

The Macon Melody

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Why Bibb schools are facing a budget crisis

BY CASEY CHOUNG
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For months, members of the Bibb County Board of Education have grappled with budget woes.

As board members looked to adopt a new fiscal year spending plan, they were confronted with a looming budget deficit, one that threatens to deplete the district's fund balance. They found no easy answers to the district's challenges

— declining enrollment, unfunded state mandates, the ever-increasing costs associated with a workforce and stagnant inflation.

The fixes aren't easy, either — and could prove to be politically unpopular for the elected board members. They could cut the district's spending, which might involve staff reductions, or raise property taxes. They might even close schools.

How did the district get here? The Macon Melody explored some of the challenges facing the district, which

serves more than 20,000 students.

Fewer students

Enrollment in Bibb County's public schools is steadily dropping, according to the Georgia Department of Education.

In 2016, the number of enrolled students was 24,236, but this year, that number was 20,556.

District officials are projecting another drop in enrollment for the 2026-27 school year, with an anticipated 20,212 students attending

public school in the county.

State contributions to the district's coffers are determined through a formula mandated by the 1985 Quality Basic Education Act.

State funding is dependent on the number of full-time students attending district schools, the training and experience levels of local educators, and a number of other factors.

Over the years, the state has increased the amount it reimburses the district per student — from an average of \$6,602 in 2024 to an

average of \$8,557 for the new fiscal year — but there's a lag, with the state basing its payments to the district on an earlier enrollment count rather than current figures.

Bibb County School District Chief Financial Officer Eric Bush said the impact of decreased enrollment has been somewhat mitigated by additional funding for raises and benefits, but he still estimates the

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The science of good sleep

PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Volunteers for Sleep in Heavenly Peace stain headboards for beds at a building event in Macon last week.



Macon nonprofit and MGA team up to study childhood bedlessness

BY KENNON PAULK
Melody Contributor

In a Macon bedroom scattered with Spider-Man drawings and learning worksheets, something was missing.

The room belongs to Camden, a 6-year-old boy. As Brian Cornett and his team surveyed the superhero headquarters last week, they discussed the best place to put the gift they had brought.

Their delivery did not come wrapped in a bow, but in a ready-to-be-built, six-piece set.

What Cornett and his team had brought to Camden was something that most of us take for granted: a bed.

Cornett serves as co-president of the Macon chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit that builds beds for kids in need of them.

"This is literally a crisis that you can walk right past and not even put two and two together," Cornett said. "We're just now getting to the point where people are realizing that this is a problem in our community."

According to the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 23.6% of children in the state live in poverty. More than 750 children in Macon are on the waitlist for beds, the local Sleep in Heavenly Peace chapter says.

Cornett's nonprofit delivers more than 500 beds on average

every year to children in the area. The organization targets "bedlessness" because it has concluded that there's a tie to a child's well-being and academic success.

Sleep in Heavenly Peace's efforts caught the eye of Middle Georgia State University's Kristi Roberts-Lewis, who met members of the nonprofit at a Chamber of Commerce event.

"We started having a conversation with them, learning more about their mission goals and objectives, and I said, 'I love this,'" said Roberts-Lewis, executive director of the school's Center for Middle Georgia Stud-

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PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Costco engineer Julie Miller stands at the podium addressing the Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning commission to get the bulk store's location on Bass Road in north Macon officially approved.

Costco on Bass Rd. approved by P&Z

BY LIZ FABIAN
The Macon Newsroom
macon-newsroom.com

After nearly three years of whispers and possibilities, Costco officially announced its intention to build a 158,000-square-foot warehouse store across from Dillard's behind the Shoppes at River Crossing.

Although the address is 1990 Bass Road, the proposed shopping center with 873 parking stalls and 32 fueling stations fronts Wesleyan Drive at the corner of New Forsyth Road in north Macon.

The Costco plans include new traffic lights at parking lot entrances on Wesleyan and New Forsyth, along with a third light at the corner of New Forsyth and Bass roads for the busy intersection near the Academy for Classical Education.

The store is expected to generate more than 6,374 vehicle trips per

weekday and up to 8,300 Saturday trips on Macon roads, but the widening of Bass Road won't begin until mid-2028.

As Costco engineer Julie Miller successfully requested highway commercial zoning Monday for a nearly 23-acre parcel that was zoned for planned development-mixed use, P&Z Chair Jeane Easom asked: "And you can say this is a Costco?"

"I can say it is a Costco," the engineer replied.

That wasn't the case in 2023 when New Forsyth Associates secured conditional use approval for an unnamed wholesale club warehouse and other stores on more than 48 acres across New Forsyth Road.

That approval expired, but Costco was back to P&Z late last year with a draft of this proposal, which The Macon Newsroom reported in

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Periodical — Mail Label

Revamped state medical marijuana program helps vets

BY CASEY CHOUNG
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Stronger medical marijuana is coming in July to ailing Georgians, a major regulatory shift hailed by the nation's oldest veterans organization.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars has long advocated for medical cannabis access for former service members who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or chronic pain. It's seen as a safer alternative to opioids.

Lawmakers passed the Putting Georgia's Patients First Act in April, removing the restrictive 5% THC potency cap on the state's medical marijuana and permitting it to be inhaled through e-ciga-

rettes.

At the annual Georgia VFW Convention held June 13, veterans flocked to the Macon Convention Center to not only discuss yearly business but also hear from vendors about services and products. Trulieve, Macon's sole state-approved medical marijuana dispensary, was there.

In the past, Mike Coles, a member of the Warm Springs VFW, has been prescribed oxycontin for back pain. He said medical marijuana is a much better alternative.

"This is a cleaner, safer option," he said.

Dr. Tiffani Forbes has been a registered cannabis doctor in the

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Macon's new arena

Mayor Lester Miller and other local officials unveiled the renderings for Macon's new arena Wednesday morning. The arena will replace the Macon Coliseum and will be located next to Interstate 16 and the Ocmulgee River not far from downtown Macon. Construction is scheduled to break ground in July. The rendering featured a large arena with a spacious interior and green space.

For more information on the new rendering, visit maconmelody.com.



Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

SOAK UP THE SUN! 5 EXPERT TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE IN THE HEAT



Sponsored by: **Carlyle Place**

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

Summer is a beautiful season for outdoor living. Many of the best activities with family and friends take place in the sun, so prepare appropriately before heading out.

Heatstroke and sunburn are two of the biggest safety concerns during the summer, and the risks are higher for older adults. Fortunately, you can soak up some much-needed vitamin D without risking your health if you follow a few simple tips for summertime activities.

STAY HYDRATED

You should never be too far away from a glass of water during the hot summer days. Staying hydrated is the best tool you have to avoid heatstroke this season.

Experts recommend drinking half your body weight (in pounds) in ounces of water daily. If you're exercising or sweating more than usual, you'll need to increase your water intake.

Dehydration is a bigger problem as you age. The Mayo Clinic points out that "your body's fluid reserve becomes smaller, your ability to conserve water is reduced, and your thirst sense becomes less acute." Be vigilant and take it seriously if you notice signs of dehydration, including dizziness, confusion, and fatigue.

The best way to avoid dehydration is to proactively follow a routine that includes plenty of fluids. Begin and end your day with water, drink water with every meal, and carry a water bottle whenever you leave the house.

If you're like many people and don't particularly enjoy drinking water, try to make it fun. The water doesn't have to be tepid and flavorless!

Add fresh fruit, cucumber, or mint to your water for a tasty change. You can freeze this infused water in an ice cube tray and add it to your water bottle on the way out the door. Also, remember that many fruits and vegetables are high in water content, so adjust your meal plans to include as many as possible over the summer.

INVEST IN SUNSCREEN

As we age, our skin becomes more sensitive to the sun. Make sunscreen an integral part of your daily summer routine to avoid damaging your skin, even if you'll only be outside for a short period or plan to stay in the shade.

If you've pulled out a bottle of sunscreen from last season, check the expiration date before use. A broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays is best. Look for one with an SPF of 30 or higher.

Reapply sunscreen every two hours, and let it soak in for 15 minutes before jumping in the water.

COVER UP

Even if you're wearing sunscreen, covering up when you're in the sun is also beneficial. The most essential item? A good hat.

These days, there are many stylish options made from UV-blocking material so that your hat not only provides shade but reduces sun exposure. If you like hiking, water activities, or anything with lots of movement, purchase a hat with a strap so you don't worry about it flying off when you need it!

In addition to a hat, it's best to cover your arms and legs when you're planning to stay outside for several hours at a

time. Lightweight cotton or linen shirts and pants help block some of the sun's rays without trapping too much heat.

Avoid synthetic materials like polyester that trap heat and sweat, making you more susceptible to heatstroke. If you'll be sitting outdoors for an extended period, take an umbrella or shade structure to block even more heat and sun.

PLAN EXTRA BREAKS

It can be hard to stop in the middle of an activity to take a rest break, but during the summer, these times to recharge are essential. Your body is working overtime in the heat, and we often don't notice how tired our muscles have become until it's too late.

Plan breaks into your activities to sit in the shade, drink water, have a snack, and recharge for the next round.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NIGHT

Even though most of your summer plans may take place during the daytime, remember the potential of evening and nighttime activities to avoid the heat.

Tending a garden, taking a walk with friends, or sitting at the local park watching the evening birds are all ways to enjoy the outdoors without the risk of overheating.

If you will be out during dusk or dark, plan for your safety accordingly. A reflective vest and flashlight are useful for neighborhood walks. Use a headlamp for convenient lighting if you need your hands free for an activity.

With a bit of preparation, you can enjoy the best that summer offers safely.

MARIJUANA

Continued from Page 1

state of Georgia for the past five years. She said the new changes signal "a huge step" for patients.

While the process for procuring a medical marijuana card will remain the same, those with a wider range of qualifying ailments will now have more "potent selections" at their disposal.

"It's just opening up a whole new world for patients to receive care," Forbes said.

Patients can qualify for medical cannabis cards, issued through the Georgia Department of Public Health, after a doctor's evaluation. There's a one-time \$30 fee. Veterans

affairs clinicians cannot prescribe cannabis, and benefits do not cover the cost of cannabis.

Patients must have a qualifying medical ailment. In addition to PTSD and intractable pain, conditions include lupus, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer and Crohn's disease.

Forbes said prospective patients should consult with a medical doctor who is a cannabis expert to talk about how it could impact their personal health. Using vape products, in particular, could increase blood pressure or bring on shortness of breath.

Finding a cannabis doctor can be difficult with only roughly 500 licensed professionals in the state, Forbes added.

"Like with any medication, there are risky benefits," she said.

Justin Howe, a grand commander with the Georgia VFW from Clayton, said he's already set up an appointment to see a doctor to get his medical cannabis card.

He said he's been on eight different medications to combat chronic pain related to his service, but could get down to just two with the help of medical marijuana.

The state's dispensaries will be better than going to "swanky vape shops," Howe said.

"It helps me (to be) able to sleep at night without waking up in the morning ... tired because the medicine hasn't worn off," he said.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Dr. Tiffanni Forbes with Better Health Wellness speaks with veterans about medical cannabis at the the 2026 Georgia VFW State Convention in Macon on June 13.

BEDS

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ies. "We learned that this notion of child bedlessness likely has some connection to their academic performance."

Roberts-Lewis explained that bedlessness can look very different from case-to-case. To the untrained eye, the problem can be almost invisible.

"You go spend a night at grandma's and all the cousins come and everybody makes a palette," Roberts-Lewis said. "You're on the floor, and you're having a great time, but that isn't necessarily quality sleep."

Roberts-Lewis and her research team signed a contract in June with Sleep in Heavenly Peace to conduct formal research on the effects of bedlessness.

It will be an uphill battle for the research team.

As of now, there aren't any major studies that link bedlessness to children's

moods and behaviors, Roberts-Lewis said.

Although Sleep in Heavenly Peace has done a small amount of their own data collecting, it hasn't been enough to net major funding for the project.

"They really were not able to, in those initial kinds of documents, create enough evidence and identify variables that would allow them to be able to connect receiving a bed and the impact on those key areas," Roberts-Lewis said.

Much of the legwork has yet to be done.

"This is really a pilot study; we're going to pilot it in Macon," Roberts-Lewis said. From there, researchers can scale the study.

Surveys, a major element of the study, will be rolled out to all who have received a bed from Sleep in Heavenly Peace. Parents and kids will report sleeping habits before receiving beds then at three-month intervals afterward.

To gather sufficient information for the study,

Roberts-Lewis said it will take 18 months total.

The study's results could be a game changer for Sleep in Heavenly Peace.

"When we go out and speak, we can say all day long, 'We believe that kids who show up to school better rested are going to do better in school,' but nobody cares what we believe," Cornett said. "They want to know what research has shown, so they're conducting research so we can change that sentence to start with 'research has shown.'"

While data will help the organization, Cornett emphasized that, for him, it's about the kids.

There's no better reward for Cornett and his team than seeing Camden run into his bedroom and fall face first onto the pillows, then sink into the mattress.

Camden and his family no longer have to worry about where he's going to sleep at night. All they have to worry about now are the perils of putting on a fitted sheet.



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PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Volunteers for the Macon chapter of the Sleep in Heavenly Peace nonprofit drill into wooden boards as beds are built outside of Ashley furniture in Macon last week.

Over a year after USAID, the path for Georgia peanuts to reach starving kids is still unclear

BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP

GPB News
gpb.org

The production line at Mana Nutrition in Fitzgerald, Ga., population about 8,000, chugged along on a day in May as company compliance officer Andrea Hines led a tour of dignitaries, from near and far.

“We have an expansion that we’ll walk past,” Hines told the group comprising Georgia farmers, local elected officials, and members of the Trump administration. “Once that expansion is fully operational and commissioned, we’ll only be able to hold two days’ worth of production here.”

“Our goal is to ship as quick as we possibly can,” Hines concluded.

Shipping what Mana makes as quickly as they can produce it became a problem a little over a year ago, when its primary customer, USAID, was gutted by the administration.

Hines pointed to cardboard cases sliding by on a conveyor belt in the shiny new factory expansion.

“Each case represents two-and-a-half lives that will be saved,” she explained.

For a malnourished child, three pocket-sized packs a day for six weeks of what’s like a fortified, sweetened peanut butter can mean the difference between life and death.

In the old part of the factory, cases of this ready-to-use therapeutic food, or RUTF, were stacked below the huge American flag hanging from the rafters.

In fact, Hines said this is the world’s largest RUTF stockpile.

“It’s such a small manufacturing site, that it’s wild to think that this is the largest,” she said.

Edesia Nutrition in Rhode Island also lays claim to that title. A representative from that factory was on the tour, too. But together with this stockpile in Fitzgerald, they mean the U.S. is the largest producer of RUTF, most of it made from Georgia

peanuts. The stockpiles exist because the decades-long international supply chain that sent RUTF around the world was upended after USAID’s dismantling.

Now, while Mana and Edesia are looking for new channels of delivery, federal officials suggest the government may be looking for favors in return for feeding starving children.

That was explained before the big factory tour when the dignitaries were treated to lunch downtown. There, in a loft apartment renovated and owned by Mana, they heard from the guest of honor: Alabama native Lynda Blanchard.

Blanchard and her husband have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to President Donald Trump’s campaigns in the past. She was ambassador to Slovenia in the first Trump administration. Now she is the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations’ World Food Program, based in Rome, Italy.

At the luncheon, she explained the president’s take on humanitarian aid.

“Now, this president’s doing it bigger and better,” Blanchard began.

With changes to the system, she went on to explain.

“Instead of it’s continual aid without showing something and raising these countries up, it’s more humanitarian trade,” Blanchard said.

Or, as some state department documents call it: “Commercial Diplomacy.”

Blanchard explained the new ethos has a home in the Bureau of Disaster and Human Response (DHR), the arm of the Department of State created to replace USAID.

“We’ve seen the USAID is gone, and it’s gone for a good reason,” Blanchard told the lunch crowd. “They did not spend the money like we would spend the money in our household. Hence this new president has changed U.S. aid into U.S. trade. It is how we would



PHOTO BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP / GPB

Mana Nutrition CEO Mark Moore (center left) and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations World Food Program Linda Blanchard (center right) talk during a tour of the Mana factory in May 2026.

all run our homes.”

DHR only has about an eighth of the funding of the former USAID.

Blanchard explained emergency food aid will flow to countries from DHR when the country has something to offer the United States in return.

“Because in some of the countries that we’ve worked in for years, and continue to feed, we don’t see progress,” she said.

Blanchard told the group: Progress could mean countries dealing with their own internal security issues. If they don’t or can’t, she says other nations are free to offer them help.

This idea of commercial diplomacy doesn’t sit well with Jeannette Bailey, who leads the Global Nutrition Program with the International Rescue Committee. The IRC is one of the many non-governmental organizations which had worked historically

with USAID to get emergency nutrition where it needed to be.

“What we don’t need are more strings attached types of programs,” Bailey said.

Bailey said one irony of the breakdown of the old RUTF delivery system is that because people like her haven’t been able to work in the countries where they have in the past, they haven’t been able to compile accurate mortality data. They are left making educated guesses at the harm done by USAID cuts.

But research published in the medical journal The Lancet estimates 163,000 more children could die annually as a result of the end of USAID.

“We need to be real about the fact that children are dying due to aid cuts,” Bailey said.

That’s why people behind the factories that produce RUTF are looking for new ways to move

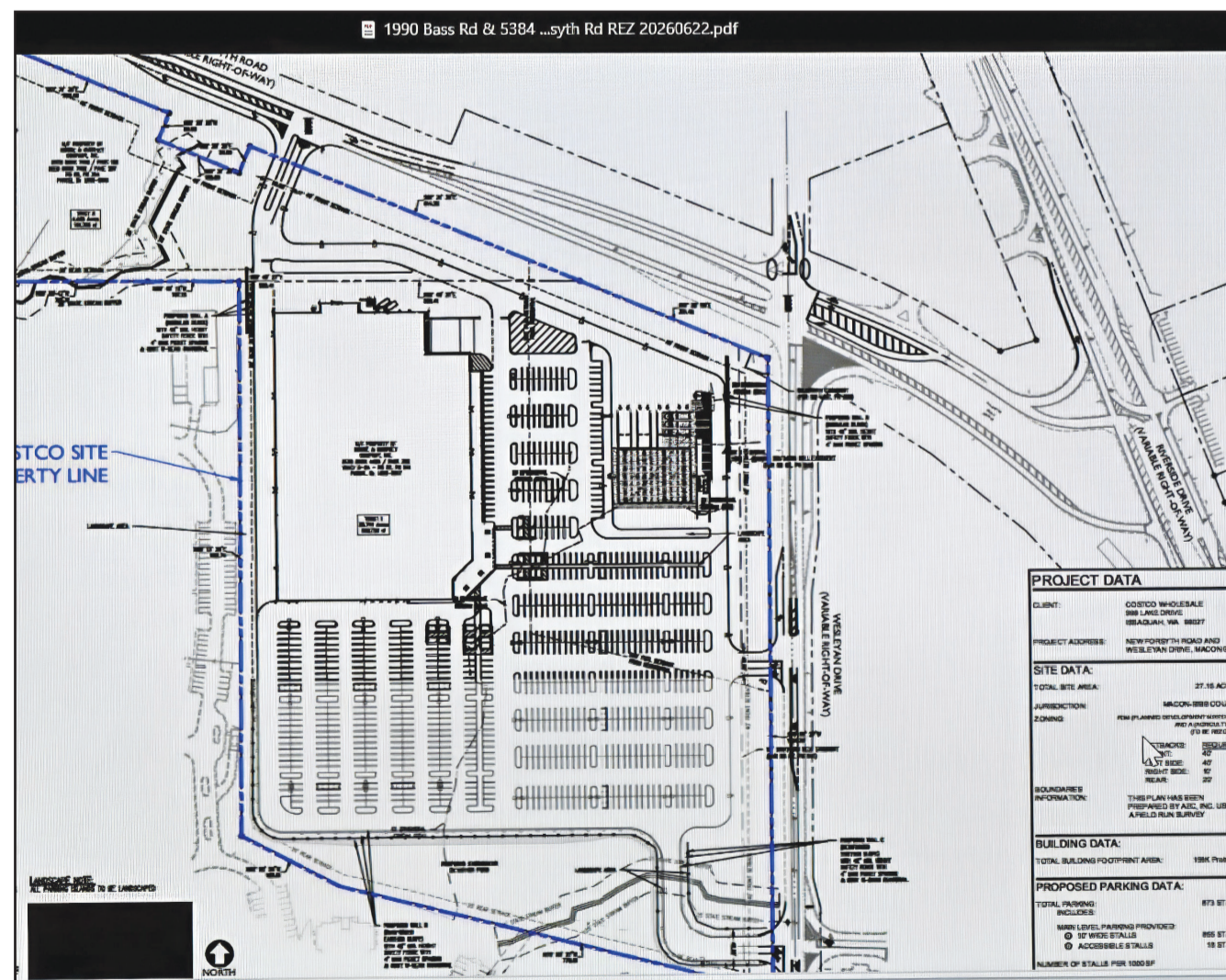
their product, with or without the federal government.

“Our ultimate need is getting these life-saving foods to children when they need them — which is now, right?” asked Maria Kasparian of Edesia Nutrition. “The need didn’t stop.”

For now, both Edesia and Mana are seeing what help is left from private philanthropy. Mana has also pivoted to selling their own branded peanut butter to help make up their budget shortfalls and to keep the production lines churning.

They have sold 2 million jars so far.

This story comes to The Melody through a reporting partnership with GPB News, a non-profit newsroom covering the state of Georgia.



GRAPHIC FROM MACON-BIBB PLANNING AND ZONING

While the Costco has a Bass Road address, the entrance to the warehouse bulk store fronts Wesleyan Drive at the corner of New Forsyth Road in north Macon and will also feature new traffic lights.

COSTCO

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December.

The store plans to hire up to 200 people at its opening.

Last month during the taping of Ask Mayor Miller, Mayor Lester Miller said he’s already looking ahead toward more commercial development on that larger site.

“It’s still going to be a development across the street from Costco as well, and I can’t wait to announce that. Hopefully, it happens when

I’m still the mayor, but otherwise I’m still going to be a part of it,” Miller said.

He hinted in January, “Where Costco goes, you’re usually going to see a Trader Joe’s. They go well together... like peas and carrots.”

Commercial corner at Bass and Rivoli

Northwest Macon Presbyterian Church member Joe Timberlake opposed plans for a convenience store next to the church a few years ago, but during Monday’s P&Z hearing he endorsed two profes-

sional office buildings at the corner of Bass Road and Rivoli Drive.

“I’m telling you that this is the best opportunity we have to have a decent facility there on the corner,” Timberlake said.

Dr. Rana Munna plans to relocate her office from off New Forsyth Road because of her patients’ traffic concerns with the Academy for Classical Education.

A second tenant has not been secured, but engineer Steven Rowland believes it will likely be a medical office and secured conditional use approval for that.

Rowland successfully argued to rezone more than nine acres of agricultural and two-family residential areas to neighborhood commercial.

Neighbor Elmo Richardson, who has lived on Rivoli for nearly 50 years, opposed the “spot zoning” plan although C-1 is the lightest commercial use.

“We’ve got a span of over three miles of essentially single-family residential properties. To rezone to C-1 right in the middle of all the single-family residential destroys the integrity of the neighborhood,” Richardson said.

Two upscale Truitt Preserve residential neighborhoods are planned on both sides of Rivoli and Rowland said the office buildings will complement those developments.

“If you have seen the proposed building, this is a very attractive site, very attractive building, highly landscaped,” Rowland said.

Time lapse kills Mead Road transfer station plan

Receiving planning and zoning approval for a project is only the first step toward construction. Other pertinent agencies such as the Macon Water Authority, Fire Department or Macon-Bibb County Health Department have to review a project in order to secure a building permit.

If construction does not begin within a year, P&Z’s approval expires and the applicant must reapply.

The expiration of P&Z’s October 2023 conditional use approval for a contested Mead Road waste transfer station proved to be costly for MMM Transfer Station LLC.

In January of 2024, months after Eberhardt Industries and Mead Road Environmental 2 revised its site plans to address complaints from nearby residents and stake-

holders and then secured P&Z approval, MMM bought the land but did not pursue a permit or begin construction.

Although P&Z staff sent Guy Eberhardt a courtesy notice that his permit was about to expire in October of 2024, that message never got to the new owners. P&Z was not notified of a change of ownership, which is needed to assume the existing approval.

Mayor Miller plans for Macon-Bibb County to build its own solid waste transfer system to more efficiently move waste to out-of-town landfills. In September of 2023, the county imposed a moratorium on new facilities until the Solid Waste Management Plan, SWMP, could be updated.

Because Eberhardt’s P&Z application was already underway, it was exempt from the moratorium.

MMM applied for an extension, but P&Z Attorney Pope Langstaff said because the zoning approval expired, there was nothing to extend. The time to apply for an extension is before approval expires, Landstaff said.

At its June 2 meeting, county commissioners lifted the moratorium and adopted the SWMP that now prevents solid waste facilities within a mile of residences, schools, churches and recreation areas.

MMM can no longer file a new application for the site because of the new one-mile restriction.

Peyton Anderson Civic Journalism Senior Fellow Liz Fabian covers Macon-Bibb County government entities for The Macon Newsroom and can be reached at fabian_lj@merc.edu or 478-301-2976.

SNAPSHOTS

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PHOTOS 1-3 — A large crowd of people gathered along Cherry and Poplar streets on Sunday to watch the 4th Annual Juneteenth Parade. Photos by Jessica Gratigny.

PHOTO NO. 4 — Guests cut the ribbon on the Gilmer Warehouse and Logistics office located at 598 Third St. on Tuesday. Photo by Jason Vorhees.

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To Macon, with love

Life has bittersweet moments. When I moved to Macon to take over as executive editor of The Melody, that was one of them. I wanted to grow beyond my native Mississippi, to experience new things and to enjoy a new adventure. And I have.

Today marks another one of those moments, as I leave The Melody office for the final time as its leader and say goodbye to my team. I'm not going far, but I won't be here anymore — and I'll surely miss them and our many supporters.

I'm moving to Atlanta to work for another newspaper group. I'm excited and looking forward to the new journey, but I'll take what Macon taught me and cherish it for the rest of my life. I'll certainly always value what my team taught me, too.

Here, in our offices at Mercer Village, I've learned to be a better leader and honestly a better man. I've had a ball orienting this publication toward a bright future and preparing for its third year of operation. We've navigated rough seas in our industry and emerged stronger as a smart digital publication with a weekly print edition.

I can reflect on many great moments.

For example, in January, we launched The Riff, our daily newsletter, with minimal fanfare. It now has almost 4,000 subscribers, folks



Joshua Wilson

who depend on us for a concise look at what's going on in their community. What a joy and a privilege. Another proud moment happened just last week. We recently moved to a new space in the Murphy Center for Collaborative Journalism, and to commemorate that, we hosted a Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event in our space. Despite nasty weather, the room was packed — and people were full of excitement and wonder about our work and how we're building a newsroom when so many others around the country are faltering. Again, what a joy and a privilege.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the great reporting we've published — from Laura Corley's "Power" series to Casey Choung's continuing coverage of the budget woes at the Bibb County School District. And there are so many other stories, too. It's been such fun shepherding those forward and collaborating with the wonderful people in our newsroom. They care deeply about Macon and deserve your continued support.

I've also loved getting to know our readers. I've built a steady relationship with many of you, answering your questions, responding to your

comments and in return querying you about our coverage. Maconites aren't short on opinions, and I've loved engaging with you on them. Thank you.

As I finish up my work here, I want to issue Macon a final challenge — actually, an ask from a friend — to keep The Melody playing. In past columns, I've mentioned to you the costs associated with producing the news, told you of the challenges facing newsrooms across our country and warned you what happens when they close. You need a watchdog in your corner, one staffed by Maconites who are invested in their community.

You have that, and Macon deserves to keep and grow its ethical, community-based newsroom. Much has been accomplished in our first two years, but The Melody must, in order to keep covering every facet of our community, continue its momentum. You can help by subscribing, advertising, donating or even sharing stories with a friend, family member or neighbor. Learn more about ways to help at maconmelody.com/support.

Macon, I've loved every minute. Thank you for welcoming me with open arms. I'll be back to visit and will always champion The Melody's success — and all of Macon's. I'm a forever fan and admirer.

With veto, Kemp passes on feeding hungry kids

We can all agree that groceries are becoming harder to afford, and that Georgia's children deserve access to the food they need to grow and thrive. Summer places a particular strain on families' grocery budgets. On top of soaring costs, children being out of school for summer creates a huge meal gap for families to fill. For many families, accessing two meals a day at school is a lifeline they can't afford to do without.

While summer feeding sites do serve meals to kids while school is out, these locations alone cannot solve the reality of increased need. For rural Georgia communities without a summer feeding site, regular meals are out of reach for families without reliable transportation. Limited operating hours can also be a barrier, especially for working people trying to balance their jobs with caregiving.

This isn't a new problem. In fact, SUN Bucks, also called Summer EBT, is a program designed to fill this known gap by providing additional funds to SNAP-eligible



Stacey Abrams

families during the summer months. Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by the states, state governments have to deliver these federal dollars into our communities. Yet, in an act of privileged cruelty, Gov. Kemp vetoed feeding Georgia's hungriest children this summer — and next summer, too.

To deliver the saving grace of SUN Bucks to struggling families, the state legislature must opt in and invest some state funds that unlock federal dollars. A bipartisan effort this year allocated \$2 million in the state's budget, a down payment on the state's share of costs. That money would have unlocked \$143 million in food aid that Georgia parents could use to feed their children during the summer, a great return on our investment. Keep in mind that this same governor authorized \$2.5 billion in tax breaks for data centers

— one source of rising costs and expanded need.

Financial considerations are a critical factor — more important, though, is the moral cost of this betrayal. The greatest return on investment we can receive as taxpayers is on the public dollars we pour into our children and their health. With an estimated 1 in 5 Georgia kids at risk of hunger, a smart state would leverage every tool at our disposal to close the meal gap in our state.

Instead, as Trump Republicans like Kemp celebrate the loss of health insurance and the slashing of SNAP benefits to fund the coffers of billionaires, working families pay the price. Duly-employed Georgians who depend on food assistance must navigate months of hunger while facing rising gas and grocery prices. In response, Trump Republicans echoed their leader who mocked, "I don't think about Americans' financial situation" and decried the

SEE ABRAMS
PAGE 6

What Ancient Rome can teach us about saving our republic

America is approaching a major milestone: its semiquincentennial, which is a fancy word that scarcely anyone knows how to spell or pronounce. It simply denotes that 2026 is the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Despite this passage of time, America looks pretty good for her age. Of course, there have been a number of proud and shameful moments in our history, and we are currently on a concerning trajectory. Where it leads is not set in stone, but if you want to learn what could be in store for America, then look to the past, the very ancient past, at Rome.

While comparing the U.S. to ancient Rome can be cliché, at least on a superficial level, a deeper



Marc Hyden

analysis shows striking similarities between the two superpowers. Since Rome has long since fallen, perhaps it can serve as a cautionary tale for Americans. So what lessons can we learn from the Roman Republic to avoid its fate?

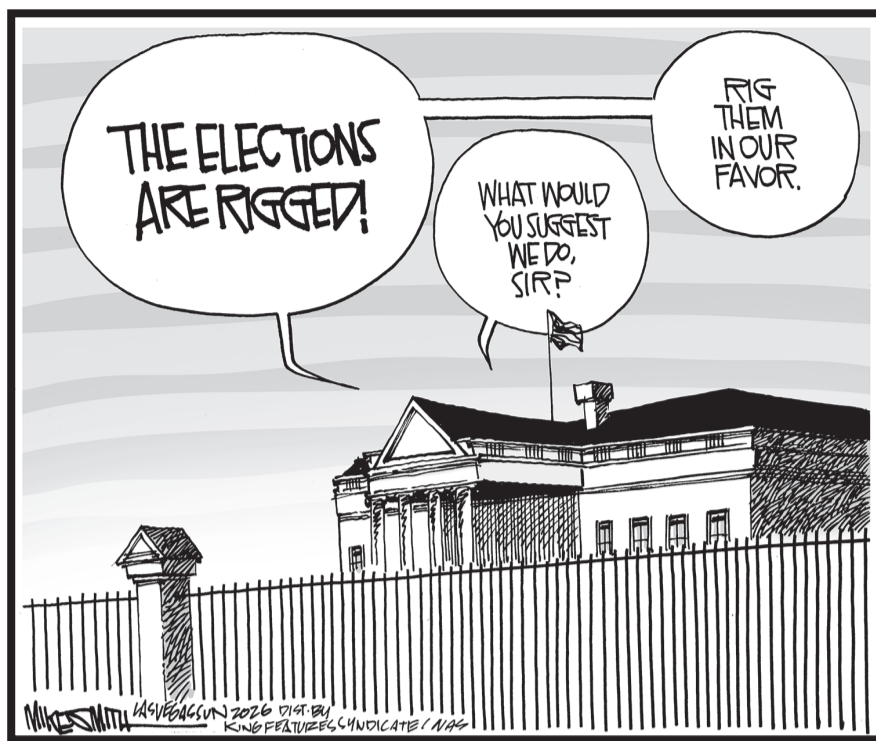
To begin with, Rome originally existed as a monarchy — according to legend — beginning in 753 BC. The Romans were tired of the oppressive rule and sparked a revolution in which they rejected the monarchy and formed a republic in 509 BC.

Its government was composed

of a number of politicians mostly elected through an ancient form of the electoral college, and the Romans boasted constitutional checks and balances and a kind of bicameral legislature. Citizens also enjoyed certain rights and liberties. Sound familiar? It should — America's Constitution was based in part on the Roman Republic.

Also like the U.S., after Rome formed into a republic, it engaged in numerous wars as it grew in power and size. Once it defeated its arch-nemeses, Carthage and Macedonia, Rome emerged as the Mediterranean world's primary superpower, much in the same way that America

SEE HYDEN
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PHOTO BY HEATHER DOTY | UNSPLASH

A cow stands in a pasture in the Elko community of Houston County. As suburban development expands rapidly across Georgia, a new \$2 million state fund aims to help farmers protect their agricultural land from being sold to developers.

Georgia launches \$2M fund to protect disappearing farmland

BY EMILY JONES

WABE and Crist
wabe.org | grist.org

Russ Moon grows corn, soybeans and strawberries and raises cattle on his family farm in Madison County outside of Athens.

His family has worked that land for four generations, around 100 years. And he said he wants to keep it that way and pass the farm on to his kids one day.

“Selling the land is really not an option,” he said. “I intend on remaining in agriculture for as long as possible.”

But he’s watched more housing and development come to the area over the years. It’s appealing to many, he said, to live near the University of Georgia in Athens and also enjoy the bucolic rural setting. Other farms around him have already sold, he said, and he’s worried that if left unchecked, the development rush will fundamentally change his community.

Moon said he’d only sell if he had to. But some day his kids could find themselves forced into the decision. Farming can be an unstable business, subject to weather and changing

crop prices and global markets.

“There may be a day where they have to sell, but I don’t want the land to be developed,” he said. “That’s my desire, that’s my family’s desire.”

In an effort to help farmers like Moon, Georgia’s legislature created a new program a few years ago meant to protect farms.

The Georgia Farmland Conservation Fund will help farmers sell development rights while keeping their land. The first applications are now in, and property owners will find out in August if they’ve been selected to receive some of the \$2 million allocated for this first round of funding.

Funding conservation

The fund coordinates federal, state and local match funding for conservation easements and creates an advisory council to review and approve proposals.

Easements allow landowners like Moon to sell the future development rights for their property to outside organizations, like land trusts. The landowner receives an upfront payment, half of which comes from state funds under the new Geor-

gia program. The rest could come from a land trust, local government or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which allocates \$450 million annually to match dollars in state conservation programs.

The landowner can continue farming, grazing livestock, growing and harvesting timber, or however else they use their land. They can even sell the land — just not to a developer who will turn it into housing, a strip mall or an industrial site.

“It’s a compelling alternative to our farming landowners that are feeling a lot of financial crunch and are just being inundated with offers for selling out,” said Katherine Moore, president of the Georgia Conservancy, which advocated for the new state fund.

Though this is a new program for Georgia, it’s not a new idea. Some 30 states already have what are known as Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement programs, though the amount of funding varies a great deal from state to state. Texas allocates \$2 million annually, while Florida set aside \$300 million in 2022 and \$100 million in 2024.

Georgia’s law, modeled after these initiatives, was adopted in

2023. The state legislature passed the initial round of funding in 2024, and the first round of applications closed May 20.

“It is unprecedented for Georgia to have such a program, which is a little wild when you think that, you know, agribusiness in total is our No. 1 economic engine in the state,” Moore said.

Balancing business

Even though agriculture is Georgia’s leading industry, farmers face mounting pressure to sell to developers for housing, warehouses, data centers and other uses. The state could lose some 800,000 acres of farmland by 2040, according to the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

“That means 10% of our farmland will be gone in the next 15 years or so,” said state Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper. “And that’s a staggering statistic.”

It’s a concern not only because farms provide food and jobs and are a big part of the state’s economy but also because farming is a way of life in much of Georgia.

State leaders often tout the booming economy, proudly calling Georgia the No. 1 state to do busi-

ness. But that gives Moon pause.

“The whole time we keep being the No. 1 place to do business, we’re hurting our No. 1 industry,” he said.

And then there are the potential climate impacts.

Converting farmland to other uses can increase greenhouse gas emissions, according to the American Farmland Trust. Topsoil is often removed, releasing the carbon that’s stored in it.

Residential development and industrial operations often produce more emissions than farming does.

Conservation easements, on the other hand, can encourage farming and management practices that sequester more carbon, and they often protect non-agricultural land adjacent to fields — like woods and wetlands.

Some of Moon’s land is already in a conservation easement, which he entered into directly with a land trust in 2019. He said he hopes that getting more farmland into conservation can help maintain some balance before it’s too late.

“Once you develop a piece of property, you’re never gonna — it’s never gonna go back,” he said. “You lose farmland, it’s gone forever.”

ABRAMS

Continued from Page 5

crippling increase in gas prices as “peanuts.”

The cost of this meanness will last beyond the hunger pangs of summer. Studies show that without regular access to nutritious food, kids often experience a larger than average “summer slide,” where students forget some of what they learned the previous school year.

This year, Kemp is trying to justify vetoing \$344 million in spending on programs like SUN Bucks by saying this is a choice that must be made in response to the \$1.3 billion deficit created by the tax cuts passed this year. When asked about the cuts he made, he said, “I wasn’t going to leave the state or our next governor or General Assembly in that fiscal position.”

Kemp and his ilk are willing to sacrifice children in exchange for avoiding tough choices. Authoritari-

ans and their lackeys will always hurt the weak to mollify the powerful. The decision to forgo participation in Summer EBT is not simply a singular choice about one program here in our state. This mirrors what has happened in Washington, D.C., when the mega-millionaire tax cuts slashed funding for safety net programs that balance the pain of a flailing economy in favor of generating unimaginable wealth for the already absurdly wealthy.

Kemp squandered billions in

surplus and ran up the tab to serve rich Georgians. Now he’s sticking Georgia children with the check. By vetoing SUN Bucks yet again, we have further proof of how little he cares. But we do care — and we can act. As a community, we can pull together to ensure all children in this state have an opportunity to grow and thrive.

In the short term, we can support our food banks, pantries and summer feeding sites working to meet a rising need for assistance. We can

also invest in our children with our votes. In November, we must vote for leaders who are willing to invest taxpayer dollars and our moral authority in one of Georgia’s greatest assets: our children.

We owe them no less.

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.

HYDEN

Continued from Page 5

found itself as a dominant global power following two world wars and the Cold War.

With increased might and wealth, the Roman Republic grew ill. Politicians and voters increasingly disregarded their constitution, side-stepped long-held precedent and looked at the government as an exploitable means to selfish ends. Politicians sought public office to enrich themselves and increase their prestige, and the people demanded expensive handouts, like free land on which to settle, subsidized grain and total debt forgiveness.

Both statesmen and voters were

willing to go to great lengths to achieve their goals. They openly violated term limits, abandoned norms, and relied on riots and assassinations to settle political scores and suppress the vote. Politicians were willing to promise enormous welfare programs to the masses if they would vote them into office. The republic was in tatters.

As power, wealth and handouts became primary objectives — instead of respecting the rule of law — it was only a matter of time before the republic devolved into a series of civil wars. After decades of intermittent fighting, one man, Augustus, remained standing, and he announced that he was giving

the Romans their republic back. But that was an illusion. Instead of reinforcing the republic, he replaced it with an autocracy — with him at the helm — in 27 BC.

The people were happy to trade their rights and liberties for security, entertainment and free grain, but their republic was dead. Even so, Rome survived for hundreds more years. Many historians date the Western Roman Empire’s fall to 476 AD and the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire’s remnants to 1453 AD, but they operated more like military dictatorships and monarchies. Rome had come full circle.

The U.S. is not in this stage. We still have a functioning republic

with checks and balances and legitimate elections, but our republic is showing cracks and signs of stress. Despite this, Rome’s fate is not necessarily our own. That republic fell not because of its constitution or institutions but in part because voters no longer bought into the idea of a republic. They resorted to violence and coalesced around base politicians, men who in turn acted unscrupulously.

To avoid this mistake, we must respect the sanctity of our institutions over politicians, strictly adhere to our Constitution and precedent, and elect people of integrity.

As our semiquincentennial approaches, we should heed the

founders’ advice — the power to secure our republic lies with us first and not with politicians.

“To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea,” James Madison wrote. “If there be sufficient virtue and intelligence in the community, it will be exercised in the selection of these men. So that we do not depend on their virtue, or put confidence in our rulers, but in the people who are to choose them.”

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

Georgia Power has a massive plan for new power lines. What does it mean for the homes that sit nearby?

BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP

GPB News
gpb.org

On a recent morning, Claudia Moore was at home, with her kids, watching them do what kids love to do in the summer.

“Watch!” Moore’s daughter shouted from the aboveground pool just off the driveway and at the edge of the woods.

“I’m watching,” Moore said. Then came the pool trick and a ton of splashing.

“Good job!”

It’s the kind of day Claudia said she and her husband, Blake, who she described as a “country boy,” wanted for their two children when they moved to this suburban neighborhood in Coweta County, southwest of Atlanta.

“We specifically chose this place because it was nestled in the woods and we had kind of the serenity of that,” Blake Moore said. “It seems like that might be going away, unfortunately.”

That’s because now the neighborhood is changing.

“So these two houses in our neighborhood are going to be demolished,” Claudia said, pointing to houses peeking through the hardwoods. “And yeah, they’re bought out.”

The neighbors sold their houses to Georgia Power before the utility could take them. Claudia said she and Blake aren’t on what she described as the “chopping block,” per se, but they still stand to lose.

“Luckily we are not getting demolished,” she said. “They are just going to claim eminent domain on some of our land.”

That means the woods that drew the Moores to this home have to go.

They are between the pool and Georgia Power’s current transmission line. Now, the utility wants to add twice as much the amount of electricity carrying capacity along an existing 35-mile easement from their Plant Wansley, where Georgia Power is installing new, fossil gas generators.

For that, the utility needs a wider easement, meaning land. If there are

houses on the land, they need those, too.

So, like a lot of people in this area, the Moores are asking: Who is this even for?

“We think it’s about the betterment of the data centers that they’re trying to put up everywhere,” Claudia said, though she added that the utility company claims otherwise.

Southern Environmental Law Center attorney Bob Sherrier said that’s not true.

“Before the data center boom happened, the transmission plan at that time said, ‘We’re going to build 50 miles of new right-of-way, high-voltage transmission across the entire state in the next 10 years,’” Sherrier said.

That was part of Georgia Power’s 2022 Integrated Resource Plan, approved by the state regulators at the Georgia Public Service Commission.

But then last year, just three years later, Georgia Power went back to the PSC and said data center growth meant they needed an unprecedented amount of more electricity to sell.

Sherrier said the transmission line plan changed in scope and scale, too.

“It’s now 1,000 miles of new transmission lines in the next 10 years,” Sherrier said.

The exact mileage, as described in public disclosures by Georgia Power, is 1,065 miles. The 35-mile project running through the Moore’s woods is a tiny fraction of that.

“I think this is just the beginning of it; these projects that you’re hearing about are the first round of transmission construction,” Sherrier said. “And the only thing that’s really changed is this data center interest in the state.”

In one sense, Georgia Power does not dispute this.

“80% of the growth that we are seeing in the state of Georgia is data centers,” said Georgia Power spokesperson Meredith Stone. “They’re here. They’re coming. There’s no way around that.”

But in the next breath, Stone offered a counterpoint.

“Georgia is also the fourth-largest growing state, meaning people are moving to Georgia because there’s



PHOTO BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP / GPB NEWS

Cynthia Van Epps stands below the existing powerline behind her home in the town of Palmetto, southwest of Atlanta. Van Epps says a new transmission line of similar size may be within yards of her bedroom once Georgia Power obtains some of her land.

opportunity here,” she said.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the state population was already growing at that clip under the older, far less expansive plan for grid expansion through 2032. But Stone said Georgia Power has a duty to reliably serve its customers.

“Whether they’re large load customers like data centers or they’re small businesses or residential customers,” she said.

In this case, serving that customer base means taking property. That’s some 300 properties along the Plant Wansley expansion alone.

Stone said Georgia Power prefers to strike a deal to buy rather than resort to taking through eminent domain. Stone said the utility offers 125% over fair market value as their first offer.

From her backyard with its own pool, Cynthia Van Epps said she wasn’t interested. She said she’s a holdout.

“100%. And now, when I say I am

a holdout, our price hasn’t changed,” Van Epps said as hummingbirds whipped by and three small, motorized waterfalls poured into her pool. She called Georgia Power’s starting offer a “lowball.”

“They’re going to start there, and then they’re going to try to look like good guys by increasing it a little bit,” she said.

Van Epps said she wants “like for like” for her property, but for what Georgia Power has offered, there just isn’t another home near hers in the town of Palmetto that offers the same comforts. At her age, she isn’t interested in rebuilding, either.

“I’m going to be 58 here shortly,” she said. “This house wasn’t for sale.”

And so she is prepared to wait for what she expects to be a kind of court-based arbitration for her final deal.

She expects the new 500-kilovolt power lines to be about 12 feet from her bedroom window after Georgia Power takes what they need.

Claudia and Blake Moore are still wrestling with what to do next.

“You know, we bought only three years ago,” Claudia Moore said. “So, it’s like we had all these dreams, aspirations for this land. And also, I just don’t think that we’re going to get what we want for it now.”

Cynthia Van Epps can’t understand how any of it is legal.

“That isn’t something that a publicly held company should be able to do to individual homeowners,” Van Epps said.

But attorney Bob Sherrier said it is all allowed under Georgia law.

“These rules haven’t been updated in a long time,” Sherrier said. “And things have changed.”

He said changing the rules would fall to the Georgia Legislature, which won’t be in full session until January 2027.

This story comes to The Melody through a reporting partnership with GPB News, a non-profit newsroom covering the state of Georgia.

BUDGET

Continued from Page 1

district losing \$2 million in state revenue next year due to enrollment losses.

The enrollment decrease can be attributed at least in part to the Georgia Promise Scholarship. The school choice voucher program, which started in fall 2025, currently offers \$6,500 per year for a public school student’s enrollment in private school or another non-public education option.

In its first year, the program handed out 582 scholarships to Bibb County students, which at the time constituted 2.75% of the district’s population.

State strains

More than half of the district’s funding comes from the state as a mix of grants and an allotment of general funds, but the Georgia General Assembly has added a number of unfunded mandates to the district’s obligations.

Lawmakers have offered the district some financial relief in the form of a one-time poverty grant and equalization funds, but district officials said the new legislative mandates have strained an already complicated situation.

Since 2022, the state has tacked on \$11 million in state health benefit increases, with the largest jump being a \$5.5 million increase between 2024 and 2025.

That’s more than a 100% increase, Bush told board members last month, and even though the state does reimburse some of those expenses, not every teacher’s benefits are fully covered. The district is also paying more — \$3 million more this year — for retirement benefits, according to budget documents.

The state has also dictated that literacy coaches are to be placed in every elementary school, a move approved by legislators this past session. Those new employees will cost the district a total of \$2.38 million, with the state only providing \$1.14 million of that.

Additionally, lawmakers have hampered the district’s ability to raise property taxes. Senate Bill 33, passed earlier this year, limits increases in a home’s assessed value to the rate of inflation. That valuation is used to determine tax rates.

Board President Daryl Morton said board members will need to study state funding levels from future legislative sessions, saying Senate Bill 33’s impact is not yet known.

“It’s going to be a wait-and-see until you see the practical impact,” he said.

Rising costs

The Consumer Price Index, recorded by the U.S. Labor Department, is the average change over time in prices paid for consumer goods and services.

According to a district presentation, the rate of inflation, as measured by the index, has outpaced the district’s total tax revenue growth by 3%.

Additionally, rising fuel prices have squeezed the district’s budget and prompted board members to inquire about the use of district vehicles and travel funds.

Bush said costs have increased across nearly every budget line, resulting in a cumulative effect that is difficult to quantify purchase by purchase.

Potential fixes

To counter the difficult financial situation, the board has decided to cut salary step increases, eliminate vacant roles, outsource paraprofessional hires and make spending cuts across departments. Those cuts amount to around \$10.86 million. Another option, which would have put numerous positions on a five-day furlough and saved about \$1.4 million, was explored but didn’t make it to a board vote.

Despite the state’s recent action capping increases in property values, the board could still decide to increase the millage rate, which is the tax rate used to calculate local property taxes.

In May, the board discussed an increase of two mills, which could bring in an additional \$9 million in revenue, but the matter didn’t move forward at the time. Last year, board members opted to increase property taxes by 5%.

Declining enrollment and aging facilities have also led the district to explore closing schools. District officials considered shuttering L.H. Williams, Porter and Hartley elementary schools last year, and the school board recently ordered district staffers to again review consolidation opportunities.

Redistributing students into fewer schools could save the district \$1.14 million per elementary school, according to

district documents — as long as schools meet the state Department of Education’s 450-student enrollment threshold for maximum funding.

The district has engaged a slew of consultants to explore better efficiency practices and redistributing. The final results of those studies are expected later this summer.

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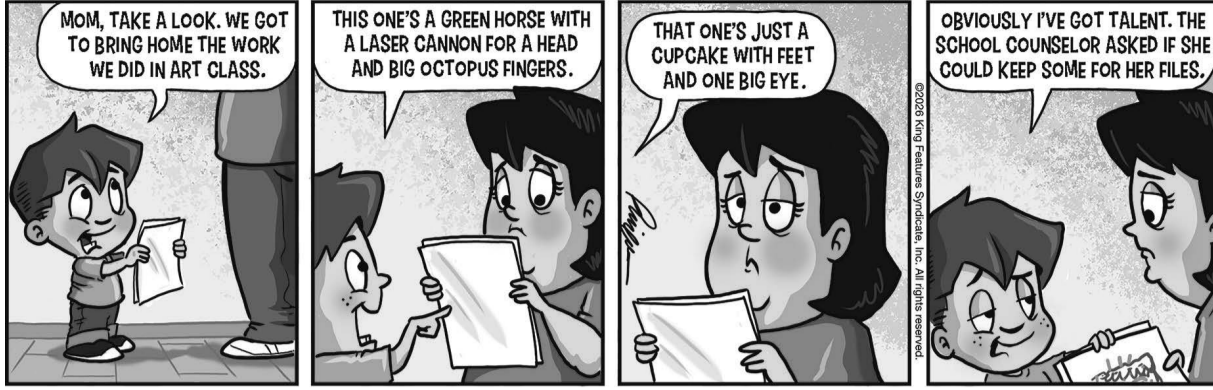
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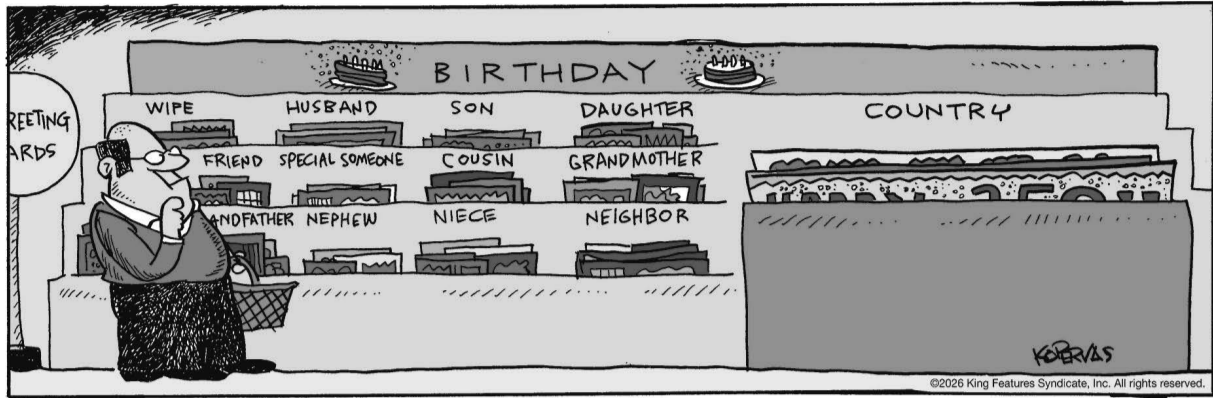
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CryptoQuip

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 S

UPSY M VSS VNQSXP MYO
ESBWWZ KLXS BYF OSX XPS
LEOS XN SQGSWWMVP MX,
M KEZ "PNU BFNEYBGWS!"

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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!

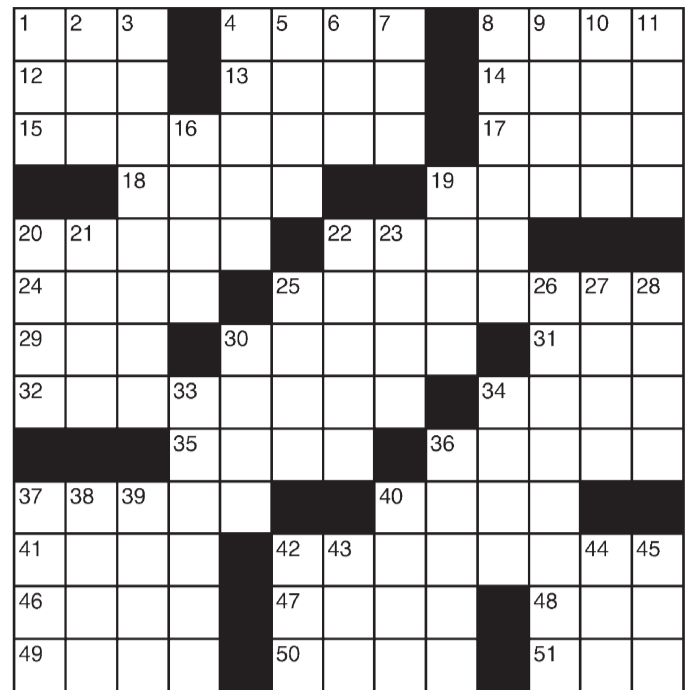
Irony AIRSET
Deal DACCOR
Slice CAVER
Expand DRAPES

TODAY'S WORD

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 "Caught ya!"
- 4 Spring melt-down
- 8 Baby's bed
- 12 Barbecue seasoning
- 13 Meditative exercise
- 14 Verdi heroine
- 15 Muffin-like treats
- 17 General - Chicken
- 18 Couturier Christian
- 19 Bracelet site
- 20 Liniment targets
- 22 "Arrivederci -"
- 24 One-named supermodel
- 25 Castle features
- 29 Unruly group
- 30 Ram
- 31 Solidify
- 32 Short extracts
- 34 Taj Mahal site
- 35 TV host Kelly
- 36 Analyze
- 37 Poultry choice
- 40 Humdrum
- 41 Honker
- 42 Marching band section
- 46 Scrambled wd.



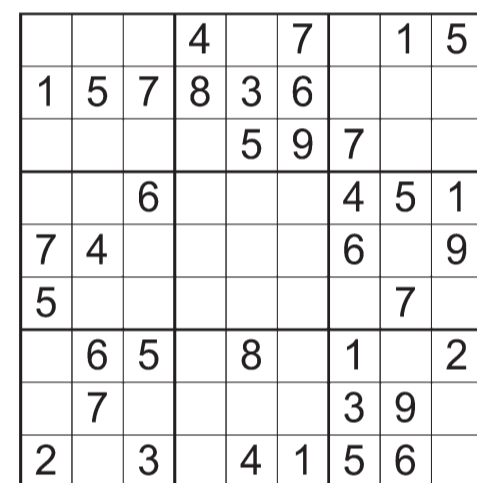
DOWN

- 1 Curved line
- 2 "Ben-"
- 3 Middle Eastern capital
- 4 Printing errors
- 5 Farmer, at times
- 6 Literary rep

- 7 Existed
- 8 40 winks
- 9 Jeopardize
- 10 Teen fave
- 11 Pyramid part
- 16 Carriage
- 19 You love (Lat.)
- 20 Goals
- 21 "Let's go!"
- 22 Indian yogurt dish
- 23 Unrefined metals
- 25 Get ready, briefly
- 26 Paint finish
- 27 Prefix with byte
- 28 Do in
- 30 Neat as -
- 33 Plug parts
- 34 Now, on a memo
- 36 Makeup brand
- 37 Scorch
- 38 Highly rated
- 39 Baby carriage
- 40 Duelist Aaron
- 42 Youngster
- 43 MGM rival
- 44 Eastern path
- 45 Boston team, for short

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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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Five Spot™

A quieter approach



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

FiveSpot is a trademark of Michael McLinden
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02645

Trivia test

by Fifi Rodriguez

- TELEVISION: Which TV sitcom features a pet pig named Arnold Ziffel?
- GEOGRAPHY: Which three countries make up Scandinavia?
- MONEY: When was the euro currency introduced?
- MEDICAL TERMS: What is a more common name for myocardial infarction?
- MYTHOLOGY: Who is the Egyptian god of the underworld?
- MOVIES: What is the building whose steps Rocky Balboa climbs triumphantly in the movie "Rocky"?
- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: Which three signs of the Zodiac are considered to be water signs?
- GAMES: How many wooden blocks are in a game of Jenga?
- U.S. STATES: Which state is home to the Petrified Forest National Park?
- ANATOMY: Which system in the human body is responsible for hormone production and regulation?

DIVORCE

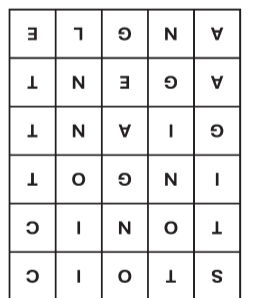
Today's Word

3. Carve; 4. Spread

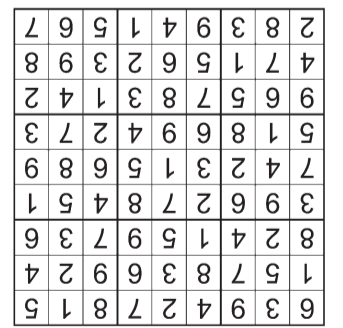
1. Saffron; 2. Accord

solution

SCRAMBLERS



FiveSpot™ solution



Answer

Weekly SUDOKU

When I see something really cute and get the urge to embellish it, I cry "How adorable!"

CryptoQuip answer

- "Green Acres"
- Denmark, Sweden and Finland
- 1999
- Heart attack
- Ostis
- The Philadelphia Museum of Art
- PISCES, CANCER and SCORPIO
- 54
- Arizona
- Endocrine

Solution time: 26 mins.

King Crossword Answers

Answers

CreekFest celebrates 10 years of Macon's local Americana and roots radio station

The Creek radio station is flowing into the future with CreekFest, a street party Saturday from 4-9 p.m. in celebration of its 10 year anniversary.

The locally programmed station at 100.9 FM will mark the occasion on Cherry Street with live music from bands with deep Macon ties, music-related goods and a variety of local craft drinks.

Attendees will also get a glimpse into the local music businesses that reflect Macon's vibrant music scenes and history.

The lowdown on Saturday's CreekFest

"CreekFest is more than a celebration of a radio station," said Susie Cowan, general manager of The Creek. "It's a celebration of Macon's living musical legacy. For 10 years, The Creek has carried forward the stories and sounds that define this city.

"CreekFest brings that mission to life in the most authentic way possible: live, in the streets, with the community."

Cowan said CreekFest performers represent "the next generation of Georgia artists that you hear on The Creek's airwaves," and added that most have newly released music to perform.

The lineup

Supper — An Atlanta-based five-piece band that digs deep into the rich cultural heritage that shaped the American sound to create soulful blues and funk.

Brother Wallace — A Georgia-bred artist who's shared the stage with gospel legend Kirk Franklin, performed at historic venues like Madison Square Garden and served as a background vocalist for the rock band The Heavy. His own album is on the verge of being released.

Mike Mattison & Trash Magic — Mattison is a singer-songwriter and founding member of the blues/roots group Scrapomatic. He has also been a member of the Tedeschi Trucks Band and Derek Trucks Band for 22 years, penning some of their signature songs and scooping up accolades along the way, including two Grammys for best blues album, eight Blues Music Awards



Michael W. Pannell

from the Blues Music Foundation and four Canadian Maple Blues Awards. "Turn a Midnight Corner" is the prolific Mattison's third solo outing, for which he's also working on a novella of the same name.

Andy Thomas — Thomas has worked his way up the ranks as an electrifying guitarist across the United States and abroad, whether fronting his Trongone Band or as guitarist for the acclaimed Americana act Yarn. His debut album, "Highway Junkie," was produced by Dave Schools, bassist for Widespread Panic, and delivers fiery Southern rock and high-octane country blues.

But Cowan said not all the attention will be on the CreekFest stage located around the intersection of Cherry and Third streets.

"The theme of CreekFest is Music Made, and we've invited businesses and brands inspired by music," she said. "It's not going to be your normal arts and crafts market. Capricorn Studios will be there, The Big House, GabbaFest, Bragg Jam, Macon Pops and others with information about themselves and promoting their upcoming events.

Cowan noted that there will also be music-related items for sale.

"Even though the acts at this event aren't directly from Macon, they're connected, and the entire event is about supporting music in Macon," she said.

Bottom line: Grab a lawn chair, get downtown, check out some booths, grab a meal at one of many outstanding restaurants, grab a beverage and enjoy some fine music — and maybe a toast to 10 years of The Creek on air.

A little Creek history: real people. real music.

The Creek's airwave roots go back to the early days of Middle Georgia radio when, in 1945, it was WNEC-AM and featured the likes of Charlie "Peanut" Faircloth's "Hoedown Party" and Del Ward's "Across the Breakfast Table."

After many iterations over the



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE CREEK

The Creek celebrates its 10th anniversary Saturday with a block party downtown. Charles Davis has been on air all that time, just one of the many bringing "Real Music. Real People" to Macon and beyond.

years, the pivotal Creek moment came when Wes Griffith, Rob Evans and Brad Evans took over and created a uniquely Macon station featuring Americana and roots music from Macon.

While almost all other U.S. stations had turned to nonlocal, corporate programming, they did the impossible and made The Creek a viable voice for the city, featuring local personalities doing local shows and interviews with hometown folks and bands traveling through. There from the beginning was Macon singer-actor Charles Davis, who still hosts the signature "Creekside Mornings" show.

Other shows you won't hear elsewhere include "Jukin'," hosted by Big Mike of the Booty Papas; "The Whipping Post Big House Radio Hour"; Justin Cutaway's "Local Load-In"; Kirk West's "Into the Mystic"; Jeff Hall's "Gospel Gothic"; and more — so many more, including "Creekside Sports," featuring renowned sports journalist Daniel Shirley of The Athletic and Steve Norris.

Though thoroughly a hometown Macon station, The Creek's reach goes surprisingly beyond the city, thanks to online streaming.

With that online factor consid-

ered, 75% of Creek listeners visit the station's website, with the ranking of top user cities going in this order: Atlanta, Macon, Chicago, Dallas, Birmingham, New York, Miami and Warner Robins. As for countries, the U.S. is tops, followed by Canada, the U.K. and Germany.

The Creek rolls on

In 2025, Visit Macon bought The Creek, taking over operations. Most probably haven't noticed changes, but a few are in store.

Don't worry, though. According to Cowan — who's been on the job as general manager for six months and brings a background in both radio and music marketing — the shift in ownership will not change the flavor of the station or much of what people are used to.

The idea is this: take The Creek's proven foundation and utilize it to its fullest to purposefully market Macon, its music and all the other good things that bring people here.

"Visit Macon is the only tourism office in the world that owns a radio station, so what we're doing is pretty fantastic," Cowan said. "Our motto is that we're broadcasting the Macon experience 24/7. We're broadening our digital footprint, and we're going to flip the script.

"Where we were a local radio station with a global streaming service, we're flipping that to be a global media company with a local radio station. We're in the middle of a huge digital expansion. We're soon going to be launching a new website. We're going to be adding streaming, podcasting and other features. We'll be telling the story of Macon from all different perspectives."

The new website is set to launch in several weeks, keeping with The Creek's actual birthday on July 8. There will be a new website address — streamthecreek.com — when it launches, but Cowan said the current thecreekfm.com will bounce visitors there when the time comes.

And another big, for-the-better change is The Creek's location. Renovations are underway, and in 2027, The Creek will move to the ground floor of the old Bibb Theatre along with Rock Candy Tours and a Visit Macon gift shop. Plans are for The Creek's on-air studio to be behind glass and visible to Third Street passersby and fans.

Pretty cool, huh?

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

BILLY'S LET'S EAT REVIEW

Downtown Macon eateries to compete for Super Spud title in annual French Fry Fight

If there is one thing I have learned during my time writing Billy's Let's Eat Reviews, it is that Macon knows how to turn food into an event.

Late last year, I spent several days making my way through Macon Burger Week. I met restaurant owners, chefs, servers and fellow food lovers. I discovered burgers I never would have ordered on my own and found myself talking about food with complete strangers. It was one of the most enjoyable culinary experiences I've had since moving to Macon.

Just when I thought my waistline had finally recovered, along comes the Downtown Macon French Fry Fight from July 8-10. To me, this further solidifies my love for Macon's growing food scene.

For those who may not be familiar with the event, the French Fry Fight was launched in 2022 as a way to bring people downtown during the summer months. Since then, it has grown into one of Macon's most anticipated food events. What started as a creative competition between local restaurants has evolved into a full-scale battle for what is arguably the most important trophy in downtown dining: bragging rights.

Past winners have included Cashman's



Billy Hennessey

Pub, which captured the inaugural title with its Birria Fries and later returned to reclaim the crown with its Asian Sesame Fries. Last year, Macon Water Ice shocked the competition by taking home the coveted Super Spud Trophy with Buffalo Mac Fries loaded with macaroni and cheese, buffalo chicken, ranch and buffalo sauce.

If that sounds excessive, you clearly underestimate how seriously Macon takes its potatoes. And let's not forget — I'm Irish and we take our spuds seriously as well. This is an exciting time!

This year's lineup features more than twenty downtown restaurants, and the entries sound absolutely wild. Diners will find everything from butter chicken fries and pineapple mango salmon fries to elote birria pork fries and even chocolate chip cookie fries. Somewhere along the way, this event stopped being about french fries and became a showcase of just how creative Macon's culinary community can be.

What excites me the most about this event is that it encourages people to step outside

their comfort zones. Much like Burger Week, it gives diners a reason to visit restaurants they may have never tried before. You might walk into a restaurant planning to order fries and leave with a new favorite place to eat.

As for me, I have not tasted a single entry yet. That adventure begins soon. Over the course of the event, I plan to make my way through as many participating restaurants as my schedule and stomach will allow. Some entries will undoubtedly be fantastic. Others may leave me questioning the decisions that led mankind to put certain ingredients on top of french fries. Either way, I am looking forward to every bite.

If Burger Week taught me anything, it is that food events like these are about far more than the food itself. They are about community. They are about supporting local businesses. They are about discovering something new in your own backyard.

The 2026 lineup

- Bearfoot Tavern
- Biddy's
- Braddock's
- Cashman's
- Famous Mike's
- Flying Biscuit

- Grant's Lounge
- H&H Soul Food
- Hotel Forty Five/Loom/Hightales
- Jalapeños
- Just Tap'd
- Kudzu Seafood
- Little India
- Longleaf
- Macon Water Ice
- Ocmulgee Brewpub
- Oliver's
- Piedmont
- Satterfield's
- Sweet Eleanor's
- Switch Macon
- The Rookery.

So if you see me wandering around downtown with a notebook in one hand and a basket of fries in the other, stop and say hello. Better yet, tell me which fries I absolutely cannot miss.

My official French Fry Fight mission begins soon, and I cannot wait to share the results with you. Until next time Macon, let's eat some French Fries!

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

Win your health World Cup: Which habits make your starting lineup?

As soccer fans around the world cheer on their favorite teams during the FIFA World Cup, there is an important lesson we can all take from these elite athletes: success rarely depends on a single player.

Championships are won when every member of the team works together toward a common goal. The same is true for our health.

There is no single food, supplement, exercise routine or quick fix that guarantees wellness. Instead, lasting health is built through a strong lineup of daily habits working together to help us perform at our best.

So, as you enjoy the excitement of the World Cup, consider this question: What does your personal health lineup look like?

Goalkeeper: sleep

Every great soccer team depends on a goalkeeper to protect the net. In the same way, quality sleep serves as the foundation of good health. Sleep affects everything from immune function and mood to heart health and weight management. Most adults should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night, but the quality of that sleep matters just as much as the number of hours.

Creating a consistent bedtime



Joy L. King

routine, limiting screen time and bright light exposure in the evening, and reducing caffeine and alcohol intake can all help improve sleep quality. Protecting your sleep may be one of the most important plays you make for your health.

Defenders: preventive care

Defenders work hard to stop problems before they reach the goal. Preventive healthcare serves a similar purpose.

Regular checkups, screenings, vaccinations and routine lab work can help identify health concerns early, often before symptoms appear. Preventive care is one of the most effective strategies for maintaining long-term health.

Midfielders: nutrition

Midfield players connect offense and defense while covering a great deal of the field. Nutrition functions much the same way by fueling every system in the body. The major midfield players on your nutrition team include essential vitamins and minerals such as vitamin D, vitamin C,

limiting screen time and bright light exposure in the evening, and reducing caffeine and alcohol intake can all help improve sleep quality. Protecting your sleep may be one of the most important plays you make for your health.



PHOTO FROM UNSPLASH

Taking care of your health can be likened to a strong soccer team. Your well-being is dependent on a variety of “teammates” working together to help you reach your health World Cup.

B vitamins, calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron. Together, these nutrients support immune function, energy production, bone health and overall well-being.

Focus on building meals that include fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains and healthy fats to ensure your body gets the nutrients it needs to perform at its best.

Forwards: physical activity

Forwards create scoring opportunities and keep the team moving toward victory. Physical activity

does the same for our health. Regular movement can reduce the risk of chronic disease, improve mental health, strengthen muscles and bones and boost energy levels.

Remember, movement does not have to happen in a gym. Walking, dancing, gardening, or playing outside with children or grandchildren all count.

The Coach: your healthcare team

Even the most talented athletes benefit from guidance. Physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharma-

cists, dietitians, therapists and other healthcare professionals can help develop a personalized game plan based on your unique health needs and goals.

The Fans: family, friends and community

No team succeeds entirely on its own. Encouragement and accountability from family, friends, coworkers, faith communities and neighbors can make healthy habits easier to maintain. Surround yourself with people who support your wellness journey and celebrate your progress along the way.

As the World Cup reminds us, success is rarely achieved by one player alone. Building a healthier life requires teamwork, consistency and commitment. This month, take a moment to evaluate your own starting lineup.

Are there areas that need strengthening? What small change can you make today to improve your health tomorrow? You may not be competing on the world stage, but every healthy choice brings you one step closer to your own championship.

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

What's the buzz about national pollinator week?

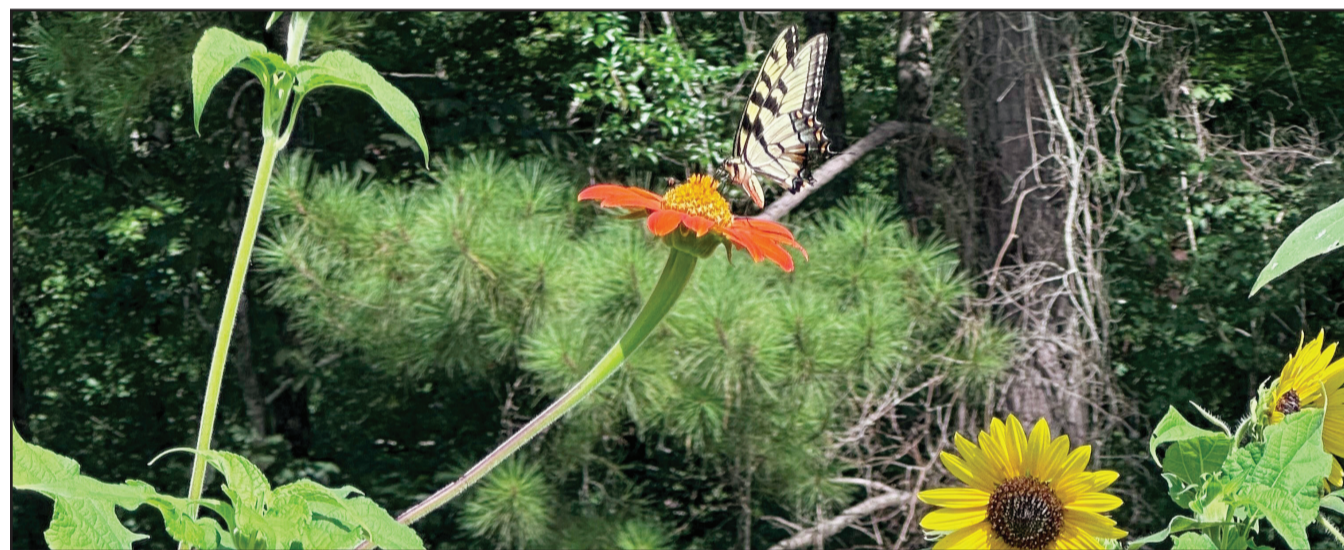


PHOTO BY KATHLEEN MCKINNEY

The Mexican Sunflowers bloom until the first frost and grows tall in poor soil and heat.

BIBB COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

UGA Cooperative Extension Service
extension.uga.edu

Pollinators are involved in the production of a whopping one-third of the food we eat, yet many pollinator populations have declined in recent decades.

In recognition of their importance to both agriculture and ecosystem health, in 2007 the United States Senate designated the last full week in June as National Pollinator Week.

A pollinator is an animal that moves pollen between flowers, a critical step in the development of fruits and seeds for many crops and native plants. One of the easiest ways homeowners can support these important creatures is by planting a pollinator garden.

To celebrate National Pollinator Week, three Bibb County Master Gardeners have shared their favorite pollinator plants. Each selection offers something unique, but all attract a remarkable diversity of pollinators while adding beauty and interest to the landscape.

Mountain Mint: A Pollinator Powerhouse

By Becca Gay

The first season I planted Clustered Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), it became my favorite pollinator plant! Native to much of North America, this plant is truly a feast for the senses.

The flower heads bloom for weeks and are surrounded by showy, silvery bracts making the entire plant glow. Rub your hands through the leaves for an intoxicating aroma.

Then notice the plethora of pollinators large and small — including

butterflies, wasps, beetles, and a multitude of bees — eagerly buzzing everywhere. It's no wonder that UGA and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia named Mountain Mint its summer-blooming Georgia Pollinator Plant of the Year in 2022!

A member of the Mint Family (Lamiaceae), Mountain Mint is a vigorous grower. If naturalizing is unwanted, prune roots with a spade to keep clumps from spreading.

It also performs nicely in containers, making it well-suited for gardeners with smaller yards who still want to attract pollinators.

While Mountain Mint is a native favorite known for attracting a wide variety of insects, other pollinator plants offer season-long color and benefits for wildlife.

Purple Coneflower: A True Perennial Standout

By Anne Tunnessen

Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a standout pollinator plant that blooms reliably from early summer to mid-fall. The original (straight species) grows 3-4 feet tall and has pinkish-purple blooms.

Available cultivars come in colors ranging from white to deep raspberry, although I have noticed fewer pollinators on my white cultivar.

They can also vary greatly in size: one of mine grows to almost 6 feet tall, while my 'Kismet Raspberry' reaches only 18 inches. Plant them in full sun to partial shade.

Once established, they are drought tolerant. Let a few flowers age on the stem and you may attract some goldfinches!

For gardeners looking to make a bold statement during Georgia's hottest months, another pollinator favorite towers above the crowd with vibrant color and nonstop blooms.

Mexican Sunflower: A Heat-Loving Pollinator Magnet

By Kathleen McKinney

When asked to write about my favorite pollinator plant, I thought of a video I took in my yard for the Great Southeast Pollinator Census in August 2025. The plant that stood out among my pollinators was the Mexican Sunflower (*Tithonia rotundifolia*).

Varieties of pollinators “jockeyed” for their place on these tall plants with their vibrant red-orange blooms like children playing the game “King of the Mountain.”

My census captured butterflies such as Black and Tiger Swallowtails, Monarchs, Gulf Fritillaries, Yellow Sulphurs and Skippers. Other pollinators included hummingbirds, dragonflies, moths, flies and bees.

Mexican Sunflowers are easy to grow and bloom continuously until the first frost. They grow tall and will thrive in poor soil and hot summer weather. An additional benefit is their deer tolerance.

Whether your garden is large or small, there are countless plants that can support pollinators while creating a beautiful landscape. Trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals all play a role by providing nectar, pollen and larval food sources throughout the year.

By selecting a variety of plants with different bloom times, gardeners can help support pollinators from spring through fall.

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service provides resources for gardeners as well as educational services and community support.

Visit their office at 715 Oglethorpe Street, call them at 748-310-5350 or email their staff at bibb.extension@uga.edu.

The Great Southeast Pollinator Census for 2026 is scheduled for August 20-21.

This citizen science project, launched by the University of Georgia in 2019, has since expanded to include participants from six southeastern states.

It provides an opportunity for residents to contribute valuable pollinator data while learning more about the insects and animals visiting their own gardens.



PHOTO BY BECCA GAY

Mountain Mint glows with its silvery bracts and releases an intoxicating aroma from its leaves.

SPORTS

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BACK IN THE SADDLE

Mount de Sales legend Robert Slocum is back with the Cavaliers — and he's looking for a resurgence



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Mount de Sales head coach Robert Slocum totes a football in front of the scoreboard on Mount de Sales' field after summer workouts one June morning. Slocum coached at Mount de Sales from 1991 to 2013 and brought the school its only football state championship.

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
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As soon as you pull up to Mount de Sales' sports facilities at Cavalier Fields in west Macon, it's easy to see the impact Robert Slocum had on the program.

For starters, the coach's name is on the side of the field house in broad, white lettering.

Once you go inside, you'll find the trophies he's won — a state championship in 1996, some coach of the year awards and more. He also has a plaque showing him in his football uniform from his playing days, denoting his induction into Mount de Sales' hall of fame.

The reverence is well-earned. Slocum won 134 games with the Cavaliers as head coach and many more as a standout rusher. He reached the state title game twice and won it once against a local rival, the Tattnall Trojans.

One thing that might not be immediately apparent, though, is that Robert Slocum has returned.

The legendary head coach signed on with the Cavaliers again in March. The man who led Mount de Sales' football team into battle for decades is back at the helm.

But make no mistake — this return to his alma mater is no glamorous trip of nostalgia for Slocum.

"This team has had some tough times recently," the Cavaliers legend said. "We want to change that."

How it happened

While Slocum's coaching days at Mount de Sales ended in 2013, he remained heavily involved with the school until he left entirely in 2021. He then worked with the GISA — which became the GIAA for the 2022-23 year — in multiple roles.

"I never really fully stepped away from Mount de Sales, though," Slocum said. "The AD would still call me and pick my

brain for things. I never snoop or pry, but if they ask my opinion, I'll give it to them."

This meant that when the school began a football coaching search earlier this year, it was an easy decision to call Slocum to ask for advice. He gave some names. Mount de Sales thought they had the right candidate in place, but the hiring fell through just two days before a contract was supposed to be signed, Slocum said.

From there, the phone calls started to have a different tone.

"They asked if I would be interested (in being the head coach). I told them, 'Let's just take it a couple more weeks. ... If it doesn't work out, I can give you a couple years,'" Slocum said. "They knew I wasn't in it for the long haul."

And yet, when other potential coaches recommended by Slocum didn't work out, the lifetime



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE WALTON

Former Mount de Sales quarterback Mike Walton practices while coach Robert Slocum watches in an old photo.

SEE SLOCUM
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NOTEPAD

Woodford transfers to CMU, Mercer extends hoops coach



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Northeast running back Nick Woodford dashes his way past defenders during the Raiders' championship game in 2024. Woodford recently transferred from Morehouse to Central Michigan.

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Former standout Northeast High School running back Nick Woodford is transferring from Morehouse to Central Michigan, the Chippewas football program announced on social media last week.

Woodford, who was a star for the Raiders and helped lead them to a state championship appearance in his senior season in 2024, committed to Morehouse that same year. He accrued 6,282 rushing yards over the course of his career, an all-time Bibb County record. He also had 88 touchdowns.

The playoff run in 2024 marked the first time a Bibb County School District team had made

a state title game since 1975 and cemented Woodford as one of the county's best high school football players.

At Morehouse in 2025, Woodford racked up 427 rushing yards on 105 attempts while tacking on 245 receiving yards on 24 catches. He played in 10 games and started six of them.

Bears extend men's basketball coach

Mercer has extended men's basketball head coach Ryan Ridder through the 2030-31 season, the school announced earlier this month.

Ridder, who arrived at Mercer for the 2024-25 campaign and led the Bears to a 19-13 overall record and 11-7 record in the Southern Conference. Mercer had one of the conference's top offenses

behind standout transfers Armani Mighty and Baraka Okojie, who were both on the All-SoCon teams at season's end.

"I want to thank President Penny Elkins, Athletics Director Jim Cole and the entire Mercer University community for the opportunity to continue to lead the men's basketball program," Ridder said in a press release. "My family and I are so excited to be at Mercer and build on the foundation that we have laid. This is a special place, and we are grateful to be here."

The Bears bowed out of the conference tournament in the first round in both of Ridder's first two seasons. Ridder will be tasked once more with retooling

SEE NOTEPAD
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Macon Bacon theme nights

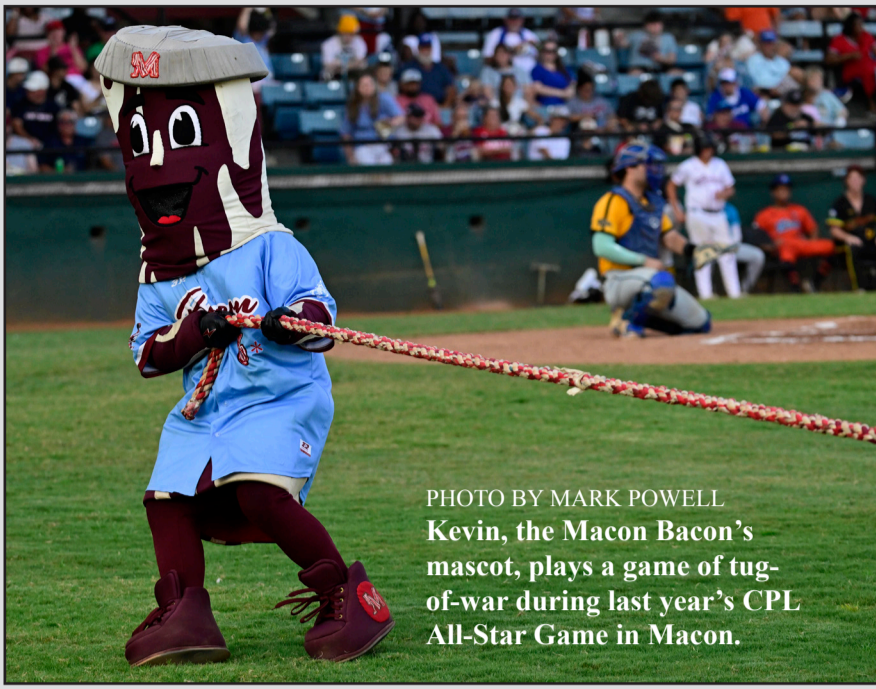


PHOTO BY MARK POWELL
Kevin, the Macon Bacon's mascot, plays a game of tug-of-war during last year's CPL All-Star Game in Macon.

As the Macon Bacon season ramps up, the team will host a variety of theme nights with unique uniforms and celebrations across the summer. The team will have themes revolving around everything from holidays to superheroes to different musical acts, all with intriguing spins to the game and team outfits. Here's a list of different theme nights coming up at historic Luther-Williams Field.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26
Strike Out Cancer night + Fireworks

SATURDAY, JUNE 27
Alter Ego Night

THURSDAY, JULY 2
Allman Brothers Night + Happy Hour

SATURDAY, JULY 4
Americas Celebration

THURSDAY, JULY 9
Game Show Night + Happy Hour

SATURDAY, JULY 11
Hawaiian Night

FRIDAY, JULY 17
80s Night + Jackie Robinson Celebration

SATURDAY, JULY 18
Country Night/Alter Ego

THURSDAY, JULY 23
Christmas in July + Happy Hour

SATURDAY, JULY 25
Princesses and Pirates + Military Appreciation

SATURDAY, AUG. 1
Closing Night

NOTEPAD

Continued from Page 11

Mercer's roster with transfers and new signees, though the head coach has proved in the past his knack for team construction.

Former Tattnall star pitches in College World Series

A former Macon baseball player recently pitched on college baseball's biggest stage.

Benjamin Stubbs, a former Tattnall Trojan who graduated in 2022, is a top pitcher in the rotation for the Troy Trojans, who upset the No. 8 Florida Gators twice in the Gainesville regional to advance before defeating Little Rock to reach the College World Series.

Stubbs pitched twice in the regionals, allowing three runs in 5 and 1/3 innings against Miami before pitching one scoreless inning on short rest against Florida. He pitched well against Little Rock, firing six innings and only allowing two runs. His final outing of the year against West Virginia was a bit bumpier with four earned runs in 3 and 2/3 innings pitched.

Stubbs was a standout for Tattnall in high school, setting the school record for strikeouts and earning all-state first team honors as a pitcher.

Macon players, coaches honored by GIAA

The GIAA announced its all-star squads for the 2026 soccer and baseball seasons earlier this month, with several Macon schools represented on rosters.

Boys and girls soccer each

have two all-star teams, red and blue, while baseball featured four teams: red, blue, Carolina blue and white.

After winning the GIAA Class 4A State Championship, the FPD Vikings had four players on all-star rosters. Wyatt Waters, Major Simmons, Conner Strandmark and Brady McHugh all appeared on the list, with Strandmark and McHugh appearing on the same team.

Other Macon schools had representatives as well. Marquez Wilson, Wyatt Still and Braxton Collins represented Tattnall on rosters. Mount de Sales' CJ Preyna was also named an all-star. Stratford, the state runner-up after losing to FPD in the championship series, had no players on the roster.

On the girls soccer side, the Stratford team that defeated FPD to win the Class 4A title had three representatives: Maggie Jamison, Campbell McIntyre and Stella McIntyre. Sophia Wrabel, Elcee Leslein and Addison Kelley were all-stars for FPD. Emory Andrews and Morgan Gunningham, who helped Central Fellowship win its third consecutive championship, also made all-star teams. Covenant was represented by Bethany Wiley, while Mount de Sales' Laura Sparks was named an all-star.

The boys' all-star teams included Alex Roseboro and Jack Bearden from Mount de Sales. Judson Walls represented Central Fellowship on the boys' all-star teams as well.

Some local teams also had coaches selected for the staff. The

girls' blue team will be coached by Stratford's Kate Blankenship and CFCA's Teddy Tanner. The boys' blue team is led by Iain Jones of Stratford, while Mount de Sales head coach Robert Ochieng heads the red team.

Some of those coaches also won Coach of the Year Awards. Tanner, Blankenship and FPD baseball coach Greg Moore all won COTY for their respective classifications.

MGA alum nets unique baseball opportunity

A former Middle Georgia State University baseball player earned a spot on a baseball team that will compete with the Savannah Bananas, the university announced last week.

Chris Burgess, a former catcher for the Knights, will join a team called the Indianapolis Clowns — the same moniker as a legendary Negro League team that existed from the 1930s-60s — in the Banana Ball world of baseball.

The Savannah Bananas began as a summer wooden bat league team but have evolved over the past decade into a sort of "Harlem Globetrotters" approximation of baseball, travelling the country and playing baseball laden with gimmicks, games and unique twists. The Bananas have added teams in recent years to compete against on tour, with the Clowns being the newest.

Burgess spent time in different minor and independent baseball leagues, including within the Baltimore Orioles' system, before joining Indianapolis.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Troy pitcher Benjamin Stubbs winds up to hurl a pitch toward home plate during a game this season. Stubbs, a Tattnall alum and Macon native who transferred to Troy from Flagler, represented Macon in the College World Series after Troy knocked off Miami, Florida and others en route to the final stages of the college baseball tournament.

SLOCUM

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Cavalier answered the call.

As he told Mount de Sales himself, Slocum doesn't think he'll be in the head coaching role for more than a few seasons, certainly not as long as his original coaching stint with the Cavs. But there's work to be done, and he agreed to be the man for the job.

A long road

The Cavaliers have struggled on the gridiron of late in an off-shifting football landscape, failing to secure a winning season since the 2020 campaign under Keith Hatcher, who is now the coach at ACE. Even that was a 6-5 effort — Mount de Sales football has achieved double-digit wins just twice since the turn of the century, and one of those occasions was when Slocum was still the head coach.

The Cavaliers have gone 2-8, 3-8 and 1-9 in their past three seasons.

"I like this program. I want to see it do well," Slocum said. "But it's a hard sell because of the way it's been going. We've had seniors decide not to play because of their past experience. ... That's what we're fighting against now, is changing the culture."

"People might think we're rivals, but we developed a relationship where we're friends. On Friday nights we might not be,

but the next day ... people would see us getting breakfast together and give us that weird look, like, 'What are you up to?'" Slocum said of Hester.

Their relationship was so close that when Hester returned to Tattnall last year, he picked up the phone and punched in a familiar number.

"(Barney) approached me about coming over and helping him," Slocum said. "I told him: 'Barney, the people at Mount de Sales would burn my house down.' But I've learned a lot from Barney. We're friends."

Friends or not, that matchup against Tattnall is one of many fierce rivalries in town that Mount de Sales wants to be competitive in again.

It won't be all rosy for Slocum in his return to these halls, but his dedication to the program might offer an opening to turn things around.

Slocum went to Mount de Sales himself. So did his sisters and brothers, his son and daughter. The Cavaliers hired a basketball coach this spring as well, one who just so happens to be the star quarterback from Slocum's state championship team, Michael Walton.

There's also familiar faces on opposite sidelines. The man Slocum so often clashed with in championship games of epic proportions, Tattnall legend Barney Hester, is back with the Trojans



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Mount de Sales head football coach Robert Slocum holds a Cavaliers helmet in the halls of the team's field house, which is named after him, at Mount de Sales' Cavalier Fields in Macon. The field house also contains many of the trophies Slocum won in his first stint with the team from 1991 to 2013.

as well.

All that time spent as a Cavalier, he hopes, will impress his mindset onto the young players donning the blue-and-gold this season.

Slocum's love for Mount de Sales will have to catch on with the roster quickly. Because of how the hiring process played out, the

head coach couldn't have spring practices and was busy finding a coaching staff instead.

"Now we're just learning names, seeing what things we might need to improve and things like that," Slocum said.

Ultimately, Slocum's situation boils down to that of a legend trying to rekindle a program's fire,

one that's been doused for decades. He loves to coach

"I don't relish it," Slocum said. "It's like I'm new again. There's new formations, they might have added a wrinkle here and there.

"But at the end of the day, you still got to block. You still got to tackle. It's the same game."