlehem Christian in the regular season. The Knights finished their season 16-7 overall and 5-3 in region play, though their hot finish should be noted — Bethlehem notched a 13-3 record over their final 16 games.

The Trojans also began their post-season campaign at noon Thursday.

**Stratford snags final 4A tourney spot**

The Stratford Eagles got the toughest draw of all Macon teams, finishing 11-12 overall to get the No. 8 seed to pit them against the bracket's No. 1 team, Calvary Christian.

The Eagles started the season slow with a very young squad that struggled to score early on, but the team eventually got rolling and even notched some impressive performances, including two wins over John Milledge and a close 7-6 loss to Tattnall.

Hayden Craddock is a key hitter for the Eagles in the leadoff spot, with Cordtney Galoia and Hatsy Russell also figuring into the heart of the order. Reagan Ray is Stratford's key pitcher.

The Eagles lost to No. 1 Calvary Christian twice in the regular season, 9-0 and 7-4, though the two contests were earlier in the year. Stratford is used to low seeding, however, as the Eagles made an impressive run in the loser's bracket last year as the No. 7 team. They came only one game short of the championship.

**Windsor earns No. 7 seed**

The Windsor Knights had a solid season, finishing the year 9-8 with an impressive 6-0 region record to earn the No. 7 seed in the GIAA Class 2A bracket.

The Knights found their stride on offense this season after finishing with a losing record and missing the playoffs last season.

Windsor scored at least three runs in 15 of their 17 games this season, including breaking the double-digit mark on seven different occasions. Sisters Abby and Maddie Price hit very well atop the Knights' lineup while Sealy Dent anchored things in the three-hole.

Windsor ran into more problems with its pitching. Abby Price started almost every game for the Knights and often gave up high run totals against more talented opponents. Some recent losses came by scores of 7-3, 6-3 and 9-8.

The No. 7 seed in an eight-team bracket is a tough spot, as the Knights will have to face defending state champion Southwest Georgia in the first round Thursday at 10a.m. Windsor did not face any of the top three seeds in Class 2A, though they did play No. 4 Gatewood twice and lost both matchups.

# STATS AND STORIES

## *How trivia turns into timeless tales*

It's amazing how much we don't know.

It seems obvious, I know — get it? — but it still warrants mentioning: there is so much out there to be learned every single day that it almost hurts my head to think about.

It's easy to say this about the world in general, of course. Heck, forget the world — the universe it sits in dwarfs our little blue dot in its vastness. There's stuff out there that we not only do not know, but cannot know.

I'm getting off track here. Why don't we shrink our scale a bit, so that the unknowable-ness of the galaxy is less daunting and instead playful and anecdotal. This is a sports column, for crying out loud.

Why don't we stick to sports, then: how much is there you don't know?

I thought more about this as I read the latest edition of Ed Grisamore's always-intriguing "Local Knowledge" trivia column this week, which you can find online or in the Oct. 17 print edition.

If you know Macon and its journalism scene, there's almost no way you don't know Gris, who is our staff columnist at The Melody. I believe he referred to himself as "ubiquitous" in a bio once, and I would not dispute that descriptor.

And if you know Gris, you know that he is the king of Macon trivia, with local sports knowledge being no exception. I did okay on this week's "Local Knowledge," but there was still plenty I learned from the questions.

The first question of the trivia — if you haven't read "Local Knowledge" yet, don't cheat; I'm about to spoil it — is about the last Macon school to win a GHSA state cham-



**Micah JOHNSTON**

most recent school to win a state title on the gridiron.

The Chargers took home the trophy in 1975, 50 years ago this year. This piece of Bibb County sports trivia became commonplace last year, when the Northeast Raiders made an impressive run through the GHSA Class A-Division I tournament all the way to the state championship.

Northeast's run was a historic one, even if they did not win the trophy, and that fun fact about Central's championship in 1975 provided valuable context. Learning new things helps me really lean into the sports that are still unfolding.

Then there's the other type of sports trivia, the kind that's purely intended to make you think, "No way, really?"

These are the facts that, while not particularly illuminating or relevant to something that's happening currently, are just plain interesting.

These can be strange statistics. During this season's American League Championship Series, I read somewhere that current Seattle Mariners manager Dan Wilson is also the franchise leader in sacrifice bunts with 121 of them. That's a pretty fun tidbit, but not particularly mind-blowing — especially considering the Mariners have not bunted much under Wilson's leadership.

This trivia is often more random and less statistically inclined. A good example is a story I heard from MLB pitcher Jim Morris, the inspiration behind the Disney film "The Rookie," when I interviewed him recently. Morris told me how he found out decades after filming that he and his grandfather knew

Gene Autry, who turned out to be related to Dennis Quaid, the actor who portrayed Morris in the film.

I had no idea that Autry — also a famous actor — was related to Quaid, let alone that Morris met Autry as a child. Even as an uninvolved third party, it was a neat story.

The truly incredible "unknown" pieces of sports lore, though, as the things you learn that are both incredible and pertinent to the sports world today.

My favorite factoid in this category is that if you took away all 755 of Hank Aaron's career home runs, he would still have more than 3,000 hits.

I believe Hammerin' Hank to be the greatest baseball player who ever lived, and I don't think anyone will ever come close to his greatness. That statistic is my go-to piece of information to illustrate that point.

Statistics can illustrate mind-boggling greatness, yes, but they can also simply make a modern sports occurrence more fascinating.

I did not need any numbers to tell me how incredible an athlete running back Nick Woodford was when he played at Northeast last season. Simply watching Woodford bowl over hapless defenders on the field was enough.

Learning his yardage totals at the end of each game — and his eventual career tally of 6,282 yards, the Bibb County School District career record — certainly helped convey his greatness to others in my stories, though.

That's the power of the stats and sports trivia in general, and why I try to have as much interesting information in our sports reporting as possible. Learning something new about a Macon athlete or sports teams is one of the greatest joys of my work.

*Micah Johnston is sports editor of The Melody. Send him an email at micah@MaconMelody.com.*

**Learning new things helps me really lean into the sports that are still unfolding.**

**PLAYOFFS**

Continued from Page B1

which is in the midst of another stellar season after making it to the A-Division I state title game last year. The Raiders have again established themselves as the premier team in Macon with a 5-2 start and 5-1 region record, though a stumble against Bleckley County dealt a blow to their region championship hopes.

The most likely outcome is Northeast winning out but finishing second in the region behind Bleckley County, though winning the final three games is not a certainty.

The Raiders have showdowns with Central, Dodge County and East Laurens left. The Chargers and Falcons should be less of a challenge for Northeast, but the Raiders have to travel to Eastman and beat the Indians on the road in a tough matchup to guarantee a second-place finish.

ACE is the only other GHSA school in Macon with playoff hopes, and they are slimmer than Northeast's almost guaranteed status. The Gryphons are 4-3 overall and 3-3 in Region 2 play, including an unexpected loss to East Laurens that put a serious dent in their post-season hopes.

Regardless, ACE has enough offensive talent to compete with some talented programs. The run game is strong with tailback Bryson Vincent, and quarterback Ace Hatcher has also become more involved in the run game.

The Gryphons will need some help to make the top four of Region 2, though. East Laurens jumped them in the standings with its tiebreaker win, putting ACE in sixth. Stretch games against Southwest this week and Washington County in the season finale will be crucial, with a very difficult home tilt with Bleckley County sandwiched in

between. Should ACE go an optimistic 2-1 in those games, it would finish 5-4 in region play and likely be the fifth team, necessitating an at-large playoff bid.

Luckily, PSR does help the Gryphons out a bit in that hypothetical. ACE is No. 30 in the PSR as of Monday, likely helped by its signature win over Dodge County earlier this year and the difficulty of its schedule. There should also be several private schools finishing in the top four, opening up spots for ACE to potentially enter the playoff picture.

**Which Macon teams could make the GIAA playoffs?**

The GIAA tournament should be friendlier to Macon teams.

The Class 4A state tournament is the main attraction with the top teams in GIAA, and two Macon squads are in line to make it and have home games in the opening round.

Stratford still holds the No. 1 ranking in 4A despite losing to John Milledge and FPD in back-to-back weeks, but the 6-2 Eagles have looked dominant at times this year. Running back Tyler Stephens leads the entire GIAA with 1,276 rushing yards. He ran all over multiple talented teams, including No. 3 Brookstone, though FPD managed to contain him.

Barring a true collapse to finish, the Eagles should be in shape to hold onto that No. 1 rank, or at least a spot in the top three. They have a less strenuous matchup with Mount de Sales on tap this week before a challenge with Calvary Christian to round out the season Oct. 24.

FPD is up next at No. 3 — only Brookstone separates the two rivals in the standings, even after the Vikings defeated Stratford — and look formidable with a 6-3 record despite some injury problems of late.

Starting quarterback Major Simmons, a force of nature for the Vikings and a critical piece on both sides of the ball, missed FPD's most recent game against John Milledge in concussion protocol.

The Vikings proved they still had talent to compete with the championship-caliber Trojans. Freshman signal caller Cash Walker played very well, though it was not enough to knock off JMA.

FPD is off this week before a matchup with a weak Tattnall team to finish the season Oct. 24, putting it in great position to stay in the top four and secure a home game to open the playoffs.

Mount de Sales (1-6) and Tattnall (0-7) are 12th and 13th in the rankings, just outside the 10-team playoff picture.

Central Fellowship is the Macon team with the next-best postseason outlook.

The Lancers are now 4-4 and No. 5 in the Class 2A rankings, which would secure them a playoff spot and a road game in the first round if they hold there. CFCAa has surged of late, winning two in a row including an upset 27-13 win over Trinity Christian.

Windsor is 1-7 this season but could still sneak into the postseason, as the Knights are currently No. 8 in Class 2A. It has been a struggle for the school from south Bibb County — Windsor's lone win came in its first game of the season and was followed by a seven-game losing streak.

With fewer teams in the classification, though, the Knights still have a shot at a playoff spot. Should they hold on to their No. 8 spot, they would be at home for a play-in game against the No. 9 seed. Windsor would benefit greatly from wins in either of its final two games, as another 1-7 team, Augusta Prep, sits right behind them at No. 9 and could take the spot.



The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, October 17, 2025 • B5

## by Dave T. Phipps

by BUD BLAKE

## by Jeff Pickering

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Differences: 1. Boy is moved. 2. Table is smaller. 3. Newspaper is longer. 4. Glove is a catcher's mitt. 5. Number on shirt is smaller. 6. Curtain is wider on left side.

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**Solution time: 21 mins.**

Answers

**themaconmelody @  & **



# SNAPSHOTS

B6 • The Macon Melody • MaconMelody.com • Friday, October 17, 2025



**PHOTO 1** — The Downstairs performs during the Macon Beer Fest in downtown Macon on Oct. 11. The annual event, presented by the Rotary Club of Downtown Macon, raises awareness for prostate cancer through craft beer, wine, live music and local vendors. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTO 2** — Competitors hold out their beers during a contest at the Macon Beer Fest. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTO 3** — John Sweet of Lake City, Fla., wins the costume contest at the Macon Beer Fest. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTO 4** — Aya El Marrase, left, and Marina Prieto, right, hang out at the Macon Beer Fest. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny*

**PHOTO 5** — The Middle Georgia Regional Library holds a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Cathy Ivey Community Library at 5494 Forsyth Road on Oct. 13. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*

**PHOTOS 6 AND 7** — Porter Elementary students perform a dance Oct. 14 while celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. The school, located in south Bibb County, has a 38% Hispanic student population. “We teach our students that we see beauty in everyone,” said Principal Berina English. *Photo by Jason Vorhees*