

The Macon Melody

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‘REAL ESTATE PARASITES’

Officials warn of rising home title fraud

BY LIZ FABIAN

The Macon Newsroom
macon-newsroom.com

Marcus Lucas got quite a shock when he checked on his Elnora Drive property while in Macon for a funeral early this year.

A Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission sign led to the discovery he was a victim of home title fraud as someone filed a limited warranty deed in Bibb County Superior Court claiming Lucas transferred his 2.3-acre property to a Florida corporation for \$10 in October.

Other documents show Lucas was paid \$55,000, but he wasn’t.

“I’ve had so many people call about that property, especially in the last two years, people from Florida, Ocala, couple other places,” Lucas told P&Z commissioners in January. “Now I find that my property has been obtained by someone, and nobody ever talked to me about it. They said they paid \$55,000 for it. I haven’t received a dime.”

Absentee or out-of-state property



PHOTO BY LIZ FABIAN FOR THE MACON NEWSROOM

Marcus Lucas addresses the Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission in January, telling commissioners that fraudulent documents were filed claiming he had sold his Elnora Drive. Lucas, who lives in Minnesota, said he learned of the deed fraud during a visit to Macon for a funeral.

owners, like Lucas who lives in Minnesota, are particularly vulnerable for this kind of crime.

“This is a growing concern

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PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

A production crew films a scene from “The Comeback King” along Coleman Avenue on Wednesday. The film stars Glen Powell as Aubrey King, a country western star fighting to revive a faltering career.

‘The Comeback King’ and Superman sequel bring Hollywood back to Macon

BY ALAYSIA EZZARD

Community Reporter
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The number of movies and TV shows shot in the Peach State bottomed out in 2025, but two projects in Macon could help boost Georgia’s declining presence in the film industry.

Production crews, actors and

set designers are bringing movie magic back to Macon for the filming of “The Comeback King,” which premieres in theaters next February. Filming, led by Tap Out Productions, took place on and near College Street Wednesday and Thursday and is scheduled to resume next week on parts of Cherry, Second and Third streets.

“The Comeback King,” directed

by Judd Apatow, follows the story of country western star Aubrey King, who must regain his footing after his career takes a tailspin.

The film stars Glen Powell.

Downtown Macon is a popular location for productions because of its wide streets and historic build-

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Macon-Bibb outsources homeless encampment cleanup to private company

BY LAURA E. CORLEY

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Macon-Bibb County will now pay a private company to clear and clean homeless encampments on public property, a job previously done by county employees.

Commissioners on Tuesday voted to approve contracting with Massachusetts-based New England Trauma Services LLC to handle the

clearing of homeless encampments on an “as-needed” basis.

Mayor Lester Miller said the county issued a request for proposals in January upon hearing concerns raised by the Parks and Beautification Director Michael Glisson.

“Sometimes they leave very harmful materials behind,” Miller said of homeless individuals who were removed from encampments on public property. “I’m not going to place our employees in dangers’

way of having to go out there and remove dangerous needles, dangerous intoxicants ... and sometimes buckets of feces and other things.”

Miller said the county does not routinely encounter encampments with such biohazards and “we’ve only had to do it one time in the last three or four years.” The cost to clean up one encampment last year was “tens of thousands,” he said, adding that the company has the qualifications to do the work safely.

The company’s cost proposal included \$6 per 55-gallon trash bag disposal, \$195 per site plus hourly rates of \$95 per technician and \$115 per biohazard technician. The contract says the county anticipates it will need to clear about eight homeless encampments yearly. The annual contract may be renewed yearly until June 30, 2030.

Police or code enforcement officers will be paid to be on site while the contractors work.

Miller said he had seen “a lot of misinformation out there” about how the county clears such encampments. He asked Assistant County Attorney Adrianna Beavers to explain the process.

“Our social services partners will go out a few times beforehand, letting people who are on these public sites unlawfully [know] that they

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County planners seek public input in comprehensive plan update

BY CASEY CHOUNG

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The Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission will get resident input on its updated comprehensive plan, which is used to inform future decisions on land-use regulations, during a public meeting May 14.

The comprehensive plan, required by state law and updated every five years, guides and forecasts sev-

eral topics integral to county development, including transportation, economic development, housing, land use and quality of life.

Previous plans, including the most recent one from 2022, also outlined goals and opportunities in each of those areas, along with historic and cultural resources, demographic data, internet speeds and coverage, potential projects to serve the community and more.

“The comprehensive plan

helps our commissioners ... make informed decisions on what the future land use of a community looks like,” said Greg Brown, planning director for the commission.

The plan will take effect in 2027, but the commission has already begun the process of researching and collecting community input. Planners held a kickoff meeting in November and another meeting in March to understand transportation needs.

The May 14 meeting is focused on quality of life — including amenities such as public parks and community centers — and economic development, which addresses job and industry benefits and needs.

To formulate the plan, officials also consult a steering committee made up of community members and look at existing plans formed by other agencies.

The plan is also reviewed by the Middle Georgia

Regional Commission, a group that provides professional assistance to Macon-Bibb County and 10 other county governments.

“Community input is a major focus of the comprehensive planning process,” Brown said.

Next Thursday’s meeting will be held at the Macon Housing Authority Family Investment Center at 905 Main St. Additional community meetings will take place through the end of the year.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

A fountain at Tattnall Park flows on a sunny day. Public parks are among quality-of-life amenities being studied as Macon-Bibb County planners update the county’s comprehensive plan.

Periodical — Mail Label

Black Pages turns 35, trades ink for the internet

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON

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This summer, the Macon-Middle Georgia Black Pages marks 35 years in publication. It will also produce its final print edition.

No need to worry, said publisher Alex Habersham. The long-standing Black business resource isn’t going anywhere. The shuttering of its print operations is just a “sign of the times.”

Digital media is “where the world is going,” he said of his plans to shift entirely online. “So you have to adapt.”

Habersham launched the Black Pages in 1991 as a free Black business directory with maga-

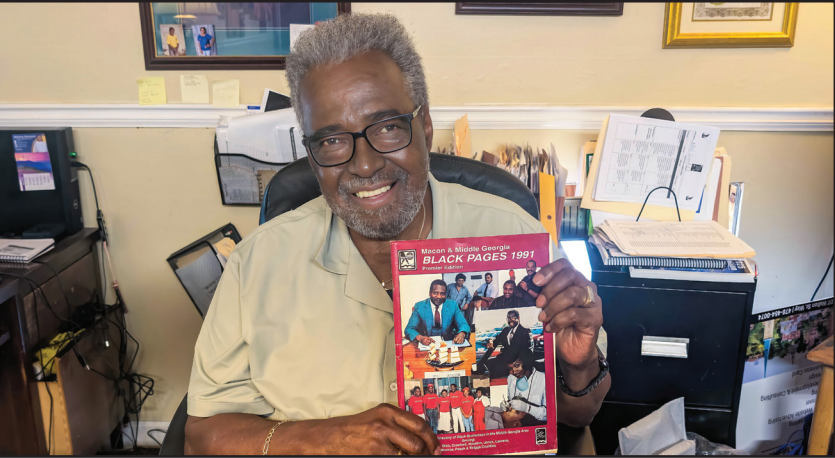


PHOTO BY EVELYN DAVIDSON

Alex Habersham holds the 1991 premier edition of the Macon & Middle Georgia Black Pages at his office. The publication marks its 35th anniversary this summer with a final print edition before moving entirely online.

zine-esque editorial content and a yearly theme. He said the publica-

tion mirrors both the Yellow Pages directory and the Green Book,

which served as a guide for Black travelers looking for room, board and food in the Jim Crow era of racial segregation.

Habersham said he wanted to introduce “a resource that we could tastefully, fairly and effectively use to uplift ourselves.” His goal wasn’t “to draw a line or create a division in the community” but to encourage Black people like himself to economically reinvest into their community by supporting Black-owned businesses.

The first edition of the Black Pages was 40% of its current size.

“It benefits the entire community if, in fact, we could promote,

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MAY 19 BALLOT INCLUDES SCHOOL, WATER RACES



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
“I Secured My Vote” stickers await voters at a county precinct during the November 2024 general election.

Election Day is 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. on Tuesday, May 19. Early voting runs through Friday, May 15. The school board and Water Authority races are nonpartisan. In addition to these races, there are a number of nonpartisan judicial contests on the ballot. Voters will also decide, in partisan races, party nominees for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, commissioner of agriculture, commissioner of insurance, state school superintendent and commissioner of labor. There are also two ballot questions — one about election integrity measures and another about judges and felony bail conditions. Check your voter status, find your polling place and see a complete sample ballot at mvp.sos.ga.gov.

BOARD OF EDUCATION AT-LARGE POST 7
— Kerry Hatcher
— Amy Morton

BOARD OF EDUCATION AT-LARGE POST 8
— Jonathan Fisher
— Lisa Garrett-Boyd*
— Carlos A. McCloud
— Nola McFadden

WATER AUTHORITY AT-LARGE
— Gary Bechtel*
— Desmond D. Brown

WATER AUTHORITY DISTRICT 2
— Ron E. Lemon
— Shariff Robbins-Brinson
— Renoalda Scott
— Marshall Talley

The Macon Water Authority board District 2 seat is vacant after Desmond Brown resigned to seek the at-large seat.

WATER AUTHORITY DISTRICT 4
— Michael McKeever
— Frank K. Patterson Jr.*
— De’Ron Rogers

WATER AUTHORITY DISTRICT 1
— Elaine H. Lucas*

** denotes incumbent*

Kemp approves education package led by literacy law

BY TY TAGAMI
Capitol Beat News Service
capitol-beat.org

A bipartisan education initiative that seeks to boost reading skills among young public school students in Georgia will go into effect this year after Gov. Brian Kemp signed it into law Tuesday, along with a package of other education bills. The Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026 is a sweeping overhaul of prior legislation that targeted literacy and dyslexia. The new measure, which was a top priority of House Speaker Jon Burns, R-Newington, adds numerous new requirements for curriculum, teacher training and student testing. It also adds about \$70 million to the formula that drives state education budgeting, enough to hire a classroom literacy coach in more than 1,300 schools that have kindergarten through third-grade classrooms. “This bill is a monumental step in our years-long work to ensure students have the literacy skills they need,” Kemp said before signing House Bill 1193. The governor signed eight other education bills, including House Bill 1009, which will ban cellphones in public high schools starting in the 2027-28 school year. The legislation expands a ban passed last year on devices in kindergarten through middle school. Although the lower grades ban does not go into effect until the upcoming school year, many schools have already prohibited personal cellphones ahead of schedule. Surveys of parents and teachers at many of those schools last fall indicated the bans were popular. Studies also showed academic gains associated with removing the devices. “The improved outcomes fol-

lowing last year’s bill have been incredible,” Kemp said, “and this commonsense step will help both students and faculty learn in safer, distraction-free environments.” Among the other bills that Kemp signed are measures that will require public schools to expand access to afterschool programs for pre-kindergarten students enrolled in those schools (House Bill 1123), require closer collaboration between public schools and “completion schools” that offer credit recovery for students at risk of dropping out (House Bill 907), and expand a program allowing retired teachers to fill teacher shortages by returning to the classroom for pay while collecting a pension (Senate Bill 150). The literacy act was the most expansive measure. Starting this summer, the state will have to identify at least one test to measure whether incoming students are reading on grade level. By fall, state leaders will convene a literacy task force that will vet literacy curricula for use statewide, with the state ensuring at least one option is free to public schools. The methods will be grounded in phonics and what proponents have labeled the “science of reading” and “structured literacy,” with approaches based on decades of research. State universities will also be tasked with overhauling the way they teach future teachers. Burns said literacy levels affect mental health and health care outcomes, employment and even the prison population. “Only one in three of our children can read on grade level when they leave the third grade. Unacceptable,” he said. “But I’m hopeful and I’m confident with Governor Kemp’s signature of the Early Literacy Act of 2026 today, we are well on our way to rewriting that narrative.”



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Macon-Bibb, Houston, Peach counties unite to fill megasite near Fort Valley

BY LAURA E. CORLEY
Senior Reporter
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Governments of Macon-Bibb, Houston and Peach counties have created a new, joint business-recruiting body to find an industrial tenant for a megasite in Peach County. The Mid-Georgia Gateway Joint Development Authority was approved by all three county commission boards at their respective meetings on Tuesday. The “Middle Georgia MegaSite” includes

1,534 acres west of Interstate 75 along state Route 96 just outside the city of Fort Valley. Most of the land is owned by The Development Authority of Peach County. The joint authority will be composed of eight members with four appointments by Peach County and two each from Macon-Bibb and Houston counties. Mayor Lester Miller and Industrial Authority Chairman Robby Fountain will serve as Macon-Bibb County’s representative. Their terms will end when the election or appointment term for each director ends.

Bibb County School District exploring VIP Academy close

BY CASEY CHOUNG
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To counter declining enrollment and achieve potential cost savings, the Bibb County School District will consider rolling the fully virtual VIP Academy into existing school-based hybrid learning programs. VIP Academy became a standalone school in 2022 following its opening during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual learning academy originally served all grade levels but currently only serves middle and high school students. The academy takes applications only, and although enrollment was projected to be 384 students this past school year, only 248 students ultimately attended. “This has been a whole new world for everyone,” said Brian Butler, district executive director of teaching and learning. The district shared initial options for “reimagining virtual learning” with the Bibb County Board of Education at a budget meeting Monday afternoon. The virtual school could be folded into the district’s in-school academies. Those programs offer in-person and virtual learning options within high schools for students with

needs that do not suit the traditional classroom environment — for example, students with discipline issues. “We saw that there’s overlapping services and this might be something to just ponder and consider,” Butler said. Virtual learning software costs for VIP Academy far exceed those of traditional high schools because of how Edgenuity, the software’s provider, charges per student versus per school, Butler noted. Butler said the district has not yet identified exact cost savings. Keeping the dozen teachers who work there — according to the school’s website — and students at VIP Academy is also still on the table. Exploring the potential move comes as the district completes its rezoning analysis and proposes its initial budget for the coming school year. “The biggest thing we’re doing right now is we want to get input from the community, anything that affects where students go to school or how services are provided to students,” Butler said. “We want to make sure families have input.” Any move would take place during the 2027-28 school year. The district will host virtual community meetings on May 11 and May 27 to collect feedback.

Taxpayers to soon get state rebate

BY TY TAGAMI
Capitol Beat News Service
capitol-beat.org

Georgia taxpayers should begin seeing income tax refunds from the state soon. Most eligible taxpayers who filed timely state returns for 2024 and 2025 can expect one-time rebates of \$250 for individuals, \$375 for heads of households and \$500 for married couples filing jointly. The payoff is the result of state lawmakers voting unanimously in the House and Senate to pass House Bill 1000 this year. The measure was funded in the amended budget for the current fiscal year, with an esti-

mated price tag of about \$1.2 billion. “Our team is ready to deliver these refunds efficiently and securely to Georgia taxpayers,” Georgia Department of Revenue Commissioner David Burge said in a statement Monday. The rebate was a priority for Gov. Brian Kemp, who touted it as the fourth under his leadership. Kemp’s office said Monday that most should see the money “within the coming weeks,” with the governor adding that Georgians “know best how to spend their money, not the government.” Check your eligibility for the state rebate at gtc.dor.ga.gov.

‘True legend’ Ted Turner dies at 87

GBP NEWS STAFF REPORT
gpb.org/news

Ted Turner — the entrepreneur who founded CNN, America’s first 24-hour cable news network — in Atlanta in 1980, died Wednesday after a brief time in hospice care. He was 87. Turner suffered from Lewy Body Dementia, a diagnosis he received in 2018. He is survived by his children Laura, Teddy, Rhett, Jennie, and Beau, his grandchildren and great-grandchild, as well as former wife Jane Fonda. He was preceded in death by former wives Judy Nye and Janie Smith. The Atlanta businessman known for bold risks and eccentricities was a larger-than-life personality — a mix of Southern wit and grit — whose legacy includes pioneering cable television with his Turner Broadcasting System and CNN, transforming the Atlanta Braves into “America’s team,” supporting environmental efforts through the TV show “Captain Planet” and funding the United Nations Foundation. Robert Edward Turner III was born Nov. 19, 1938, in Cincinnati, Ohio. When he was 9 years old, the family moved to Savannah, where his father built a successful billboard business. When Turner was just 24 years old, his father’s suicide thrust him into taking over the family company. Over the course of his decades-long career, Ted Turner oversaw the building and merging of many ventures in media, sports, conservation and philanthropy.

In addition to founding TBS and CNN, his endeavors included owning the Atlanta Braves and the Atlanta Hawks, racing boats and winning the America’s Cup, broadcasting wrestling, creating the Goodwill Games and the Nuclear Threat Initiative. He hunted, fished, bought ranches and became one of the largest private landowners and conservationists in the country. Atlanta loomed large in Turner’s life, “Call Me Ted” documentary director and writer Keith Clarke told GPB in 2024. “We have a greater appreciation [of the city], just because I think he opened up the world to what Atlanta is and the history and the potential of the people,” Clarke said of CNN’s beginnings in 1980 on Techwood Drive in Midtown Atlanta. “Bringing CNN here was a way to put Atlanta on the map.” On June 1, 1980, CNN’s first broadcast went to 1.7 million cable television subscribers across America. At its high point, Turner Broadcasting’s more than two-dozen branded networks and services reached 2 billion people in 200 countries. In December 2019, Ted Turner was honored at a dedication of what was then called WarnerMedia’s Techwood campus in Atlanta on the site where the original TBS stood. “We raise our glasses to you, Ted,” CNN’s Wolf Blitzer said as he led hundreds of employees in a toast. “The original maverick, pioneer of the media industry, champion of the environment. A true legend. To Ted.”

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

SHAKE UP YOUR FITNESS WITH THESE SIMPLE CHALLENGES



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SIGN UP FOR A FITNESS CLASS

For many adults, the hardest part of staying active isn't the workout itself. It's being confident and taking the first step toward a new experience. Trying a new trail, walking into a fitness class, or stretching past your normal range can be intimidating.

Increasing physical activity by even just 10 minutes a day could reduce your risk of things like developing dementia, heart disease, high blood pressure, and more.

Luckily, improving your fitness can be as easy as a new environment, different movements, or just a few extra minutes of activity.

TRY TAKING A NEW TRAIL

Walking is one of the easiest and most effective ways to stay active. It's low-impact, easy to adjust to your needs and fitness level, and doesn't require any special equipment.

While consistency is great, changing your route can add excitement and variety to your day, making your walk feel more like an adventure than a chore.

Changing your path can also benefit your body. If you choose a path with hills or uneven surfaces, you'll engage different leg and core muscles, improving balance and coordination.

DON'T FEEL OVERWHELMED

at night, can help you maintain your mobility. Gentle movements for the shoulders, hips, and legs can loosen tight areas and even support better posture.

One of the most common reasons people skip exercise is because they don't think there's enough time in the day, but you don't have to commit to hour-long workouts.

Health experts recommend at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week. This may seem like a lot, but that doesn't have to happen all at once.

Start by taking a short walk after meals, stretching while you watch TV at night, or taking an extra lap around the block with your dog. These small changes will add up quickly, and you'll build consistent, healthy habits before you know it.

THE COURAGE TO KEEP MOVING

People think fitness has to be measured in miles walked or total time spent exercising, but at the end of the day, all that matters is the willingness to try something new.

Things like taking a new path on your walk, signing up for a new class, or stretching a little more than yesterday may seem like small choices. Over time, though, those small choices will help you build your confidence while staying strong, capable, and healthy.

FOCUS ON RANGE OF MOTION

Fitness doesn't mean only improving your endurance or strength. Another important part of fitness is mobility and how easily you're able to move throughout your day.

Your range of motion affects everyday activities like reaching overhead and bending down. As you get older and your joints become stiffer, these simple tasks can start to feel harder than they should.

Adding a few minutes of stretching to your routine, in the morning and

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SNAPSHOTS

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PHOTO NO. 1 — Macon-Bibb Recreation celebrated the career of James Hand with a retirement party at Macon Bibb United Boxing Club At Freedom Park last week. *Photo courtesy of Macon-Bibb County Recreation.*

PHOTO NO. 2 — Macon-Bibb County Recreation held a prom for the county’s adaptive program last week at Delores A. Brooks Recreation Center. *Photo courtesy of Macon-Bibb County Recreation.*

PHOTO NO. 3 — Bibb County School District Superintendent Dan Sims, the Fort Valley State University mascot and other volunteers cheered and welcomed students to L.H. Williams Elementary last week to encourage students before their Milestones testing. *Photo courtesy United Way of Central Georgia.*

PHOTO NO. 4 — Rev. Krystle Moraska speaks at an Interfaith Prayer Vigil in support of immigrant families on May 2 at Faith Lutheran Church in Warner Robins. *Photo courtesy of DeMarcus Beckham.*

PHOTO NO. 5 — The Bibb County School District hosted a Joint Military Signing Day Ceremony May 5 inside Central Geprgia Technical College’s gym. *Photo courtesy of Bibb County Schools.*

Georgians see damage from Trump tariff love

There are few things President Donald Trump loves more than gold-plated furnishings and seeing his name and face emblazoned on public property — except, perhaps, tariffs.

Unfortunately, his obsession is so unhealthy that it will give his therapist fits and is toxic to hardworking Georgians.

Trump’s unabashed romance with tariffs began long before his presidency, but they became a key part of his second term. On what he coined “Liberation Day,” he slapped massive tariffs — taxes on imports generally passed onto American consumers — on nearly every country, particularly U.S. allies. The tariffs were difficult to track since he revised them more than 50 times, but they soared to an average of over 21%.

To many spectators, this appeared blatantly unconstitutional. Trump is not an autocrat; he is a president bound by constitutional limits, and the power to levy tariffs wholesale lies with Congress. It is even spelled out in plain English in the Constitution: “The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises [and] To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations.”

Trump disagreed with our founding document and attempted legal gymnastics to justify his unilaterally imposed tariffs. He even suggested that Americans could start receiving tariff dividend checks from the government and his tariffs might balance the federal budget — a claim that stands at odds with foundational mathematics.

This pseudoarithmetic aside, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to consider Trump’s tariff arguments and ultimately scoffed at them.

“By a vote of 6-3, the justices ruled that the tariffs exceed the powers given to the president by Congress



Marc Hyden

The high court then ordered the Trump administration to refund the ill-gotten tariff funds, and it began doing so last month.

“But only the entities [i.e., companies] that officially paid the tariffs are eligible to recover that money,” The New York Times noted. “That means that the fuller universe of people affected by Mr. Trump’s policies — including millions of Americans who paid higher prices for the products they bought — are not able to apply for direct relief.”

So much for tariff dividend checks.

Was it worth it, Georgia? Absolutely not. While in effect, tariffs stifled trade, inhibited job growth and increased consumer prices. On average, this cost families about \$1,700 — money that they are not getting back. It is fair to assume that Georgia particularly felt the sharp sting of tariffs, since the Peach State is a trading hub and agricultural center, which was central to trade disputes.

“Georgia depends more on global trade than the average state. Imports equal 17% of Georgia’s GDP compared to 11% of U.S. GDP,” reports the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. “Tariffs and nontariff barriers to trade will be a stronger economic headwind for Georgia than for the rest of the United States.”

Meanwhile, agriculture adds over \$90 billion to Georgia’s economy, although tariffs can significantly impact the sector.

According to the National Tax-

under a 1977 law providing him the authority to regulate commerce during national emergencies created by foreign threats,” SCOTUS Blog reported.

payers Union, “Tariffs hit farmers and ranchers with a double-whammy of lower exports and higher input prices. Under Liberation Day tariffs, U.S. agricultural exports declined and the 2025 agricultural trade deficit increased by 10.8%.”

What’s more, the tariffs increased, rather than eased, the country’s trade deficit and reduced manufacturing jobs, which was a predictable outcome to anyone with a cursory knowledge of economics.

While the court invalidated Trump’s so-called Liberation Day tariffs, some pain remains: “Residents and business owners [in Georgia] say the economic effects are still unfolding, often in ways that are subtle and cumulative,” said the Savannah Morning News. “That strain, some locally say, has not eased.”

It is hard to predict Trump’s next steps on tariffs, especially considering he exchanged a trade war for a real war with Iran, which is consuming his attention. Nevertheless, Trump’s dalliance with tariffs does not seem fleeting.

They always seem to be on the tip of his tongue, and while a theoretical case can be made in support of targeted tariffs for national security purposes, Trump’s use far exceeds this. Rather than continuing his infatuation with these taxes, he should consider the pain they inflicted on all Americans.

“The evidence is in: tariffs failed even by the Trump Administration’s own terms,” the Taxpayers Union explained. “They did not shrink the trade deficit, did not revitalize manufacturing, and did not help farmers.”

Georgians understand this, but does Trump?

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

FILE PHOTO
Stacked shipping containers fill a cargo facility. President Donald Trump’s tariffs on imports cost American families an average of \$1,700, according to Moneywise report. Columnist Mark Hyden argues the cost — and the related chaos — wasn’t worth it.



United Way CEO: On May 14, your business can be a lifeline

BY CARL TIMS
Special to The Melody

If you talk to a business owner or manager, one of the most pressing challenges they face is finding affordable health insurance for their employees.

As someone who spent more than 30 years in the insurance industry, I can tell you the problem is real and getting worse.

From large corporations to small (family-owned) businesses, providing quality healthcare at a reasonable price has become increasingly difficult. Premiums keep rising, while the quality of plans continues to decline at a pace that simply isn’t sustainable.

And ultimately, it’s workers who are paying the price — sometimes financially, and other times with their health.

Recent national reporting highlights just how serious this has become. Americans are making real, everyday tradeoffs just to afford healthcare. Consider this:

- 15% of Americans (38 million people) have stretched out prescriptions to save money.
- 15% have borrowed money to

cover healthcare costs.

- 11% have skipped meals.
- 11% have driven less.
- 9% have cut back on utilities.

Most concerning of all, one in three American adults has had to make at least one of these tradeoffs.

These aren’t abstract statistics. They represent the day-to-day reality for ALICE families — households that are working hard, often full-time, and still struggling to afford the basics. Even with steady employment, many are being forced into impossible choices as the cost of living continues to rise.

For these families, deciding between paying rent, covering a medical bill, buying groceries, fixing a car, purchasing school supplies or paying a utility bill isn’t an occasional hardship. It’s a monthly reality.

Here in Central Georgia, 42% of families fall below the ALICE threshold, and that number continues to grow. That’s why the Brookdale Resource Center is so critical to our mission.

Brookdale often serves as the last line of defense for families on the brink. Its 45-day program offers a fresh start by providing shelter, food,

clothing and other basic necessities, while trained caseworkers work alongside families to help them secure stable, independent housing.

Through strong partnerships with Macon-Bibb County, United Way and other community organizations, Brookdale has helped nearly 5,000 of our neighbors avoid falling deeper into poverty.

But this work doesn’t happen without community support — and on May 14, you have an opportunity to make a real impact.

We’re launching United We Dine, a community-wide initiative where local restaurants, shops and businesses will donate a portion of their sales for one day to support the Brookdale Resource Center. We’re looking for businesses across Central Georgia to step up and be part of something meaningful.

If you’re a business owner or manager and want to get involved, send me a message to sign up. Let’s come together and make a difference.

Carl Tims is the CEO of United Way of Central Georgia. Email him at uwceo@unitedwaycg.com. Learn more about the organization’s efforts at unitedwaycg.org.



The Macon Melody

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Jason Vorhees » Photographer

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ABOUT THE MACON MELODY

The Macon Melody is a community newsroom founded in 2024 by the National Trust for Local News, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America’s newspapers, building brighter futures for them and better serving readers in the process.

The Melody, named for Macon’s enormous influence on American music, is the premier community news source in Macon-Bibb County. We are also a national innovation lab testing scalable models and tools for strengthening local news.

We follow the Code of Ethics published by the Society of Professional Journalists (spj.org/ethics), and we believe in doing what is right every time and not just when it is convenient.

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The Macon Melody welcomes letters to the editor and guest editorials from readers. Submissions should be concise, relevant to our coverage or community issues, and respectful in tone.

Letters may be edited for length, clarity and style. Submissions must include the writer’s name, city of residence and a phone number for verification purposes only.

Anonymous submissions will not be published. These items are published at the discretion of the executive editor and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Macon Melody or its staff.

Submissions may be sent to joshua@maconmelody.com.

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DuBose Porter » Publisher Emeritus » dubose@ntln.org

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THE HYMNAL » REFLECTIONS ON FAITH

The Lord doth provide

In his book “The Sure Cure for Worry,” Kent Crockett wrote about Max Wilkins, who serves as a vision catalyst for church multiplication with the Global Methodist Church.

When Max sensed God’s call to ministry, he applied to Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He had no resources to pay for it. He considered two employment opportunities before fall classes started — a local church position, which would give ministry training, or a church camp staff position with a super low salary. The church job was the obvious choice.

After spending time in prayer, Max felt led to pursue the camp job instead of the better-paying church position. His parents tried to talk him out of it. Yet Max felt strongly God led him to work at summer camp.

For the next two and a half months, Max faithfully did his camp duties and collected his meager pay. At the end of the summer, classes were two weeks away, and Max still didn’t have money to pay tuition.

As he thought about his financial situation, he realized his parents were right. If he had taken the church position, he would have gained valuable experience and had the money to pay for the first semester. Max had prayed about the two job choices and felt a peace about his decision to do the camp. Now starting fall seminary classes looked impossible.

Max stormed down to the camp lake and cried out to God, “Lord, what are you doing? You are the one who called me to seminary. You are the one who called me to work at this camp. I’m trying to be obedient to you, but I have no idea what to do now.”

Suddenly he sensed the presence of someone nearby, turned around and noticed an elderly woman quietly sitting on a lakeside bench.

“Uh, hello,” Max said, embarrassed. “Have we met?”

“No, you don’t know me,” she replied. “My name is Emily Ann. Tell me what’s bothering you.”

Max sat down and talked about his call to ministry, his desire to attend seminary and his turning down the summer church staff job to work at this camp: “Now camp is almost over and I have no money. Seminary classes start in two weeks. I have no idea what I’m going to do with my life.”

“Candler School of Theology?” she asked. “My husband and I happen to have some friends who are endowing a scholarship at that sem-



David Chancey

inary. Please give me your contact info and I will tell them about you.”

Max was thinking, “Yeah, right.” What are the odds that someone with a connection to the

very seminary he applied to would come to that spot at the very moment he was praying? Max scribbled his address on a piece of paper, handed it to her and thanked her.

After camp ended, Max returned home and tried to figure out his next step. Mail accumulated over the summer was stacked on his desk, and in that stack was a letter from the Sherman Foundation: “Dear Max ... Our dear friend Emily Ann spoke very highly of you and your calling to ministry. We trust her implicitly. Based on her recommendation, we are pleased to award you an all-expense paid scholarship to Candler School of Theology at Emory University.”

Max was stunned. What looked like a poor decision to work at summer camp for a pittance became an opportunity to demonstrate how God can maneuver people to the right locations at the right time to help carry out His purposes and become channels of His promised provision.

My wife and I experienced God’s provision in our seminary journey as well. A coworker at the former Home Mission Board in Atlanta used her connections to help us receive a scholarship that helped tremendously. An anesthesiologist and his wife in our Sunday school class pulled us aside one Sunday just before we moved to Fort Worth to begin studies and said every year, they allocated money to bless someone and this year, they wanted to help with our seminary expenses.

They handed us a check for \$500, a lot of money in 1981. This more than covered our moving and startup expenses.

Throughout the years, we’ve seen God fulfill his promise recorded in Philippians 4:19, “My God shall supply all your needs...” time and time again.

As my Mom always said, “The Lord doth provide!”

David Chancey lives in Fayetteville, where he was pastor of McDonough Road Baptist Church for more than 20 years. He currently serves as the transitional pastor of Griffin Church in Griffin. Write to him at davidchancey.com.

technology leaves old folks out,” Habersham said.

He said he plans to print a few for those who need it and make the entire resource printable from his website.

He will also focus on expanding the “online mall,” a digital marketplace on Macon Black Pages’ platform.

Small business owners who do not have the bandwidth to run their own websites can still reach online customers through their presence on his website.

In the past six months, the Black Pages publisher has gone back to his roots as a teacher, reaching an entirely new audience on TikTok. In his video series “Blackenomics,” Habersham talks about the economic contributions and history of Black people in Macon, such as Black Wall Street, which was once located in the Cotton Avenue District.

“In spite of the tenor and attitudes of some elements of the country and the community,” Habersham said, there is a general understanding that diversity and inclusion matters and benefits all.

“I just believe very strongly in the community,” he said.

Learn more about the Black Pages at maconblackpages.com.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY FRANCES DE LA ROSA

Fernando La Rosa photographs along the Ocmulgee River in Macon in November 2016. Thousands of La Rosa’s film negatives are being digitized for the first time as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded archive project at Wesleyan College. La Rosa, a Peruvian-born photographer and longtime Wesleyan professor, died in 2017.

Wesleyan grant project brings photographer’s archive to light

BY RISHIKA RIMAL
Special to The Melody

Thousands of Fernando La Rosa’s film negatives are being seen as positive images for the first time, bringing new life to the archive of the Peruvian photographer and longtime Wesleyan College professor.

Wesleyan and Michigan State University received a \$349,605 National Endowment for the Humanities grant for the two-year project, which started last September.

According to his wife, retired Wesleyan art professor Frances de La Rosa, college archivist Virginia Blake and undergraduate students are processing about 22,500 photographs and film negatives dating from 1965 to 2017.

The work includes preservation, digitization, archival rehousing and metadata creation, and it will result in a public website hosted by Michigan State’s Matrix Digi-

tal Humanities Center. The archive will digitally house La Rosa’s work, which documented everyday life and artists in Peru’s capital of Lima as well as in other Andean countries, including Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador.

The photographer, born in 1943, also documented archaeological sites across South America.

Working largely in black and white, La Rosa was known for photographs shaped by shadow, geometry, architecture and poetic composition. He studied with American photographer Minor White in Boston in 1973 and later founded an art gallery, Secuencia Foto Galeria, where he exhibited works by famous U.S. photographers Aaron Siskind and Harry Callahan.

Before moving to Macon in 1998 to teach at Wesleyan, he taught in Peru and throughout the U.S., with stints at Parsons School of Design in New York City and Tulane University in New Orleans. He taught

at Wesleyan until his death in 2017.

Frances de La Rosa, who holds the copyrights to La Rosa’s work, is stewarding the project to completion as its project manager. She said the project employs more than 17 people across Wesleyan, Michigan State, consultancies and cultural institutions. She added that the project documents her husband’s long career and traces his growth as an artist.

She said there are many images La Rosa only ever saw as the raw, reversed negatives — never as the finished photographs we are now able to see.

Editor’s note: Rishika Rimal is a student at Wesleyan College, where she is majoring in both biology and neuroscience. She is also a participant in the college’s Local Democracy Lab, which helps students gain real-world journalism experience through collaboration opportunities with professional staff members at The Melody.

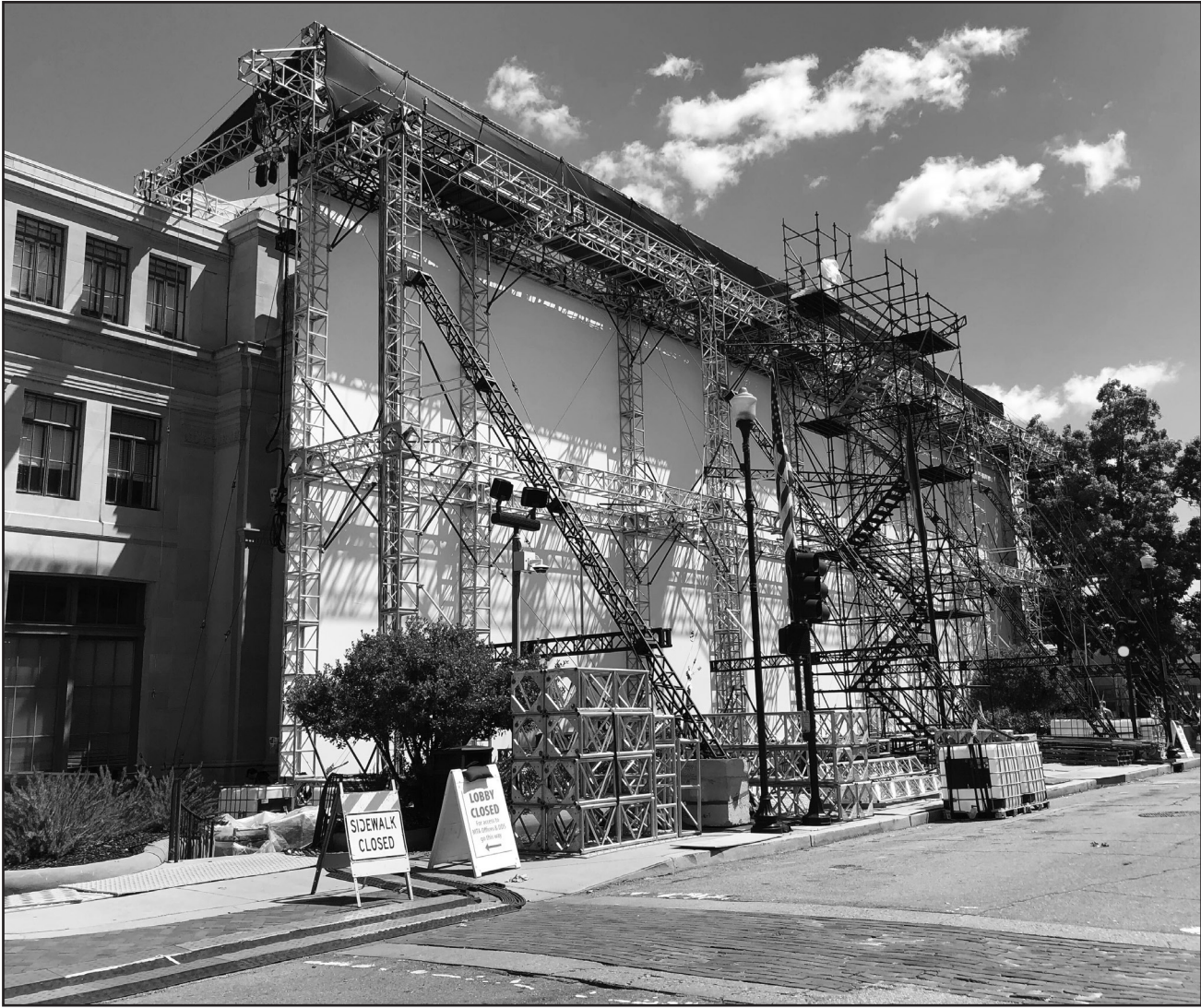


PHOTO BY LIZ FABIAN FOR THE MACON NEWSROOM

Production crews rigged Macon’s Terminal Station with lighting scaffolding in spring 2024 to transform the historic building into the Daily Planet newsroom for the 2025 “Superman” film. The station is set to return to the silver screen in mid-June for the filming of the sequel, “Man of Tomorrow.”

HOLLYWOOD

Continued from Page 1

ings, said Aaron Buzza, senior vice president and chief operating officer at Visit Macon.

“It allows film productions to come into town and utilize downtown streets and buildings to be a variety of different places. It doesn’t have just a look of one particular community,” Buzza said.

The area benefits from the cast and crews staying in hotels, eating at local restaurants and, as time allows, taking in some of Macon’s attractions or going to any events that may be happening, he said. The locations that are used can later be showcased for visitors who are interested in a particular film.

Georgia has been an attractive state for productions since the 1970s, but filming really accelerated after legislators approved

enhanced tax incentives for filmmakers in 2008.

In 2022, productions reportedly spent \$4.4 billion in the state, an economic impact that was an industry record, according to a press release from Governor Brian Kemp. In 2025, however, the state ranked second — surpassed by California — with 245 productions filmed in Georgia last year compared to 412 productions in 2022.

Before the pandemic, Macon saw about five to six major studio productions yearly, not including independent films, locally produced films or student films. But the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the writers’ and actors’ strikes that occurred in 2023 slowed things down nationwide.

Currently, there are 26 productions filming in Georgia. Macon is getting back to a place where it’s seeing between three and five films

in a year, Buzza said, which he describes as a “sweet spot.”

“It allows us to be a participant in the industry, be a participant in the making of film and television production without it being a major inconvenience to residents and businesses,” he said.

Macon’s latest star-studded production comes after the filming of the 2025 “Superman” movie, which prominently featured Macon’s Grand Terminal Station as the iconic Daily Planet newsroom. The local train station will return to the silver screen in mid-June for the filming of the sequel “Man of Tomorrow.”

“What we have on deck for this year — the production that’s filming right now and then we have one coming in summer — I’m very optimistic that we’re going to see Macon presented really nicely in film,” Buzza said.

PAGES

Continued from Page 1

uplift and advance these businesses because they will be better community partners,” he said.

Supporting Black businesses feeds into improved education, an increased tax base and reduced crime, he said, noting that “a rising tide raises the whole ship.”

Habersham has long been at the heart of business in Middle Georgia.

A Macon native from Tindall Heights, he attended the segregated Ballard Hudson High School, later became a teacher and was witness to growing opportunities for Black individuals in the years that followed.

He launched several business endeavors, including a newspaper, car wash service, floral shop, transportation company, and radio and TV repair shop.

Most notably, he opened Macon’s iconic Habersham Records store in 1972.

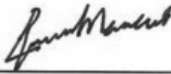
Habersham has not lost focus of his original goal to provide civic, social and educational engagement to the community — even if his publication will look a little different moving forward.

“I have seen instances where

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract or parcel of land, with all and singular the rights, members and appurtenances thereof, to the same being, belonging, or in anywise appertaining, to the only proper use, benefit and behoof of the said party of the second part, its successors and assigns, forever, in FEE SIMPLE.

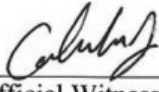
AND THE SAID party of the first part, for his heirs and assigns, will warrant and forever defend the right and title to the above described property, unto the said party of the second part, its successors and assigns, against claims of all persons owning, holding or claiming by, through or under the said party of the first part.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said party of the first part has hereunto set his hand and seal, the day and year above written.

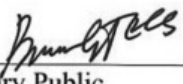


MARCUS J. LUCAS (SEAL)

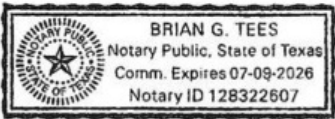
Signed, sealed and delivered
in the presence of:



Unofficial Witness



Notary Public
[Notary Seal and Expiration Date]



SUBMITTED PHOTO

All three signatures on this limited warranty deed — including one purportedly belonging to Marcus Lucas — slope similarly upward, a pattern that Fickling & Company realtor Angela Sarrell says can be a telltale sign of forgery. Lucas, a Minnesota resident, discovered earlier this year his Elnora Drive property had been fraudulently transferred to a Florida corporation.

FRAUD

Continued from Page 1

across the nation,” said Capt. Dennis Terry, head of the Bibb County Sheriff’s Office Property Crimes Division. “They call it real estate fraud, deed fraud, title fraud. We call it real estate parasites.”

Crooks only need an owner’s name and a property address to begin filing fraudulent documents. In Lucas’ case, a notary seal was on the deed, but it proved to be fake.

Fraudsters ride through neighborhoods looking for properties for sale or rent, search online property listings, and scan obituary notices to find potential targets, Terry said.

“They can go on that website, with all the people who pass away, and they can do research and see what they own. And they can acquire these (properties) with a quick claim deed, but they can file the paperwork at the court’s office, at the clerk’s office and have it notarized. Most of the time there’s fake notaries — and it’s that easy,” Terry said.

Undoing the damage is much more difficult, and legal fees can be expensive.

Due to the increase in these fraud cases, Bibb County Superior Court Clerk Erica Woodford drafted an “Affidavit Regarding Unauthorized Transaction on Property” document that is now used throughout the state when someone challenges a recorded deed or alleged property sale.

Two days after appearing before P&Z, Lucas filed his affidavit with Woodford’s office stating he swears he did not authorize the sale of his property.

“That affidavit is being cross-referenced or attached to your property,” Woodford explained. “If there’s a title search done, then that affidavit will come up, and it’ll be a red flag.”

If property owners notice they haven’t received a tax bill, or a water bill, that can be another indication something may be amiss. If a water bill on a vacant property rises sharply, it could mean someone is living there unbeknownst to the owner.

Law enforcement websites suggest you notify authorities if you suspect fraud, but simply reporting the crime isn’t enough to get your property back. Even if a suspect is identified and criminally charged, attorneys must be involved to sort out everything in civil court, Terry said.

In one recent case in north Macon, a judge voided the fraudulent deed after reading affidavits from the true owners and the notary whose seal was copied.

Terry knew of a former Maconite living in New York who had two houses in Lynmore Estates stolen out from under her.

“She wanted us to help her get her houses back, and we tried to explain, ‘So you’ve got to get a lawyer now.’ I mean, it causes so much problems. I thought it was easy. I file a police report, I get my house back,” Terry said. “You

have to get an attorney. And it’s a great financial loss, right? People had lost thousands of dollars having their home taken from them, and paying attorney fees is not cheap.”

Proactive protection

The best way to protect your property is to be proactive and sign up for email or text alerts.

Bibb County’s Superior Court Clerk offers a free property check for documents filed in her office.

“It’s a free service where you can sign up and you will get notification if there’s anything filed on your property ... so whether you file it, or whether the tax commissioner filed it, or the IRS or John bad actor files,” Woodford said. “You can sign up for your mom’s house, your great aunt’s house, your dead uncle’s house.”

To catch documents filed across the state, the Georgia Superior Court Clerks’ Cooperative Authority offers a free registration service, the Filing Activity Notification System, or FANS, which can be accessed at fans.gscca.org.

Those who have registered their information will be notified when real estate and personal property records containing those keywords, such as names or property addresses, are filed within the state, alerting rightful owners to begin the civil process of reclaiming property.

Last year, following news reports of home title fraud across the state, the Georgia General Assembly also put new safeguards in place.

Woodford and her superior court clerk colleagues around the state now must obtain photographic identification cards of those who present deeds or other documents to place in the official record.

Those who self-file also must submit to facial recognition and provide enough identifying information, whether it be a driver’s license, passport or other official identification.

Those who do not have computers at home can use a kiosk at the Bibb County Superior Court Clerk’s Office to register, Woodford said.

Under the new law, public notaries are required to keep a journal of each official act they perform, listing identifying information for each client that they have confirmed either through government records or personal knowledge of the self-filer.

Notaries also are required to take classes and training before being appointed and within a month of renewing their license.

The 2025 law also provides remedies for the legal owner who has been a victim of fraudulently recorded deeds. They can recoup their actual damages or \$5,000, whichever is greater, and recover attorney’s fees in cases of fraud.

A September AARP article warns that bargain sales and rushed closings can be “hallmarks of fraudulent sales.” Because of that, Georgia House Bill 1292, requires realtors to disclose in

capital letters when making unsolicited monetary offers on a property: “This offer may or may not be the fair market value of the property.”

If the offer is less than the prior year’s assessed value for property taxes, it must state: “This offer is less than the county assessed value for this property.”

Frauds and fakes

Fickling & Company realtor Angela Sarrell was scrolling through Facebook when she noticed a Macon house she was familiar with. The below-market price tipped her off that the home was fraudulently listed.

“They may even have certain websites for it, and someone will describe the property. And I mean, they’ve got it down to a T, like a realtor would. They’re telling you square footage. They’re telling you things about the home,” Sarrell said. “It is scary.”

Buyers should beware of phony real estate site posts that list homes with old pictures gathered online from previous sales.

Hearing about these types of scams makes Sarrell extra cautious when dealing with clients.

She wants to see their driver’s license or articles of organization if the home is part of a limited liability company.

“I want to make sure that the property I’m selling these people have the legal right to do so,” Sarrell said.

She encourages people to examine signatures on the real estate deed and look for similarities of letter design, or other identical patterns that could indicate forgery.

On the fraudulent deed in Lucas’ case, all the signatures slanted similarly upward from the line.

Sarrell believes all homebuyers need to spring for title insurance.

“When the closing attorney asks you if you want an owner’s policy, the answer has always got to be yes, because that owner’s policy protects you as an individual,” Sarrell said. “If somebody says, ‘Oh, that was my great-great-granddaddy’s land. Technically, that should be mine. I’m the heir,’ whatever. That policy protects you and your purchase and it is a one-time payment at closing, and it’s not very expensive.”

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation encourages victims to file a report with local law enforcement and also inform the GBI either online at gbi.georgia.gov or by calling 800-597-8477.

Sarrell encourages all property owners to be on guard.

“It’s one of the biggest assets in life,” she said. “It could be a property that’s been handed down from generation to generation, and to lose it all over a scam? It’s not right.”

Woodford suggests making sure elderly or less computer-savvy relatives also file these protections.

“You work hard to try to get some things and have some things for your family and then a bad actor comes and steals it from you. It’s very unfortunate,” Woodford said.

CLEANUP

Continued from Page 1

can’t stay here, these are the services we have available, offering them assistance to get them connected with services, rapid rehousing, transported to Brookdale, whatever they may need,” Beavers said, adding many of those homeless individuals accept those offers. “Others who may choose not to are advised that they need to leave the site by [this time and date], at which point ... There’s a final walk through that says, ‘Hey, you have to vacate this site.’”

Miller mentioned a program that reunites some of those individuals with their families via bus tickets out of town.

He also said the county offers those who are evacuated from the encampment a safe place to store their personal items.

“We always protect, too, the people’s belongings,” he said. “We offer something to put all their belongings in, make sure we keep those if they can’t take those with them. We store those in a safe place.”

Jail money and roadwork

Commissioners also earmarked \$34 million to pay for the expansion of the Bibb County Jail. The money will come from the 2025 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax voters approved last March.

The county has so far spent about \$1,244,040 for preconstruction work.

Miller said the estimated price for the jail has “gone up a little bit” because the sheriff added features he wanted, including office space and additional beds. Renderings of the rehabilitated jail are expected later this month. The work is expected to start in June and take 14-18 months to complete.

County roads, too, will continue getting upgrades. Commissioners approved a new \$3.2 million contract with Professional Paving Services Inc., which will cover more than 16 miles of roadway. A mix of state road maintenance money and 2018 SPLOST collections will pay for the work.

Professional Paving Services Inc. has received nearly \$10 million in county paving contracts over the past year. The company was established a decade ago and is registered to a financial company on Forsyth Road.

Lake Tobo enhancements

Commissioners met behind

closed doors for nearly an hour before reemerging to vote on an interim agreement with Lovejoy Capital LLC, an outdoor hospitality company owned by the grandson of late Georgia Sen. Herman Talmadge Sr.

The agreement proposes a yearlong period to plan, develop, design and engineer plans to enhance the Lake Tobesofkee Recreation Area.

The public-private partnership proposal could yield upscale outdoor lodging, commonly known as glamping, along with a new walking trail and a new life for Sandy Beach Water Park, which would be transformed “into a world-class maze attraction that can operate year-round,” the company wrote in an unsolicited proposal to the county.

One resident who spoke during public comments said folks who live on the lake had not heard anything about the public-private partnership from the county in at least 12 months and could not make it to the meeting because of the short notice.

“There is a great concern about some of the changes being proposed,” she said.

Residents “just want to have more transparency. ... There’s a lot of anxiety about it,” she added.

Miller assured her no agreements had been finalized and “it’s just preliminary.” He added the county is planning two more public information sessions during which “there will be lots of things for you to see and ask questions” about.

In other business, commissioners on Tuesday approved: — Abandonment of an alleyway at 855 and 847 Northern Street and subsequent sale of it to Nevada-based Daniwin Associates LLC for \$565.

— A contract with the Macon Area Habitat for Humanity for \$345,767 to build two new, single-family homes on Duncan Avenue.

— A grant application for \$8 million in state funds “for the purpose of reducing unsheltered homelessness” in the county.

— Acceptance of a Federal Aviation Administration grant of \$2.6 million with a local match of \$137,817 for funding the second phase of a runway extension project at the Middle Georgia Regional Airport.

— An agreement with SAFEbuilt Georgia LLC for building department administrative services to be paid on a percent-of-fees basis by the fire department.



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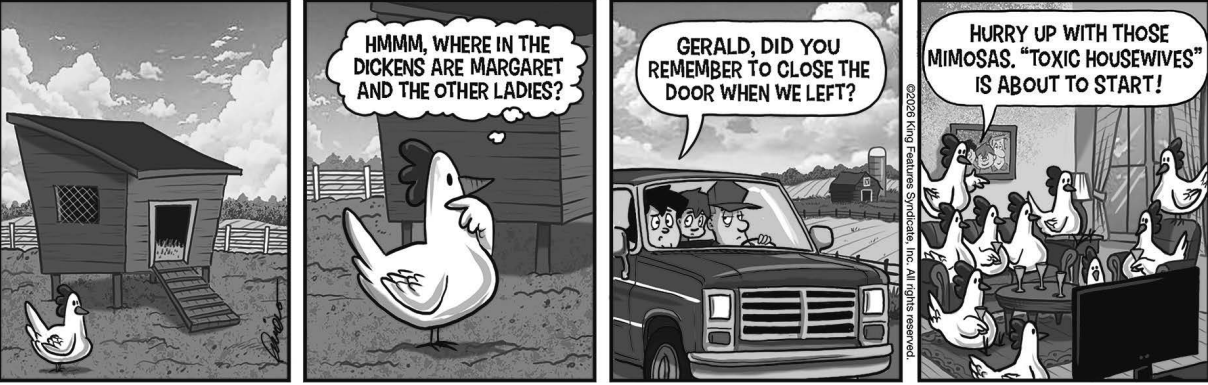
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A woman holding a large fish.

Amber Waves

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Out on a Limb

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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



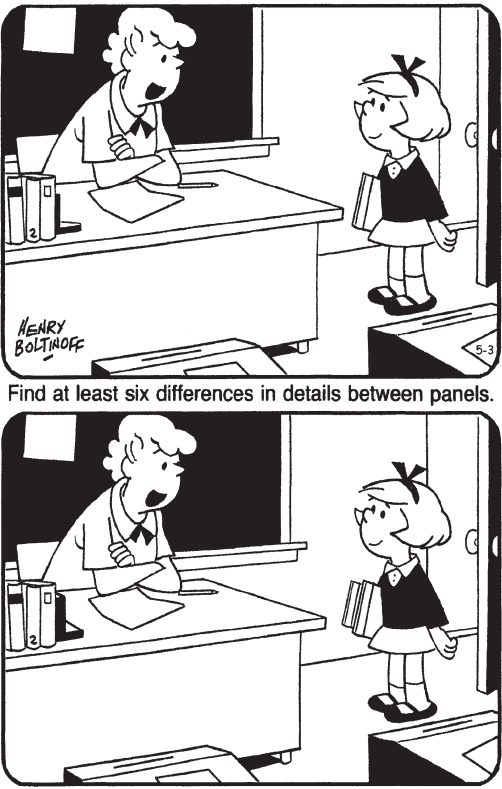
OLIVE & POPEYE

By Randy Milholland



HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINGOFF



Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: P equals W

XMC RISOGPHROHYJ OIPJ PGIRH
FMOMQHJR TWW IPJ T ETMY
IU CYTFHUSW EIJZ XMYZR:
OPI-RPTJ, TYMQIJT.

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SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

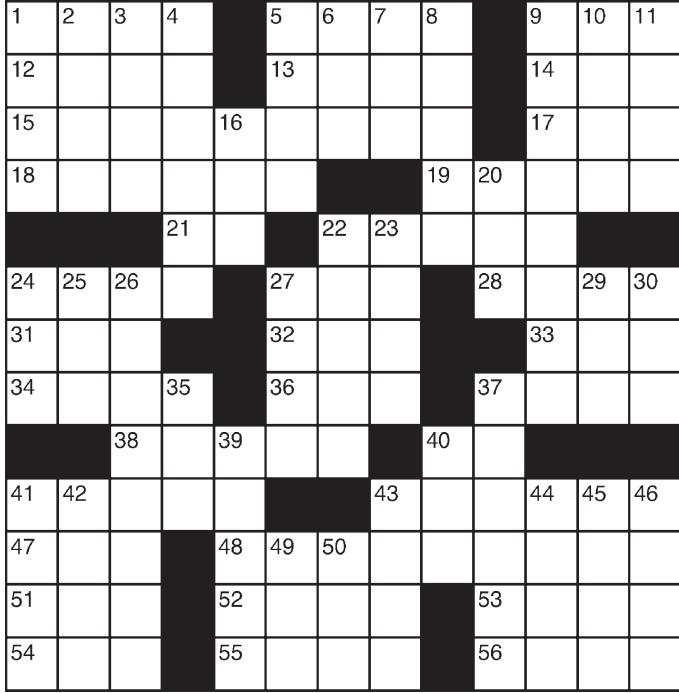
Trim
NUPER
Place
DATES
Burn
GENIS
Saying
EAGAD

TODAY'S WORD

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Supergirl's first name
5 Platter
9 Author Tolstoy
12 Lay — the line
13 Cold War initials
14 Days of yore
15 Citrus producer
17 Avril follower
18 At hand
19 Unmanned plane
21 Apt. cooler
22 Rid of wool
24 Coconut juice
27 "Nova" subj.
28 Feed the piggy bank
31 Hearty quaff
32 Klutz
33 Actor Patel
34 Mater lead-in
36 Roman 1051
37 Big party
38 Chose
40 Undergrad deg.
41 Ford or Hudson
43 Parlor piece
47 PC key
48 Tangy, custard-like spread
51 Employ



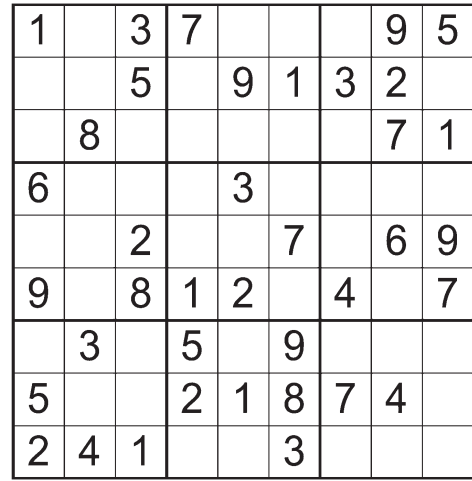
DOWN

- 1 Pottery oven
2 Suit to —
3 Capital of Italy
4 Parka
5 Obligation
6 Medit. nation
7 Away from NNW

- 8 Words to live by
9 Picnic drink
10 Panache
11 Garfield's pal
16 "The Wall" network
20 B&O and others (Abbr.)
22 Burn with steam
23 LP player
24 Goat's cry
25 Under the weather
26 Throat-soothing drink
29 Bird doc
30 Cain's mom
35 Earth Day mo.
37 Nabob
39 10th U.S. president
40 "Gandhi" star
41 Move, as freight
42 Otherwise
43 Pop
44 Melody
45 Sea eagle
46 Paradise
49 Id counterpart
50 Pas' mates

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Weekly SUDOKU



Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

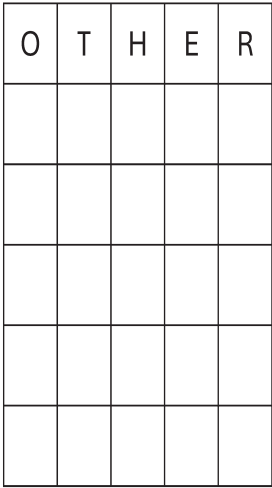
DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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FiveSpot™

Not tonight

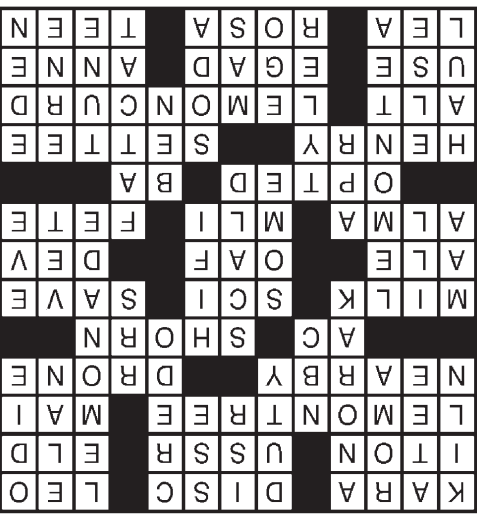


- Not this
Major Monopoly purchase
Dowel and spindle maker
Where oil is frequently found
Expire
Concocts a scheme

Solve each row by replacing one letter from the answer above or below and scrambling to make a new word. When complete, the top and bottom words will have no letters in common.

FiveSpot is a trademark of Michael McLinden
See more at www.sproutspuzzle.com

02638



Solution time: 25 mins.

Answers

King Crossword

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

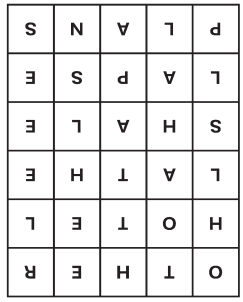
1. MOVIES: What is the name of the blue diamond necklace in "Titanic"?
2. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president once said, "Speak softly and carry a big stick"?
3. GEOGRAPHY: What is New Zealand's national bird?
4. MATH: How many sides does a tridecagon have?
5. BIBLE: What is the first book in the Bible called?
6. SPACE: How long does it take the International Space Station to orbit the Earth?
7. MYTHOLOGY: Who is the Greek god of the sun?
8. ANATOMY: Where are the carpus and metacarpus located in the human body?
9. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What is the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world?
10. LITERATURE: Who wrote the dystopian novel titled "The Testaments"?
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ARGUED

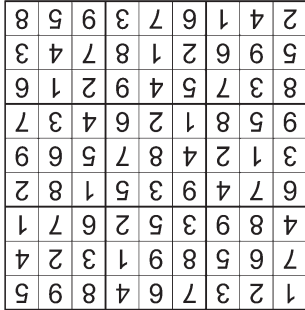
Today's Word

3. Singe; 4. Adage
1. Prune; 2. Stead

SCRAMBLERS



Solution



Answer

Weekly SUDOKU

Big southwestern town whose citizens all own a pair of graceful pond birds: Two-swan, Arizona.

1. "Heart of the Ocean"
2. Theodore Roosevelt
3. The kiwi
4. 13
5. Genesis
6. 90-93 minutes
7. Helios
8. The hand
9. Three Georges Dam, China
10. Margaret Atwood

Gallery West saved from closure, local business owner to continue its legacy

Gallery West abides.

With owner-operator Kirsten West's recent retirement, it seemed like the local gallery was done for after 11 years of serving as Macon's primary gathering spot for music tourists and fans of the Allman Brothers Band.

Featuring decades of Kirk West's photos of renowned musicians while also highlighting the Allman Brothers' legacy, the gallery is being rescued from closure by Scott Mitchell, owner of downtown's The Bohemian Den and Sweet Eleanor's Divine Deserts.

"I could not have picked a better human being than Scott Mitchell to take over our gallery," Kirsten told me last week before the final decision was announced. "It just makes total sense."

Not only has Mitchell proven himself a savvy entrepreneur-businessman, but he's shown his love for Macon through both personal and professional involvements, such as being holding various positions with the Downtown Macon Community Association, being a Newtown Macon Downtown Ambassador award winner, helping establish the Macon Sculpture Walk and Macon Music Sculpture Park, as well as founding and guiding the work of Macon Pride.

Nate Weeks wrote in The Middle Georgia Times that Mitchell's work in art and music projects was done out of seeing the need and opportunity and getting things done without "waiting for government funding."

Mitchell was instrumental in helping other small business owners correctly complete the morass of paperwork required for financial aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kirsten West said she will stay on board at Gallery West until July 1 when Mitchell officially takes over. She said the name will remain the same, as will Kirk's work. She also said she and Kirk West will still be around for Gallery West happenings.

Mitchell said he had ideas for



Michael W. Pannell

"I really want to lead with the same kind of heart they put into it — I can't wait," he said.

It's a relief to admirers of the gallery and Kirk West's work, including lovers of his internationally-known photography and those who love the tales he spins about his decades of service as the Allman Brothers Road manager.

Don't forget, it was the Wests who moved to town and restored what's now The Allman Brothers Band Museum at The Big House.

It was Kirsten's work at the Capitol Theatre, now the Robins Financial Capitol Theatre, that put it on the path to becoming a significant regional music venue.

"For years, Gallery West has

the future of the beloved gallery and noted that he was "honored and humbled" to take the helm following the legacy Kirsten and Kirk built.

been more than just a gallery. It has been a gathering place for artists, dreamers, collectors, musicians, storytellers and people searching for connection through creativity. That spirit exists because of the love, vision and dedication that Kirk and Kirsten poured into this space," Mitchell said at the announcement event last Friday. "Taking over a space with this much heart carries a deep responsibility. Kirk and Kirsten created something special here. They championed artists, nurtured community and made people feel welcome the moment they walked through the door.

"I believe art spaces matter. They give people room to feel, to heal, to question, to celebrate and to belong. My hope is to continue building a place where creativity and community meet, where local artists are uplifted, where difficult conversations can happen, where joy can be shared and where everyone feels like they have a seat at the table... the soul of

Gallery West will always remain rooted in the foundation Kirk and Kirsten built with so much care.

"Thank you both for trusting me with something that means so much to you. I promise to lead with my heart."

Kyler Mosley, president of the Georgia Allman Brothers Band Association and the annual GABBA Fest, shared what he thought about Gallery West continuing.

"Folks coming in for GABBA and Skydog (a festival honoring Duane Allman) have always seen Gallery West as a part of the festival and we've been proud of our association with it and the Wests," he said. "We're very thankful the gallery isn't closing and wish Scott every success. We look forward to a great relationship with him and getting to talk about his plans. I helped Kirk unload the trailer when he and Kirsten first moved here into the Big House — those two have made such an impression on Macon and still are."

Art news from Houston County

Things are happening in the Houston County art world you need to know about.

The Warner Robins-based Fine Arts Society of Middle Georgia lost its gallery months ago when its home on Commercial Circle off Watson Boulevard was torn down.

That's where Warner Robins' early-days downtown once existed and where current efforts are being focused to make it a city center.

Though they haven't found a new home gallery, Fine Arts Society members have found a showcase for their work in the corridors of Rigby's Entertainment Complex/Rigby's Conference Center on Ga. 96.

President of the Fine Arts Society Karen Sisk and three others are opening a gallery in Perry. Others involved are artists Cathy Compton, Susan Arrington and photographer Steve Arnold.

The gallery, called The Village Louvre on Carroll, is having an opening drop-in reception Friday from 6-8 p.m. at 736 Carroll St., Unit 9.

"It's a small gallery, but it's a start and we'll just be showing our work at first," Sisk said.

Later they hope to expand with more outreach to the community and other artists, she said, noting that it's the first art-dedicated gallery in Perry.

Finally, bringing it back to Rigby's and their association with the Fine Arts Society, the two have partnered to create an art expo Aug. 14-16.

Deadline for submissions is May 15. It is a juried show, limited to 40 artists in a variety of media. A \$35 application fee includes professional feedback.

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



PHOTO BY MICHAEL W. PANNELL

Kirsten West, Scott Mitchell and Kirk West celebrate the announcement Friday that Mitchell will take over Gallery West upon Kirsten West's retirement as owner-operator of the longtime downtown gallery.

BILLY'S LET'S EAT REVIEW

Celebrating one year in Macon: The city that nourishes the soul, one bite at a time

One year ago, I arrived in Macon not knowing a single soul. Like many people relocating to a new city, I turned to Google. And let me tell you, Google was absolutely no friend to Macon.

Search results often painted a picture filled with crime statistics, negative headlines and enough alarming commentary to make any reasonable person clutch their steering wheel a little tighter.

For many Maconites, that frustration is understandable because they know their city is often judged by its hardships before its heart is ever given a chance to shine. But I made a conscious choice early on — I refused to let internet search results define my experience.

"For many Maconites... they know their city is often judged by its hardships before its heart is ever given a chance to shine."



Billy Hennessey

Google's algorithm and show people the Macon that I see.

Yes, Macon has its challenges, just like any city with a rich history and evolving future. What I found here, however, was something far greater than what headlines could ever capture. I found heart. I found resilience. I found community. I chose to focus on the positives, and in return, Macon opened its arms to me in ways I never could have imagined.

I discovered a city filled with passionate small business owners, hardworking hospitality professionals and people who genuinely care about one another. I found warmth in

I believed Macon deserved better than that, and thankfully, this city proved me right. I hope my articles about Macon's amazing food and drink spots will change



PHOTO BY BILLY HENNESSEY

SEE BILLY
PAGE 10

Melody food columnist Billy Hennessey and his partner enjoy downtown Macon. Hennessey marked one year in Macon this April.

You are not alone: Local counselor offers take on mental health challenges

As a nurse practitioner, I often see how closely mental and physical health are connected. For Mental Health Awareness Month, I connected with Quintessa Solomon-Hardy, MS, LPC, NCC, CT-R, Community Support Services Program Manager at River Edge Behavioral Health, to hear directly from someone serving individuals and families right here in Middle Georgia. Her message is clear. Mental health deserves to be understood, supported and taken seriously.

“Mental health is not a character flaw”

One of the most powerful points Solomon-Hardy shared is something she wishes more people in our community truly understood. Mental health challenges are not a sign of weakness, lack of faith or personal failure. There is no “magic wand” moment where everything is suddenly fixed. Instead, Solomon-Hardy emphasizes the importance of early detection, education and ongoing support.

While faith and community are meaningful sources of strength, she noted they are not a cure-all for everyone. Relying on them alone may sometimes delay individuals from receiving the care they need.

What she sees in Middle Georgia

In her work, Solomon-Hardy consistently sees individuals navigating:

- Anxiety and overwhelm
- Depression and hopelessness
- Trauma and chronic stress
- Youth suicide risk
- Housing instability
- Barriers to care, including transportation

She also highlighted how broader economic pressures, such as rising costs of living and a competitive job market, are affecting families. Children often absorb that stress in ways that impact their emotional well-being and school performance.

Breaking the therapy stigma

One of the biggest barriers to care



Joy L. King

worry about being judged or assume therapy should provide quick, immediate results.

She reframes therapy as something entirely different:

“It’s not a one-size-fits-all or microwaveable process,” she said. “Therapy is a life choice. It is about building a mental toolbox to manage stress and navigate challenges.”

She also emphasized that therapy is not only for crisis situations. It is a proactive step toward growth and stability. For those concerned about cost, Solomon-Hardy reminded the community that organizations like River Edge Behavioral Health offer services at no cost for those who qualify.

Small habits make a big difference

Solomon-Hardy encouraged people to start with simple, consistent habits:

- Daily movement — even a short walk — to boost mood and reduce stress
 - Deep breathing techniques, such as “smell the roses and blow out the birthday candles”
 - Mindfulness practices to calm the mind and body
 - Consistent routines for sleep, meals and hydration
- “These are foundational,” she said, noting that such small behaviors can significantly improve mood, focus and overall functioning over time.

When should you seek help?

Stress is a normal part of life. However, Solomon-Hardy advised paying attention when it becomes persistent, worsens or begins to interfere with daily responsibilities and relationships. That is when it may be time to seek professional support.

is stigma, according to Solomon-Hardy. Many people fear that seeking therapy means they are on the verge of a breakdown or that something is wrong with them. Others

“You are not alone”

For those who feel like help may be out of reach, Solomon-Hardy offers a message she wants everyone to hear:

“Reaching out for assistance is not a sign of weakness. It is a strength,” she said. “You do not have to carry the load alone.”

If immediate support is needed, individuals can call or text 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for confidential help and connection to local resources.

The connection between mental and physical health

Solomon-Hardy also emphasized something many people overlook. Mental health directly impacts physical health. Poorly managed stress, anxiety and depression can increase the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke. They can also worsen sleep, pain and recovery. As healthcare providers, this reinforces the importance of addressing the whole person, both mind and body.

“Your feelings matter and are valid,” Solomon-Hardy said. “The goal is not to eliminate stress, but to learn how to manage it.”

We show up best for others when we also take care of ourselves, including our mental health.

Joy King, DNP, MBA, APRN, NP-C, FAIHM, serves as president of the Georgia Nurses Association.



PHOTO PROVIDED
Quintessa Solomon-Hardy works in community support services at River Edge Behavioral Health.

BILLY

Continued from Page 9

local restaurants, laughter in neighborhood bars and connections that transformed a complete stranger into someone who now feels deeply rooted here. For me, food became the bridge that connected me to this extraordinary city. What began as simple Facebook posts in “Support Macon Restaurants” soon turned into something much bigger than I ever expected.

Through sharing my honest thoughts, celebrating local establishments and championing the businesses that make this city special, I found my voice and apparently, Macon found its “Hey, you’re The Food Guy.”

Somewhere between beer fests, Burger Week, wine pairing dinners, soft openings and more unforgettable meals than my waistband would like to acknowledge, I became part of something bigger.

Now, has this journey been entirely without sacrifice? Absolutely not. Since moving here, I have proudly gained about twenty pounds, gone up a shirt size and discovered that stretchy waistbands are not just a luxury, they are a necessity.

My closet may be quietly protesting, and my pants and I are currently negotiating terms, but let me be clear: every single bite was worth it.

Behind every added pound is a story, a friendship, a local business supported and a memory made. If loving Macon’s food scene means occasionally sizing up, then consider it my delicious badge of honor.

It is a small price to pay because I got to enjoy Layer’s amazing cakes, Mercer Village Pizza’s smoked wings and the best “Peachy Keen” pizza, Bearfoot Tavern’s pimento cheese fritters and we won’t even mention the copious amounts of beers and snacks I’ve consumed at Fall Line, Ocmulgee and Just Tap’d.

I fell in love with these places and they have become my home away from home.

What this city gave me over the past year was so much more than incredible meals; It gave me belonging.

I’ve become friends with



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Billy Hennessey explores Macon’s restaurants as The Melody’s food columnist.

many of the employees that work at my favorite places. They became the reason why I love Macon so much.

Through the service industry, restaurant owners, bartenders, chefs and countless new friends, I found a community that welcomed me not as an outsider, but as family.

I found myself walking into places where people know my name, where conversations flow effortlessly, and where shared meals became the foundation for meaningful relationships.

In many ways, Macon didn’t just feed me, it nourished my soul because this really IS where the soul lives. As I reflect on my first year here, my overwhelming emotion is gratitude.

Gratitude for the friendships, the opportunities, the laughter, the extra shirt size and the remarkable people who made this city feel like home almost immediately. Macon did not simply become the place where I live. It became my community.

While Google may never fully capture the true spirit of this city, I can say with complete certainty that Macon is far more than its reputation. It is what you make of it. And for me, it has been one of life’s greatest blessings served generously, often with a side of fries. Until next time, my fellow Maconites ... Let’s Eat!

Billy Hennessey is the food columnist for The Melody. Write him an email at newlifenkiss@gmail.com.

“I can say with complete certainty that Macon is far more than its reputation.”

Native hydrangeas in the southern landscape

BY GRACE KRAUSS

UGA Cooperative Extension
extension.uga.edu

What is that showy white shrub brightening the landscape in May and June? The dazzling panicle blooms of the Oakleaf Hydrangea can brighten even the shadiest garden corner while adding native beauty to the landscape.

Oakleaf Hydrangea, *Hydrangea Quercifolia*, is one of three native hydrangeas in the southeastern U.S. This hydrangea variety is native to our area and tough enough to tolerate the heat and humidity of our southern summers.

Oakleaf Hydrangeas get their name from their distinctive leaves, which resemble those of an oak tree. These hydrangeas thrive in woodland settings where they receive morning sun and afternoon shade.

They prefer well-drained soil, and a layer of mulch during the summer helps retain moisture and keep roots cool. While they have few pest issues, deer may browse the tender new leaves and flower buds in spring.

Oakleaf Hydrangeas make a stunning statement in mass plantings but are equally beautiful as a single specimen brightening a shady corner of the landscape.

The Oakleaf Hydrangea attracts many pollinators, including butterflies, moths, several native bees and wasps. Songbirds also eat the seeds.

It is a host plant for the Hydrangea Sphinx Moth and the Hydrangea Leafminer Moth, whose larvae feed on

the leaves.

If you are planting one, keep the mature size in mind when deciding where to place it. They can grow 6-8 feet tall and wide, so select the planting site accordingly. Dig a hole twice as wide, but no deeper than the root ball. Do not plant it deeper than the surrounding soil.

The beautiful, long white blooms begin in late spring (April- May) and will last for weeks. In autumn, the foliage transforms into striking shades of red and orange, giving Oakleaf Hydrangeas seasonal interest and a unique advantage over many other hydrangea varieties.

Even in winter, the exfoliating bark adds interest to the landscape. The dried blooms can remain on the plant well into the season, adding continued beauty to the landscape.

However, if pruning is needed, it should be done immediately after flowering. Oakleaf Hydrangeas bloom on old wood, meaning they begin forming next year’s flower buds in late summer.

‘Snowflake’ and ‘Snow Queen’ are two popular Oakleaf Hydrangea varieties, though several compact cultivars are also available for gardeners working with smaller spaces.

Other native hydrangeas

There are two other species of hydrangeas native to the southeast: the Smooth Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) and the Climbing Hydrangea (*Hydrangea barbara*).

Smooth Hydrangea grows well in full or partial sun and is quite cold hardy. It typically reaches 3-5 feet tall and wide.



PHOTO BY GRACE KRAUSS

The Oakleaf Hydrangea is native to the southeastern U.S. and prefers well-drained soil and woodland settings. Other native hydrangeas include the Smooth Hydrangea and the Climbing Hydrangea.

The flowers are large, white ball-shaped blooms and can sometimes droop after heavy rain. Because it blooms on new wood, it can be pruned in late winter. The stems may become weak once the flowers appear, so they may need staking or other support.

Smooth Hydrangea is generally resistant to deer, rabbits and salt. It is also a host plant for the Hydrangea Sphinx Moth, and its blooms

attract a variety of pollinators.

Climbing Hydrangea grows well in partial shade but requires more sun for the best flowering. It readily climbs fences, trees and trellises. Its fragrant blooms appear on new wood and attract a variety of pollinators.

Climbing Hydrangea is also considered more resistant to deer than many other hydrangea species. Consider adding these native hydrangeas

to your landscape!

Grace Krauss is a master gardener with the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service in Bibb County. The county office provides resources for gardeners as well as educational services and community support. Visit their office at 715 Oglethorpe Street, call them at 748-310-5350 or email their staff at bibb.extension@uga.edu.



PHOTO BY JESSICA GRATIGNY

TOP: FPD shortstop Keon Johnson slides into home during the Vikings' game against Stratford last season. Johnson is committed to Vanderbilt and could be selected in the MLB Draft this summer.

FPD shortstop eyes MLB future — and a state championship

BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH

Melody Contributor

Keon Johnson was 9 when he stood in City Hall in front of the Macon-Bibb County Commission.

"I tried out in Dallas — Dallas, Georgia," he said on a video back in 2017, his mother Sheena by his side as he addressed the commission.

Johnson had tried out for the US-SAA All-American showcase and was picked for the regional all-star team to play that August at ESPN's Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando.

Back then, the Alexander Magnet II student was considered among the best young players from Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. He was being recognized by the city for that accomplishment.

Now? Throw in the other 47 states and all sorts of countries, and Johnson is still among the best as his senior season at First Presbyterian Day wraps up.

Not that you'd have any indication of that when watching or listening to him.

To sit with Johnson for nearly 30 minutes as practice commences in front of him is to sit with somebody who doesn't act, talk or sound like

the average teenager — or the average elite athlete. Johnson is polite and personable, maintains eye contact and fulfills his part of a conversation with thoughtful answers and a quick smile.

There's no indication that he is a superstar.

"I would say in a word he's 'grateful,'" FPD head coach Greg Moore said. "We got through playing at John Milledge, and there are four or five kids standing at the gate outside the visitors' dugout trying to get his autograph."

"It's just become part of the scenery of what's going on in our baseball program, and it's a great thing. This is a guy that's still working with young kids, teaching them how to hit on the weekends."

Some parents of the youngsters holding a Keon Johnson autograph — and there are loads over the past few years — may want to hold on to that paper, considering the kind of future that may be ahead.

Granted, the only thing Johnson is thinking about is ending this season with a win. Others, whom he politely doesn't pay much mind to, are more focused about down the line with perhaps the best baseball prospect ever in Bibb County and one of the best in the area.

There are playoffs awaiting, and a state championship to be won.

"I'm just trying to end it the best way possible," said Johnson, who went 2 for 4 with 2 RBIs and a homer Monday night in FPD's regular-season finale, a 10-2 win over Covenant. "Dogpiling in Statesboro, winning state."

That journey doesn't begin for the Vikings until May 15, when the top seed in GIAA Class 4A hosts the winner of Strong Rock vs. George Walton. A win there, and either Athens Christian, Tattnall or Tallulah Falls is next in the semifinals.

Lurking as the No. 2 seed is Brookstone, which has vanquished FPD in the last two state title series, one in Macon at Luther Williams Field and one in Columbus.

Looking ahead is inevitable. "We've been on the side of losing twice, and we're trying to climb Everest," Johnson said. "That's what it feels like, at least, just because we played the same team in state twice, just couldn't get it done."

There's staying focused, and there's paying attention to college baseball and the SEC.

Johnson signed in January with

SEE KEON
PAGE 12

GIAA releases playoff brackets



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Stratford's Maddie Biesterfeld dribbles upfield against Tattnall during a game earlier this season. The Eagles are 17-0.

BY MICAH JOHNSTON

Sports Editor

micah@maconmelody.com

The GIAA begins its postseason this week, and several Macon teams are in the fray for baseball and soccer.

An impressive trio of Macon teams — FPD baseball, Stratford girls soccer and CFCA girls soccer — all earned the No. 1 seeds in their respective tournaments.

All told, there will be 14 different teams from seven different schools in the playoffs. Five teams will get a bye because they have top-five seeds in their respective brackets.

All games — and series, for the baseball tournament — are scheduled to begin Friday. See which teams made the playoffs below. Times and dates for playoff matchups may change.

BASEBALL, CLASS 4A

- No. 1 FPD (27-1), bye in first round, will play the winner of No.8/No. 9 on May 15
- No. 3 Stratford (19-8), bye in first round, will play the winner of No.6/No. 11 on May 15
- No. 5 Tattnall (11-11) vs. No. 12 Tallulah Falls (14-15) on Friday

BASEBALL, CLASS 2A

- No. 9 Windsor (12-11) @ No. 8 Westminster Christian (12-11), Friday

BASEBALL, CLASS A

- No. 9 Covenant (5-16) @ No. 8 First Preparatory Christian (6-18-1), Friday

GIRLS SOCCER, CLASS 4A

- No. 1 Stratford (17-0), bye in first round, will play winner of No. 8/No. 9 on May 15
- No. 2 FPD (13-2), bye in first round, will play winner of No. 7/No. 10 on May 15
- No. 8 Mount de Sales (8-8) vs. No. 9 Tallulah Falls (7-6), Friday
- No. 12 Tattnall (4-11) @ No. 5 George Walton (13-3), Friday

GIRLS SOCCER, CLASS 2A

- No. 1 Central Fellowship (20-1), bye in first round, will play winner of No. 8/No. 9 on May 15

BOYS SOCCER, CLASS 4A

- No. 3 Mount de Sales (10-1), bye in first round, will play the winner of No.6/No. 11 on May 15
- No. 7 Stratford (11-6) vs. No. 10 George Walton (13-3), Friday
- No. 12 Tattnall (5-7) @ No. 5 Tallulah Falls (15-1), Friday

BOYS SOCCER CLASS 2A

- No. 6 Central Fellowship vs. No. 11 Furtah Prep (6-5), Friday

Macon Sports HOF inducts 2026 class

BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH

Melody Contributor

Maggie Johnston Waldrop was a force at FPD, in soccer and track and field.

Her exploits as a discus and shot put whiz led to state championships, and a superb college career at Samford that included a trip to the NAAs.

And she's well aware of it, as she shared Tuesday night at the Macon Sports Hall of Fame's induction ceremony.

"(Coach) Dave Sparrow put a discus in my hand for the first time, and it was like I found my first love," the 2016 FPD graduate said. "It just came out of my hand perfectly, and (we) never separated after that."

"I was incredibly fortunate to get to do multiple events through track and field, and to carry that into ... set-

ting me up for a great college career and education, and kind of jump-start education and career, and really propel me through the rest of my life."

She was one of 10 inductees, two posthumously, in this year's ceremony in front of what may have been the largest crowd ever for a Macon Sports Hall of Fame ceremony at the Edgar H. Wilson Convention Center, a crowd of about 450.

The River North Academy baseball team of 1981-82 was honored, with more than a dozen members — including current Mercer head baseball coach Craig Gibson, legendary high school head coach and former MLB player Bobby Hendley and assistant M.L. Clark, who are both in the MSHOF.

River North had a 33-game winning streak stretching over the two

SEE HOF
PAGE 12



ACE soccer makes semis

PHOTO BY MARK POWELL

The ACE girls soccer team defeated Bremen on Monday to reach the Final Four of the GHSA Class A-Division I state tournament. ACE was in the semifinals Thursday, after The Melody went to print.

To read coverage of the semis, visit maconmelody.com/sports. For coverage of the Gryphons' quarterfinal win, see B12.

ACE girls advance to semifinals with win over Bremen

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

The ACE girls soccer team punched its ticket to the state semifinals for the second straight season Monday night, defeating Bremen 4-0 at home with focused passing and solid defense in the third round of



PHOTO BY MARK POWELL
ACE senior Kate Thomason tries to sneak the ball past Bremen defenders on a shot during the Gryphons’ third-round playoff game.

the GHSA Class A-Division I tournament. It was the most physical game of the playoffs so far for ACE, as both the Gryphons and Blue Devils had yellow cards and some push-off fouls called in a rough-and-tumble opening half. “There’s more work to be done. Very proud of their effort as a team, they’ve had a great week of practice

and effort,” head coach Robby Jones said. “(Bremen) are very physical. They have very fast players, especially the left wing gave us a lot of trouble. ... It was a difficult battle both ways. Probably a hard one to ref, but they managed to do it well. I think the better team won.” ACE proved more adept at handling the ball, though, controlling things at midfield to create good chances in the final third even if they did not always turn into goals. “Our calling card is being able to connect and pass in the midfield. We say, just climb the next rung in the ladder. We don’t need to send everything forward,” Jones said. “We did pretty well. ... When we were passing well, we were difficult to handle.” Kate Thomason scored two goals and had a brilliant pass to assist another, controlling the ball with poise on the front line for ACE to help the Gryphons score twice in the opening half and then fully control things in the second half. The first chance that did connect was just that, as Thomason put a gorgeous pass on the money to Powell, who poked it past the Bremen keeper with relative ease to put ACE up 1-0 just a few minutes in. “She drew a lot of defenders and

I thought she was gonna shoot, but instead she made a very square ball to her teammate — very unselfish — which set up Edy for a finish,” Jones said. “The weight of it, the direction of it was nice. Kind of like a Magic Johnson no-look pass, that’s what it felt like.” Thomason scored the next two goals before Lily Bivins netted the final Gryphon score with only a few minutes left to cement the 4-0 victory, which put No. 2 ACE in line for a Final Four match against No. 3 Model. It’s a significant alignment in the bracket, as Model sent ACE packing last season in the semifinals here in Macon. The rematch should make the playoff game even more intense, as Model went on the win the championship last year. “It’s a huge game. I’m glad we’re playing here. I want to fix what happened last year,” Jones said. “It’s the same teams, the same round, in the same location. Other than that, we’re different — we’re completely different than we were last year. We’ve grown a lot. ... We’re way more excited this time. It’s gonna be a battle royale.” After Thomason’s assist created the goal for Powell early, ACE went quiet for a bit as it missed a couple

other chances despite great corner kicks from Lily Bivins. It looked like Bremen’s recovery on defense would send the battle into halftime 1-0. Then Thomason scored a goal of her own with just a few minutes left in the half. Her speed made all the difference, as a long drop kick from ACE keeper Macy Pierce set the table for Thomason to outrun Bremen’s backline and punch it in to make it 2-0. After the break, the Gryphons took firm command of things when Thomason scored her second goal with about 30 minutes left. Bremen’s keeper Samantha Shumake — who had made some nice stops in the net thus far to keep things close — decided to rush forward to try and stop the ball as Thomason was dribbling into the box. The quick-footed forward read the move perfectly and looped a soft, rainbow shot high in the air above Shumake’s head, which landed just in front of the goal and bounced softly into the net to make it 3-0. From there, the Gryphons ran the show. Aside from a few more yellow cards and an ejection of a Bremen player late, the only other excitement came when Bivins scored the fourth ACE goal with about three minutes remaining.

KEON

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Vanderbilt, having just watched videos at the ceremony of Commodore coaches rave happily about who they hoped would be their starting shortstop for a few years. They can’t wait, considering Vanderbilt is having an un-Vanderbilt-like season, below .500 in SEC play and a little above .500 overall. No matter what happens in July with the Draft, he’ll have a huge decision. Barring injury, that professional career isn’t going anywhere. But he’s also aware that one is of college age only once, and three years at Vanderbilt would put him on track for a degree from an elite school. “I can’t go wrong either way, to be honest,” said Johnson, equally non-plussed about the scores of individual records he’ll depart with. “I’m either going to be playing for Tim Corbin and all the guys that I honestly play around during the summer — so I know them — for three years and get better and go be a first-rounder. Or I can wait it out, see what the draft’s going to do this year and still

potentially could be a first-rounder and take that route. “There’s no bad option.” Of course, he can’t get too cocky about that academic rep at Vandy. Older brother Ishmail is in the Air Force, currently stationed in Las Vegas. “He’s like a wizard,” Johnson said with an ever-so-slight tone of a defeated younger brother. “He’s insanely smart. ... He’s like, with all the wizards and the smart ones. I say ‘the smart ones,’ not like I don’t have a 3.8 GPA or 3.7 myself, but he’s that intelligent.” Ishmail took his mother’s last name and Johnson his father’s, but Keesha Wingo is a single parent who has taken on breast cancer three times and has two children making her proud. “She is 62, believe it or not,” Johnson said with pride. “And she does not look 62. She used to joke that she’s old enough to be some of my coaches’ grandma.” Not that she actually fits that role. Mom is at every game, manning the Gamechanger video camera, and taking in the joy her youngest plays

with and shares with others. After games, he talks with little kids while signing autographs. He talks to adults with ease, too. Sometimes, it’s as if he doesn’t quite grasp his impact with others. “I think that’s a fair assessment,” Moore said. “But he’s well aware of what’s going on. There’s a lot of expectation out there. We’ll go anywhere from five to 20, 25 scouts per game. “So, he’s very well aware of what’s going and what’s happening, but he has done such a really good job at enjoying every step along the way and having a good time with it.” Being grounded, above and beyond the level of someone much older than he is, makes a big difference. “Keon’s played all over the world, all over the country,” Moore said. “He’s been everywhere. He played with different teams in the summer and just done all kind of things. “But to this day, he will still tell you his favorite baseball to this point in his life has been on his high school baseball team.” Among the things that stands out to Moore is how Johnson — in-

involved in assorted community-service groups — improved every year, in one form or another. Now, as a senior, his defense at shortstop is on par with his offense. Thankfully. “My freshman year, I had 11 errors,” Johnson said with a slight cringe. “I was throwing it over the dugout my freshman year. I was hitting the top. It was bad.” Nobody’s ducking any more. He and big buddy Brady McHugh at second base are having a dream senior season on the dirt. “Me and our second baseman have turned some sick double plays,” Johnson said. “Me and him have been infield partners since seventh grade.” Johnson is one of several Vikings who have signed to play college baseball. McHugh is headed to East Tennessee State, Conner Strandmark to Mercer, Wyatt Waters to Augusta. Many Vikings have been partners for a while. “Since about probably 10 years old,” Johnson said. “We’ve all played against each other. We’ve played with and against each other

forever.” Thus, the only thing on his mind besides graduation is joining the other Vikings in a delirious dogpile three weeks from now on the infield at Georgia Southern’s J.C. Clements Stadium. He’ll have six weeks after that to worry about his long-term future, hoping to spend that time smiling as a state champ with a group he’s been a part of since fifth grade. They’ll need to keep each other chilled a little throughout a postseason that’s taken awhile to get here, and one that has had particularly unhappy endings the last two years. Erasing some of the past pain has blocked out Johnson’s thoughts of a bright future. “We all love each other,” he said. “Playing for the name on the front rather than worrying about your number on the back. We don’t even have our last names on the back. “At this point, right now, as we’re speaking, it feels like it’s taking forever to get to the playoffs because we’re on a (24-game) win streak, and we’re just ... We want the ring so bad.”

HOF

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seasons en route to state titles in the Southeastern Association of Independent Schools, the precursor to the GISA. This was the first year in a long time the ceremony wasn’t held in the smaller Monument Room of the Coliseum. The format underwent a change, from new inductees offering heartfelt memories and thanks to a short question-and-answer session with master of ceremonies Frank Malloy. Inductees provided both humor and heartfelt thanks in their time on stage. Reggie Manuel played at Southwest under legendary head coach Duck Richardson, as did his brother Eric, who was inducted last year and was on hand for his brother. Who won the pickup games? Manuel whispered the answer to Malloy. It was Eric, who nodded and pointed at his brother. Manuel gave a shoutout to a few teachers who were in the crowd. “When Coach Richardson would tell me I had to practice,” Manuel said, “they’re the two that stood in front of him and said, ‘No, he’s not going to practice, he’s got to finish school first.’” Westside grad Clint Kent was a standout at James Madison before embarking on a career in the Canadian Football League. Both are serious road trips, but Kent’s father made them. barely, at times.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH
The 2026 class of the Macon Sports Hall of Fame gathers at the ceremony Tuesday, featuring athletes, coaches and mentors.

“My junior year, we played Villanova, in Philadelphia,” said Kent, who veered into the coaching profession after playing. “He took the train up. By the time he was getting off the train, the game was over, so he had missed the whole game.” Kent later played in the Grey Cup in Canada. “It’s like minus 40 outside,” Kent said. “My dad, he’s from Vidalia, Georgia, so he came up with his little winter gear on. I felt so bad.” Edwana Dee Hazel had the most unique road to induction. After a standout basketball career at Peter

Appling, she gave up the game and took up family life and working. Three children later, a Mercer coach saw her in an airport and started working on bringing her back to the court. Assorted Mercer officials and coaches met with her, and soon enough, she was a Bear. And part of her own team. “I’d like to thank my mom, for keeping those three children,” she said. “I couldn’t have done it without her. My husband was a traveling man, so, it’s me and mom and the kids. “We did it.”

Johnston Waldrop cruised through the questions, but the final inquiry, about who she wanted to thank, slowed her down, starting when she reeled off a list of coaches. “To my parents, that taught me everything I am, and made me who I am today,” she said, trying to keep fully composed. “And to my Granddaddy, my No. 1 fan, I’m so thankful that you never let a moment go by without being celebrated. “I’m so blessed to have had the athletic career I have and to have all the support that I have going through the rest of my life as well.”

- MACON SPORTS
HALL OF FAME
- CLASS OF 2026
- Edwana Dee Hazel
Brett Hendley
Bobby Huellemeier
Casey Jones
Clint Kent Reggie Manuel
Claude Smith
Andy Summers
Joshua Trieste
Maggie Johnston Waldrop