

The Macon Melody

\$2.00 » VOLUME II, NUMBER 48 » FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2026 » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Emory Gross Sr., a U.S. Air Force veteran, holds a photo of his father, Arcelious Emory Gross, at Linwood Cemetery in Macon. The elder Gross, a World War II Army veteran, was buried at the historic Pleasant Hill cemetery 62 years ago. Emory Gross Sr. spent months searching for his father’s grave marker.

At Linwood Cemetery, a son searches for the dad he never understood

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
Features Editor
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On a sunny afternoon, Emory Gross Sr. scans over a trail of dry weeds, sunken graves and faded headstones too worn to read.

More than 60 years ago, his father, Arcelious Emory Gross, was laid to rest in this place — Macon’s Linwood Cemetery, a historic burial ground left behind by the area’s growth.

But standing in the scorching heat, surveying a 14-acre sea of crumbling burial markers, the Macon native isn’t quite sure where his father — or any of his family — rests.

He finds a government-issued stone marker that shows its age.

It’s now 62 years old.

The inscription reads, “Arcelious Emory Gross. Georgia. S SGT US Army. World War II. Sept 16 1918-Sept 3 1964.”

The rectangular slab has been moved over the years, Gross said. Still, finding it is a relief — and a sign of determination. Gross wants to remember, and honor, a man’s complicated legacy.

His father is one of 4,000 people buried in the cemetery. Some graves are marked. Some are not. The cemetery, the final resting place for several prominent Black Maconites,



PHOTO BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
The grave marker for Arcelious Emory Gross, a World War II Army veteran, sits at Linwood Cemetery in Macon.

sprawls across land wedged between Grant Avenue and Interstate 75. The 132-year-old cemetery in Pleasant Hill, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, could have been lost to time with the construction of the interstate.

But folks like Gross still care and still visit.

A father’s shadow

Gross grew up in Pleasant Hill and remembers biking through Linwood with his childhood friends. He was just a teen when his father, who fought in World War II and returned

from the war’s combat zones a changed man, died.

“He drank himself to death,” Gross said.

His father rarely talked about his military service. Gross instead saw his parents fight and eventually divorce. Arcelious worked at Robins Air Force Base in Houston County, at the post office and as a brickmason.

Post-traumatic stress disorder wasn’t well understood then, Gross

SEE SON
PAGE 7

Downtown Macon renovation projects in limbo after Kemp vetoes historic tax credit expansion

BY CASEY CHOUNG
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Remodeling efforts for several downtown Macon buildings — including structures that once housed Union Furniture Co. on Third St. and the Macon Rescue Mission on Hazel St. — might be stalled after Gov. Brian Kemp axed an expansion of Georgia’s historic rehabilitation tax credit.

Developers have been using the tax credit to restore buildings for

new commercial projects, most prominently in the downtown area, NewTown Macon CEO James Fritze told The Melody in a past interview. The credit helps them move projects forward without having to shell out so much upfront cash, he said.

The tax credit partially reimburses renovation costs for properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The

SEE LIMBO
PAGE 7

Proposed 2027 county budget anticipates no tax rate increase, ups public safety spending

BY LAURA E. CORLEY
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Bibb County property taxes for the upcoming fiscal year will hold steady under a budget proposed this week by Mayor Lester Miller, though the sheriff’s office would receive a \$3.4 million boost while funding for courts would decrease by nearly \$302,000.

A public hearing on the budget will be held June 2 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Occasionally glancing down at documents in a three-inch white binder on the podium in City Hall on Tuesday, Miller presented what he described as “a very lean” and “balanced” 2027 budget for Macon-Bibb County.

The budget proposes \$221.5 million in revenue and \$221.5 million in expenses for the fiscal year that starts July 1. That’s about \$1.7 million more than the budget for the current fiscal year and about \$22.7 million more than the 2021 budget of \$99.9 million.

The county is bringing in more

money and spending more money than it did in 2021, when the millage rate was nearly double the current 9.575 rate.

“We’ve been planning this for a while, and we’re in good shape,” Miller said Tuesday of his proposed budget, which Macon-Bibb County commissioners saw for the first time at the meeting. Commissioner Paul Bronson was absent.

The budget assumes maintaining about the same millage rate, which commissioners typically vote on in the coming months after the budget is approved.

Miller said he asked departments to find ways to cut their budgets by 10%. The exception to that was public safety, for which the mayor proposes a total budget increase of \$3.6 million compared to last year.

In addition to the sheriff’s office, the budget proposal also includes increases for the fire department, emergency management agency, code enforcement and the coroner’s office.

SEE BUDGET
PAGE 2

Periodical — Mail Label

‘10 Good Men’ preserves firsthand accounts of World War II B-17 crews

BY SANDRA HERNANDEZ
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Fewer than 46,000 World War II veterans are still alive to share their stories, but a local director made it his mission to record living history. The result is a documentary, “10 Good Men,” which will premiere Sunday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House in Macon.

The film is about the crew members who served on the Boeing B-17, also known as

the “Flying Fortress.” Director Trent Jones said it was the most iconic bomber of World War II, and in his opinion, U.S. history.

“10 Good Men” is a 90-minute documentary that includes rare and colorized archival footage. Emmy Award-winning voice talent Dan Nachtrab narrates it. Jones said the film has already received rave reviews from New York Times best-selling authors and respected Air Force historians.

The B-17 was the first

heavy bomber developed by the United States. By the time production ended in 1945, Boeing produced more than 12,000 of them.

They were sent to lead the bombing campaign in Europe and saw action in every combat zone during the war. They are most known for strategic daytime strikes against German industrial targets. Robins Air Force Base in neighboring



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRENT JONES
“10 Good Men” director Trent Jones, left, poses with veteran Richard Bushong. The Arizona native flew 28 combat missions during World War II and is one of the 10 warfighters featured in the documentary, which premieres Sunday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House in Macon.

SEE ACCOUNTS
PAGE 7

Longtime Macon-Bibb leader Ed DeFore dies at 94.
See Page 2 and maconmelody.com for details.



Democrats outvote Republicans as Macon-Bibb voters pick school board and water authority seats

BY CASEY CHOUNG
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More than 28,000 voters participated in this week’s election, accounting for just over 27% of all registered voters in Bibb County. Democrats came out in stronger numbers Tuesday, casting 8,000 more ballots than their Republican neighbors. Lisa Garrett-Boyd and Amy Morton will hold the county’s at-large board of education seats, while Frank Patterson and Gary Bechtel will return to the Macon Water Authority. Patterson was reelected to the seat he’s held for nearly 20 years with 50.5% of the vote, and he said he hopes to maintain the viability of the authority. He won one of three water authority seats on the ballot. Elaine Lucas ran unopposed for the District 1 seat while the District 2 seat will head to a runoff between Ron Lemon and Marshall Talley.

That contest will be held June 16. Morton, who received nearly 15,000 votes, will join the board at a critical moment for the Bibb County School District’s finances. She said she wants to start by looking at ways to control expenses “across the board.” “We have to look at reasonable measures the board can take to control costs,” she said. “We have to look at what we can do as a system and as a community to continue to serve our students at the highest possible level.” Morton’s opponent, Kerry Hatcher, lost with 39.7% of the vote. Hatcher said he felt like he succeeded in what he set out to do — getting people to talk about the issues facing the school district. “The fact that I got that close says that there’s a real groundswell of people who think that what I had to offer makes sense,” he said. Garrett-Boyd will enter her final term of eligibility on the school board, where she said she will focus

on reducing absenteeism, improving literacy and postgraduate outcomes. “We don’t do it by ourselves; it takes parents, it takes leaders ... all the community to come together and strengthen our school system,” she said. Former State Sen. John Kennedy, R-Macon, will also head to a runoff in the lieutenant governor race against state Sen. Greg Dolezal, R-Cumming. Kennedy vacated his seat in December ahead of the race. His successor, Steven McNeel, R-Macon, who won a special election in February to fill the Middle Georgia state senate spot, won again with more than 90% of the vote in the Republican primary. He does not have a Democrat challenger. Incumbent Miriam Paris, D-Macon, garnered 74.6% of votes in the primary to beat out George Thomas for the House District 142 seat. She will face Republican Calvin Palmer in November. For full vote tallies from Bibb County, go to maconmelody.com.

‘Man of the People’ DeFore dies

MELODY STAFF REPORT
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Ed DeFore Sr., a charismatic, stalwart figure who dubbed himself “a man of the people” in elected roles in Macon and Bibb County governments for nearly half a century, died Tuesday. He was 94.

DeFore was an often bold and vocal presence and had been from an early age. He was a standout basketball and baseball player for the Lanier High Poets.

In 1975, when DeFore was mulling a run for mayor, a local news writer described him as someone “who always has something to say about anything.” He was fond of calling reporters at all hours with “tips.”

“Looka here,” he might say in confidence before dishing on some topic of the local day, followed by a “keep me outta this.”

DeFore is among the longest-serving elected officials in



DeFore

Macon-Bibb County history — and perhaps even state history — with more than four decades of public service. His name appears in local newspapers about 5,500 times in topics ranging from high school sports, city council and beyond. He served under nine different mayors, starting with Ronnie Thompson in 1971.

DeFore spearheaded the effort to build West Macon Park in the early 1980s.

In 2008, the county named the Ed DeFore Sports Complex at Westside High School in his honor.

BUDGET

Continued from Page 1

All told, the mayor proposes \$125.8 million for public safety. Of that, \$61.5 million is earmarked for the sheriff’s office. Public safety comprises about 57% of the county’s budget, Miller said, “and that’s mostly employees and benefits. That doesn’t include the cost to the jail, equipment, technology and those types of things.” Budget increases are also being proposed for a few other departments. The information technology department, which the mayor proposes funding at \$9.1 million, could see an increase of nearly half a million dollars compared to the current fiscal year’s budget. The

proposal includes more than a quarter-million-dollar increase for the recreation department, for which he proposes a \$8 million budget. The proposed budget for parks and beautification includes a reduction of about \$392,000 compared to its current budget of \$4.7 million. Miller said the county is “doing much, much more with a lot less.” “We’ve made up for decreasing property taxes by increasing sales taxes,” Miller said. He cited rising costs for pensions, healthcare, trash pickup and waste management due to the rising gas prices and the Consumer Price Index, an economic indicator set by the U.S. Department of Labor on which an untold number of county contracts depend upon for contrac-

tual annual cost adjustments. Previous administrations — and other elected bodies, such as the Bibb County Board of Education — typically provide the public details about its reserves or its “fund balance.” Miller has not included those figures in budget presentations, but county spokesperson Chris Floore said the county has a fund balance that is “way above our 60-day [operating cost] requirement” of about \$40 million to \$42 million. Floore was unable to provide a total for the fund balance by The Melody’s press deadline Wednesday. Miller noted after the meeting that the fund balance “doesn’t really trigger anything for us” unless it falls below the amount needed to fund

the government for 60 days. That number, Floore said, depends on each year’s approved budget. County commissioners had little to say about the budget immediately after the mayor’s presentation. “We just got a hold of it,” Commissioner Raymond Wilder said. “It’s hard to have an opinion yet.” Mayor Pro Tem Valerie Wynn said she thinks the budget is a good one because of the minimal increase in spending. “We’ve done real well over the last couple of years about keeping that budget under control,” she said. “I think it’s being increased where it should be increased, and that’s public safety.” Commissioner Stanley Stewart said he wanted to study the budget

to ensure it serves the people. Commissioner Bill Howell said “it is always good to maintain the millage rate. I understand that if we have to have an increase, we have to have an increase, but there are certain things we can’t cut out of our budget. It’s one thing to have a lean budget and it’s another thing to have a budget that’s not doable.” Even as the county begins the budgeting process for 2027, the audit for fiscal year 2025 is not yet publicly available. State law says municipalities have 180 days after the close of their fiscal year to submit an audit, but Macon-Bibb County has missed that deadline each year since 2022, according to data from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

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PHOTO BY LIZ FABIAN FOR THE MACON NEWSROOM

Paula East’s home at 931 Walnut St. dates to 1860. The Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission has given the 95-year-old 60 days to replace windows installed without approval 27 years ago or face fines or jail time.

Windows replaced 27 years ago now pose a problem for 95-year-old Macon woman

BY LIZ FABIAN
The Macon Newsroom
macon-newsroom.com

The majority of the Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission recently decided a 95-year-old Macon woman can’t continue to skirt historic district guidelines, a ruling contrary to the wishes of the Design Review Board.

About 27 years ago, Paula East replaced historic windows with vinyl ones in her 1860 slate row house at 931 Walnut St. and reconfigured the six-over-six design of the panes. The work was done without the required certificate of appropriateness and in violation of regulations, according to documents filed with the commission. A recent complaint about the windows brought the matter to the panel’s attention.

East’s friends appealed for mercy, considering her age, health considerations and the dancer’s contributions to the community over several decades.

“It would not be in her best interest to undergo major construction work inside the home,” a letter of support stated. “At 95 years old, exposure to dust and disruption from such work could potentially aggravate respira-

tory insufficiencies and pose unnecessary health risks.”

On May 4, the review board voted to allow the vinyl windows to stay for now, noting the replacement occurred more than two decades ago and removal at this time is not reasonable.

Any future work on the home would need to meet historic district guidelines, including future window replacements.

During the commission’s May 11 administrative meeting, Chair Jeane Easom questioned the review board’s proposed exception. P&Z Executive Director Jeff Ruggieri explained that the review board considered it was more than two decades since the violation occurred.

He noted that some other states limit the time period that someone could be held responsible for earlier violations. In his prior position in North Carolina, Ruggieri could not enforce violations more than four years old.

In the Walnut Street case, East’s neighbor Edwin Atkins appealed to the commission to enforce historic district regulations on the property.

“My concern is that the visual beauty and historic elements of the 1860 slate row homes are protected. That’s

it,” Atkins told commissioners. “I urge the board not to allow incorrect or incompatible window designs to diminish the authenticity, reduce the real estate values and establish a precedent for the future owners.”

P&Z Vice Chair Tim Jones moved to deny the application that would have allowed East to keep those windows until they needed to be replaced.

“I’m not going to let her situation influence me, her age and everything,” Jones said. “I know what we’ve been doing about windows and we’re enforcing the regulation.”

Easom also said East’s community service does not change the legal parameters she should follow for her property.

“While she may be 95 years old, when she installed those windows she was not and she knew what she was doing,” Easom said. “And she defied the recommendation of the planning and zoning at that time, and so we take great offense to that, or at least I do.”

P&Z plans to notify East that she has up to 60 days to bring the windows into historic district guidelines or face possible legal action, fines or jail time.



FILE PHOTO

A fuel nozzle pumps gas into a vehicle at a filling station. Gov. Brian Kemp extended Georgia’s motor fuel excise tax suspension through June 2, giving drivers a 33-cent-per-gallon break at the pump ahead of Memorial Day weekend.

Kemp extends gas tax break

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

Georgians and people visiting or just passing through the state will get a 33-cent per gallon break at the gas pump while traveling for Memorial Day.

Gov. Brian Kemp on May 15 used his authority under state law to declare a state of emergency due to spiraling fuel prices. That in turn allowed him to resuspend collection of the motor fuel excise tax a minute after the current suspension expired Tuesday. He first approved the suspension on March 20, just hours after the General

Assembly gave it the green-light.

The renewed suspension started at midnight Wednesday. It will remain in effect until 11:59 p.m. on June 2.

The U.S. conflict with Iran has continued to drive up oil prices.

“Global markets remain unstable and are subjecting Georgians to unpredictable price shocks on basic goods and services,” Kemp wrote in his executive order, which noted that futures on Brent crude, a global benchmark for oil prices, had spiked 3% for the day.

The order prohibits price gouging. It also suspends collections on the 37.3-cent per

gallon tax on diesel fuel.

Diesel factors into the cost of groceries and any other product that must be hauled.

“As Georgia families prepare for the Memorial Day travel weekend, they should not feel blindsided by prices at the gas pump,” Kemp said in a statement.

His office said AAA predicts 39.1 million Americans will travel by car this Memorial Day weekend, topping last year’s record.

The release said the average cost of a gallon of regular gas in Georgia is \$4.02, half a dollar less than the national average. It said Georgia is one of only two states with a motor fuel tax suspension.

Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

POP-UP EVENTS: YOUR TICKET TO SUMMER ADVENTURE



Sponsored by: Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

Summer offers a chance for adventure and exploration away from the typical daily routine. For seniors looking to add more fun, creativity, and spontaneous social interaction into their days, summer pop-up events are the perfect place to start.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Research shows that activities such as spending time with family, talking with children, engaging in hobbies, and talking with friends contribute to greater life satisfaction among older adults. Social interactions don’t just fill our days; they give us meaning, purpose, and a sense of belonging that can help anchor other changes in our lives.

CREATIVE, NEW EXPERIENCES

Finding new and exciting ways to meet people and explore interests is important for seniors at every stage. While daily routines that include social connections are crucial, it’s also important to add novelty and creativity to your schedule. Research suggests that creative engagement is positively related to the experience of aging. By combining social interaction with creative exploration, active adults can help improve their overall aging experience and well-being.

FINDING NOVELTY CLOSE TO HOME

How do seniors find new, creative experiences without having to travel or expend unreasonable resources? Fortunately, summertime is one of the best seasons for getting out of the house to explore new places and

ideas. Pop-up events and seasonal venues offer unique experiences that seniors can enjoy while maintaining ties to the local community, family, and friends.

POP-UP EVENTS FOR THE SUMMER

What are pop-up events? This general term describes any activity or destination that is temporary or seasonal. Some pop-up events might be one-night-only, while others might last an entire summer. Taking advantage of pop-up events in your community is one of the best ways to experience new and exciting social interactions.

DON'T MISS THESE EVENTS

While pop-up events are often highly local, there are many common types of experiences you should look out for this summer.

• Farmers’ markets:

Local farmers and artisans often set up in public spaces on summer weekends to sell their current wares.

• Food trucks:

During long summer days, food trucks often set up shop near parks and other outdoor attractions to offer special menu items.

• Traveling exhibits:

Museums and art galleries host traveling exhibits year-round, but the summer months often bring larger installations that may require outdoor space.

• Free concerts:

Neighborhood music events are popular in the summer, both planned and spontaneous!

• Block parties:

These street events often

happen around holidays or on summer weekends. They’re usually open to everyone and can be a great way to meet community members.

• Outdoor art pop-ups:

Artists use the warm summer months to create installations around town or showcase their work on cool summer mornings in the park.

FINDING POP-UP EVENTS NEAR YOU

Community calendars are a great place to start for local pop-up events. Check your city and county event pages this summer for a broad overview of available events. Food trucks, musicians, and art events held in public spaces often need to register with the city or county for a permit, so these calendars will include great details!

Local museums, art galleries, and convention centers often host pop-up events during the summer. Check individual locations to see their summer lineups. And don’t forget word of mouth! Spread the message that you’re looking for fun summer pop-up events, and you’ll be surprised by how many neighbors and friends have recommendations.

After you’ve done your research, it’s time for one of the best ways to find summer pop-up events: get out and explore! These new experiences are meant to stretch your comfort zone and introduce novelty into your routine, so try heading out the door without a concrete plan in mind. You never know who or what you’ll find!



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SNAPSHOTS

PAGE 4 » THE MACON MELODY » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM » FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2026



PHOTO NO. 1 — 2026 Northeast High School graduates take a selfie while flipping their tassels during their graduation ceremony May 19. *Photo courtesy of Bibb County Schools.*

PHOTO NO. 2 — 2026 Middle Georgia State graduates pose for a photo after their commencement ceremony last week. *Photo by Jessica Whitley.*

PHOTO NO. 3 — 2026 Wesleyan College graduates walk towards Porter Auditorium during their commencement ceremony May 16. *Photo courtesy of Wesleyan College.*

PHOTO NO. 4 — 2026 Middle Georgia State graduates congratulate each other with a hug after their commencement ceremony last week. *Photo by Jessica Whitley.*

PHOTO 5 — 2026 Southwest High School graduates take a selfie prior to their graduation ceremony May 19. *Photo courtesy of Bibb County Schools.*

PHOTO 6 — Reimagining Community Connections mini-grant recipients Monica Miller and JaCory Marcus help revive Pleasant Hill's Historic May Day Celebration held on Saturday, May 16, at Mattie Hubbard Park. *Photo by Dsto Moore.*

PHOTO 7 — Gina Pugh is crowned festival queen at the Pleasant Hill Historic May Day Celebration last Saturday. *Photo by Dsto Moore.*

Justice, 27 years late, for replaced windows

The Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission has been busy.

In a recent meeting, as detailed in a report from our partners at The Macon Newsroom, they approved a slew of business activity. Oh, and I almost forgot — they also threatened to jail a 95-year-old Maconite over the windows on her home.

Yes, seriously.

Paula East, who lives on Walnut Street, replaced the windows on her historic home 27 years ago. She did so without the required government approvals, and now, nearly three decades later, Macon’s planners and zoners are mighty angry.

The chair takes “great offense” to what East did many years ago, according to one of the quotes from her in the article. The vice chair said he knows “what we’ve been doing about windows and we’re enforcing the regulation.”

What sparked these puffed-up responses and the sudden outrage? I guess it stems from one of



Joshua Wilson

East’s neighbors, who brought the matter to the commission’s attention after the local design review board reviewed the case and logically concluded that, since the windows were replaced so long ago, this should just be left alone.

Should East have sought approval for her project 20-some-odd-years ago? Sure. Is this even worth discussing in a government meeting today? No.

Instead of agreeing with the review board, the commission ordered East to, within 60 days, bring the windows up to snuff. She’ll have to replace them, I guess, even after neighbors and friends said the work would pose unnecessary health risks to the nonagenarian. If she doesn’t, she’ll face legal action, which could include a stay in the slammer or monetary fines.

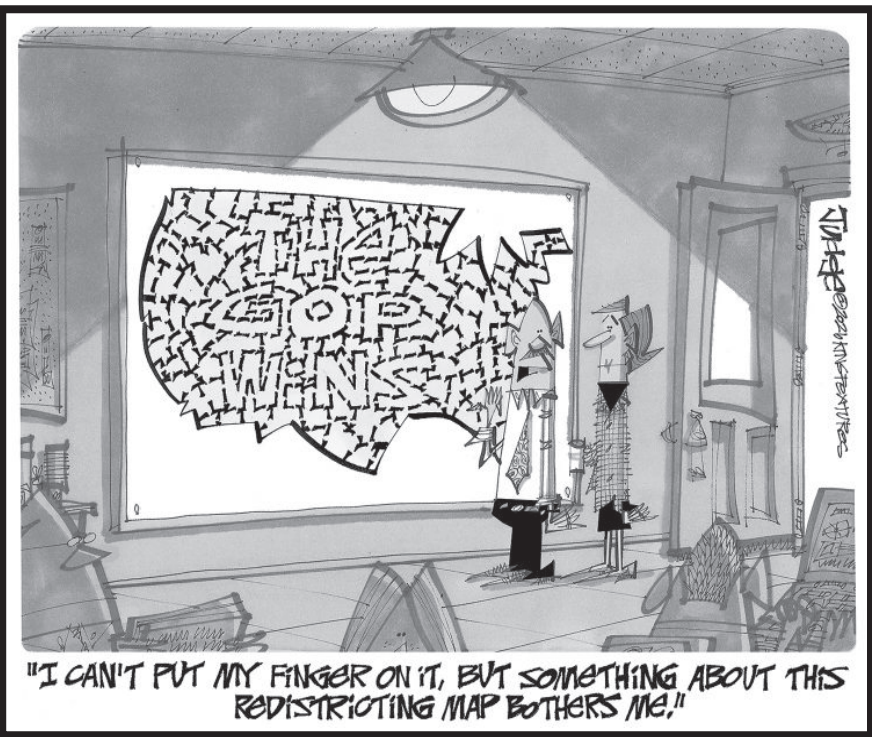
Some people — including me — would call this entire thing petty, a waste of government resources and the reason planning and zoning commissions across the country are widely viewed as busybodies.

Don’t get me wrong. I think planning and zoning laws are necessary for an area’s logical and orderly development. I also think citizens should follow local laws and respect government authority. But this entire matter is ridiculous, especially when you consider that Georgia’s statute of limitations for some of the worst-possible offenses, such as forcible rape, is 15 years.

Macon-Bibb might not have a statute of limitations for East’s oh-so-terrible offense, but I think it’s time to let it go. I’m sure she’s been properly admonished.

Anyway, that’s the view from my window. I hope I don’t have to replace it anytime soon.

Joshua Wilson is the executive editor of The Macon Melody.



The Macon Melody

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ABOUT THE MACON MELODY

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

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

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Submissions may be sent to joshua@gtnl.org.

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LEGALESE

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Lights, camera, bad deal: Film subsidies never paid off

Hailed the Hollywood of the South, Georgia’s once-soaring film industry is crashing down to Earth. Last fiscal year, 245 productions were filmed in the Peach State, which resulted in \$2.3 billion in spending, but that pales in comparison with 2022 — Georgia’s zenith — when there were 412 productions that drove \$4.4 billion in spending.

It is not a mystery where these TV and film productions are going or why. Movie makers are pursuing ways to film cheaper. Many are going abroad where labor costs are lower and they receive sweetheart tax deals, although some of the tax credits are similar to what they can secure in the states.

Even if they remain in the U.S., there are states willing to dole out even more generous handouts than Georgia is willing to offer, and that’s OK. Given the state’s experience, taxpayers should be relieved that films are fleeing for more profligate pastures.

Georgia’s dysfunctional rela-



Marc Hyden

tionship with tax credits for film and TV productions began about 20 years ago and gradually morphed into a boondoggle. “Studios can receive credits equal to 20% of production costs incurred in-state, plus an extra 10% if they promote Georgia by putting its peach logo in the movie’s credits,” according to The Wall Street Journal. “The credit amounts to free cash. Most studios owe little in local income taxes. Instead, they can sell the credits to Georgia taxpayers.”

This was supposed to lure productions here, spur economic activity and presumably result in increased tax revenue, but out-of-state film companies benefited more than Georgia. The Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts disclosed in 2020, “The film tax credit is not designed to incentivize hiring residents over nonresidents; it pro-

vides the same credit regardless of workers’ residency. While Georgia residents held most of the jobs (80%) associated with the credit, most wages (53%) were paid to non-residents.”

Meanwhile, a 2021 study found, “88% of companies participating in the program are based outside of Georgia.” That’s not all.

“Auditors estimated that every dollar the state awarded studios — \$5.2 billion between 2015 and 2022 — returned only 19 cents in tax revenue, an 81% loss,” the Journal recently reported.

That is a terrible return on investment, but if Georgia is willing to maintain wasteful programs, could they at least make them aid Georgians instead of deep-pocketed out-of-state film companies?

Proponents of this subsidy are certainly quick to point out inflated economic impact numbers and how

SEE HYDEN
PAGE 6

From Jim Crow to Callais, the voting fight continues

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Louisiana v. Callais gutted the Voting Rights Act and has given a green light for politicians in Georgia and across the South to redraw maps that silence Black and brown voters before a single vote is cast.

The Voting Rights Act ended one of Jim Crow’s most effective anti-voting tools: voting maps that ignored voters. Let’s start with some history. After the Civil War, Congress adopted the 13th and 14th amendments to end slavery and guarantee citizenship.

We talk less, though, about the 15th Amendment. It mandated that no state nor the federal government could use race to stop Black people from voting. Over the next decade, Black men got elected to mayorships, state legislative bodies and Congress. But Southern states, with the help of a racist, vengeful president and a complicit Supreme Court, put a stop to that progress. Enter Jim Crow — a series of state and local laws that included anti-voting provisions.



Stacey Abrams

Suddenly, all voters faced poll taxes and literacy tests, which were technically “race-neutral” or “colorblind” as they say. Yet Black Southerners had been barred from learning to read or from making a fair wage, so they couldn’t pass the tests or pay the toll. White Southerners also faced illiteracy and poverty, but those crafty legislators and governors had a cure — grandfather clauses that said the laws don’t apply if your ancestors could vote before the Civil War. So, these “race-neutral” laws shockingly only affected Black voters.

As more Blacks gained education and economic independence, the Jim Crow South had to get creative. If they couldn’t block individuals from passing the Herculean gauntlet of impossible tasks, they decided to take another approach. The goal of legislative districts is to ensure that communities of shared interests

had a voice — someone to speak up for them. Every community of size or substance is supposed to have a chance to pick a champion.

Yet, when Black voters finally had the numbers, legislatures drew district lines to dilute their power. Legislators, swearing “race neutrality” all along, used gerrymandering to divide and conquer. Their racist tactics worked for more than 100 years.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 got wise to the chicanery, and its Section 2 made it illegal to draw districts that diluted the voting power of racial communities. When that threshold was crossed, maps had to reflect the growing political power of people of color. The solution was imperfect, but it worked and created accountability.

Communities of color, like rural communities and suburban enclaves, simply want to have a voice to speak up for their issues.

SEE ABRAMS
PAGE 6

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Macon leaders should focus on housing supply, not distractions

Macon has an opportunity many fast-growing communities wish they had: time to act before housing affordability becomes a full-blown crisis.

Across Georgia, rising costs have shown what happens when housing supply fails to keep pace with demand. Macon is not there yet, but the early warning signs are clear.

Recent local data shows housing development in Bibb County has not kept up with changing demand, and new construction has been uneven across the community.

That demand is only expected to grow as young adults, working families and retirees look for attainable places to live. That includes “missing middle”



Kyle Wingfield

options — such as townhomes, duplexes and single-family rentals — that provide flexibility for residents at different incomes and stages of life.

Housing debates often turn complicated problems into simple blame games. Institutional investors are often portrayed as the primary reason homes are becoming less affordable, but the data shows they represent only a small share of the overall market.

When policymakers focus too narrowly on who owns homes, they risk

ignoring the question that matters most for affordability: whether Macon is allowing enough homes to be built in the first place.

The path forward is clear. Macon needs a broader mix of housing types, price points and densities. That requires modernizing zoning policies, streamlining approvals and encouraging development that reflects actual demand.

Macon can either make room for growth now or make affordability harder later.

Kyle Wingfield is the president and CEO of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

New homes for sale along Barrington Place Way in Macon are shown in this January 2026 file photo.

HYDEN

Continued from Page 5

the incentives brought many hundreds of productions here. That made Georgia the film capital of the country for a period, but that is not necessarily a legitimate argument for perpetuating the tax incentives.

“Tax credits have increased filming in Georgia, which is not surprising,” the Atlanta Journal-Constitution pointed out. “If the state subsidized 30% of the cost of manufacturing toilets, Georgia would be the toilet capital of the world. The question is if there are better uses for [the lost tax revenue].”

The economic impact stemming from these subsidies is another one of the proponents’ supporting arguments, although it is likewise fraught. The state multiplies whatever amount of money filmmakers spent on production in Georgia by 3.57 and asserts that the resulting number is the true economic impact. The only problem is bureaucrats don’t really know where that number comes from or the math behind it.

To the Georgia General Assembly’s credit, they have worked to curtail these tax credits, and some members not-so-secretly want to abolish them outright. Doing so would be a tall order, but as filming wanes in Georgia, lawmakers may want to restore Georgia’s place as the South’s filmmaking capital,

especially following some high-profile departures.

“Marvel has left Georgia’s market — its last movie filmed there was 2025’s ‘Thunderbolts’ — and shifted its massive productions to the United Kingdom, where labor and production costs are cheaper,” Georgia Public Broadcasting noted. “Streamers like Netflix are also increasingly filming abroad, while producing fewer shows in general. Other states, including California and Texas, have upped incentives to compete with Georgia’s tax credits.”

It’s not just state governments that have engaged in economic warfare to secure filming. President Donald Trump has even attempted to dissuade filming abroad. He called for 100% tariffs on films produced overseas, but it seems that has done little to influence film companies’ decisions.

Like many Georgians, I think it is neat when a film is produced locally, and I am sympathetic to the Georgians who work in film and are struggling financially. However, as a matter of public policy, providing lavish tax credits to filmmakers has been a failure.

That’s why many Georgians will shrug when they hear about the Georgia film industry’s decline.

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

ABRAMS

Continued from Page 5

Imagine if Cordele had to rely on Atlanta for decisions or if Augusta made decisions for Unadilla. All of us are Georgians, but the choices and circumstances we face differ.

Difference matters. But with the striking down of Section 2, accountability for fair representation is gone. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana are carving up districts because they believe Black and brown voters don’t matter.

Here in Georgia, Republican politicians are calling on the legislature to redraw congressional and state legislative maps. Districts that finally gave all Georgians meaningful representation — hard-won through decades of organizing and litigation — are now vulnerable. Representatives who understand the unique needs of the communities they serve could lose their seats.

This ruling didn’t arrive in a vacuum. It comes after decades of deliberate blows to the Voting Rights Act, many of which were struck here in Georgia. “Race neutrality” is a fiction. Everybody knows this is about who holds power and how they wield that power against the people.

But we’re not done. Even as legislators rush to redraw maps, Southern communities are organizing, litigating and refusing to be erased. Georgia, the same state that spent decades suppressing Black and brown votes, has proven that we can work against this treachery.

Our record-breaking turnouts in 2018, 2020 and 2021 didn’t just

happen in metro Atlanta. Voters from Randolph to Tifton to Liberty showed up. Those elections proved that when the rules are stacked against us, we don’t quit — we mobilize.

Fighting against authoritarianism has felt remote for a lot of Georgians, but rigging elections is a tool of seizing power. With the Callais decision, everything from school board seats to county commission lines hangs in the balance. To fight back, Congress must strengthen voting protections.

Plus, we have work to do here in the Peach State. Voters must demand elected officials stand publicly for fair maps. Civic organizations — and there are many in Georgia — are already mobilizing, even when the rules shift beneath their feet.

We can also use this moment to remind ourselves of what happens when we fail to have people who show up for us — closed hospitals, skyrocketing utility bills and underfunded schools, for example. In an election year, we can speak up, but after the polls close, politicians need to believe that we’ll still show up. The proof is in how many of us vote now and engage the day after.

The fight for a multiracial democracy is not over. In Georgia and across the South, it never was. Organize. Insist. Refuse to back down. We’ve got this.

Stacey Abrams is a bestselling author, entrepreneur and host of the podcast “Assembly Required.” She previously served as the minority leader of the Georgia House of Representatives.

Jobs boom, church sale headline busy week for local boards

BY LIZ FABIAN

The Macon Newsroom
macon-newsroom.com

The Middle Georgia Regional Commission got an update last week on a \$100 million industrial expansion expected to bring hundreds of jobs to south Bibb County, while the Urban Development Authority voted to sell Macon’s oldest church building.

Growth could bring up to 500 new jobs

Unified Legacy, the parent company for Unified Defense, Truss US and Prince Service & Manufacturing is expanding its sheet metal fabrication operation to more than 30 acres at 2255 Barnes Ferry Road, which backs up to Prince’s current location at 6600 Hawkinsville Road.

The expected \$100 million expansion could provide between 350-500 jobs and up to \$600,000 of annual tax revenue, according to the company’s Development of Regional Impact, or DRI, filing.

“A big win for economic development that doesn’t always get captured [is] when we have our local businesses that are expanding and homegrown, so it’s good to celebrate them when we have them,” said Middle Georgia Regional Commission’s Director of Planning and Public Administration Greg Boike at the group’s May 14 meeting.

Regional leaders learned commission staff completed the required DRI review for Prince’s planned 82-foot-tall, 610,000-square-foot building. The company hopes to complete it early next year.

The Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning Commission approved the extraordinary building height on May 11.

P&Z staff concluded the approval “would allow the property to be developed in a manner that fully reflects its zoning and planned industrial purpose, while denial would limit the site’s productive use. The proposed building height is directly related to functional manufacturing needs and efficient internal operations, rather than an increase in intensity or impact.”

The plant is expected to use 12,500 gallons of water per day, which the Macon Water Authority stated it could handle, but a new sanitary sewer line is needed.

An underground detention pond system is expected to handle stormwater and there should be “no harmful effects downstream,” according to the company’s P&Z application.

The plant is expected to generate 2,690 to 2,853 vehicle trips per day



PHOTO BY LIZ FABIAN FOR THE MACON NEWSROOM

The former Fulton Baptist Church at 506 Hawthorne St. is Macon’s oldest church building, dating to 1829. The Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority voted last week to sell the structure to a new congregation.

from employees, trucks and shipments during peak hours, so the Georgia Department of Transportation asked for a traffic study during the DRI process.

MGRC also reviewed a DRI report for the proposed Macon Arena project. The plan generated a Georgia Department of Transportation request for a “worst-case scenario” for traffic around events at the planned facility just off Interstate 16 and the Second Street Bridge.

The panel also adopted the Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative’s Corridor Strategic Plan for preparing to host Georgia’s first national park and accommodate millions of tourists in the coming decades.

Boike explained that adopting the resolution also renews MGRC’s support for the national park and preserve designation.

“It will task us, as the regional commission, to help our member local governments with the priorities that are around economic development, tourism, land use and such priorities that are laid out in that planning document,” Boike said.

Representatives of the 11 counties also learned the state expects local governments to commission their own geographic information system data, or GIS.

Georgia’s first geospatial information officer, Susan Miller, said the regional commission is the elected officials’ best partner in the data-mapping operation that will be critical to developing a next-generation 911 system that allows redundancy throughout the region if one county is experiencing a devastating emergency.

Miller said it will take six years to acquire all the data needed for Georgia to take advantage of the latest technology and replace systems originally developed 50 years ago.

Old church, new congregation

At its May 14 meeting, the Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority agreed to sell Macon’s oldest church building, which will become home to a new congregation after it was spared from becoming part of a low-income housing proposal in 2020.

In 1829, the one-story, white wooden church was designed for First Presbyterian Church by architect Elam Alexander when he was working on the Bibb County Courthouse.

Originally, it was built on Fourth Street, which is now Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Once the Presbyterian congregation outgrew the church in 1837, Alexander, who was married there, purchased it and sold it to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Savannah in 1841.

After 25 years, the Catholic Church bought First Presbyterian’s newer brick church on Broadway between Mulberry and Walnut streets as that congregation moved to its current home on Mulberry Street.

Pope Pius IX decreed the Catholic congregation could sell the old wooden building if it was dismantled to prevent it from being “converted into sordid use.”

Piece by piece, the church was taken apart and moved to 506 Hawthorne St. to be the home of the Second Baptist congregation between 1868 and 1887. Most recently, Fulton Baptist Church worshipped there.

Bibb County bought the building for \$150,000 from Fulton Baptist in 2013 and turned it over to the UDA. The county already owned the adjoining Virgil Powers Elementary School that it bought in 2009 as it was eyeing a location for a new courthouse or jail expansion. That school building is being renovated as the new home of the “One Safe Place” Family Justice Center.



PHOTO FROM
MUSEUM OF AVIATION
MUSEUMOFAVIATION.ORG
A Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress on display at the Museum of Aviation in Warner Robins. The heavy bomber, which carried a crew of 10, was the most iconic American bomber of World War II. Veterans who flew missions over Europe in aircraft like this one share their stories in “10 Good Men,” a documentary by Warner Robins director Trent Jones that premieres in Macon this Sunday at the Piedmont Grand Opera House.

ACCOUNTS

Continued from Page 1

Houston County has one on display at its Museum of Aviation.

Jones said the film, through surviving crew members, tells the story of the B-17. He believes this film is important right now because, on average, World War II veterans are in their 90s or older. “This is their last time telling this story,” he said.

Jones was born and raised in nearby Warner Robins and is a graduate of Houston County High School. He made his directorial debut on YouTube in 2019. He started by making short documentaries about aviation history. He quickly gained a following and made his video career his full-time job. His YouTube channel now has 295,000 subscribers.

He first interviewed a World War II veteran in late 2022 and then recreated

that veteran’s story in a video. People then started reaching out to Jones, eager to share stories about other service members.

Jones and his associate producer, fellow Houston County native Joshua Profit, have since interviewed about 40 veterans, including 15 who served on a B-17. Ten of those veterans are featured in the aptly titled “10 Good Men.” Ten was also the crew complement of the B-17, Jones noted.

Jones is passionate about history and said he wants to preserve and promote the legacies of these warfighters.

“You realize ... that eventually they’re not going to be here,” he said. “If nobody records ... those stories and those firsthand accounts, then they’re simply gone forever.”

He said combat reports only tell part of the story, but people who lived through the war can describe how moments felt, how they smelled, how

scary they were and even how it felt to lose a friend.

“Those sorts of things cannot be conveyed by simple military histories,” Jones said. “Those can only be preserved by firsthand accounts.”

Jones said it is vital that people understand the war, its causes and how thousands of young men answered a call to fight tyranny.

“Without that, the world would be very different and, likely, a whole lot worse today,” he said. “It is because of the courage and sacrifice of a bunch of 18- and 19-year-old kids that we have what we have today. If we forget that, then eventually we’re doomed to repeat the same mistakes.”

To buy tickets for the Sunday premiere, which includes a chat with Jones, visit thegrandmacon.com. The event begins at 5 p.m.

View the film’s trailer on YouTube at youtube.com/@TJ3.

Gross, who until recently rarely visited the cemetery, learned of Linwood’s deterioration six months ago and headed there.

He didn’t find the marker on that visit, but — with the help of local cemetery preservationist Y-O Latimore — soon located it.

He hopes to one day commission a more prominent headstone for his father. First, though, he wants to find his father’s actual grave.

Until then — and especially this Memorial Day — Gross will spend time reflecting on his father, missed opportunities and what military service, and sacrifice, means.

“I got a flagpole at my house,” Gross said. “I fly it everyday — it’s for him.”

don’t understand that as a civilian, but PTSD is something else.”

Sober, steady and searching

The son followed in the steps of the father.

Gross, too, suffered with the mental strain of service and later with alcoholism. After being discharged from his railroad job for reeking of alcohol in 1985, he entered a 28-day treatment program and has since maintained his sobriety.

At 53, he entered college to pursue a degree in psychology and started a new career mentoring children with behavioral challenges. It took Gross years to understand the potential causes of his father’s behavior.

SON

Continued from Page 1

said, but he thinks now that his father suffered from it.

PTSD, a mental condition triggered by shock, can cause angry outbursts, detachment from others, memory lapses and more. According to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, seven out of every 100 veterans experience the condition.

As a kid, Gross thought his father was just an alcoholic. It wasn’t until he served in the U.S. Air Force that he was able to relate to what his father might have been feeling.

“You go to sleep at night — all that stuff comes back to you,” he said. “You



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

The former Macon Rescue Mission building on Hazel Street sits vacant Tuesday in downtown Macon. Renovations for the building and several others nearby could be stalled after Gov. Brian Kemp vetoed an expansion of Georgia’s historic rehabilitation tax credit.

LIMBO

Continued from Page 1

program, set to end in 2029, is limited to \$30 million in available statewide credits per year. Officials said all available credits through 2029 have already been claimed.

Legislation passed by the General Assembly in April would have doubled the program’s annual cap, bringing it to \$60 million. Kemp vetoed the bill on May 15 along with other bills that would have increased spending. He said he did so to compensate for a \$1.3 billion revenue shortfall from an income tax cut he approved earlier in May.

“The General Assembly failed to account for this loss of revenue in the appropriations process, instead prioritizing general taxpayer relief,” the governor said in his veto statement.

Emily Hopkins, executive director

of the Historic Macon Foundation, said the veto was “deeply disappointing” because the tax credits yield local projects that bolster local housing supply and raise the property tax roll.

Macon has many historic buildings and is home to several historic districts, Hopkins said. She noted that any building within those districts that is “contributing” — or fitting within the district’s time period of historic significance — is eligible for the credit.

In 2022, Main Street America reported that downtown Macon utilized historic tax credits for 69 projects, making the area the largest user of such credits in the nation.

“These tax credits have been the difference in downtown’s revitalization,” Hopkins said.

Most of downtown Macon’s commercial projects are completed using historic tax credits, Hopkins said. The

credits can cover up to 25% of a project’s costs. Developers often sell those credits to investors to raise cash and cover financing gaps that would otherwise stall a project.

Along with the Union Furniture and Rescue Mission buildings, developers have pondered using the credits to renovate downtown’s former army surplus store. With some help from the state, those buildings could, like the former Macon Grocery Warehouses on Seventh Street, see new life. The Seventh Street project, which received the credits, will soon house 57 new lofts.

“This tax credit has been nothing but beneficial for Georgia,” she said. “It creates more investment — you’re getting so much return on every single dollar when you do these projects.”

Hopkins said the foundation will continue advocating for the program’s expansion.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Georgia Trust for Local News names Cynthia DuBose executive director

BY JOSHUA WILSON

Executive Editor
joshua@gtn.org



DuBose

Journalist and media executive Cynthia DuBose has been tapped as the new head of the Georgia Trust for Local News, which, as the Peach State’s largest independent newspaper company, operates 20 publications throughout Middle and South Georgia.

DuBose, a former Atlanta Journal-Constitution newsroom lead and McClatchy Media Co. administrator, will lead the group’s continued digital transformation, according to officials at the nonprofit National Trust for Local News, which owns the Georgia Trust. As executive director, DuBose will be responsible for, among other duties, audience and revenue growth and editorial innovation.

She starts her new role on June 1 at a “pivotal moment” for the Georgia Trust, said Tom Wiley, CEO of the National Trust, in a news release. The group, which runs some of the state’s oldest newspapers as well as the Knight Foundation-backed startup The Macon Melody, has been investing in the future of its properties, the release notes.

Those endeavors include equipping newsrooms with digital infrastructure and helping them launch newsletters, podcasts and social video to grow and sustain local audiences.

Wiley said in the release that those efforts are “vital” and that DuBose’s “talents in building new digital products that drive audience growth, her hands-on leadership and mentorship experience, and her focus on executing bold ideas to strengthen local news pair well with our leadership team’s energy, direction and style.”

“We’re thrilled to have Cynthia ... drive our next stage of growth,” Wiley said.

DuBose, a native of Long Island, was first attracted to journalism as a student at Spelman College in Atlanta. There, a professor urged her to write for the campus newspaper. She later became its editor.

“I fell in love with the opportunity to be able to tell stories and meet people and learn something different every day,” DuBose said in the National Trust’s press release.

After graduating from Spelman with her bachelor’s degree, DuBose attended Columbia University, where

she earned a master’s degree in journalism. She then worked for Long Island’s Newsday before returning to Atlanta in 2006 to work as a reporter at the state’s largest newspaper. Over the next nine years, she served in several audience engagement and digital growth roles, helping to modernize the publication and grow its revenue.

DuBose then spent almost seven years in management roles at McClatchy, which operates 29 newspapers across 14 states. Rising to the role of executive vice president of membership, she built the organization’s audience growth, product development and content monetization teams.

In 2022, DuBose completed the executive program in news leadership and innovation program at the City University of New York’s Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism. She later became the program’s lead coach, a position she will continue to hold as she also works to strengthen the Georgia Trust.

DuBose said she is eager to build deep relationships with the communities the Georgia Trust serves and to bring her experience developing digital products and growing audiences to her new role. She said she will “work tirelessly to ensure” residents have “access to credible, community-centered news and information.”

“Throughout my career, in every position I’ve held, I have always valued bringing coverage to local communities,” DuBose said. “I see tremendous opportunity for the Georgia Trust moving forward.”

DuBose replaces DuBose Porter, who served as executive director from the 2023 founding of the Georgia Trust through this January. The longtime newspaper publisher, attorney and former state representative now focuses on fundraising, partnerships and acquisitions as publisher emeritus. Danyale Starley, who served as interim executive director of the Georgia Trust, will return to her role as the organization’s controller.

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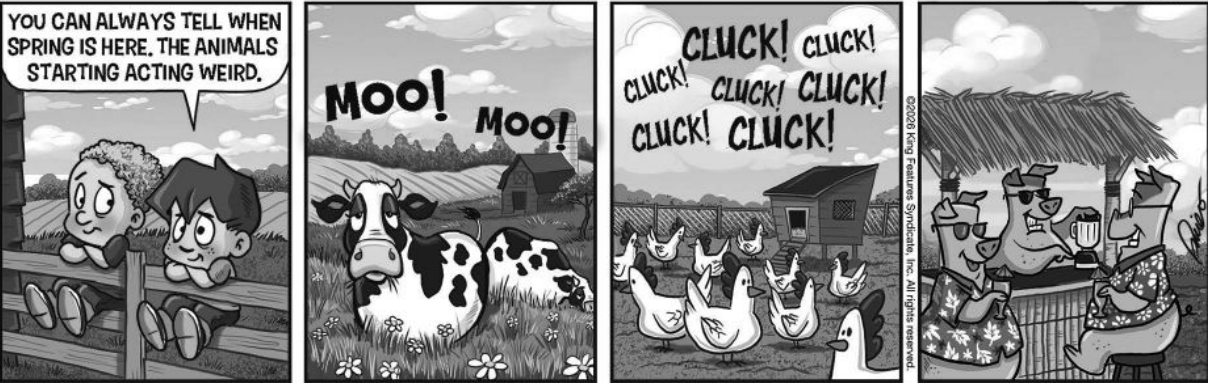
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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



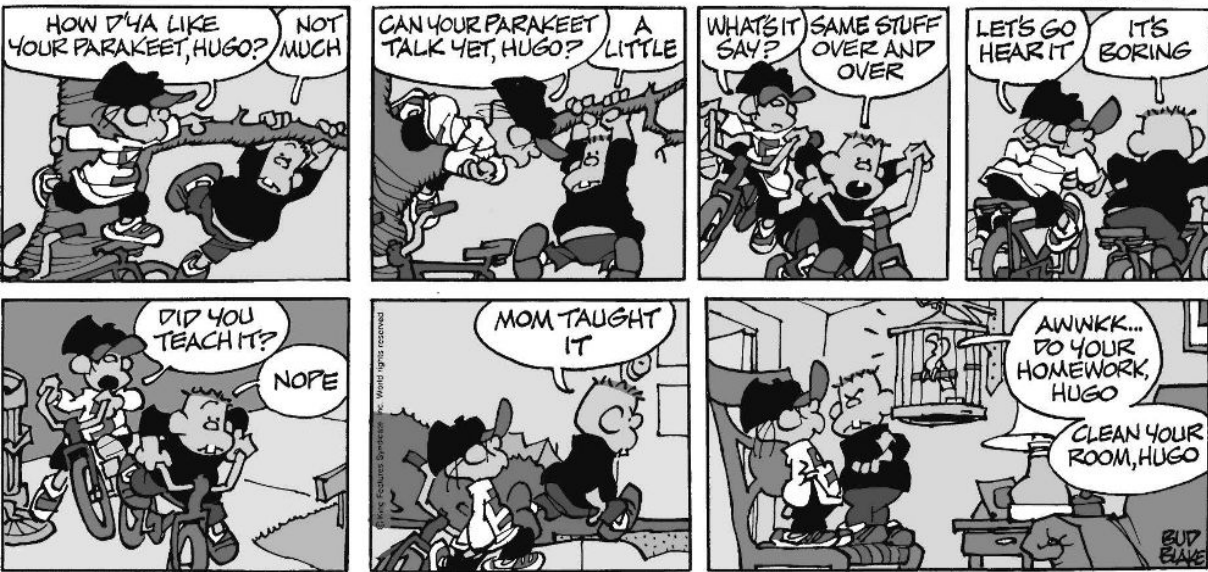
The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



OLIVE & POPEYE

By Randy Milholland



HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



CryptoQuip

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

Clue: V equals G

HX MTFHXN MTDO VTZPF, BQTI
HF IQP APTFI TZNYXI JPNJAP
TDP NCAHVTIPO IN CPI?
ZXHXZYZ BTVPD.

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SCRAMBLERS

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

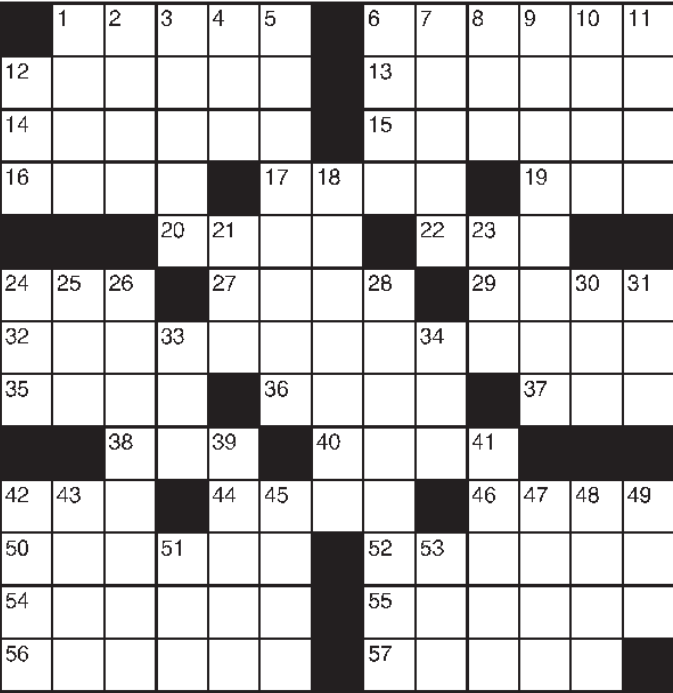
Ring
MIHCE
Mad
NANIES
Plush
EXCLUDE
Piece
CELSI

TODAY'S WORD

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Detox center
6 Gives up
12 Swiss metropolis
13 Unexpected
14 Ingratiate
15 Stahl of "60 Minutes"
16 Disposition
17 "La — Bonita"
19 Casual shirt
20 Third son
22 Capote nickname
24 Canine greeting
27 Furnace fuel
29 Branches
32 President of South Africa, 1994-1999



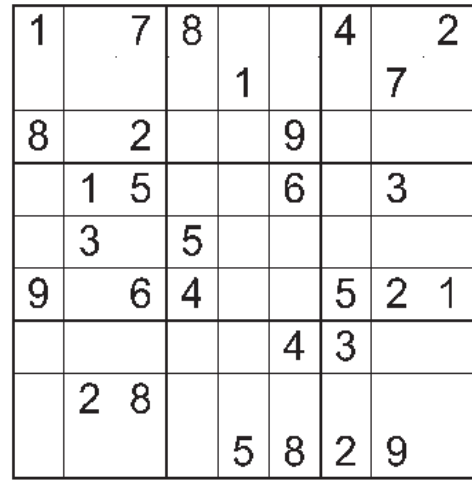
- 35 Pronto
36 Monumental
37 Half dozen
38 Fannie —
40 Former Laker Lamar
42 Sashimi fish
44 Neatnik's nightmare
46 Jazzy James
50 Legislative group
52 Camelot king
54 Aerie new-born
55 Organize an art show

- 9 Birds of prey
10 Duel tool
11 Ocular woe
12 Tiara jewel
18 Rug cleaner
21 — -friendly
23 "Awesome, dude!"
24 Navarro of "The View"
25 Scale members
26 Pink wading bird
28 Relaxed
30 Roman 1051
31 Coltrane's instrument

- 33 Aromatherapy spot
34 Sgt., e.g.
39 Lauder of cosmetics
41 Paris subway
42 Cruising
43 Lettuce unit
45 Reply to "Shall we?"
47 Spring melt-down
48 Mild rebukes
49 "How — you?"
51 Cleric's tunic
53 Scamper

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Weekly SUDOKU



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

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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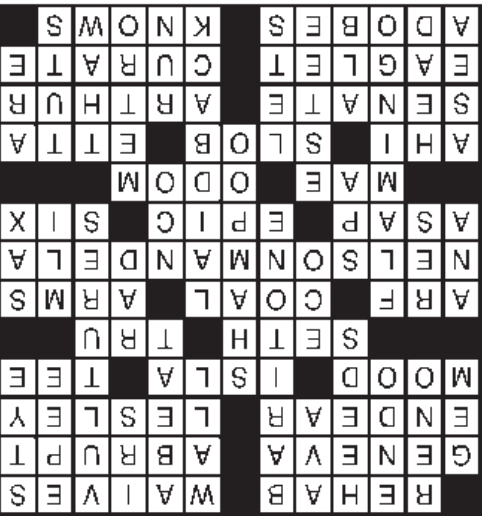
Phonetics



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

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Solution time: 21 mins.

Answers

King Crossword

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

- FOOD & DRINK: When fish eggs are served as food, what are they called?
- LITERATURE: Which Dr. Seuss book about trying new foods has a character called Sam-I-Am?
- GEOGRAPHY: What is the most populated country in Africa?
- U.S. STATES: Which state's nickname is The Pine Tree State?
- ANIMAL KINGDOM: What kind of animal produces mohair?
- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How many times does a standard dinner fork have?
- FOOD & DRINK: In what year was Kool-Aid introduced?
- TELEVISION: Which animated TV show features a baby named Stewie?
- MOVIES: What is the name of the character played by John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever"?
- SCIENCE: What is a googol?

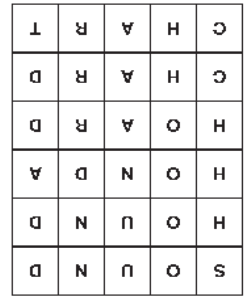
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EXCUSES

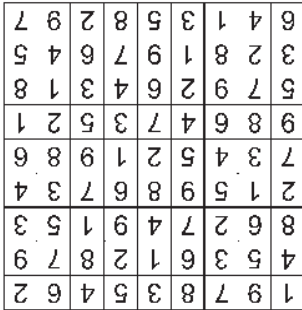
Today's Word

1. Chime; 2. Insane
3. Deluxe; 4. Slice

SCRAMBLERS



Solution



Answer

Weekly SUDOKU

In casino card games, what is the least amount people are obligated to bet?
Minimum wager.

CryptoQuip

Answers

1. Roe

2. "Green Eggs and Ham"

3. Nigeria

4. Maine

5. Angora goats

6. Four

7. 1927

8. "Family Guy"

9. Tony Manero

10. The digit "1" followed by 100 zeroes

Phoebe Bridgers made a surprise stop in Macon — and it meant something

BY AVERY JONES
Special to The Melody

Three framed paintings, two lamps and a couch. And Phoebe Bridgers.

At 9 a.m. Saturday, May 16, Bridgers’ team posted flyers announcing the Grammy Award-winning artist would be performing at Macon’s Capitol Theatre that evening.

Thanks to a flurry of speculation and wishful thinking, more than 75 people were already in line — soon to be joined by several hundred more hopeful fans.

The show was shrouded in mystery. Bridgers began her tour in New Mexico and then made stops in Lubbock, Little Rock, Memphis, Mobile and Jackson, Mississippi.

Macon, long renowned for its music history, often falls off the beaten path for touring artists. Yet Bridgers, who has never performed here before, added the city to her tour.

Some speculated the tour focused primarily on cities with notable UFO sightings. While there have been claims of extraterrestrial visits to Middle Georgia since at least the 1970s, it seems Bridgers chose

Macon for another reason.

She opened the show with a popular song (in keeping with the show’s secrecy, I won’t name it, but take a guess based on her Spotify Top 5). As she started a setlist of new material, however, the show took on a new meaning.

Bridgers took time to lambast “Cop City,” the recently built Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, which has been criticized for the destruction of the South River Forest. Those critiques have often coincided with criticism of the Atlanta Police Department and its collaboration with the Israel Defense Forces.

As Bridgers continued to play unreleased songs, she shared more personal reasons for performing in Macon. She asked the crowd how many of them had conservative parents. I would quote her directly, but she prohibited phones and electronic devices in the venue. Many concertgoers raised their hands, and Bridgers launched into a short monologue, expressing gratitude for her dad for shedding the conservative ideologies of his parents.

The show continued, and it made me wonder: did Bridgers choose Macon for its supposed UFO con-



PHOTO BY RAPH_PH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC BY 2.0)
Phoebe Bridgers performs at a London nightclub in 2023. The Grammy Award winner’s Saturday show in Macon was her first performance in the city and featured mostly unreleased material.

nections or for the large number of progressives who grew up in a South inundated by conservatism?

The set ended in a sweet yet somber moment. A concertgoer shared with Bridgers that her father had recently passed, and Bridgers

became visibly upset. Rather than proceed with the music, she stepped away from her guitar and couch, walked down the stage stairs and embraced the fan.

Bridgers played several more new songs and closed the concert with a

few more previously released tracks (also unnamed, in honor of the anonymity of the show). At the end of the night, she sat at the edge of the stage and signed one item for each fan who was willing to wait however long it took to reach the front.

Unsung heroes of food service

I love going out to eat. Not just for the food, but for the service. As a flight attendant who often serves passengers all day and night, when I come home, I am all too grateful for the men and women in the food and beverage service industry.

My closest connections that I’ve made since moving to Macon are with servers and bartenders. Some of those have actually turned into friends!

You can go to the restaurant that makes the best food or the bar that makes the best cocktails but without the amazing service, the entire experience shifts into something, well, let’s just say, less than desired. At the end of the day, servers just want to ensure that we get the best possible experience imaginable. When something goes wrong, a polite “excuse me, but…” goes a very long way. They’re delighted to make it right. That’s what they’re there for. It’s important that we, as patrons, remember that.

Across Middle Georgia and small cities throughout the South, being a server is not just a job. It is a balancing act. It means long hours on your feet, unpredictable income and a paycheck that, on paper, barely exists. The federal tipped minimum wage still sits around \$2.13 an hour in many places, which means the real income comes from tips. Those tips change depending on the day, the crowd, the economy, and honestly, the mood of the guest. In smaller markets like Macon, where the dining scene is built on community and familiar faces, servers depend heavily on repeat customers and steady traffic. It is honest work, but it is not easy work.

In the South, there is another layer to it. Hospitality is expected to feel warm, personal and genuine. Guests are not just looking for a meal. They are looking for connection. But that expectation comes with a cost. Servers are not only delivering food. They are managing emotions, reading the room and absorbing energy from every table they serve. It is emotional labor, and most people never see it.

In Macon, that reality becomes



Billy Hennessey

personal. I spoke with two servers whose paths into this industry look very different, but whose experiences share a common thread. One has been in the industry for nearly a decade and is now pursuing a law degree, working toward a future beyond the restaurant floor. The other has spent years building stability in a role that offers reliability, even if it comes with limitations. Both spoke candidly about what the job takes out of you, not physically, but mentally. The constant stream of questions, some reasonable and some that make you pause, requires a level of patience that most people underestimate.

One server said something that stuck with me. It is just food. It is not that serious. And yet, every day, servers encounter guests who treat it like it is. Bad attitudes, unnecessary frustration and moments where a simple meal turns into something far more difficult than it needs to be. Through it all, servers are expected to stay composed, keep smiling and move forward. They are not just serving food. They are managing the entire experience.

The second server shared a perspective rooted in consistency. In a place where many of the same customers return again and again, the work becomes familiar, but not easier. She spoke about how difficult it can be when guests arrive already frustrated, and how that energy can impact an entire shift. A single negative interaction does not stay at one table. It follows you, and it lingers.

In reality, when something goes wrong, we seem to forget that our servers are people with real world issues. I have personally had food delivered that was wrong and I simply talked to my server as a friend. Immediately they took care of it. But, I have seen people being downright mean to servers without any reason. Proudly I can say, I have

SEE FOOD
PAGE 10

Ga. heat is no joke: protect your health this summer

As temperatures continue to rise across Middle Georgia, many of us are spending more time outdoors enjoying vacations, walks, workouts, sporting events, and time with family and friends.

While summer can be one of the best times of the year, the Georgia heat can also place significant stress on the body if we are not careful.

As a nurse practitioner, one of the biggest concerns I see during the warmer months is dehydration and heat-related illness. Many people do not realize how quickly excessive heat and humidity can affect the body, especially in Georgia, where temperatures and heat indexes can become dangerously high.

Stay hydrated

One of the simplest but most important things we can do during the summer is stay hydrated. Do not wait until you feel thirsty to drink water. By the time thirst sets in, your



Joy L. King

dizziness, headaches, fatigue, muscle cramps and nausea. Carrying a reusable water bottle throughout the day may seem small, but it can make a major difference.

It is also important to remember that certain beverages, such as alcohol and excessive caffeine, can contribute to dehydration. Increasing water intake becomes even more important for individuals spending extended time outdoors, exercising, attending sporting events or working outside in the heat.

Spot signs of heat exhaustion
Knowing the warning signs of

body may already be experiencing dehydration. Increased sweating causes the body to lose both fluids and electrolytes, which can lead to

heat exhaustion is critical during the summer months. Symptoms can include excessive sweating, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, rapid heartbeat and confusion. If symptoms begin to worsen or someone becomes disoriented or loses consciousness, immediate medical attention should be sought, as this may signal heat stroke, which can become life-threatening.

Who is most at risk?

Certain groups are especially vulnerable during the summer months, including older adults, young children, outdoor workers, athletes, and individuals with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease or high blood pressure.

Some medications, including diuretics and certain blood pressure medications, may also increase the

SEE HEAT
PAGE 10

To prune or not to prune: the great tomato debate

BY SUSAN FISHER
Special to The Melody

Tomato season is here, and chances are your plants are already throwing out branches in every direction. If you’ve searched online about pruning tomatoes, you’ve probably discovered gardeners disagree on this topic almost as passionately as people debate barbecue sauce or college football.

Fear not. Let’s break it down so you can make the best decision for your garden without falling into a tomato-based identity crisis.

The first thing you need to know is what type of tomato you’re growing: determinate or indeterminate. Remember that little tag that came in the pot and hopefully didn’t blow away the second you planted

it? That tag tells you the variety and whether it’s determinate or indeterminate. If you started from seed, the seed packet will tell you. If all else fails, a quick internet search of the variety name can usually solve the mystery.

Indeterminate tomatoes

Indeterminate tomatoes are vining plants that continue growing and producing fruit until frost. Popular varieties include Better Boy, Beefsteak, Cherokee Purple and most cherry tomatoes. Because these plants grow tall and vigorous, they need sturdy cages, stakes or trellises for support.

Pruning is especially helpful with indeterminate tomatoes because it improves airflow and helps reduce disease problems in

our hot, humid Georgia summers. Remove branches touching the ground, overcrowded growth and stems growing inward toward the center of the plant. Many gardeners also remove suckers, which are shoots that form where branches meet the main stem.

Left alone, suckers become additional vines that produce more tomatoes, though the fruit is usually smaller. Removing suckers allows the plant to focus its energy on fewer, often larger tomatoes.

Be careful not to over-prune. Leaves help protect developing fruit from sunscald, which appears as pale or yellow patches on exposed tomatoes.

SEE TOMATO
PAGE 10

Nurturing creativity: Art and mental health



PHOTO COMPOSITE BY MICHAEL W. PANNELL

Artists Rhonda Miller, Pam Pinkston and Hazel Caldwell can each speak with authority about the relationship between art and mental health this May, which is National Mental Health Month. Pinkston’s middle photo is an example of shots taken during hikes she organizes that combine the outdoors, art and mental health benefits.

May is Mental Health Month, so I talked with three well-known area artists who understand the connection between art and mental health and have spoken openly about mental health struggles in the past.

They talked about creating and using art as a diagnostic and restorative tool, though noted that while helpful for mental health, art is not a cure.

Here’s what they had to say.

Rhonda Miller

“Art is very important to mental health, and, for me, it’s played a big role,” Rhonda Miller said.

In recent years, Miller’s folk-art paintings — often portraits — have grown increasingly popular for their bright colors and expressive style. She has been open about the trauma she has faced, from abuse to battling and beating cancer.

“Painting allows me to release what I carry inside,” Miller said. “I started creating art because it gave a voice to my emotions and expressed things I couldn’t say with words.”

When she can’t explain how she feels in words, Miller expresses herself through colors, text and even texture.

“It’s about survival, but also about healing, reflection and freedom,” she said. “Most of all, I like seeing that I can transfer my pain into beauty; silence into expression. I’m not taking pills, so that says something.”

Miller, an unschooled artist creating vivid work, began not with painting but with journaling, adding doodles and drawings. That grew into greeting-style cards, then painting. She sees her creative growth as key to surviving early trauma, becoming an empty-nester and enduring breast cancer and radiation treatments.

Miller said she still suffers from PTSD and bouts of depression, but creating art helps her endure it. She was also the first to say what all three expressed: art is an aid — a good one — whether you create it or observe it, but it’s not a cure. She said seeing a good therapist, staying connected with others and finding other wellness tools are important.

The 567 Center for Renewal and The Bohemian Den will feature Miller’s art starting June 5, on First Friday. She also has work displayed at the Tubman African American Museum.

Pam Pinkston

When asked if art was important to mental health, Pam Pinkston responded with a resounding “Absolutely!” Pinkston expresses creativity in many ways — drawing, knitting and embroidery — but her primary medium is photography.

A military veteran with a degree in psychology, Pinkston loves the outdoors and is a committed hiker. Nature is the subject of most of her current work.

“I was raised to be very logical,



Michael W. Pannell

didn’t know what I wanted to do.”

Pinkston said she still faces diagnosed mental health issues but lives beyond the diagnoses as an organizer of healing-focused hikes and nature-based art activities.

“I think most people don’t understand that each of us has a creative side,” Pinkston said. “Even if, let’s say, your job is accounting or something you think is the furthest thing from art, there’s still a creative side that needs to be nurtured for the other parts of our lives to come together. You don’t have to paint or draw, take pictures or whatever — just do something as a creative outlet.”

Pinkston said art and creativity work in practical, proven ways. Creative activity engages different parts of the brain, she said, helping mental and overall health. It can foster calmness and relaxation — like a walk in the park — which she often pairs with drawing, journaling or photography.

When her mental health was deteriorating, art helped her find her way. In those days, people didn’t talk about trauma, PTSD, depression or mental health, she noted. She said it took a while to realize something wasn’t right and she was no longer able to work in the way most people think of work. But it didn’t mean she couldn’t do anything — Pinkston turned to art.

“Once I realized I was a creator and started calling myself an artist, I realized how much that helped. Art didn’t cure everything, but it’s a tool I can use if I’m feeling overly anxious, having intrusive thoughts or something similar,” she said. “Art helps me process things. I figured out that art, hiking and mindfulness go together for the creator and the one who sees the finished work.”

Pinkston collaborates on art and healing hikes as well as monthly mental health and wellness workshops with Artspace Macon, Macon Mental Health Matters and the women’s hiking group, We Hike to Heal. Though there is crossover, Pinkston uses @dragonflypaws on social media to show her photography and creative work and @southernqueerfolkhikes to share hiking information.

Hazel Caldwell

Hazel Caldwell is an established painter and art therapist who works with River Edge Behavioral Health as an art therapist and traditional therapist. In her private practice, she offers art therapy to individuals and groups. Caldwell also teaches art at Stratford Academy.

Caldwell defines art therapy,

very reasonable, and art wasn’t a viable career and never encouraged,” she said. “I wound up in the military because I had gotten lost on life’s journey and

writing that it “enriches the lives of individuals, families and communities through active artmaking, creative process, applied psychological theory and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship.”

She describes her own work as “an exploration of human emotions and the evolution of societal norms using different painting techniques to translate them as accurately and as rawly as possible.”

Art is one of the most important facets of mental health and can encompass many different disciplines, such as music, drawing, painting, singing and writing, Caldwell said.

“Art is an acceptable way to express oneself even if it feels like what you have to express is not socially acceptable,” she added. “Art gives permission to be and act exactly as you feel, but you’re doing it in a positive way versus going to the grocery store and yelling how you feel.”

Creating offers an opportunity for validation and by being authentic, she said, there’s the possibility of reaching people — letting your emotions and humanity engage with others in the peculiar way art can.

Being seen by others is an important component of mental health, and expressing the universality of humanity can be powerful and healing, she noted.

As a creator, seeing you’re not alone and having others identify with your work is all part of the power of art, she said.

“If you reach someone, it may not be that you’ve experienced the exact same thing in the same way, but the underlying emotion — the feeling we have, such as grief or loss or joy — is the same,” Caldwell said. “Art is a safe, protective and even rewarding way to be expressive and boost human connection and mental health.”

Caldwell holds a bachelor of arts in studio art from the College of Charleston and a master of science in art therapy from Eastern Virginia Medical School.

But she said it’s her own experiences — trauma, broken relationships and life’s storms — that give her work gravitas through her personal need for art’s emotional healing power.

In this glimpse — not a treatise — into art and mental health from some of our artful neighbors, each would encourage those in need to seek available help, including, or perhaps especially, artists and creators who are struggling.

Jot down 988, the number of the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline that routes calls to Georgia operators and services.

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

FOOD

Continued from Page 9

never seen this happen in Macon, but, in other cities, it’s not completely uncommon.

Both women spoke openly about tipping, and this is where the conversation becomes important. The expectation is typically between 18-20%, with about 60% of guests meeting that standard. The rest fall below it, and very few go above.

What many people do not realize is that tips are not extra income. They are the income. When you are earning just a few dollars an hour, that tip determines whether bills get paid.

There is also a misconception about where that money goes. Servers often share a portion of their tips with bartenders, hosts and other staff. In some restaurants, all tips are pooled together and distributed based on hours worked. This system can help balance out a slow shift, but it also means that exceptional service does not always result in exceptional pay.

The income itself can be wildly unpredictable.

One server described a week where she earned as little as ten dollars, and another where she made several hundred. The other shared that a slow day might bring in eighty dollars, while a strong one could reach two hundred and fifty. On average, she brings home around fifteen hundred dollars a month.

There is no guaranteed paycheck, no benefits and no safety net. When asked what would happen if she could not work due to an injury, her answer was simple: She would struggle.

And still, they show up. Because there is something about this work

that stays with you — the connection with people, the ability to make someone smile and the satisfaction of getting through a busy shift.

This is not work that people do because they have no other option. Many choose it, even with its challenges, because it gives them something meaningful.

There is a stigma that people in food service are uneducated or lack ambition. That is simply not true. These are individuals with goals, families and responsibilities. They are not servants. They are professionals doing demanding and often overlooked work.

So here is the takeaway: If you can afford to go out to eat, you can afford to tip, and tip well.

A few extra dollars may not seem like much for you, but for a server, it can mean everything. It can cover groceries, gas or a bill that is due.

Beyond the money, it is about respect. Be kind. Be patient. Pay attention to what is happening around you. Ask for what you need, but do not make someone’s job harder than it already is.

If the people who are taking care of us cannot make a living wage, then we have to ask ourselves what that says about our community. A place cannot truly thrive if the people working the hardest to support it are barely getting by.

I have always considered myself a good tipper. Perhaps this is the reason why I have been able to make those connections with Macon’s unsung heroes of food and drink service.

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

HEAT

Continued from Page 9

risk of dehydration. Checking in on elderly family members, neighbors and loved ones during periods of extreme heat can make a significant difference.

Exercising safely during the summer

For those who enjoy outdoor exercise and physical activity, summer does not mean you have to stop moving your body. However, it is important to exercise smart.

Early mornings and later evenings are often safer times for outdoor activity when temperatures are lower.

Wearing lightweight, breathable clothing, taking breaks and listening to your body are all important ways to reduce heat-related risks.

Protecting your skin in the sun

Sun protection should also remain a priority throughout the

summer. Wearing sunscreen, protective clothing, sunglasses, and hats can help reduce the risk of sunburn and long-term skin damage.

Reapplying sunscreen throughout the day is just as important as putting it on initially, especially during prolonged outdoor activities.

A few small precautions can make a big difference

As healthcare providers, we often remind patients that prevention is one of the most powerful tools we have.

A few small precautions can make a major difference in helping you and your family stay safe and healthy this summer.

This summer, enjoy the sunshine, stay active and remember to take care of your body along the way.

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

TOMATO

Continued from Page 9

Determinate tomatoes

Determinate tomatoes are bush-type plants that grow to a set size and produce most of their fruit over a shorter period. Common varieties include Roma, Rutgers and Celebrity. These plants are usually more compact and easier to manage.

Unlike indeterminate tomatoes, determinate varieties generally should not have their suckers removed. Since they produce fruit in one concentrated flush, removing suckers can reduce the overall harvest.

Light pruning is still beneficial. Remove branches touching the soil and thin crowded growth slightly to improve airflow. Determinate tomatoes also benefit from cages or stakes, though they usually require less support than indeterminate varieties.

General tomato care

Healthy tomato plants rely on more than pruning. Consistent watering, proper fertilization, mulching and good airflow all play important roles in preventing disease and producing quality fruit.

Once plants reach about 12-18

inches tall, it’s a good idea to remove lower branches touching the ground. Many tomato diseases are soil-borne, and keeping foliage off the soil helps reduce problems later in the season.

Avoid removing more than about one-quarter of the plant at a time. While pruning can improve airflow and fruit production, too much pruning may stress the plant during hot summer weather.

At the end of the day, there is no single “perfect” pruning method. Some gardeners prefer fewer, larger tomatoes, while others want as much fruit as possible. If you grow several plants, experiment with different approaches and see what works best in your garden.

Most importantly, enjoy the process. After all, homegrown tomatoes have one very important purpose: becoming the star of your next tomato sandwich.

Susan Fisher is the garden manager at the Brookdale Gardens. If you have questions or gardening tips to share, contact the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service in Bibb County. Visit their office at 715 Oglethorpe Street, call them at 748-310-5350 or email their staff at bibb.extension@uga.edu.

WESTSIDE’S STATE CHAMP

Anthony Horton won the 2A state title in discus as one of Westside’s most lauded athletes — and he’s only a sophomore

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
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After throwing the discus three times at the GHSA Class 2A State Championships last week, Westside sophomore Anthony Horton hesitated. It was looking like the sophomore, who had already finished in the Top 10 in discus last year at the state title event, would have to wait until his junior year to reach the podium.

“My first three throws weren’t very good, I was maybe fourth out of all the competitors,” Horton said Tuesday as he stood inside Westside’s gym, remembering his effort at the track meet at UGA’s track and field complex.

So — before his fourth and final try, discus in hand — he paused and reflected. “I said a little prayer before I went in the circle and said, ‘It’s all or nothing,’” Horton recalled.

That seemed to do the trick.

Horton’s last effort proceeded to fly through the air for a distance of 154 feet and 6 inches, giving him the state championship by more than 9 feet over the second-place finisher. He was the only Bibb County athlete to win a state championship in track and field this year and the first Westside athlete to do so in about eight years, one coach said.

SEE HORTON
PAGE 12

PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Westside sophomore Anthony Horton holds a discus for a photo outside Westside’s gym. Horton won the state championship in Class 2A for discus last week, beating the second place finisher by more than 9 feet and becoming Westside’s first track and field state champ in about eight years.



Mercer wins SoCon title, enters tournament red-hot



PHOTO COURTESY OF MERCER ATHLETICS
Mercer’s baseball team poses for a celebratory photo after they officially claimed the outright Southern Conference title Sunday with a series victory over ETSU. The Bears finished the season 40-13 and dominated during the second half to cement themselves as the conference’s top seed going into the tourney.

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
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As the Mercer baseball team was about to secure its first regular season Southern Conference championship in almost a decade last weekend, longtime head coach Craig Gibson asked a few of his players a question.

Mercer clinched a share of the SoCon title with a victory over East Tennessee State on Saturday, so the Bears knew that after their regular season finale Sunday, they could celebrate.

“I asked a few of the guys Saturday, ‘Are you guys going to dogpile, you know, do a big celebration?’” Gibson said.

He got an answer that indicated how laser-focused this Mercer team has been all season.

“They said, ‘No, coach, we want to save it,’” Gibson recalled Tuesday over the phone. He was on the Bears’ bus up to the SoCon tournament in Greenville. “This team never looks ahead, but they also know what the

expectations are.”

High — that’s what the expectations are, especially after Mercer ripped the second half of its regular season schedule to shreds and finished with a sweep of ETSU, a 43-13 overall record and the No. 1 seed in the SoCon tournament that begins this week.

The weekend sweep of the Buccaneers, who came into the weekend ranked fourth but fell to seventh after Mercer won all three games, saw the Bears’ offense continue its torrid hot stretch. The Bears rank third in the country in home runs with 124 and won two games 9-7 before taking the final game of the regular season 11-6.

“Obviously we were offensive, and the ballpark was playing that way,” Gibson said of ETSU’s Thomas Stadium. “The wind was blowing a bit out, so it was a big offensive series. I was really impressed with ETSU, but we got some good starts

SEE MERCER
PAGE 12

NOTEPAD

GIAA playoffs reach semifinals, Bibb County football schedule to feature more all-Macon rivalry matchups

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
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The GIAA playoffs are in the semifinals this week, and multiple Macon teams advanced to the penultimate round of their respective state tournaments.

Two of Macon’s most dominant squads moved on with ease, as the Stratford and Central Fellowship girls soccer teams won in the second round in the GIAA Class 4A and 2A tournaments. Stratford defeated city rival Mount de Sales 7-0 while CFCA got a 2-0 win over a talented Gatewood squad.

The FPD Vikings, the No. 1 seed in the GIAA Class 4A baseball tournament, needed three games to dispatch with No. 8 Strong Rock, but FPD got the job done behind a great pitching effort from newcomer Harrison Strange in Game 3.

The Vikings will face No. 4 Athens Christian, which dominated No. 5 Tattnall to eliminate the Trojans from the playoffs. Tattnall lost 9-1 and 20-4 in unexpected blowouts to end their season.

No. 3 Stratford dominated their second-round matchup, thoroughly handling Bethlehem Christian 10-0 and 11-1 to advance. The Eagles seem to be peaking at the right time,

but they’ll have to go on the road to face No. 2 Brookstone in Columbus this week in the semifinals.

Should FPD and Stratford both win, they would meet in the GIAA Class 4A State Championship in Statesboro from May 28-30.

On the soccer side of things, the FPD girls also dominated, defeating Strong Rock 6-1 to reach the semifinals. The Vikings, ranked No. 2, appear on a collision course with the rival Eagles in the championship game, though they will have to defeat No. 3 King’s Academy in the penultimate round first.

Mount de Sales is the last boys team standing, as they narrowly de-

feated Cristo Rey on penalties to advance. The Cavaliers are the No. 3 seed in the Class 4A bracket.

The other boys teams that were still alive last week, No. 6 Central Fellowship in 2A and No. 7 Stratford in 4A, both lost in the second round.

Bibb football schedules feature some shakeups

Bibb County schools officially have their football schedules for the 2026 season, and fans have some interesting matchups to look forward

SEE NOTEPAD
PAGE 12

GIAA tournament
semifinal games

- CLASS 4A BASEBALL**
No. 1 FPD vs. No. 4 Athens Christian
No. 3 Stratford vs. No. 2 Brookstone
- CLASS 4A GIRLS SOCCER**
No. 1 Stratford vs. No. 4 St. Anne Pacelli
No. 2 FPD vs. No. 3 King’s Academy
- CLASS 2A GIRLS SOCCER**
No. 1 Central Fellowship vs. No. 4 St. George’s
- CLASS 4A BOYS SOCCER**
No. 3 Mount de Sales @ No. 2 Brookstone

HORTON

Continued from Page 11

Horton was wearing his GHSA Track and Field championship T-shirt at Westside on Tuesday. He smiled as he recounted his win, neatly recapping his fourth and final throw.

His track coach, Westside football coach and former Weaver athletic director James Harris, was grinning as well.

“I’ll be honest, I wasn’t watching the last throw,” Harris said. “After the first three throws I thought, ‘Maybe it’s (me).’ So I looked away. ... I heard cheers and that’s when I knew he had done well.”

After he learned what Horton did before his last try in the circle, Harris chuckled.

“Maybe the prayer helped, too,” he said.

A natural talent

Horton credited his coaches and his family for helping advance his track career. His older brother, Michael, was a big part of that — he also went to Westside and now plays offensive line for Mercer’s football team, but he was a track and field athlete first, inspiring Anthony.

“I started (track and field) in sixth grade. My older brother was pretty good, and my dad told me that I could be a state champion someday. I believed him,” Horton said.

The sophomore said he improved “exponentially” during his second year as a track and field athlete at Westside. He also placed second in the shot-put, further evidence of his progress.

Horton, who also plays football and basketball, learned a lot of lessons from coaches in addition to his parents.

“It’s really about hard work. Having to go out and grind for football helps me especially, having to work through hardships I may be facing in my training, but (knowing) it’s all gonna pay off,” Horton said. “Not every day of practice is gonna be a good day, that’s like any sport. Hard work will never not pay off.”

Harris has only been Horton’s main track and field coach for two years, but he was aware of Horton’s athleticism at Weaver as the AD there. Harris will also coach Horton in football next year and is excited to do so, noting that the sophomore is one of the hardest workers he’s ever seen.

“I’m sometimes just waiting for him to make a mistake,” Harris joked. “Probably the only thing he might make a mistake with is working too hard, staying late or practicing too much, and you can’t fault that. He just wants to be great.”

A multi-skilled star

Standing in the halls of Westside with Horton is not unlike being with a sort of celebrity.

While a few students say hello, it’s really the teachers and coaches who love to talk with Horton as they walk by, chatting him up while the star athlete gets his picture taken. They want to talk about his classes, his recent state trophy and just how he’s doing.

At one point, Horton returned to the gym after taking several photos.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTSIDE ATHLETICS / FACEBOOK

Horton won the gold medal for discus with his fourth throw at the GHSA Class 2A State Championships, which were held at UGA’s track and field facilities. Horton also placed second in the shot-put for the class.

While he was gone, a few Westside staff members walked by and asked what the photo equipment was for. When they heard Horton’s name, their faces lit up as they lauded his incredible talent — not just his athletic prowess, but his skills in just about everything else.

One teacher praises his SAT score. Another mentions Horton’s eloquence in a video interview he did when as a freshman.

“He’s a sophomore (in high school), but when you listen to him talk it’s like he’s a sophomore in college,” Harris said.

NOTEPAD

Continued from Page 11

to over the summer as they wait for fall to arrive.

New classifications and region alignments have shaken up the slates for Macon’s teams. As a reminder, most schools moved up when GHSA restructured things earlier this year. Westside and Howard are Class 4A while Central, Rutland, Northeast and Southwest are all Class 3A.

Only ACE, which is not a Bibb County School District school, is in Class 2A.

This means one key matchup, Westside’s rivalry game with Howard, will now be in the final week of the season after the showdown opened those teams’ schedules the last two seasons. The matchup has been a very competitive one in recent years, with multiple results coming down to the final play.

Another interesting piece of the tentative schedule are the off weeks, as Bibb County’s teams all have two different weeks without games this season. Central’s gap weeks are in back-to-back weeks, giving them a long stretch without a game in September before region play begins.

The region lends itself to more all-Macon showdowns as well. Some of Macon’s teams were previously in a 10-team region, allowing for

only one non-region game on the schedule. With more room, many Bibb County schools in different regions will clash in non-region play.

Westside will face Northeast to open the season in a game that should excite Maconites. The two teams have only met twice, right after Westside’s inception, in 1998 and ‘99 — the Seminoles won both matchups.

Howard and Southwest will meet in another season opener. Those teams have met more recently, with the Huskies beating the Patriots soundly three years in a row from 2021-23.

The high school football season is set to begin the week of Aug. 21. See the full schedules at the bottom of this story.

Mercer women’s golf finishes fourth at invitational

The Mercer women’s golf team surged to finish in fourth at the National Golf Invitational in Arizona last week.

The team was led by Tylar Whiting, who finished tied for seventh place in the field of 50 players by shooting just two strokes over par. She also shot par 13 times over the three-day contest. The event winner, Bowling Green’s Addison Kartusch, shot 7 under.

Mercer shot 897 overall and moved up one spot on the tournament’s final day with a solid 295 in the final round, their best mark out of the three

days. They finished ahead of Lipscomb by one stroke in what was their final tournament of the season.

Mercer’s men’s golf team will play the National Golf Invitational at the same course, Ak-Chin Southern Dunes, beginning Friday.

Mercer football schedule features ‘Week 0’ game

Mercer announced its 2026 football schedule May 15, which includes a game during ‘Week 0’ to open the season Aug. 29.

The opponent for that game is yet to be determined, but it will be a home game, as the Bears begin new head coach Joel Taylor’s tenure with three straight home games. The following two games will be against Presbyterian, a Pioneer League team that upset Mercer last season, and conference opponent Furman.

The Bears will then have to contend with Georgia Tech in Atlanta, by far Mercer’s toughest game. Other non-conference opponents include Abilene Christian and the undecided opener.

The other showdowns on the Southern Conference front are familiar with the exception of new member Tennessee Tech, which the Bears will visit for a road game Nov. 14.

Bibb County Football Schedule

CENTRAL CHARGERS

Week 1 – 8/21 vs. Greenville
Week 2 – 8/28 at Jordan-Columbus
Week 3 – 9/4 BYE
Week 4 – 9/11 BYE
Week 5 – 9/18 at Lamar County
Week 6 – 9/24 vs. Southwest
Week 7 – 10/2 at Pike County
Week 8 – 10/9 BYE
Week 9 – 10/16 at Northeast
Week 10 – 10/23 vs. Jackson
Week 11 – 10/29 vs. Callaway
Week 12 – 11/5 at Rutland

RUTLAND HURRICANES

Week 1 – 8/21 vs. Crawford Co.
Week 2 – 8/28 vs. Westside
Week 3 – 9/4 BYE
Week 4 – 9/11 at Wilkinson Co.
Week 5 – 9/18 at Pike County
Week 6 – 9/25 at Jackson
Week 7 – 10/1 vs. Northeast
Week 8 – 10/9 BYE
Week 9 – 10/16 vs. Southwest
Week 10 – 10/23 at Callaway
Week 11 – 10/23 at Lamar County
Week 12 – 11/5 vs. Central

HOWARD HUSKIES

Week 1 – 8/21 vs. Southwest
Week 2 – 8/28 at Valdosta
Week 3 – 9/4 at Perry
Week 4 – 9/11 BYE
Week 5 – 9/18 vs. Baldwin
Week 6 – 9/25 at Upson-Lee
Week 7 – 10/1 at Spalding
Week 8 – 10/9 BYE
Week 9 – 10/16 at Mary Persons
Week 10 – 10/23 at Peach County
Week 11 – 10/30 vs. Troup Co.
Week 12 – 11/6 vs. Westside

SOUTHWEST PATRIOTS

Week 1 – 8/21 at Howard
Week 2 – 8/28 BYE
Week 3 – 9/4 at ACE Charter
Week 4 – 9/11 vs. Westside
Week 5 – 9/18 vs. Callaway
Week 6 – 9/24 at Central-Macon
Week 7 – 10/2 vs. Lamar Co.
Week 8 – 10/9 BYE
Week 9 – 10/16 at Rutland
Week 10 – 10/22 vs. Northeast
Week 11 – 10/30 at Jackson
Week 12 – 11/6 at Pike County

NORTHEAST RAIDERS

Week 1 – 8/22 vs. Westside
Week 2 – 8/28 at Warner Robins
Week 3 – 9/4 BYE
Week 4 – 9/11 vs. Perry
Week 5 – 9/17 vs. Jackson
Week 6 – 9/25 vs. Lamar Co.
Week 7 – 10/1 at Rutland
Week 8 – 10/9 BYE
Week 9 – 10/16 vs. Central
Week 10 – 10/22 at Southwest
Week 11 – 10/30 vs. Pike Co.
Week 12 – 11/6 vs. Callaway

WESTSIDE SEMINOLES

Week 1 – 8/22 vs. Northeast &
Week 2 – 8/28 at Rutland
Week 3 – 9/4 BYE
Week 4 – 9/11 at Southwest
Week 5 – 9/18 at Mary Persons
Week 6 – 9/25 vs. Baldwin
Week 7 – 10/2 vs. Troup Co.
Week 8 – 10/9 at Peach County
Week 9 – 10/16 BYE
Week 10 – 10/23 vs. Spalding
Week 11 – (none listed)
Week 12 – (none listed)



PHOTO COURTESY OF MERCER ATHLETICS

Chris Katz celebrates ephatically as he rounds the bases during a Mercer home game earlier this year. Katz, who finished the season with 20 home runs and a .374 average, won the SoCon Player of the Year award after leading Mercer’s prolific offense in left field.

MERCER

Continued from Page 11

and the bats just jumped on them and got us the runs we needed.”

Mercer scored five runs in the first three innings of Game 1, then had a six-spot in the opening frame of Game 3. The Bears smashed six homers in the series and spread them out relatively evenly across all three games, but more impressive was their consistent hitting — Mercer had 12, 11 and 14 hits in the contests, respectively.

It feels like the group is poised every game, according to their head coach.

“It’s wild how locked in they are. It’s felt like for the past month, every game has been the most important game of the year,” Gibson said. “With this series, even, they didn’t

just want a share of the conference, they wanted the whole thing. So they played for it.”

With the regular season behind them, the Bears head to Greenville for the SoCon tournament, which begins Wednesday. Mercer has a double-bye as the No. 1 and plays its first game at 9 a.m. Thursday. The Bears could face VMI, The Citadel or Wofford, depending on who comes out of Wednesday’s games victorious.

Regardless, Mercer will stick to the pitching formula that’s held firm all year: Garrett Lambert will start their first game, while Miguel Hugas will start the second.

Lambert has been solid, with a 4.55 ERA — the eighth-best individual mark in the SoCon — while Hugas recently had a pair of sparkling, seven-inning performances against two of Mercer’s possible

early opponents, VMI and Wofford.

All of this has led to Mercer earning some national notoriety. After the Bears’ upset win over Georgia Tech earlier this year, the game’s ESPN announcers commented on Mercer potentially making the tournament as an at-large team if they do not win the SoCon tournament.

“I just keep doing the same things, I have since the first game of the season. It’s consistency,” Gibson said. “The challenging thing with guys nowadays is that information is available everywhere. They know what the expectations are, but I tell them that we control our own destiny.”

The Bears begin their tournament run with a game at 9 a.m. Thursday. If they win, they play in the semifinal at 9 a.m. Friday. The conference championship game is Saturday at 7:30 p.m.