

# The Macon Melody

\$2.00 » VOLUME II, NUMBER 47 » FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026 » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » [MACONMELODY.COM](http://MACONMELODY.COM)

## RECORDS RUSH

### How social media is turning police footage into profit

BY LAURA E. CORLEY  
Senior Accountability Reporter  
[laura@maconmelody.com](mailto:laura@maconmelody.com)

It didn't take long for the video to go viral.

During an arrest last month, a Bibb County sheriff's deputy slapped a man who was already lying prone, and the moment was captured on a fellow officer's bodycam.

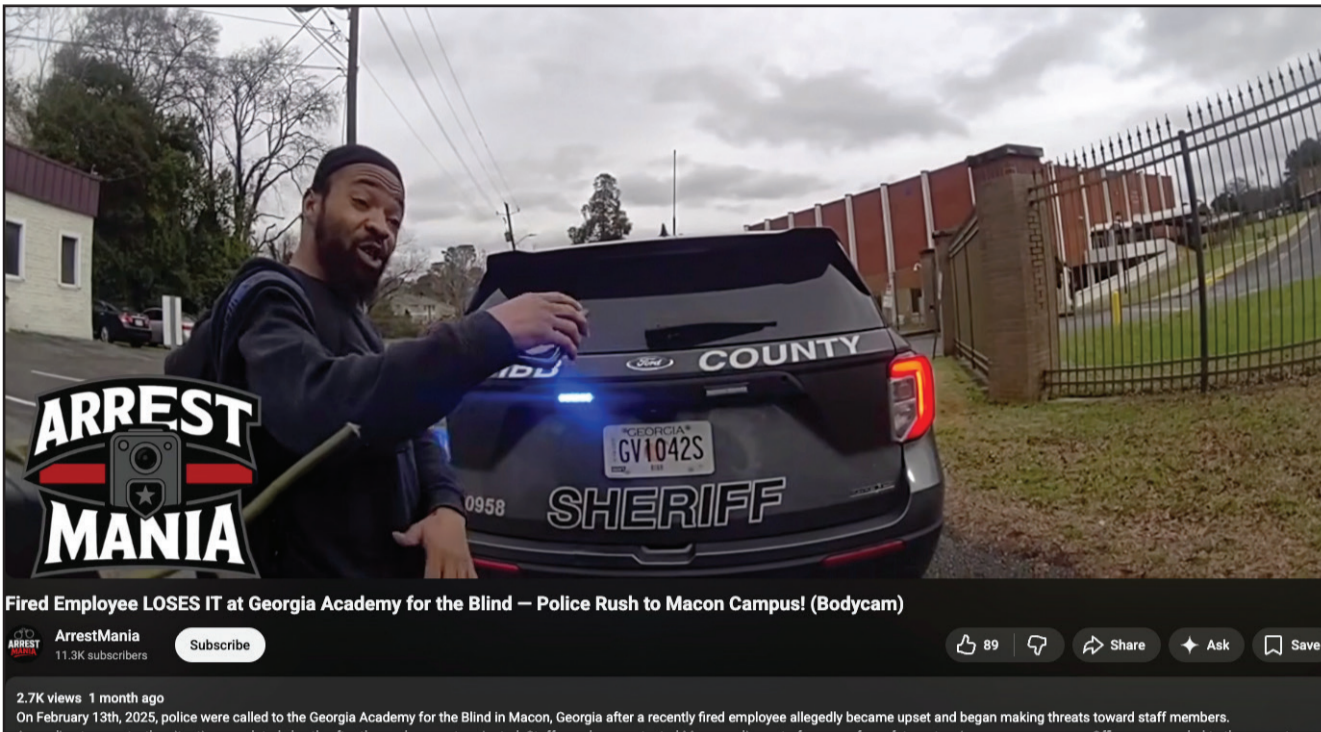
"Bro, you just hit me in my face, bro," the man says in disbelief.

"My hand slipped," the deputy answers.

That incident ended the deputy's law enforcement career in Bibb County.

But it didn't end the interest in the video, which has garnered thousands of views on Instagram, YouTube and other social media websites as it lives on in perpetuity.

Dig around online and you can also watch a stolen box truck careening down Interstate 75 in Bibb County, swerving from one shoulder to the other, while a line of patrol cars chases it.



SCREENSHOT

A screenshot from the YouTube channel ArrestMania shows bodycam footage from a Bibb County Sheriff's Office response call in Macon.

Or, if you wanted to, you can watch an officer question a shooting victim.

It used to be that mainly the

media or lawyers filed open-records requests seeking body camera footage from law enforcement agencies, but, these days, YouTubers and Ins-

tagrammers are also asking for the footage.

Once a tool for police accountability, bodycam footage has fueled

a cottage industry of content creators who've monetized them.

The Bibb County Sheriff's Office, along with law enforcement agencies across the country, says the increased interest puts a strain on their resources.

Under the Georgia Open Records Act, the public is entitled to request body camera footage for cases that are no longer being investigated. Occasionally, law enforcement agencies will proactively publish select videos online for the sake of transparency.

The number of requests submitted to the Bibb County Sheriff's Office has steadily increased, from 2,634 in 2021 to 7,099 last year. The wait to get the footage — and any other public records — recently increased from 45 days to 60 "due to the high volume of Open Records Requests received daily," according to an automated response from the sheriff's office.

SEE RECORDS  
PAGE 6

## Don't call them lazy: Top grads challenge biases, offer advice

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
Community Reporter  
[casey@maconmelody.com](mailto:casey@maconmelody.com)

If there's one thing the area's best and brightest students have a chip on their collective shoulders about, it's a stereotype that way too many boomers buy into — that Gen Z'ers are lazy.

"There seems to be an assumption among many adults that tools such as (artificial intelligence) have made us lazier," Howard High School's top grad Jeremy Wang said.

"In my opinion, it could be argued that technology is not making us lazier, it is helping us to work harder and faster through innovation," he said.

Wang, who is set to attend the Georgia Institute of Technology, was among 14 high school valedictorians who answered The Macon Melody's questions about everything from misperceptions of their generation and the obstacles they expect to face to the secrets to

SEE INSIDE FOR A SPECIAL SECTION HONORING OUR AREA'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADS!

their success and advice for incoming freshmen at their respective schools.

The defense of Gen Z's work ethic echoed throughout the responses of these top-tier students as they prepare to graduate and strike out into the world.

"Adults often think our generation is lazy or too dependent on technology, but that's not true," said Kayla Lee, valedictorian at Northeast High School and a future University of Georgia student. "We just use technology differently, and it's actually a big part of how we learn, connect and stay informed."

Still, Central High School's Oliver Jennings, who plans on attending the University of Georgia, knows the dizzying pace of

technological advances will bring challenges.

"It means we will likely have to continuously adapt, retrain and develop skills that AI cannot easily replace, such as creativity, critical thinking, leadership and emotional intelligence," he said.

Another challenge, said VIP Academy valedictorian Brandon Clark, who will attend Central Georgia Technical College, will be "dealing with constant judgment and pressure, whether it's from our peers or the outside world."

"There's always an expectation to look a certain way, act a certain way or live up to unrealistic standards," Clark said.

But these students have proven they can handle pressure. Their transcripts and extracurricular schedules tell stories of hard work and relentless late nights. Still, many of them said they found high school enjoyable and encouraged

SEE GRADS  
PAGE 6

## Bibb schools weigh tough choices as \$23M deficit looms

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
Community Reporter  
[casey@maconmelody.com](mailto:casey@maconmelody.com)

After last year's contentious budget process and a \$5 million budget error, the Bibb County School District is heading into fiscal year 2027 facing a potential \$23 million deficit — and taxpayers could be asked to help cover it.

According to state law, the school board must adopt, after at least two public hearings, a budget by June 30

for the new fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The district faces an uphill battle with a depleted fund balance after the board took on a \$21 million deficit last year. If the district stays the course without cutting spending or increasing taxes, its cash reserves could be exhausted by 2028.

Board members were deadlocked last summer over the district's finan-

SEE CHOICES  
PAGE 6



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
Superintendent Dan Sims speaks during a January 2026 Bibb County Board of Education meeting.

Periodical — Mail Label

## Tornadoes, solar flares and more: Macon-Bibb is updating its disaster playbook

BY ALAYSIA EZZARD  
Community Reporter  
[alaysia@maconmelody.com](mailto:alaysia@maconmelody.com)

Macon-Bibb County is prepared for almost anything — even solar flares.

The county's Emergency Management Agency is updating its pre-disaster mitigation plan, which takes into account hazards that may affect the community.

"If you name it, I think it's probably covered," said Deputy Director Robert McCord.

The plan encompasses long-term strategies for protecting people and property from natural disasters — tornadoes, earthquakes, extreme temperatures and other weather events — and man-made threats, including cyber hacks, active shooters or terrorist attacks, McCord noted.

The plan has been in place for many years but, according to federal law, must be updated every five years. The current plan, first adopted in 2021, expires later this



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
Macon-Bibb County Emergency Management Agency Executive Director Robert McCord speaks with a resident during a public meeting on the county's pre-disaster hazard mitigation plan April 6 in Macon.

month. Officials will submit the plan to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which must give its approval before the

SEE PLAYBOOK  
PAGE 6



You're reading local news. Help us keep it going.

Learn about ways to *Keep The Melody Playing* at [maconmelody.com/support](http://maconmelody.com/support).

# New Bike Walk Macon director Pruitt is ready to ride



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Kaylee Pruitt is set to take over at Bike Walk Macon as executive director after former head Rachel Umana, who was in charge of the program for more than a decade, moved away.**

**BY EVELYN DAVIDSON**  
Features Editor

evelyn@maconmelody.com

After more than a decade serving as executive director of Bike Walk Macon, Rachel Umana will pass the handlebars to education and engagement manager Kaylee Pruitt.

"I've really been set up for success," said Pruitt, who joined Bike Walk in 2021.

She worked closely with Umana, who helped expand the recreational organization into a local advocacy group at the forefront of Macon's pedestrian safety efforts.

Umana taught Pruitt everything she knows about mobility advocacy. Pruitt plans to build on those efforts by participating in various boards and working to destigmatize public transportation, she said.

"Public transit is really a human

right," she said. "It's meant for everybody."

She does not officially step into the role until May 20, but Pruitt "hit the ground running" as interim director after Umana announced her departure in March and moved to Maryland in April.

Pruitt said she intends to join the pedestrian safety review and the Macon Transit Authority boards in order to continue relationships fostered by Umana.

She also plans to get Bike Walk more involved with Newtown Macon's ongoing Ocmulgee Heritage Trail project, which aims to connect Downtown Macon with nearby neighborhoods along the Ocmulgee River.

A Jones County native, Pruitt grew up on a "washboard dirt road" and "didn't even realize how important transportation was"

growing up.

She didn't learn about such infrastructure until she worked at the Hay House and moved to downtown Macon in the mid 2000s, later volunteering with Bike Walk in 2016, a year after it first launched.

"It's just been a journey to learn everything," said Pruitt, who used to be a wedding planner.

She saw firsthand one of Bike Walk's earliest initiatives, Macon Connects, which sought to create the world's largest pop-up bike lane. In collaboration with Newtown Macon and funded by a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation grant, the project led to the development of a community action plan that included improvements to pedestrian infrastructure.

**SEE BIKE**  
PAGE 3

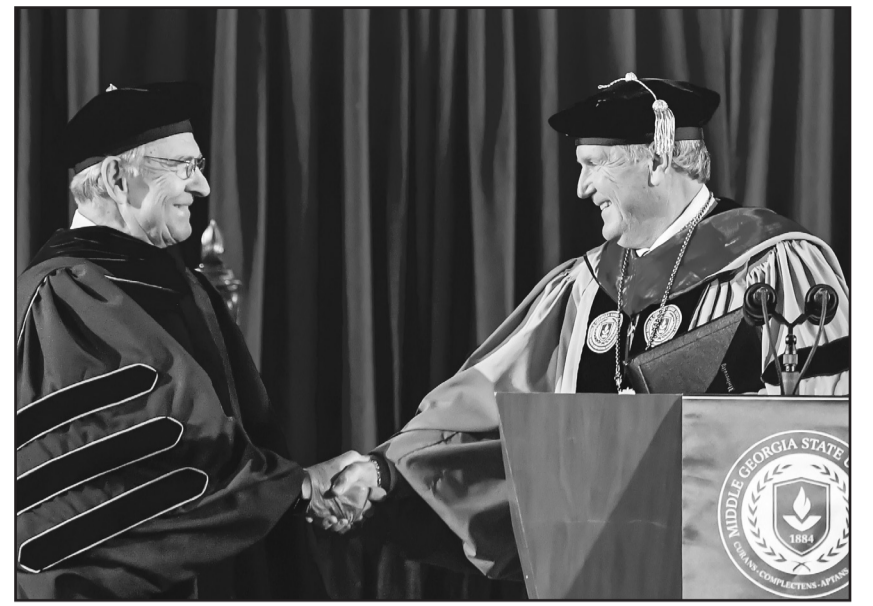


PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Middle Georgia State President Christopher Blake, right, shakes hands with Robert F. Hatcher, Sr. before rewarding Hatcher with the University's first-ever honorary doctorate.**

## MGA confers honorary degrees to local leaders

**BY CASEY CHOUNG**

Community Reporter  
casey@maconmelody.com

Robert Hatcher has donned the regalia many times for Middle Georgia State University graduations, but this Wednesday was the first time he received a degree from the institution.

Hatcher, a longtime banker in the region, and Larry Walker, a former Georgia state representative, will be the first ever honorary degree recipients for the university after their efforts to elevate the college's status to a state university.

"I was surprised and feel very honored and appreciative of the recognition," Hatcher said of the degree.

The pair were among those behind the proposal for the University System of Georgia to merge Macon State College with Middle Georgia College while serving on the board of regents in 2013.

Hatcher said combining the two schools, which had similar curricula and missions, made

sense to create a much larger school covering the entire Middle Georgia region. The idea came as then-governor Sonny Perdue and legislators asked the university system to look into consolidation.

Now, the university confers thousands of degrees every year, with many graduates staying in the region, Hatcher noted.

"It's a remarkable success story, but that consolidation really formed a very strong foundation for that institution," he said.

Hatcher worked as a banker for 50 years, which he said has allowed him to immerse himself in the community.

He's been a member of Mercer University's board of trustees, the boards of NewTown Macon and the Community Foundation of Central Georgia and helped found the 21st Century Partnership at Robins Air Force Base.

Hatcher received his degree at MGA's noon commencement Wednesday.

"The work of that university and what it will continue to do is amazing, how it will continue to grow individuals here," he said.

## Commission staff, Georgia Power propose deal to lower energy bills

**BY EMILY JONES**

WABE/Crist

*This coverage is made possible through a partnership between WABE and Crist, a nonprofit environmental media organization.*

Georgia Power and the Georgia Public Service Commission's staff have reached a deal that, if approved by the commission, would save customers more money on their power bills.

The PSC, which has oversight over Georgia Power's spending and prices, is considering two requests from the utility this month: changes to the rate Georgia Power charges for fuel and reimbursement for spending on recovering from Hurricane Helene. Taken together, the company estimated the adjustments would lower monthly bills by \$1.32 for what it calls typical customers — those using a thousand kilowatt-hours a month.

But the commission's staff charged with representing the public interest argued that the fuel cost savings could be increased. They recommended the commission deny nearly \$19 million in fuel costs related to power plant outages and argued for changing or terminating other elements of the fuel cost rate.

Now, the public interest advocacy staff and Georgia Power have signed a deal that removes \$13 million dollars in fuel costs and more than \$100 million from the storm cost request. This plan is expected to save \$4.03 monthly for a 1,000 kilowatt-hour customer — \$2.71 more savings a month than the utility originally

proposed — though the actual amount will vary widely based on how much power customers use.

"We expect to be able to provide significantly more savings than we anticipated in February when we filed these cases," said Tyler Cook, Georgia Power's CFO and treasurer, in a statement. "Lower rates mean real savings for Georgia families and businesses as the heat of summer begins which can lead to higher bills."

The deal also calls for the commission to investigate how large customers like data centers pay for fuel and potentially make changes to ensure ordinary customers aren't paying data center costs.

Bills have increased six times since 2023, totaling more than \$40 a month for a 1,000 kilowatt-hour customer. The largest increase came the last time Georgia Power adjusted its fuel rate, which added about \$15.90 a month to that typical customer's bill. Last year, the commission approved a three-year freeze on base rates with the caveat that Georgia Power could still request the fuel and storm cost adjustments currently before the commission.

The commission will hold hearings this week on the storm cost request and the newly-announced deal before voting on May 28. Commissioners can approve the deal as-is, change it, or reject it.

This type of deal, known as a stipulated agreement, is a common way for cases before the commission to be resolved.

## 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.**

### 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

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](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov).

# Five things to know about Ga's upcoming Senate election

BY ROSS WILLIAMS  
The Georgia Recorder

This time next week, the GOP field to face off against Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff should be at least narrowed down.

Ossoff is up for re-election in November, and Republican voters will have their say Tuesday on who will compete against him. Five men are on the ballot to face Ossoff in the fall, and three lead the pack: Congressmen Mike Collins and Buddy Carter and former University of Tennessee football coach Derek Dooley.

Here's what to know as the big day approaches.

## Collins appears to be in the lead, but a runoff is likely

Congressman Mike Collins makes a campaign stop at the Bearded Bean, a breakfast spot in Toccoa May 8, 2026. Ross Williams/Georgia Recorder

At a recent campaign stop at a Toccoa coffee shop, Collins seemed to already be running a general election race, focusing his attacks on Ossoff much more than his GOP opponents.

Polling data consistently puts Collins ahead of his Republican opponents, but not far enough to avoid sending votes back to the polls next month. If no candidate wins more than 50% of the vote, the top two will compete in a runoff June 16.

An Atlanta Journal-Constitution poll conducted in April found Collins with 22% of the vote, ahead of Carter at nearly 13% and Dooley at 11%, which leaves about 54% of voters undecided.

That's more undecided voters than another AJC poll conducted in October, where only 38% of respondents said they didn't know who they'd vote for.

David Fry of Stephens County, who came out to see Collins in Toccoa, said he liked what he heard but hadn't decided on a candidate yet. He said he'd probably come to a decision on the way to the polling place.

"I'm gonna do some reading on Mike Collins and study about what he's for," Fry said. "Then I'm going to talk it over with my wife and we're gonna cast our votes."

## Democrats are hoping for a messy runoff

Meanwhile, Ossoff's allies welcome another month of campaigning on the Republican side. Their hope is that the eventual winner will emerge with a damaged reputation after butting heads with a GOP opponent.

"It is going to showcase another month of these clowns just beating the fool out of each other," said Democratic Party of Georgia Chairman Charlie Bailey in a press call with reporters

Monday.

Bailey said the candidates will need to impress GOP primary voters by tying themselves to President Donald Trump in a way that could turn off more moderate general election voters.

All three GOP candidates have sought Trump's endorsement, but the president has yet to weigh in.

"While Senator Ossoff is working to represent the people of Georgia every day, the Republicans continue to fight amongst themselves, and take really unpopular positions while doing it, and that's really hard for them to come back from," Bailey said.

Speaking to reporters on Friday, Collins indicated he doesn't plan to change his message if he makes the general.

"I think my message is going to be consistent, it should be consistent, you should be who you are, period," he said. "If you're not a perfect fit, if you're not the right fit, people let you know that, but this is who I am and what I have to offer, and they see that, they see somebody that just wants to go up there and get something done."

## Who's in what lane?

Both Collins and Carter have sought to position themselves as strong allies of Trump and the MAGA movement.

As his lead in the polls has remained steady, Collins has also sought to paint himself as someone willing to cross the aisle to get Democratic votes.

He gave the example of the Laken Riley Act, which requires the detention of immigrants without permanent legal status who are charged but not convicted of certain crimes. The act passed the Senate with the help of 12 Democrats, including Ossoff and Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock.

Carter has tried to get the president's attention in a number of ways, including introducing a resolution calling on him to receive the Nobel Peace Prize and a bill authorizing Trump to acquire Greenland and renaming it to Red, White and Blueland.

When asked, Dooley says he would welcome Trump's endorsement, but the former coach took a different route to the nomination.

Dooley got involved with the blessing of Republican Gov. Brian Kemp after Kemp declined to run. He continues to make campaign appearances with Kemp and his family across the state.

Though Trump and Kemp were once allies, the two have since largely parted ways politically. They had a falling out after Kemp refused to back Trump's efforts to change Georgia's 2020 election results.

Dooley supporters say his connection with Kemp and lack of a congressional voting record and ties to Trump make him the ideal candidate to face Ossoff in the fall.

## The bigger picture

Right now, Republicans have a 53-45 majority in the U.S. Senate, but 33 of the 100 seats will be up on ballots across the country in November.

Ossoff's seat is the only one held by a Democrat in a state won by Trump in 2024. That means if Democrats want a chance to gain control of the Senate, they'll need to defend Georgia and other states with vulnerable Democratic incumbents while picking up at least four new seats.

That's an uphill battle for the party, but dissatisfaction with Trump's foreign and domestic policy and the state of the economy has some Democrats feeling more optimistic about their chances.

For Republicans, defeating Ossoff in Georgia would represent good insurance against Democrats peeling off seats in other states, and with so much at stake for either side, the race is likely to wind up as one of the most expensive in the country.

The Senate Leadership Fund, a Super PAC that supports Republicans in the Senate, has announced plans to spend \$44 million to unseat Ossoff.

Ossoff has raised the most money of any Senate candidate in 2026, according to the Federal Election Commission.

After raising just over \$14 million from the start of the year through the end of March, Ossoff's total funds topped \$31 million as of his most recent filing.

Collins enters the primary as the top GOP fundraiser in the race, bringing in just over \$1 million in the first quarter of 2026.

Dooley's filing reported around \$664,000 raised and Carter's about \$470,000.

## How to vote

Early voting is open now and runs through Friday.

Tuesday is Election Day. If you vote early, you can go to any polling place in your county, but if you want to vote on Election Day, you'll have to go to your assigned polling precinct, which you can find on the Georgia Secretary of State's website.

For the primary, you can choose a ballot from one party, Democrats or Republicans, or you can choose a nonpartisan ballot, which will only have nonpartisan races like judges on it.

Whichever ballot you choose, you can vote for candidates from either party in November.

You'll need to bring ID to vote.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

## PUT YOUR WATER BOTTLE ASIDE AND EAT THESE HYDRATING FOODS



# Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

Sponsored by:

During the summer months, we crave delicious drinks and refreshing salads.

Part of this craving comes from the fresh ingredients, but our body also knows a trick: These foods contain extra water to keep us hydrated during the hottest hours.

### Dehydration in Older Adults

As we age, one unfortunate side effect is that our typical thirst cues may not function as well. Dehydration can sneak up on older adults quickly and lead to health complications if left untreated.

### Signs of Dehydration

In older adults, feeling thirsty may not happen until you're already dehydrated. It's crucial to drink plenty of water throughout the day and develop a solid routine that keeps you well-hydrated. It's also important to know the signs of dehydration so that you can take action right away:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Fatigue or weakness
- Muscle cramps
- Flushed skin
- Dry mouth
- Defeating Dehydration

If you notice you're dehydrated, don't panic. Chugging a gallon of water isn't necessary, but you should make a plan to get back on track. Start by habit-stacking water intake. In other words, add drinking water to the end of routines you've already established; for example, take three sips every time you walk into the bedroom.

Staying hydrated doesn't have to be boring either. Adding fresh fruit and herbs to your water can make getting plenty of fluids more fun. In addition, there are plenty of foods with a high water content that can make defeating dehydration a culinary adventure!

### Foods with High Water Content

One of the best ways to beat the heat and avoid dehydration this summer is to eat more water-filled foods! Typical options like watermelon make the list, but there are also several surprising ingredients that can help you cool down and hydrate. Choose these ingredients for soups and infused waters to add more liquid to your daily menu.

### Fruits

Eating fruit is one of the easiest ways to get water! Take advantage of fresh watermelon to enjoy a meal that can give you more water than the full cup sitting next to your plate. Making this Watermelon Feta Salad incorporates several powerhouse hydrating ingredients.

Along with watermelon, strawberries are one of the most hydrating fruits available. Add some to a salad, grab a handful to dip into peanut butter for a snack, or start your day off right with this Ricotta, Walnut, and Strawberry Crostini for breakfast.

### Vegetables

On the list of the best hydrating vegetables, you'll find many options that all contain over 80% water. When this produce is fresh from summer gardens, you'll get even more of the hydrating benefits.

Cucumbers are a top hydration choice with over 96% water. You can snack on a slice with hummus or try a more interesting recipe for dinner like this Cold Cucumber Gazpacho.

Choose celery to include in your meals if you've been sweating more than normal from a workout or time in the summer sun. The sodium and potassium in celery can help replenish your electrolytes, along with the water. This Celery Smoothie recipe is perfect for cooling down and hydrating without sacrificing flavor.

You might be surprised to learn that tomatoes are more than 90% water! Their super-hydrating properties are boosted during the summer months by antioxidants that help protect against UV damage. Eat fresh tomatoes in a salad or prepare a dish like this Grilled Cheese BLT for a surprising dose of water in sandwich form.

### Herbs

While herbs don't contain much water themselves, many can help your body absorb more water from the rest of your meal or cool your system when you get overheated.

Basil is a summer staple for a reason. Not only does this herb add deliciousness to summer salads, but it can also be cooling and hydrating for your system. Add basil to any pasta dish or as a garnish on chicken salad for an easy way to add extra water to the meal. For something more adventurous, try this recipe for Stir-Fried Sesame Eggplant with Basil.

Although most famous for its calming properties, chamomile can also be a powerful hydrating herb when cold-infused. Soak the chamomile in room-temperature water overnight to get the most benefit, then use the liquid in your daily drinks. You can also use the chamomile-infused water in a recipe like this one for Chamomile Corn Chowder.

Staying hydrated this summer doesn't have to be hard. Incorporate more fruits, vegetables, and herbs into your meals, and you'll naturally boost your water intake every day!

For older adults, staying active and hydrated during the summer can be tricky. It's crucial to understand how to add water to your diet, one sip or bite at a time.



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

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

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

# Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



Atrium Health Navicent

5300 Zebulon Rd. | Macon, GA 31210

## BIKE

Continued from Page 2

"If you build it, they will come," Pruitt said of the project's outcome. "If we had better infrastructure people would use it."

A third of Macon residents don't have a driver's license or access to a vehicle for transportation, she added.

"When the road is built

for walkability, it works better for everybody," Pruitt said.

She noted the hardest part of her new leadership role will be balancing compassion and advocacy when navigating topics such as pedestrian death and the need for safer streets.

Despite any challenges on the horizon, Pruitt said she believes Macon holds "so much potential for connectivity between

downtown, midtown, in-town."

In fact, Macon's ideal size and community focus makes it easier to work alongside county officials and build lasting relationships.

Macon is "small enough to really make a change and really have a say in what's happening," Pruitt said. "If we were in Atlanta, your voice can get lost."



## ON THE BIBB SCHOOL BOARD, Amy Morton will always keep **first things first.**

### Invest In Classrooms

Direct more funding to classrooms and reduce central office waste

### Prioritize Student Safety

Champion programs that support mental health and safe schools

### Keep Taxes Low

Oppose raising property taxes and support the senior exemption

### Strengthen Partnerships

Build collaboration with business, faith and civic partners

---

## We Support **Amy Morton** for Bibb County School Board!

Dr. Thelma Dillard  
Lynda & Oby Brown  
Mayor Lester Miller  
Rep. Dr. Anissa Jones & Deon Aiken  
June & Hank O'Neal  
The Hon. Roy Barnes  
Rep. Tangie & Wallace Herring  
Jeremy Grissom  
Sheriff David Davis  
Laura & Gary Bechtel  
Susan Cable  
Claire Chapman  
Comm. Andrea Cooke  
Rebecca & David Cooke  
Jim Crisp  
Sam Dennis  
Cartese Dillard  
Connie & Jason Downey  
B.J. & Gene Dunwody, Jr.  
Blake Sullivan  
Nancy Terrill  
Pearlie & John Toliver  
Theron Ussery

Neal Weinberg  
Blake Lisenby  
Yanna Banks  
Tharon Johnson  
Charles Shaw  
Tom Joyce  
Marty & Evan Koplín  
Christy Kovac  
Bob Nickels  
Dr. Steve Smith  
Thomas Herman  
Thomas Hinson  
Rep. Stacey Evans  
Jarome Gautreaux  
Rebecca & Joel Grist  
Benjy Griffith  
Wes Griffith  
Corrie Hall  
Emily Amos  
Duke Groover  
Dr. Angela Hale  
Jed Hill  
Jennifer Askew

Kristin Hanlon  
Comm. Bill Howell  
Chairman Adrick Ingram  
Jordan Jackson  
The Revs. Erin & Jake Hall  
Dr. Curtis Jones  
Barney Hester  
Rebecca Richard & Seth Clark  
Carmel Sanders  
Katie & Jeff Powers  
Nikki Randall  
Lynn & Steve Farmer  
Melanie & Chuck Byrd  
Brenda & Judge Henry Williams  
Dr. Sondralyn & David Thompson  
Katherine & Dr. David Kalish  
Comm. Raymond Wilder



**Vote Amy Morton - Countywide, Nonpartisan  
ELECTION DAY: MAY 19 | EARLY VOTING UNTIL MAY 15**

## What will happen when Americans find out how indebted they truly are?

The Wall Street Journal recently posed a curious question: “What happens when Europeans find out how poor they are?” This wasn’t a cheap shot at our friends across the pond, but an objective look at Europe’s stagnant economy, government spending and political realities compared to the U.S.

In an ironic juxtaposition, the paper also featured an article the same day announcing, “The U.S. national debt now exceeds 100% of gross domestic product, crossing a once-unthinkable threshold.”

While yes, the Europeans are facing some imminent issues, the Journal’s question about their alleged poverty could be tweaked and applied to the United States: What happens when Americans find out how indebted they are? More on that momentarily.

“The widening gap between American and European prosperity is among the most important facts of the global economy,” the Journal noted. “The clearest manifestation is the chasm in per capita gross domestic product: \$94,400 in the U.S., according to the Interna-



Marc Hyden

tional Monetary Fund, compared with \$65,300 in Germany, \$61,000 in the U.K. and \$52,000 in France.”

This shift has apparently taken many Europeans unawares. In a recent poll, British respondents were asked if the United Kingdom were a U.S. state, where would it rank in terms of GDP per capita.

On average, the British believed they would be the seventh-richest state, but that was not even remotely close. They would rank near the bottom — essentially on par with Mississippi.

“European welfare states,” the Journal continued, “by creating relatively comfortable lives for voters, conceal the full extent of Europe’s prosperity gap.” But European nations cannot continue down this path in perpetuity. Something must give eventually. “A collision with reality may be required. The bliss will run out when the funding for welfare does... Europe can use

social welfare to hide from its economic failures, but it can’t run from them forever.”

This is true for European nations as well as the United States, especially in the wake of our record-setting debt. “As of March 31, the country’s publicly held debt was \$31.265 trillion, while GDP over the preceding year was \$31.216 trillion,” the Journal disclosed. This is one accounting of our national debt, but other metrics place it much higher. The U.S. Debt Clock pegs it at over \$39 trillion.

Whatever accounting method you use, most lawmakers are not taking the debt seriously.

“That figure will likely climb for the foreseeable future because the federal government is running historically large annual deficits of nearly 6% of GDP, which add to the debt,” the Journal predicted. “The government is spending \$1.33 for every dollar it collects in revenue, and the budget deficit this year is projected at \$1.9 trillion.”

SEE HYDEN  
PAGE 10

### GUEST EDITORIAL

## A witness to change

I was born in 1941, into a world shaped by hard work, firm expectations and the steady belief that effort, character and preparation would secure one’s place in society. My father was a man of discipline and quiet pride. He taught me that work was more than a means of earning a living. It was a measure of one’s integrity. He also taught me something I have carried my entire life: A man is his own most valuable enterprise. No institution, no employer, no title would ever invest in you the way you must invest in yourself. In his generation, a man’s word, his consistency and his willingness to labor carried weight. There was an understanding — spoken and unspoken — that stability could be built through perseverance and responsibility, but that it was your responsibility to build it.

Over the course of my lifetime, I have watched that sense of stability tested more than once.

As a younger man, I witnessed the early signs of economic displacement in communities that had depended on industrial labor for generations. Jobs that once sustained entire families began to shift, shrink or disappear altogether. Workers who had given decades of loyalty found themselves facing an unfamiliar uncertainty, not because they had failed, but because the economy beneath them was changing. Many sensed it before they could name it. The steadiness they had been promised was quietly eroding.

What followed was more severe. Factories that had anchored towns and cities shut their doors entirely. Plants closed. Signs went up. Here in Macon, we witnessed it firsthand when Brown and Williamson — once the city’s largest employer, providing thousands of families with steady, well paying work — consolidated its operations and left. The jobs left with it. The building sat vacant for years, a quiet reminder of what happens when an entire community’s livelihood is tied to a single institution. Skilled men and women who had done everything asked of them were told to retrain or adapt, but the pathways were often



Samuel Hart, Sr.

unclear and the support insufficient. Too many had entrusted their futures entirely to the companies they served, and when those companies no longer needed them, they had no plan of their own to fall back on.

Later, I saw another transformation take hold as offices, institutions and workplaces shifted from paper to computers, from physical processes to digital systems, from manual routines to knowledge-based work. The Information Age altered how organizations functioned, how decisions were made, and how quickly the pace of work accelerated. Entire professions evolved. Expectations changed. Credentials became more important, and education took on new meaning as the gateway to opportunity. Those who recognized early that they needed to continuously develop themselves rather than wait for an employer or a program to do it for them, were the ones who navigated that transition most successfully.

Most recently, I watched as the pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of daily life. Work moved from offices to homes. Meetings moved from conference rooms to computer screens. Systems that once seemed immovable shifted almost overnight. In that period, it became clear to me that the speed of change in our society has increased dramatically.

What once unfolded over decades can now occur in a matter of years or even months. And in those months, the individuals who had already taken ownership of their own growth, sharpened their skills, broadened their understanding and refused to become comfortable, weathered the disruption best.

I do not claim to understand every new technology or emerging system. However, I recognize patterns. I have seen what happens when economic progress moves faster than people’s ability to prepare for

it. I have seen what happens when workers, families and communities are caught off guard by change that was not adequately explained, anticipated or managed. And I have seen, time and again, that the people who survive these shifts are the ones who understood that no one was coming to save them. The responsibility to prepare, to grow, to adapt, belonged to them first.

In earlier years, it was blue-collar and industrial workers who felt the impact of economic transition most severely. Today, it is becoming increasingly apparent that professionals, office workers and even those with advanced degrees may face similar uncertainty. The coming transformation, driven by automation and advanced technologies, has the potential to move more quickly and reach more broadly than any we have experienced before.

Progress, when guided wisely, can improve lives. When handled carelessly, it can leave good people behind.

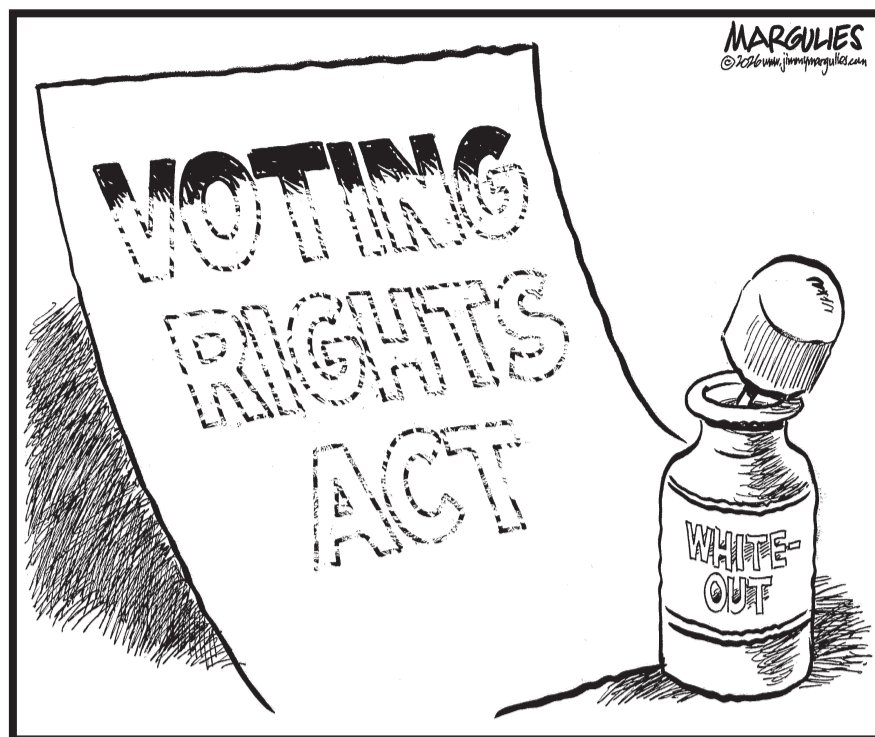
My hope is not that we resist change, but that we prepare for it more thoughtfully than we have in the past. The next generation deserves clearer guidance, stronger tools, and a deeper emphasis on adaptability, critical thinking and sound judgment.

But above all, they must be taught to take ownership of their own development; to see themselves as something worth investing in, continuously and deliberately. We must ensure that advancement serves people, but people must also be willing to serve their own potential.

I have faith that there are leaders, educators and community builders who understand the responsibility of this moment. If we learn from history, remain attentive to the warning signs and invest in the development of human potential, we can move forward with confidence rather than fear.

Change is inevitable. Being unprepared does not have to be.

*Samuel Hart, Sr. is the executive director of the Middle GA Center for Academic Excellence*



## The Macon Melody

1675 Montpelier Avenue » Macon, GA 31201

Customer Service and General Questions: 478-200-7403

Subscribe online and read more news: [maconmelody.com](http://maconmelody.com)

Sign up for our free newsletter: [maconmelody.com/newsletter](http://maconmelody.com/newsletter)

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

### OUR STAFF (WE LIVE, WORK AND PLAY IN MACON)

Joshua Wilson » Executive Editor

Janisha Rozier » Operations and Special Projects Associate

Micah Johnston » Sports and Newsletter Editor

Evelyn Davidson » Features Editor

Laura E. Corley » Senior Reporter

Casey Chung » Community Reporter

Alaysia Ezzard » Community Reporter

Jason Vorhees » Photographer

To reach a staff member, email [firstname@maconmelody.com](mailto:firstname@maconmelody.com).

### 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](http://spj.org/ethics)), and we believe in doing what is right every time and not just when it is convenient.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND GUEST EDITORIALS POLICY

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](mailto:joshua@maconmelody.com).

### EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE NOTE

The Macon Melody maintains a strict separation between news coverage and funding sources. Advertisers, donors and partners do not influence editorial content.

### CORRECTIONS POLICY

The Macon Melody strives for accuracy in all coverage. When factual errors occur, we correct them promptly and transparently, both online and in print when warranted. Readers may submit correction requests to [joshua@maconmelody.com](mailto:joshua@maconmelody.com).

### SUPPORTING OUR WORK

Quality journalism costs money to produce, and we are grateful to the readers who purchase subscriptions to help us recruit and retain quality talent. These funds enable us to also meet readers where they are — and in fresh, innovative ways.

To subscribe, visit [maconmelody.com/membership](http://maconmelody.com/membership) or call our office at 478-200-7403. You can also mail us a check. Subscription tiers — with annual pricing — include:

- » Digital-Only Access: \$69.99
- » Just the Print Newspaper: \$99.99
- » Digital Access + Print Newspaper: \$149.99

We also offer a GOOD NEIGHBOR option for those who may not be able to afford the full price of a subscription. To learn more about this pay-what-you-can model, contact our office.

If you would like to make one-time or recurring donations to support our work, those gifts are tax deductible. To do so, visit [georgiatrustedforlocalnews.fundjournalism.org](http://georgiatrustedforlocalnews.fundjournalism.org).

### ADVERTISE WITH US

Connect with engaged local readers through The Macon Melody. Send us an email at [advertising@maconmelody.com](mailto:advertising@maconmelody.com) or learn more at [maconmelody.com/advertise-with-us/](http://maconmelody.com/advertise-with-us/).

### ABOUT THE GEORGIA TRUST FOR LOCAL NEWS

We are proud to be one of 20 newsrooms in the Georgia Trust for Local News, the local subsidiary of the National Trust. Our group covers Middle and South Georgia, protecting local news and building it up for a bright future. We serve 1 in 10 Georgians.

DuBose Porter » Publisher Emeritus » [dubose@ntln.org](mailto:dubose@ntln.org)

### LEGALESE

Periodicals postage is paid at Macon, GA 31201. All content is the copyright of The Macon Melody, 2026.

**CHOICES**

Continued from Page 1

cial position, with much debate surrounding new staff positions and public pressure to reduce expenses.

Two posts on the school board are also on the May 19 ballot, with the Post 7 officeholder, Daryl Morton, meeting a term limit and the Post 8 incumbent, Lisa Garrett-Boyd, facing three contenders.

Candidates for both posts have been vocal about the need for responsible spending. In May 1 Macon Melody op-eds, the Post 7 candidates — software engineer Kerry Hatcher and family therapist and small business owner Amy Morton — acknowledged the district's challenges.

Hatcher wrote that the school board "lacks" someone "who won't let word salad pass for an answer" as well as the public's trust. Amy Morton, who is married to Daryl Morton, said the district is at a "pivotal moment," one requiring a "disciplined approach to managing taxpayer dollars."

**Tax increase on the table**

Daryl Morton, who serves as the school board's president, said it's "painfully obvious" the district needs to correct its financial path.

He said a potential tax increase "might deal with an immediate situation, but it's clear that's not sustainable."

The board voted last year to increase property taxes by 5%. In a May 4 budget meeting, an increase of two mills was floated. Raising the millage rate — how much a property owner pays per \$1,000 of assessed property value — by that amount

could bring in an additional \$9 million in revenue.

Millage is the primary lever the board controls to increase local tax revenue. Georgia law limits school districts to a millage rate of 20. The Bibb district's rate is currently 14.674.

Rising property values — as assessed by the county — also generate additional dollars without any action from the board. However, the district's ability to benefit from those rising values could be hindered by a new state law that caps increases in property values to the rate of inflation.

In the past, the board has occasionally rolled back the millage rate to offset the gains from rising property values.

The new law, approved Monday by Gov. Brian Kemp, will limit how much assessed values can grow in the first place, shrinking both revenue gains and the board's ability to offset them.

Daryl Morton said the impact will depend on whether the state increases funding to offset the potential lost revenue.

**State mandates add to costs**

The district will also have to spend more money in response to other new state laws.

One piece of legislation, approved by Kemp last week, includes putting literacy coaches in every elementary school. That mandate will cost the school district \$1.24 million, of which the state will provide \$1.14 million.

The district is also eyeing the impact of other changes, including one-time supplemental payments for educators. Those provisions are



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Henry Ficklin, a member of the Bibb County Board of Education, raises a question during a budget work session in January.**

both hard to plan for and costly, said Eric Bush, the district's chief financial officer.

"It's going to make challenges for any district," he said.

**Studies could shape the path forward**

District officials and board members are also exploring early recommendations from efficiency and rezoning studies being conducted by outside consultants.

The first notes on potential rezoning pitched several possibilities for moving students around to balance enrollment and maximize state funding.

Additionally, an initial review of the efficiency study conducted by Leap Frog Consulting called for streamlining processes while also upgrading technological infrastructure.

School board member Henry Ficklin said a millage increase is a "big ask" in light of the study, which, according to him, "identified so much that can be corrected and should be corrected."

Final recommendations from both studies are expected this summer.

**GRADS**

Continued from Page 1

their younger peers to dive head first into high school's new opportunities.

"As an introvert, high school has taught me that you cannot stay tucked away in your own little world of safety and comfort forever," said Covenant Academy valedictorian Sidney Grace Thaxton, who plans to enroll at the University of North Georgia.

"Even if you feel uncomfortable expressing yourself in a new space, this is a necessary step to becoming a part of the high school community, and relationships that you build in

your freshman year will follow past high school," she said.

Rutland High School's Hannah Liles, a self-proclaimed perfectionist, advised freshmen to not wait until they are ready to take on new opportunities.

The incoming Mercer University freshman said she thought success was a measurable achievement tethered to previous outcomes, but her time in high school has broadened her definition.

"When I think of success now, I think of being able to reflect on something and know that I challenged myself and was able to contribute something meaningful," Liles said.

Asa Scott, valedictorian at Tattall Square Academy, said he believes his generation will have a "huge impact" on the world.

Coming out of high school, the future University of Georgia student said he's learned about "the value of faith" in his life and the importance of taking advantage of new opportunities.

"Money, popularity and recognition do not mean you have found success in your life," he said. "All of those things will be gone one day, but changing someone's life will make an impact forever."

Social media has created new pressures on how kids appear and how they act. Destiny Curry, South-

**PLAYBOOK**

Continued from Page 1

west's valedictorian, said it has led the new generation to always be comparing and competing amongst themselves, with little room to uplift one another.

Curry, a future Spelman College student, added she's found success by building a "healthy balance" between school work and life to manage her stress.

Covenant Academy's Thaxton said incoming freshmen should try and seek out those who "click with them" rather than trying to appease everyone.

More than 1,700 students will graduate from Macon-Bibb County's 15 high schools — seven public, eight private — this year. Mount de-

west's valedictorian, said it has led the new generation to always be comparing and competing amongst themselves, with little room to uplift one another.

Curry, a future Spelman College student, added she's found success by building a "healthy balance" between school work and life to manage her stress.

Covenant Academy's Thaxton said incoming freshmen should try and seek out those who "click with them" rather than trying to appease everyone.

More than 1,700 students will graduate from Macon-Bibb County's 15 high schools — seven public, eight private — this year. Mount de-

west's valedictorian, said it has led the new generation to always be comparing and competing amongst themselves, with little room to uplift one another.

Curry, a future Spelman College student, added she's found success by building a "healthy balance" between school work and life to manage her stress.

Covenant Academy's Thaxton said incoming freshmen should try and seek out those who "click with them" rather than trying to appease everyone.

if it's buying a property that gets flooded multiple times because it's in a flood plain, we can actually use mitigation funds to buy that property and turn it into green space," McCord said. "We've done it multiple times along the Ocmulgee because of places that just continually get flooded."

The Macon Melody requested a copy of the 2021 plan, which is 291 pages long, but was told by county officials the document would cost \$488.30 to produce.

According to the county attorney, certain information in the document would need to be redacted, including security information involving schools and other specific response protocols. The county does have parts of the 2004 version of the plan on its website.

**Siren upgrades**

Disaster mitigation efforts also involve updates to the county's emergency sirens, McCord said. The county's existing 56 sirens will be moved from their wooden poles to concrete poles.

Twenty-seven new sirens will also be installed.

That project, according to an April 24 county press release, will kick off this month.

**Ready residents**

McCord said that, as the county prepares itself for potential disasters, residents should also check their own readiness.

His office provides a tool to do just that. Visit [maconbibb.us/ema](http://maconbibb.us/ema) to learn more about writing a plan and building an emergency kit.

**RECORDS**

Continued from Page 1

A clerk pointed the finger at social media influencers.

Lt. Jason Jaffe, who supervises the central records division, declined an in-person interview but said in an email that clerks have to watch all requested footage "in its entirety to determine if redactions or omissions need to be made. This can delay the process substantially depending on the length of the videos involved."

Jaffe said the sheriff's office has "no precise way to know how many people requesting records from us are in-fact YouTubers or social media content creators."

"They may be a content creator with five followers or they may be from a reputable news organization, we process the request just the same," according to Jaffe. "There is also nothing that requires them to disclose their intentions with a record that has been deemed releasable."

**Transparency as a commodity**

About a decade ago, public outcry reached a fever pitch following several high-profile police shootings across the nation. People demanded transparency and police responded by increasing their use of bodycams.

In addition to bodycam footage, mug shots and dashcam footage are also hot items for people looking to turn a profit online. The sites make money through advertising and subscriptions.

Earlier this year, the Georgia Sheriffs' Association unsuccessfully lobbied for legislation that would have limited who can file requests for such footage. Before the bill was expanded to include bodycam and dashcam videos, the initial goal was to curtail requests from websites

that post mug shots of people who have been arrested.

"Some people in the public, they don't really recognize the difference between an arrest and a conviction," Georgia Sheriffs' Association Executive Director Terry Norris said.

In other words, they assume, if someone is arrested, that person committed a crime, as opposed to assuming someone is innocent until proven guilty.

At one time, some of the mug shot websites would demand a fee from people who requested removal of their pictures when found not guilty or charges dropped. A state law put a stop to that in 2013.

Online content creators regularly ask numerous law enforcement agencies for mug shots of "everybody that's been arrested for the last three months," Norris said. "It's a shotgun approach for those people."

The bill proposed this year, Senate Bill 482, did not make it out of the upper house but is expected to be introduced again next session. SB 482 would have made it harder for all requestors who are not "bona fide credential members of the Georgia Press Association or the Georgia Association of Broadcasters" to obtain mug shots, dashcam or bodycam footage.

It would have also required those requestors to ask for individual mug shots by name, in separate requests, along with a notarized document stating they will not publish the photo or charge to remove it from a website.

The Georgia First Amendment Foundation, a nonprofit free speech advocacy organization, opposed the bill.

"The bill would have significantly restricted Georgians' access to law enforcement video, reducing oversight of police activities, including

officer-involved shootings," read a statement on its website. "The original intent of SB 482 was to reduce access to booking photos. But once the bill's language was revised to cover 'law enforcement video,' it became a broader and much more worrisome measure that could upend the state's open records laws."

Mike Mitchell, deputy executive director of the state sheriffs' association, said he thinks the open records act is being used for the wrong purpose.

"I think what folks have done is they've exploited the original intent of the Open Records Act here in the state of Georgia, and they're using it as their business model for profit," he said.

Norris said the association's board might ask legislators to consider a revised bill, one that offers "maybe some better clarification" surrounding the issue and its impacts.

**The 'Cops' effect**

Cindy Montgomery, an assistant media and communications professor at Middle Georgia State University, said the long-running TV show "Cops" may have helped create the interest in law enforcement videos.

"It's like they get to live the life of a law enforcement officer and have that satisfaction of capturing the bad guy, but without any of the risk," she said.

Online videos sometimes come with provocative titles, narrations with editorial commentary and even music to set the scene. There are even some AI-generated police encounter videos that don't disclose to viewers that the footage is fake.

Those are the kinds of videos that most concern Montgomery.

"There's always some kind of bias," she said.



SCREENSHOT

**A screenshot from the YouTube channel Unspoken Crime Murders features a map tied to a shooting at Pendleton Homes in Macon.**

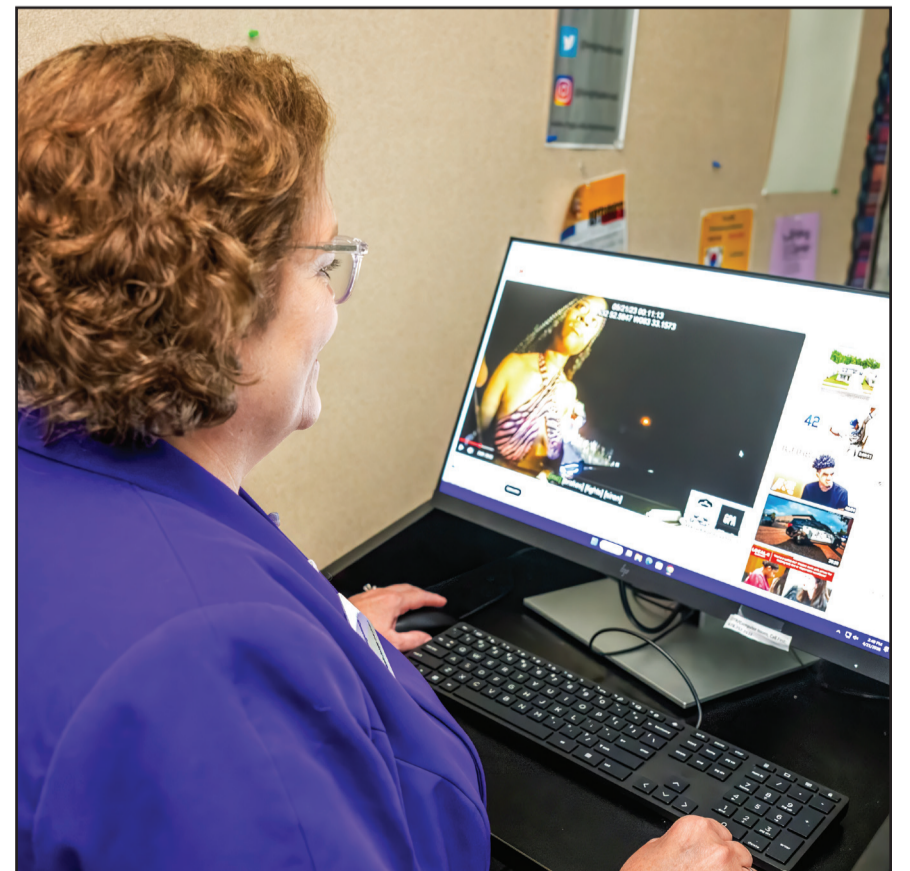


PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Cindy Montgomery, an assistant media and communications professor at Middle Georgia State University, reviews bodycam footage posted to YouTube as part of a growing trend of content creators monetizing public records requests.**

# SNAPSHOTS

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026 » THE MACON MELODY » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM » PAGE A7



**PHOTO NO. 1** — A member of the Bibb County Sheriff's Office salutes the Macon Police Department Memorial after placing a rose during a Peace Officer's Memorial Day ceremony on May 8. *Photo by Jason Vorhees.*

**PHOTO NO. 2** — Macon Housing Authority CEO Mike Austin, center, writes words of encouragement on a future home on Villa Esta Avenue Tuesday morning during a frame signing event. Five new single-family homes are being built across from Bruce Elementary School. *Photo by Jason Vorhees.*

**PHOTO NO. 3** — Mercer University President Penny Elkins greets a graduate on stage during the university's commencement ceremony May 11. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny.*

**PHOTO NO. 4** — A Mercer University School of Medicine graduate holds up her diploma during commencement May 8. *Photo by Leah Yetter.*

**PHOTO 5** — Mercer University President Penny Elkins, left, conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws to keynote speaker and Bibb County Superior Court clerk Erica L. Woodford during the University's School of Law commencement ceremony. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny.*

**PHOTO 6** — A Mercer University law graduate reacts after receiving her diploma during the commencement ceremony May 8. *Photo by Jessica Gratigny.*

**SAVE \$350** when you transform your patio into an outdoor oasis.

**SunSetter**  
America's #1 Awning

- Instant shade—at the touch of a button.
- Enjoy more quality time with family and friends.
- Up to 10-Year Limited Warranty.

Call 1-877-740-0337 now to **SAVE \$350 TODAY!**



America's #1 Awning



BILLY'S LET'S EAT

## Macon's summer food scene heating up with events, specials and other offerings

Summer in Macon is shaping up to be an absolute feast, and if you thought Middle Georgia would slow down when temperatures rose, think again. This season, Macon's culinary scene is proving that it is not just surviving, it is thriving.

From elevated wine dinners and curated beer pairings to barbecue celebrations, themed brewery weekends, interactive paint nights and community-driven food festivals, Macon's restaurants, breweries and hospitality leaders are pulling out all the stops. Across downtown and beyond, food is once again doing what it does best here: bringing people together.

J. Reid's Gastropub is wasting no time launching into summer with one of the most diverse event calendars in town. Their May 27 Fall Line Brewing and Flatbread Pairing offers guests a creative introduction to summer brews paired with inventive flatbread combinations.

June only builds momentum, with First Friday on June 5 delivering live music, tacos, margaritas and family-friendly fun in the plaza, creating an ideal kickoff to summer evenings downtown. Their June 10 paint and sip event combines creativity and cocktails for those seeking a more relaxed social outing, while "Tuesday in Tuscany" on June 16 promises a four-course Italian wine dinner that blends upscale flavors with approachable, family-style hospital-



**Billy Hennessey**

ity. It is exactly the type of programming that continues to position Macon as a growing destination for food-forward experiences.

Elsewhere, Macon's hospitality scene continues to blend culinary excellence with community impact. Brasserie Circa's Dine & Donate event supporting the Boys and Girls Club of Central Georgia highlights how restaurants here continue to use their platforms for more than just serving meals.

Miramar's June 2 Sunsets & Cellars Wine Dinner brings elegance to the season, while long-standing favorites like Grits Café continue building on their reputation for immersive dining with a trio of supper clubs ranging from beef tastings to Appalachian-inspired cuisine.

Macon's brewery scene may be where summer energy shines brightest. Ocmulgee Brewpub is fully leaning into sports, community and creativity with weekly Burgers & Braves Brewdays every Tuesday, pairing baseball, wings and beer into a perfect Southern summer tradition.

From June through mid-July, Ocmulgee also transforms into Macon's FIFA World Cup watch party headquarters, offering specialty brews, themed food and a festive

atmosphere that taps into global excitement while staying rooted in local flavor. Add in slushie drink specials all summer long, and Ocmulgee is clearly aiming to be one of the city's seasonal social hubs.

Fall Line Brewing, however, may very well be entering its most ambitious summer yet. Their June Baja Bash celebrates the release of a Baja Blast-inspired sour beer with Taco Bell-inspired nostalgia, Crunchwraps, cinnamon twists, and themed festivities.

Doggy Day later that month invites four-legged friends into the fun with pup cups and splash zones, while July turns the volume up with a tiki-themed downtown bar crawl, Fourth of July hot dog happy hour and the wildly imaginative Pickle Fest. If there were ever any doubt that Macon's brewery scene knows how to market creatively, Fall Line appears determined to erase it entirely.

For barbecue lovers, Satterfield's BBQ is preparing for a major July 4 celebration, offering dine-in, pickup and highly encouraged pre-orders. In true Southern fashion, Independence Day in Macon is not just about fireworks. It is about smoked meats, family gatherings and plates worth planning ahead for.

Beyond individual restaurant events, Macon's broader summer calendar adds even more flavor. Visit Macon's seasonal

event lineup, Bragg Jam festivities, downtown live music events and farmers markets continue to support the city's identity as a place where food and culture are deeply intertwined. The city's signature hospitality remains front and center, giving both locals and visitors endless opportunities to experience not just meals, but meaningful moments.

What is perhaps most exciting is that Macon's food scene no longer feels like it is simply participating in summer trends. It feels like it is creating its own. Restaurants are diversifying their offerings. Breweries are embracing bold creativity. Supper clubs are elevating expectations.

This is no longer just about grabbing dinner. This is about building a city where food becomes part of the entertainment, culture and identity.

For food lovers, summer 2026 may very well be one of Macon's most dynamic culinary seasons yet. Whether you are craving an upscale wine dinner, a casual taco-and-margarita night, a pickle-themed brewery bash or a comforting Southern barbecue spread, Macon is making one thing crystal clear: This summer, the table is set, the drinks are cold and the city is ready

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

## Transform your landscape into a hummingbird paradise



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY UGA EXTENSION SERVICES

**Georgia is home to 11 species of hummingbirds. It is easy to attract the colorful birds to your garden by adding plants that provide nectar or installing bird feeders containing a sugary water solution.**

**BY KAROL KELLY**  
Special to The Melody

As spring settles into Georgia, many homeowners are beginning to spot the familiar flash of hummingbirds returning to their gardens and feeders.

For many homeowners, these tiny flying wonders are a welcome sight each year, though some landscapes do a better job attracting them than others.

Even if you are not a serious gardener, your backyard can easily be transformed into an inviting habitat for these remarkable birds.

Georgia is home to 11 species of hummingbirds, according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division. The list includes the ruby-throated, black-chinned, rufous, calliope, magnificent, Allen's, Anna's, broad-billed, green violet-ear, green-breasted mango and broad-tailed hummingbird. Of these, the ruby-throated hummingbird is the only species known to nest in Georgia. This tiny bird weighs about one-tenth of an

ounce and builds a nest about the size of a walnut. The female lays two eggs, each about the size of a black-eyed pea.

UGA experts recommend placing six to eight hummingbird feeders per half-acre of land, with two or three feeders in open areas for males and the remaining feeders in tree canopies for females and young birds.

Feeders should be maintained year-round in Georgia, as hummingbirds may leave areas where food sources are not consistently available.

A sugar solution made of four parts water to one part table sugar, which closely mirrors the sugar concentration found in natural nectar, is the best mixture for feeders. Boil the water for several minutes before adding the sugar. Allow the mixture to cool and store it in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Never add fruit juice, honey or red dye. Since hummingbirds get their protein from gnats and other tiny insects, they do not require any additional ingredients in the feeder solution.

It is important to clean feeders every

few days to help prevent bacterial growth that can make birds sick. One way to reduce waste and keep nectar fresh is by filling feeders only halfway and refilling them more frequently.

To clean feeders, discard any leftover nectar and rinse thoroughly three or four times before refilling. Ants can be discouraged by installing an "ant moat" between the feeder and the hanging structure or by applying petroleum jelly or a similar substance to the wire above the feeder.

Bees, wasps and yellow jackets can be deterred by lightly coating the artificial flowers around feeding ports with cooking oil.

There are also many plants that can help attract hummingbirds by providing nectar sources throughout the growing season.

Consider adding some of the following to your landscape:

— **Early-season plants:** native columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*),

### NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT

## Survivors of sex trafficking find their voice in Ga.

**BY AMY CHARAN**  
Special to The Melody

For young women in Georgia who survived being exploited by sex trafficking, safe care in the form of accommodation and treatment for unplanned pregnancies can be rare and hard to find. However, there are organizations offering support and resources, such as Edify Teens.

Organization founder Elsie Dunn said she can relate to what other young women go through.

"I was 15, pregnant, and hidden away in a maternity home out of shame of being a teen mom," she said.

But she received encouragement from her grandmother, who told her, "Mary was a teen girl who gave birth to Jesus. Just one sin doesn't determine your destiny."

At age 60, Dunn has transformed her suffering into hope. She said that these victims have already suffered abuse, exploitation and rejection.

The State of Georgia is considered one of the seven states with the highest level of human trafficking in

the U.S., according to the Georgia Secretary of State's Office. Four cases per every 100,000 people happen within state boundaries.

These statistics conceal the suffering of young girls who have been exploited and now struggle with their unwanted pregnancy.

Edify House is a maternity home in Georgia which takes in pregnant teenagers who have been sex trafficked.

It is more than a safe haven for these vulnerable girls. It gives them round-the-clock care, therapy, prenatal assistance and life skills coaching.

Edify Teens provides safe accommodations for women ages 18-25 who were sexually assaulted and are now dealing with their unplanned pregnancy.

In the last three years, Edify Teens accommodated about 17 women and helped nine victims who have suffered from sex trafficking.

Dunn's main vision is a world in which all teen moms can live with their families while feeling protected, cared for and strong.

**SEE NONPROFIT**  
PAGE 10

premier-screens.com

*Premier Screens, LLC*

CUSTOM MADE WINDOW SCREENS & RESCREENING SERVICES

SERVICING CENTRAL GEORGIA  
MOBILE SERVICE

*We Come to You!*

(478)244-3885 | Find us on Google

**NONPROFIT**

Continued from Page 9

The organization also offers other forms of assistance, stability and advocacy. Dunn's organization raises awareness of sexual trafficking among teenagers, especially those who become pregnant while under the care of the state.

A recent community-based

intervention initiative, the Strengthening Families Program in Peach County, extends this impact by offering weekly sessions that provide family-centered support and education for children and caregivers in need.

In a state where the problem of trafficking still persists, Edify Teens proves that there is hope for survivors if only they receive

proper assistance and care.

For more information visit [edifyteens.wixsite.com/etlc](http://edifyteens.wixsite.com/etlc)

*Amy Charan is a freshman at Wesleyan College. She is part of the college's Local Democracy Lab, which helps students gain real-world journalism experience through collaboration opportunities with professional staff members at The Melody.*

**HUMMINGBIRD**

Continued from Page 9

bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*), red buckeye (*A. pavia*), native honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) and trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*).

— **Mid-season plants:** blue sage (*Salvia guaranitica*), chaste tree (*Vitex*

agnus-castus), spider flower (*Cleome hasslerana*), sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*), butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), common impatiens (*Impatiens hybrida*) and bee balm (*Monarda didyma*).

— **Late-season plants:** cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), pineapple sage (*Salvia coccinea*), lantana (*Lantana camara* 'Miss Huff'), morning glories (*Ipo-*

moea spp.), cannas (*Canna generalis*) and upright verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*).

Hummingbirds are truly remarkable creatures that can be enjoyed by the whole family.

*For more information on hummingbirds and other backyard birds, visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org).*

**HYDEN**

Continued from Page 5

For all the bluster about the U.S. far exceeding Europe economically, debt as a percent of GDP tells another story. Of the European countries, only Italy and Greece have a worse debt to GDP ratio. America is of course able to shoulder this level of debt better for a few reasons — the dollar is the world's reserve currency and Treasury bonds are considered safe investments. Moreover, our economy is massive — with a larger GDP than the entire European Union combined.

Even so, debt takes its toll, and just like a family persistently living far beyond its means, a reckoning is coming. Net interest payments on our debt are set to exceed around \$1 trillion this year — representing just under

one-seventh of our budget — and they continue to grow. Eventually, they could dwarf all other line items, and as creditors lose faith in our ability to repay it, the U.S. will either have to deal with hyperinflation from printing too much money, default on loans, or raise taxes and/or cut the budget.

Hyperinflation and defaulting are the worst possible options — meaning if officials became serious about our mounting debt, then they need to take a serious look at the budget. Debt repayment aside, entitlement programs — such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — account for the majority of all federal spending.

Just as the Journal implied European states will need to reform spending on social programs, so too will the U.S., but is there the will to do so?

"The thing that really

scares people is the politics are so dysfunctional," said William Gale of the Brookings Institution.

"If you just saw the economic forecast and you had confidence that political leaders could get together and solve this problem, it would calm everybody down."

Unfortunately, nobody really believes Congress will tackle this anytime soon, but Americans will feel the pain of seemingly insurmountable debt. All the boasting about how much richer we are compared to Europe will do us no good.

So what will Americans do when they find out how indebted they are? Sadly, probably nothing productive, to our own detriment.

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

# Coheed and Cambria to perform at the City Auditorium in Macon



PHOTO BY MICHAEL W. PANNELL

**New York-based progressive rock band Coheed and Cambria is set to perform at the Macon City Auditorium May 25. The band draws inspiration from Led Zeppelin among other musical icons.**

**BY BILL FORMAN**

Special to The Melody

The twin guitar harmonies of Iron Maiden. The recurring lyrical themes of Rush. The shape-shifting bombast of Faith No More. Those are just a few of the influences that have helped shape Coheed and Cambria's musical identity. The progressive rock band is set to perform at the Macon City Auditorium May 25.

As small-town teenagers growing up in Nyack, New York, none of those bands could compare to the outright awesomeness of Led Zeppelin, who at that age transcended pretty much everything there was to be transcended.

"Everybody has that one band, and mine is Led Zeppelin," said Coheed and Cambria cofounder Josh Eppard, who fell under Led Zeppelin's spell at the age of 11.

"There was this 25-year old guy who worked for a Big Brothers type of program, and he'd take us poor kids out to lunch," Eppard recalled in a recent interview. "And one day he told us, 'Don't EVER listen to Led Zeppelin.' Then he told us how he listened to 'Stairway to Heaven' backwards and it invoked a demon in his house. And we were just like, 'Holy sh\*t, dude!' So then, of course, we got my dad's copy of the album and played 'Stairway to Heaven' backwards. And at the point where it's supposed to say 'Satan is God,' I was like 'Really? What I hear is 'I love cheeseburgers.' And I realized that you can make it say anything you want it to be in your mind. But it was still kind of mysterious. Zeppelin had that sort of mystique that we try to carry on in Coheed and Cambria."

Back in the early days, Coheed and Cambria — which consists of bandleader Claudio Sanchez, guitarist Travis Stever, bassist Zach Cooper and drummer Eppard — were once described as what would happen "if Iron Maiden went emo." But they've covered a whole lot of musical ground over the course of 11 studio albums and more than two decades.

Coheed and Cambria's "Vaxis Part III: The Father of Make Believe" album, which was released in March 2025,

is a case in point. Songs range from the two-and-a-half-minute pedal-to-the-metal "Blind Side Sonny" to the more pop-punk "Someone Who Can." And then there's "The Continuum," a sprawling 20-minute epic in four movements that begins as a really catchy pop song before veering off in enough different musical directions to make prog-influenced bands like Dream Theater jealous.

"It's one of my favorite tunes on the album," said Eppard. "The way it starts out as this tender song and then it moves through these parts that are epic, evil, grand and beautiful. When you have such a big catalogue, it's easy to fall into like 'Oh, I've already done that before.' So we're constantly trying to reinvent ourselves. And it happens on every record, probably every song."

All of which can make it that much more challenging to keep track of the songs in their early stages.

"On every record, the working titles for a lot of the songs are the names of the bands that inspired them. Like "A Favor House Atlantic," which was one of our biggest songs. The working name for that was "Police," because it felt very Police. And then there's a hidden instrumental track we called "2113" as a nod to Rush. We ended up keeping that name for the record."

There's more, of course. A lot more.

"I don't think anyone would say that 'The Light in the Glass' actually sounds like 'Stairway to Heaven,' but that's what we called it," Eppard said. "That whole album [the 2003 sophomore release "Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3"], every song on it had a band that inspired it. And I think that happens to all artists. We're all fans of music, and music spoke to us. That's why we dedicated our lives to it."

When it comes to arranging the songs for live shows, Eppard says the band takes a considerably different approach than it did back in its early days.

"I think as we've gotten older — and dare I say, better — we've tried to be more faithful to the records," he said. "And thank God we have gotten better. I just saw a video the other day of us playing in 2001 and I was like, 'Oh, dear God,

we were horrible!' I think we were playing the song literally twice as fast as it is on the record. But we were kids, and we were excited just being in Baltimore and getting to play there. And I think something spoke to somebody, because it landed for people."

So while Coheed and Cambria's aim is truer these days, the band still leaves room for what can make a live show unique, intentionally or not.

Eppard fondly recalls going to a Radiohead show where one of their songs fell apart and they had to start it all over again.

"For Radiohead to have a song fall apart and then they just start laughing — nobody was mad — it just taught me so much seeing that, and I'm so thankful," Eppard said. "It was a really profound moment for me to realize that, hey, mistakes maybe should be embraced. We're all human, and there's a humanity to playing live. I don't think us trying to get it close to the record is ever going to sacrifice that humanity."

Meanwhile, to help keep the mystique alive, the band continues to release deluxe versions of their albums, which include lengthy graphic novels that complement the song lyrics. Sanchez, who began writing them back in the band's early stages, lists Grant Morrison's "Batman: Arkham Asylum" and Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five" among his influences.

For Coheed and Cambria fans, those evolving storylines in the lyrics and graphic novels add a world-building dimension that gives them that much more to anticipate.

"It's almost daily that I run into a fan who has such a passion for the music, which is really inspiring, and it makes me think of myself back when I was 11 years old," said Eppard, recalling how he would listen to the music while staring at gatefold sleeves and reading the liner notes. "If Led Zeppelin had these other tiers to immerse myself in, I'd be in there hook, line and sinker. Feet first or head first, I'd be jumping in. And I hope that, on our best days, maybe we can be that for somebody."

*For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [maconcentrex.org/event/coheed-cambria/](http://maconcentrex.org/event/coheed-cambria/)*

# LYDER'S

## TOWING LLC

### 478.501.1983

BREAKING DOWN SHOULDN'T  
MEAN BREAKING THE BANK

Lockouts • Jump Starts • Winchout • Fuel Delivery

## (478) 501-1983

LYDERSTOWING@GMAIL.COM

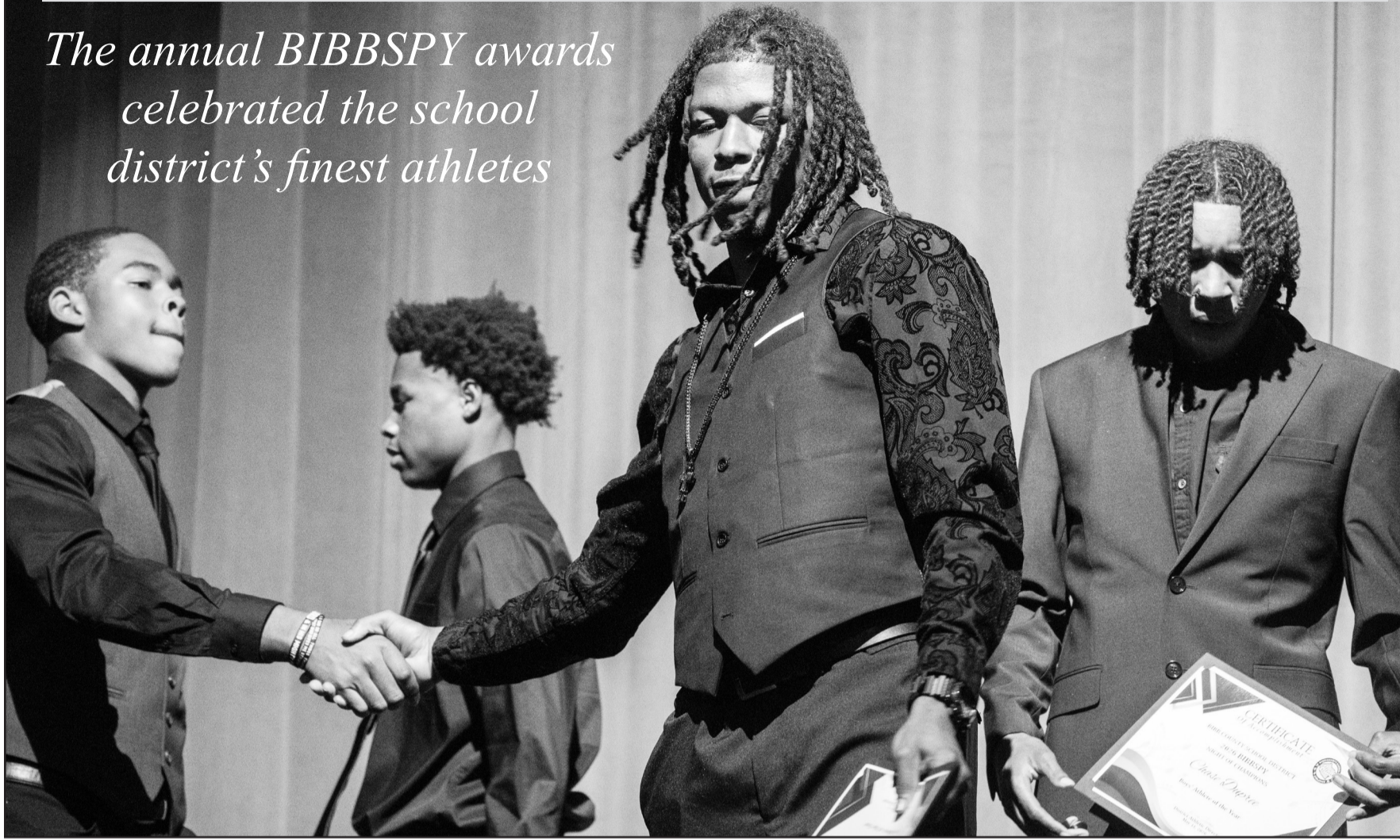
WWW.LYDERSTOWINGLLC.COM  
MACON, GA 31220

# SPORTS

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026 » THE MACON MELODY » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM » PAGE A11

## THE BEST OF BIBB

*The annual BIBBSPY awards celebrated the school district's finest athletes*



**BY MICAH JOHNSTON**  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

As the Bibb County School District recognized its finest athletes at the annual BIBBSPY awards Monday night, the packed house at Howard High School hooted and hollered when players received their translucent, teardrop-shaped trophies, shouting school slogans with pride.

There were calls of "Triple H!" for the host school. One Rutland video that played during the ceremony declared "We from the Bridge," a reference to the school's location off Hartley Bridge Road. Northeast Raider fans shouted "Eastside!," garnering the crowd response of "Out loud!"

But there was one catchphrase that was heard far more often than the others.

"Whoooooose house?"  
"C's House!"

The Central High School students and fans engaged in that call-and-response many times, as the Chargers won a whopping 16 awards on the night, some individual and others team-based.

"It was an awesome night to be a Central Charger, man, I'm so proud of my student athletes," Central Athletic Director Andre Taylor said. "They don't only work hard on the field, they work hard in the classroom, and it showed tonight."

That trophy haul included one of the top awards: Female Athlete of the Year for the entire school district, which was won by Tacovia Braswell.

"I feel like my hard work paid off," Braswell said. "I put in the practice, I put in the work. I'm able to manage sports with all of my academics. I'm proud and I'm honored. ... My favorite memories are just being with my teammates. That's why I excel, because I have great teammates. Being

around such fun people, it drives me to do better."

Braswell plays volleyball, soccer, softball and flag football. Taylor wishes she could play some other sports, too.

"If you've watched her play, you know she deserves the recognition for what she does," Taylor said. "I always say I wish she could play male sports. That's how much she puts into it."

The Male Athlete of the Year represented the host school and was no surprise to anyone who has followed Bibb County sports this year. It was just the latest accolade for Ta'Shawn Poole, a junior football player at Howard who is one of the top prospects in the country at the safety position.

"I'm just happy to be here in this situation representing Howard," Poole said. "I give a big shoutout to my head coach, Tre Porter, he got me where I'm at."

Could Poole be shooting to win the same award next year after his senior season on the gridiron? The standout Huskies defensive back might have other priorities.

"The main focus is probably giving back to the community," he said. "I just want to help people at the Bibb County level. That's what I think about, career-wise."

Those awards were two of the 36 total honors given out by the county at the event, which had the tagline "Night of Champions: An All-Black Affair." Most of the trophies went to players, though coaches, trainers and entire teams also received some awards.

Athletes, coaches and many attendees sported spiffy all-black outfits — though many ensembles were

**SEE BIBBSPY**  
PAGE 12



PHOTOS BY JASON VORHEES

**TOP:** Howard football standout Ta'Shawn Poole shakes hands with Westside's Anthony Horton after winning the Male Athlete of the Year award.

**MIDDLE:** Central's Tacovia Braswell wins the Female AOTY award.  
**BOTTOM:** Northeast girls basketball coach Heavenly Whitehead won the Female Coach of the Year award.

### NOTEPAD

## Playoffs roll on; MU and MGA in tournaments

**BY MICAH JOHNSTON**  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

The GIAA playoffs continue this week as the second round unfolds. Several Macon squads will be in action after earning a bye in the first round thanks to a high seed.

Three No. 1 teams will play this week, as FPD baseball, Stratford girls soccer and CFCA girls soccer all begin their postseason efforts. Those three teams played Wednesday and Thursday, after The Melody went to print.

Stratford baseball, the No. 3 team, also played Thursday. Tattnall baseball, one of the few teams without a bye to escape the first round last week, is set to play Friday.

For a full list of playoff games, see page B12.

### Mercer lacrosse falls in NCAA tournament

The Mercer women's lacrosse team fell in the first round of the NCAA tournament last week, losing 18-8 to the Michigan Wolverines in Ann Arbor.

The Bears entered the national tournament coming off their fifth consecutive season winning the Big South Conference championship in both the regular season and conference tournament. It was also Mercer's eight straight year making the NCAA tournament.

It looked like the Bears' tournament was off to a good start early. Sofia D'Angelo scored a goal just two minutes into the game to give Mercer a quick lead.

But the Wolverines answered soon after, scoring two goals less than 35 seconds apart later in the first quarter. Michigan ended up scoring five unanswered points to finish the opening period and take a 5-1 lead.

Mercer fought back with goals from Abby Vane and Caroline Glus to make it 5-3 in the second quarter, which marked the beginning of a back-and-forth stretch that would last through the half and into the third quarter.

The Bears trailed by 6-4 at one point and then trailed 9-6 with about eight minutes remaining in the third quarter, but the Wolverines pulled away after that. Michigan scored six unanswered goals from the 5:42 mark of the third quarter to the 11:10 mark of the fourth, taking a commanding 15-6 lead that Mercer could not surmount.

A few more goals in the fourth wrapped up the 18-8 contest. Emma Bradbury had five goals for the Wolverines to lead the field, while Glus

**SEE NOTEPAD**  
PAGE 12

## Mercer baseball upsets Georgia Tech, eyes SoCon tournament run

**BY MICAH JOHNSTON**  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

The Mercer baseball team shattered records over the weekend and put itself in position to have its best regular season finish in nearly a decade.

The Bears swept the VMI Keydets at home last weekend and upset Georgia Tech on Tuesday, vaulting them into a tie for first place in the Southern Conference with Western Carolina. Mercer is now 40-13 on the season overall and 12-6 in conference play.

A series against East Tennessee State on the road this weekend —

and Western Carolina's series against seventh-place UNC-Greensboro at home — will decide if Mercer can snag the regular season SoCon championship for the first time since 2017.

That comes after the Bears upset Georgia Tech, the No. 3 team in the D1Baseball.com poll, in a 12-9 shootout on Tuesday. The Bears had a 12-2 lead at one point and showcased their offensive dominance against the Yellow Jackets. Eli Stephens hit two home runs and had 6 RBIs.

"The chemistry and camaraderie is there," head coach Craig Gibson said Monday. "It's a smart group of guys,

**SEE MERCER**  
PAGE 12



PHOTO BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
**The Mercer baseball dugout roars in approval after a home run during a game against Kennesaw State earlier this season. The Bears defeated Georgia Tech on the road Tuesday to continue a hot streak.**

**MERCER**

Continued from Page 11

it's hard not to know what position we're in and what we have in front of us. I told 'em: 'Very few times in life can you control your destiny. We're just trying to go 1-0. At the end of the day, if it doesn't happen, you don't have anybody to blame but yourself.'"

The three-game sweep of VMI was a dominant one — Mercer won 13-2, 5-2 and 11-1 — that continues an incredible run for the Bears, who are 15-1 dating back to April 17.

"I think we're on a pretty good run," Gibson said. "It all starts with the pitching, for sure. We've really limited the free bases we're giving up — not giving up too many walks, not hitting batters, that's been key for us."

The hot stretch also gave Mercer a 29-2 record at home this season, the best such finish in program history.

"I don't talk about records and stuff like that much, but oh, man. It's incredible. I told the guys, 'When you're 50 and I'm 120, I still don't think anyone will break that record,'" Gibson said. "The crazy part is, I really think we could have been 30-1. One of those losses, we had some missed opportunities."

The streak, broken up only by one measly loss to Samford on the road the first weekend of May, was a necessary one for Mercer after it was swept by Western Carolina and lost to Kennesaw State for a four-game skid.

The head coach thinks much of that rapid in-season pitching improvement comes thanks to pitching coach Kade McClure, who was hired in December after the Bears' previous pitching coach got a job in the Seattle Mariners system.

McClure is settled in now, Gibson said, and really starting to understand the pitching staff after coming on late in January.

Frontline starter Garrett Lambert has led that charge with a 3.79 ERA on the season and 75 strikeouts in 61 2/3 innings pitched. He's lowered that ERA by more than a run in four stellar starts since mid-April. Saturday pitcher Miguel Hugas has also found some success, including two seven-inning efforts against conference opponents VMI and Wofford.

The bullpen has risen to the challenge as well. Jess Ackerman won the SoCon's Pitcher of the Week Award on Monday after tossing nine shutout innings across three games from May 3 to May 10.

That's to say nothing of the hitters. Mercer has an OPS of 1.026 as a team, which leads the conference by more than .120. The Bears also have a batting average of .320, more than .20 points higher than any other SoCon squad. Before the weekend series, Mercer had 102 home runs, the third most in the country. Now they have 114.

"The challenge is getting all nine guys going at the same time and playing at a high level with consistency. You get three or four guys going and you might get five runs,

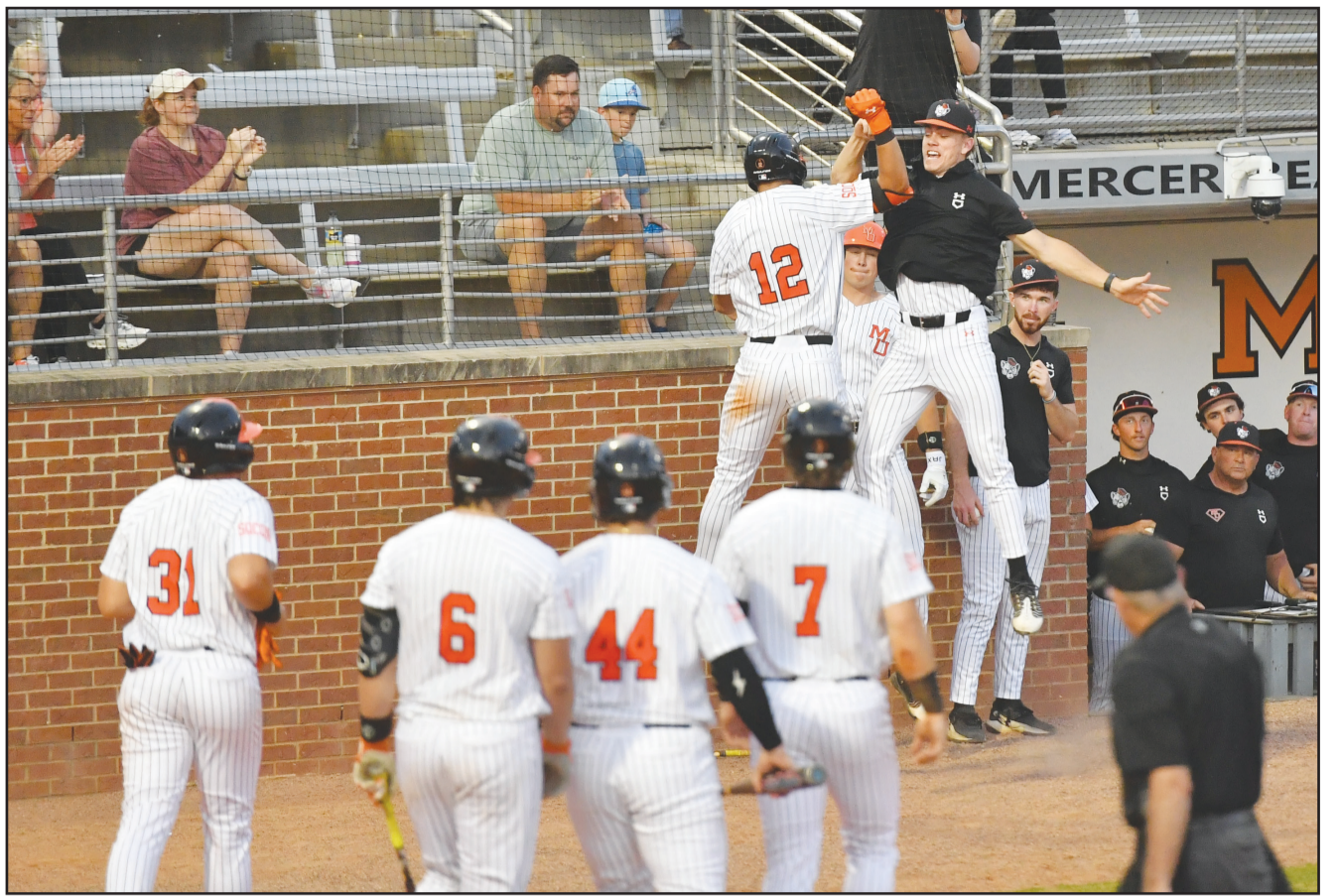


PHOTO BY MARK POWELL

**Mercer's Eli Stephens (12) celebrates a grand slam with a teammate during the Bears' 14-4 win over Kennesaw State earlier this year. Stephens slugged a pair of home runs against Georgia Tech on Tuesday.**

you get six or seven and you might score 10 runs," Gibson said. "The one thing we've focused on this year that's really worked is bat-to-ball skills, finding guys that maybe make more contact."

That approach has led to baserunners, and the Bears have not had to sacrifice the longball to boot.

Titan Kamaka still leads Mercer with a .416 batting average while playing standout defense at shortstop. Braydon Kersey leads the team

with 20 long balls — and he occasionally pitches for the Bears, too. Chris Katz has slugged his way to 18 home runs and a team-best 1.255 OPS. He's closely followed by Eli Stephens and Logan Shepherd, who each have 17 homers.

"It's a total group effort. They're all just great guys, super unselfish," Gibson said. "When you have everyone going, it's hard to stop. It's a fun time to be on the bus with these guys right now."

Mercer will keep its standard pitching rotation in place for its series with ETSU despite Tuesday's game against the Yellow Jackets, meaning Lambert and a resurgent Hugas will pitch Friday and Saturday, respectively.

Though they are tied for first, the Bears could slip depending on other conference results this weekend. Wofford closely trails Mercer with an 11-7 record in SoCon play, while ETSU and Samford are tied at 10-7.

**GIAA playoff games**

**BASEBALL**

- Class 4A:** No. 1 FPD vs. No. 8 Strong Rock
- No. 3 Stratford vs. No. 6 Bethlehem Christian
- No. 5 Tattnall @ No. 4 Athens Christian

**BOYS SOCCER**

- Class 4A:** No. 3 Mount de Sales vs. No. 6 Cristo Rey
- No. 7 Stratford @ No. 2 Brookstone
- Class 2A:** No. 6 CFCA @ No. 3 Holy Spirit Prep

**GIRLS SOCCER**

- Class 4A:** No. 1 Stratford vs. No. 8 Mount de Sales
- No. 2 FPD vs. No. 7 Strong Rock
- Class 2A:** No. 1 CFCA vs. No. 8 Gatewood

**NOTEPAD**

Continued from Page 11

led Mercer with three goals to end her career as a magnificent scorer for the Bears.

Mercer finished the season with a 13-7 overall record. Michigan improved to 13-6 and advanced to the second round, where they lost to Stanford.

**Middle Georgia State baseball and softball seasons end**

The Middle Georgia State baseball and softball teams were each eliminated from their respective conference tournaments last week, ending their seasons.

The softball team was eliminated from contention in the tournament during the regular season, as they finished next-to-last in the Peach Belt Conference. They finished with a record of 17-28 and went 9-18 in conference play. Three dif-

ferent Knights softball players hit over .300 and had an OPS higher than .870: Jada Akeson, Nayeli Hernandez and Madison Cosgrove.

The baseball team qualified for the Peach Belt Tournament by finishing 12-18 in conference play and 19-33 overall. After losing their first game against North Georgia, the Knights got into a fierce battle with Georgia Southwestern. GSW got out to a 7-1 lead at one point and was up 10-4 entering the ninth inning.

The Knights proceeded to score six runs in the final frame, tying the game and sending it to extra innings. After both teams were held scoreless, GSW scored the game-winner in the 12th inning to end Middle Georgia State's season in heartbreaking fashion.

Mikal Ashley had three hits in the elimination game for the Knights, finishing strong to end a standout season in which he hit .387 with five home runs and 15 doubles.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MERCER ATHLETICS

**Mercer lacrosse's Caroline Glus rushes around a Michigan defender during the Bears' NCAA tournament match against the Wolverines. Glus was Mercer's leading scorer this season as a senior.**

**BIBBSPY**

Continued from Page 11

enhanced with dazzling shoes or sharp accessories — for the occasion. So did Bibb County Athletic Director Kevin Grooms, who encouraged athletes and guests to snap a selfie at the beginning of the ceremony and take pictures on the glitzed-out red carpet area outside the Howard auditorium.

"It's all about creating an experience for the kids," Grooms said. "We want this to be something they're going to remember and take home with them for the rest of their life."

The evening's MC, Steven Jones of the school district, said the awards were voted on by community mem-

bers who sponsored the event. The judges voted on who should win after reviewing the applications without the names of the athletes.

Other notable awards included Offensive and Defensive players of the year for football. Central's Wyquavis Gaither took home the offensive award, beating standouts like Southwest star and Rutgers player Rinaldo Callaway and speedy Northeast wideout Kortnei Williams. Westside's Paul Risper won the defensive honors.

Southwest star Chase Dupree, unsurprisingly, earned the district's Boys Basketball Player of the Year award. Central's Jamyree Simmons was named the best girls hoops player in the district. Rutland baseball

coach Darryl Silas took home the Male Coach of the Year award, while Northeast's Heavenly Whitehead got the Female Coach of the Year honors.

In addition to the district's awards, the Community Foundation of Central Georgia also recognized the winners of the Al Lucas Memorial Scholarship.

David and Elaine Lucas spoke at the ceremony, explaining the scholarship honoring their son. Al Lucas was a football player who died after sustaining a spinal cord injury during a game. The scholarship awards \$1,000 to one male and one female athlete from Northeast and one athlete at every other Bibb County school.

**BIBBSPY Winners**

- Football Offensive Player of the Year: **Wyquavis Gaither, Central**
- Football Defensive Player of the Year: **Paul Risper, Westside**
- Cheerleader of the Year: **Eva Ray, Central**
- Softball Player of the Year: **Caylin Mathis, Central**
- Volleyball Player of the Year: **Kaylee Reese, Central**
- Flag Football Player of the Year: **Dominique Billue, Westside**
- Girls Cross country Runner of the Year: **Keiran Morgan, Howard**
- Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year: **Isaiah Penney, Howard**
- Girls Basketball Player of the year: **Jamyree Simmons, Central**
- Boys Basketball Player of the Year: **Chase Dupree, Southwest**
- Female Wrestler of the Year: **tZipporah Bulloch, Central**
- Male Wrestler of the Year: **Tabais Williams, Howard**
- Female Tennis Player of the Year: **Zoe Johnson, Central**
- Male Tennis Player of the Year: **Garner Michael, Central**
- Girls Soccer Player of the Year: **Tacoyia Braswell, Central**
- Boys Soccer Player of the Year: **Shritham Panda, Central**
- Girls Track and Field Player of the Year: **Karmen hill, Rutland**
- Boys Track and Field Player of the Year: **Jason Curry, Central**
- Baseball Player of the Year: **Matthew "Thor" Griffin, Howard**
- Girls Golfer of the Year: **Nyla Howard, Northeast**
- Boys Golfer of the Year: **Nick Battle, Northeast**
- Female Athlete of the Year: **Tacoyia Braswell, Central**
- Male Athlete of the Year: **Ta'Shawn Poole, Howard**
- Female Scholar Athlete of the Year: **Emma Tillery, Central**
- Male Scholar Athlete of the Year: **Shritham Panda, Central**
- Middle School Girls Athlete of the Year: **Peyton Wray, Rutland**
- Middle School Boys Athlete of the Year: **Marcus Brooks Jr., Rutland**
- Athletic Trainer of the Year: **Brad Miles, Central**
- Female Coach of the Year: **Heavenly Whitehead, Northeast girls basketball**
- Male Coach of the Year: **Darryl Silas, Rutland baseball**
- Team Stewardship Award: **Howard cheerleaders**
- Team Scholarship Award: **Central girls basketball**
- Team Sportsmanship Award: **Howard cheerleaders**
- Middle School All Sports Award: **Weaver Middle**
- Middle School AD of the Year: **Cameron Prather, Ballard-Hudson**
- High School AD of the Year: **Latavia Coleman, Howard High School**



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

**Central's Shritham Panda (left) shakes hands with Bibb County Schools Athletic Director Kevin Grooms after Panda won the Male Scholar Athlete of the Year award at Monday's BIBBSPY ceremony.**