

# The Macon Melody

\$2.00 » VOL. III, NO. 1 » JULY 10, 2026 » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM

## Bibb school budget crisis prompts salary scrutiny

BY CASEY CHOUNG  
Community Reporter  
casey@maconmelody.com

The Bibb County Board of Education’s recent passage of a deficit-ridden budget has prompted public scrutiny of the school system’s finances, particularly the payroll.

While the board managed to narrow its projected shortfall from \$23 million to \$15 million by freezing open positions, eliminating employee step increases and trimming depart-

mental inefficiencies, the fiscal crisis intensified questions about spending priorities.

Community engagement was low at last month’s public hearings, with only a handful of residents attending to listen to the board’s presentation on proposed cuts. At one of the meetings, a resident urged board members to take a hard look at the personnel and the salaries in the school district’s central office before considering any tax increase.

Many more residents, however,

have taken to social media to voice concerns about the salaries paid to people at the top.

Board member Henry Ficklin has expressed similar concerns. He said the school district’s salary distribution is very “top heavy,” and the board could “go a long way” to balance the budget by removing unneeded positions.

He said the board needs to prioritize paying certified teachers more to keep them from going to work in neighboring counties.

“We need the money in the classrooms, where the teachers are,” Ficklin said.

So, how do the salaries in Bibb County compare to elsewhere?

The median pay for a high school teacher this past school year in the Bibb County district is \$57,911, according to information acquired through a Melody open records request.

The base salary for a brand new teacher in Bibb County started at \$48,740, while in Houston County

a teacher starting out earns \$49,980, according to both districts’ pay tables.

While some Bibb County School District administrators make hundreds of thousands of dollars, those salaries fall in line with similar positions around the state.

The Bibb County School District oversees more than 20,000 students and expects to employ more than 2,300 people.

SEE SALARIES  
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## Surviving a heat wave

As temperatures soar, locals help keep Macon’s homeless population safe



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Debra Singleton hands out freezer pops to a gentleman outside of Loaves and Fishes Ministry on July 2 as the organization tries to help people stay safe in the extreme Georgia heat this summer.**

BY ALAYSIA EZZARD  
Community Reporter  
alaysia@maconmelody.com

It was hot last week. It was hot this week. And, you guessed it, it’ll be hot next week, too.

Yes, it’s that time of year. July is historically the hottest month of the year in Macon. But this summer’s temperatures are expected to soar even higher than normal for Middle Georgia, according to the National Weather Service.

While most people can retreat indoors, those who don’t have homes can’t. So, local advocates have swung into action to help Macon’s homeless population sur-

vive a brutal summer.

At Loaves & Fishes Ministry’s outdoor pavilion, at 651 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, anyone can stop in for shade, food, water and rest.

To those who come by, Debra Singleton — a Loaves & Fishes board member, volunteer and spiritual adviser — stresses the need to stay hydrated.

Three decades of data tracking from the National Weather Service shows that extreme heat kills more Americans on average per year than all other major weather events. Dangers include dehydration, heat-stroke and heat exhaustion.

“What is harder to measure is the

additional stress that the heat puts on our bodies and mental health,” said Katherine McLeod, chief executive officer of First Choice Primary, which focuses on medically underserved people in Middle Georgia. “The financial cost — increased electrical bills for A/C — is an indirect stressor for many of our patients.”

Singleton sees that stress. She said people can be testy when they first wander into Loaves & Fishes. To help, she leads those who are homeless to a cool shower and

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## North Macon additions could bring traffic woes



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Costco was recently approved to build a 158,000-square-foot warehouse store across from Dillard’s behind the Shoppes at River Crossing. The busy North Macon area could see an increase in traffic.**

BY LAURA E. CORLEY  
Senior Accountability Reporter  
laura@maconmelody.com

Lindsey Smith can spend up to five grueling minutes on any given day idling in her car at the mouth of her neighborhood, watching a relentless stream of traffic blur past as she waits for a safe break to turn onto the two-lane Bass Road.

Every minute that ticks by adds to her frustration.

“I can leave my house at the same time every day and not know what the traffic’s going to look like,” Smith said, adding that the unpredictable standoffs often threaten to make her late. “Traffic to get out of our neighborhood is already very difficult to manage sometimes — especially when I’m trying to get my kids to school.”

The compounding traffic headache faced by motorists who regularly travel Bass Road, New Forsyth Road and Wesleyan Drive is expected to get worse before it gets any better.

Major retail developments soon

to begin nearly 75 acres away will likely draw even more traffic to the area.

A Costco Wholesale warehouse with a 32-pump fuel station and parking for 873 vehicles is planned on nearly 30 acres near the Shoppes at River Crossing. The Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission voted to approve it for rezoning in late June. And, later this month, the commission is set to decide on a proposed rezoning of about 50 acres across from the coming Costco where a big-box store development called Riverside Centre is planned on New Forsyth Road.

“Bass Road is not set up for the traffic load that the new Costco and the new shopping center would bring,” Smith said. “Pouring more traffic into that area that’s already poorly managed is just a really terrible idea.”

Though the Georgia Department of Transportation plans to widen part of Bass Road that stretches over

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Periodical — Mail Label

## Firefighter overcomes injury, finishes top of class

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON  
Features Editor  
evelyn@maconmelody.com

It takes firefighter Zachary Horton a minute and a half to gear up — 30 seconds less than the state requirement.

Boots, gloves, hood, helmet and a breathing apparatus slip on like second nature. Every second counts for Horton and other employees of the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department.

But this is what they’re trained to do. Horton is the valedictorian of the department’s most recent fire recruit class, 26 people strong. It was a challenging journey.

He first entered training in June 2025, but a stress fracture led to a broken femur that forced him to put class on hold.

“That’s the first thing I thought of when I broke my leg ... ‘I hope that I can still graduate,’” he

recalled.

Horton had surgery to have a metal rod implanted. Instead of training alongside fellow recruits, he set his sights on learning to walk again. He spent 12 weeks in recovery and returned to class after nine weeks — though still unable to participate in some of the physical activities.

Firefighter training consists of four months of both physical and mental tests. Recruits constantly train, run 1.5 miles everyday and take three tests a week.

“You basically don’t have a life outside of training for that four months,” Horton said.

He received full medical clearance the day before he would have graduated from training and enrolled in the next recruit class this past January.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Firefighter Zachary Horton earned his spot as valedictorian of his 26-person fire recruit class last month. On June 22, Horton endured the heat outside of Station 10 on his first day for practice exercises.**

SEE FIREFIGHTER  
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Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

## CRUISE DEALS FOR SENIORS: HOW TO FIND THE BEST PRICE



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# Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

So, you're finally retired. You have the time you need to relax and travel the world via cruise — but you're still on a budget.

Fortunately, seniors who want to take in the sights on a fixed income can still find great cruise deals with these simple tricks.

### CRUISE DEALS FOR SENIORS

Seniors are one of the top demographics on cruise ships, and for good reason.

### WHY SENIORS LOVE CRUISES

Cruises offer plenty of amenities that can make travel easier, even if you've lost some mobility. You don't need to worry about separately scheduling meals, lodging, or entertainment since everything is either on board or planned into your schedule.

Cruises can also be one of the easiest ways to see a variety of destinations without the cumbersome logistics of travel. From one ship, you can visit a dozen European ports, explore the Caribbean, or even travel to Africa!

### THE SENIOR ADVANTAGE FOR DEALS

Most seniors have a few advantages when it comes to booking the best cruise deals:

- Free time to travel. Without work obligations, seniors can be flexible with their vacations and book dates or destinations that offer the best price.
- Last-minute availability. If something pops up on short notice, seniors can grab it!
- Solo or couples travel. Without kids in tow, seniors can book smaller cabins and find package deals for single travelers or couples.

### HOW TO GET THE BEST PRICE: SENIOR OPTIONS

Cruises can be a fantastic deal, but that doesn't mean that every price is a bargain. Here are some of the lesser-known ways to save money on your voyage.

### LOOK FOR BUNDLE DEALS

Some cruise lines offer general price discounts, but these are often less than 15%. The best deals come with add-ons and package offers that don't change the base price but give you far more for your money.

As you compare cruise prices, keep a list of which amenities each cruise includes. While you search for deals, look out for these bundle perks rather than focusing only on the total price.

### BE FLEXIBLE WITH DATES OR DESTINATIONS

Cruise lines offer deep discounts when they have rooms to fill. One of the best ways to get a great deal is by being flexible with your dates and destinations.

Ships that are 30-60 days out from sailing will start trying to fill their empty rooms, so you can often snag a great price. By widening your search to include a variety of destinations and departure days, you'll take advantage of the best offers.

### BOOK INTERIOR CABINS

What you've heard is true: Interior cabins are far less expensive than rooms with views. By sacrificing that view and forgoing a window, you can often sail at almost half the price.

If you're planning to spend most of your time on deck, exploring ports, or visiting with friends in the common areas, the lack of windows in your interior room won't change your experience much.

### BOOK, THEN REBOOK

If you have a particular date or destination in mind, go ahead and book at a rate that seems reasonable. Then, set an alert for price and option changes for that specific cruise (read on for instructions on this process). It's simple to rebook your voyage if something

better becomes available, since most cruise lines don't charge any fees to change your reservation details.

### BEST OPTIONS FOR GETTING ALERTS

Even if you have a lot of free time, checking for cruise deals every day can get tedious. Use one of these systems to automate your search, then take advantage of the results.

### SET UP A GOOGLE ALERT

Google Alerts are great tools for tracking anything new that's published online — including new discounts and specials. If you're trying to watch for cruise deals, a Google alert will be most useful if you know a specific destination or ship you'd like to book.

For detailed instructions on setting up your Google alert, follow these directions. Try some of these phrases to get alerts that are actually useful, then watch your email inbox for the deals:

- **Seniors + cruise + [destination].** For example: "Seniors cruise Portugal"
- **[Cruise line or ship name] + [upcoming two months] + cruise deal.** For example: "Norwegian July August cruise deal"
- **Seniors + bundle deals + cruise + [destination].** For example: "Seniors bundle deals cruise Bahamas"

### SUBSCRIBE TO CRUISE ALERT LISTS

There are many aggregated lists that offer cruise alert deals. This compilation lists some of the best options based on your preferences for cruise line, destination, and discount type.

Pay attention to the guidelines for setting your alerts, though! Getting a notification for every price change will overwhelm you with junk mail. You'll want to set an appropriate price threshold based on the guidelines from All Aboard Cruise Deals.

If you're ready to enjoy your retirement, see the world, and experience the comfort of a cruise, follow these steps to secure the best deal possible!

# FACT BRIEFS

Fact Briefs are sourced answers to questions and claims circulating in our community. They are produced in partnership with Gigafact, a nonprofit that helps local newsrooms address false and misleading information.

Read some of The Melody's recent fact briefs below.  
For more details on sourcing, visit  
[maconmelody.com/gigafact](https://maconmelody.com/gigafact).

## Does affordable housing attract crime?

BY GABRIEL KOPP

Editorial Intern  
[gabriel@maconmelody.com](mailto:gabriel@maconmelody.com)

No. Affordable housing does not attract crime and may even modestly reduce it.

A Stanford study looking at the impact of affordable housing over a ten-year span found that new projects in poorer neighborhoods reduced crime while increasing surrounding

home prices.

Researchers from the University of California, Irvine similarly found violent and property crimes in Orange County, California remained flat or declined slightly overall after low-income housing was introduced while property values rose.

A 2011 study concluded developing affordable housing in "particularly disadvantaged

communities" reduced robberies and assaults by 3%.

Affordable housing, often subsidized by the government, is defined as housing costs that are less than 30% of a tenant's income.

Nearly one in 10 residents of Macon-Bibb County and about 2% of Houston County residents lived in subsidized housing in 2025, according to USAFacts.

## Does an increase in the number of nurse practitioners in underserved communities improve healthcare access?

BY GABRIEL KOPP

Editorial Intern  
[gabriel@maconmelody.com](mailto:gabriel@maconmelody.com)

Yes. Studies have shown an increase in registered nurses across the country can lead to better access to healthcare in rural and underserved communities.

One study found that nurse practitioners "can deliver most of the services that physicians

provide," and the Journal for Nurse Practitioners found their care is "equivalent" to that of physicians.

Outside of medical care at dedicated centers, a report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine said nurse practitioners often enhance public health through at-home check-ups as well as care at schools in low-income communities.

Georgia allows nurses to practice at a restricted scope of practice, according to the KFF, due to state statute. In rural and underserved communities, the limited scope of practice is exacerbated by a reduction of hospitals in rural areas. Since 2010, the state has lost nine rural hospitals, according to the Georgia Recorder.

### SALARIES

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Salaries make up more than \$175 million of the district's \$293 million general fund expenditures, according to the district's June 2026 financial statement.

The district employs 10 assistant superintendents, who oversee everything from principal activities to federal grants to human resources. On average, those employees make \$160,866, which exceeds the state's average of \$154,094 for assistant superintendents.

Superintendent Dan Sims received a three-year contract extension in November 2024. His salary was \$262,000 this past school year, which will bump up to \$275,625 next year, according to figures provided by the district.

However, a discrepancy exists in the state

database, last updated in 2024, where Sims' total compensation was listed at \$329,789. That made him the 20th highest paid superintendent in the state.

By comparison, some Atlanta area school superintendents made nearly twice as much as Sims, according to the state database.

In Richmond County, where Augusta is located, the superintendent pulled in \$195,000. And, in Muscogee County, where Columbus is located, the superintendent made \$287,543, according to a state database.

In Houston County, Superintendent Mark Scott made \$368,000 annually before his retirement, which came after the 2024-25 school year, according to the database.

The public will have another opportunity to comment — on August 12 and August 19 — before the board finalizes the property tax rate on the latter date.

### TRAFFIC

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Interstate 75 to New Forsyth Road, construction is not expected to begin until April 2029.

Jeff Ruggieri, executive director of the Planning & Zoning Commission, recognizes the likelihood that the developments will cause temporary traffic jams.

"Everybody knows that the capacity of Bass Road is being strained," he said.

It's a difficult problem to address, he added, "because of the way it's constructed, with open ditch on both sides and a large powerline easement with large transmission poles on one side."

Ruggieri has read the comments about the developments on social media. People have expressed deep concerns about the impending traffic nightmare that could accompany a new bulk retailer.

"Some 25% of the people love it," Ruggieri said of the planned Costco. "The other 75% are terrified of the traffic."

Quantifying the cumulative projected impact on traffic from the two separate developments is difficult, but Ruggieri said developers of the properties lining New Forsyth Road are studying the feasibility of "controlled intersection improvements, lights, turn lanes, things like that." The developers will pay for any new traffic lights, he said.

State data shows the traffic at New Forsyth and Bass Road has tripled over the past decade, during which time the Academy for Classical Education opened and the new North Macon Plaza was built near I-75.

At one point, GDOT planned to build a roundabout to alleviate traffic at that intersection, which is often clogged during the

school year when classes let out.

Michael Greenwald, administrator for the Metropolitan Planning Organization, said the state's plans for a roundabout at that intersection were scrapped due to environmental and cost-related concerns.

Plans for installing a traffic light and designated turn lanes at New Forsyth and Bass roads are included in GDOT documents.

However, that intersection is part of the state's plan to widen Bass Road, so construction could be years away.

"It's probably going to be a pretty significant choke point in the short term," Greenwald said.

Bobby Hartley's insurance office is next to the planned Costco and across New Forsyth Road from the planned Riverside Centre.

On some afternoons, he said, the logjam from the Academy for Classical Education is so bad that he's forced to postpone his errands.

"Just a simple right-hand turn lane would alleviate a ton" of traffic, he said. "I've been sitting in that situation where, at 3 [p.m.], I've had to actually go across in the oncoming traffic lane and pass several cars just so I can take a right to get there. Or else I'll just sit there."

Witt Gaither, chair of the state charter school's governing board, said the school is keeping "a close eye" on development and expansion in the areas surrounding ACE.

"We are certainly aware of the proposed Costco development and the accompanying commercial projects. While those developments could create more challenging traffic patterns, our student drop-off and pick-up windows generally occur outside the peak retail business hours. We are hopeful that will help minimize any impact on our daily operations."

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# Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



Atrium Health Navicent

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HEAT

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offers them food. Being clean and having proper hygiene plays a big role in someone’s mental health, she said.

The nonprofit has board games set up in the pavilion, which can take guests’ minds off the heat.

Singleton said she wants those who visit the pavilion to know that someone cares about them.

“It’s always about looking at that person and making them feel, ‘She really sees me,’ because sometimes people become faceless,” Singleton said. “Nobody seems to care.”

The Salvation Army, at 1955 Broadway, and the Daybreak Resource Center, at 174 Walnut Street, are also welcoming people in from the heat at their air-conditioned facilities.

The Salvation Army operates a cooling center when the heat index and/or the temperatures reach 100 degrees, and volunteers hand out water to everyone who comes there.

“We definitely don’t want anyone, any individual, to die from heat exhaustion or heatstroke,” said Salvation Army Social Service Director Latresa White. “We here at the Salvation Army open our doors to our neighbors,” which includes homeless individuals, as well as people who have homes but no air conditioning.

The Salvation Army’s outreach also extends to homeless encampment areas. Volunteers pass out food, water and electrolyte mixes.

At least 25 people nationwide have died in the current heat wave, according to media reports.

Atrium Health Navicent Nurse Practitioner Justin Malcom stressed that heat-related illnesses are preventable.

You have to be “heat aware and heat smart,” he said, “which includes staying hydrated, drinking lots of water often, even if you’re not thirsty.”

If you find yourself outside, he recommends incorporating electrolytes in your fluid intake and stopping for frequent breaks in the shade. If possible, plan activities early in the morning or later in the evening when it isn’t as hot.

Homeless people should take note of the local organizations that provide water, he said.

It’s important for everyone to be aware of the signs of heatstroke and heat exhaustion. According to Ready, a national public service campaign from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, signs of a heatstroke are:

- Body temperature above 103 degrees
- Rapid and strong pulse
- Skin that is red, dry and hot without sweat
- Dizziness, confusion or unconsciousness

If you suspect someone is having a heatstroke, call 911 or go to the hospital immediately. If possible, move the person to a shaded area, remove outer clothing, apply an ice-pack to the head, neck, armpits and groin and elevate the person’s feet.

The signs of heat exhaustion, an early warning that a more serious illness might be developing, include:

- Pallor
- Heavy sweating
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness and weakness
- Fast or weak pulse
- Dizziness, fainting, headache, nausea and vomiting

How you can help:

Volunteer at Daybreak. The director there, Sister Deborah Mallott, said the facility is getting short on food and is looking for water, hydration packets, individually wrapped snacks, beef jerky, lemonade mix, canned and fresh fruit, jelly, instant oatmeal and grits, cold cereal, pudding, jello and paper drinking cups. They are also looking for daytime cold medicine, antacid tablets, disinfectant spray and air freshener, as well as new women’s underwear and new men’s T-shirts in all sizes.

The Salvation Army is accepting water, snacks, hygiene products for the showers they offer, magazines and board games. Loaves & Fishes is looking for the same including peanut butter, jelly, crackers, soup as well as clothing and fresh lemons or limes for the water they hand out.

Donations can be dropped off during the week to Daybreak and Loaves & Fishes until 3 p.m. and The Salvation Army until 5 p.m.



PHOTOS BY JASON VORHEES  
**Debra Singleton slices strawberries and oranges to prep, then serves the finished drink at Loaves and Fishes Ministry on July 2. Singleton and others know the risks of high heat during this part of summer.**

**FIREFIGHTER**  
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In June, Horton had his first 24-hour shift at Fire Station No. 10. Inside the Oglethorpe Street station, a bell rings followed by a tone that indicates the type of emergency. Horton stays attuned to the various announcements, ready to jump into action if needed.

“They can teach us a lot of stuff in training, but there’s also a lot of things that they can’t prepare you for,” he said. “You have to take it as it comes.”

But practice doesn’t end after graduation, said Lt. Brandon Teague. It’s actually just begun.

“We need to know that he knows what he’s doing,” he said.

In the afternoon heat outside of the fire station, Teague walks Horton through a practice exercise. He instructs the new firefighter to pull the 4-inch water supply line off the

back of the fire truck and properly connect it to a fire hydrant without letting the massive line get caught on anything — something he said should take roughly 30 seconds. The task requires 26 full rotations of a wrench.

Their work is “organized chaos,” Teague said, but safety is still the most challenging part of the job.

For Horton, having a job that utilizes his body and requires physical activity is what initially made him set out to be a firefighter. A friend who trained as a firefighter also encouraged him to do so.

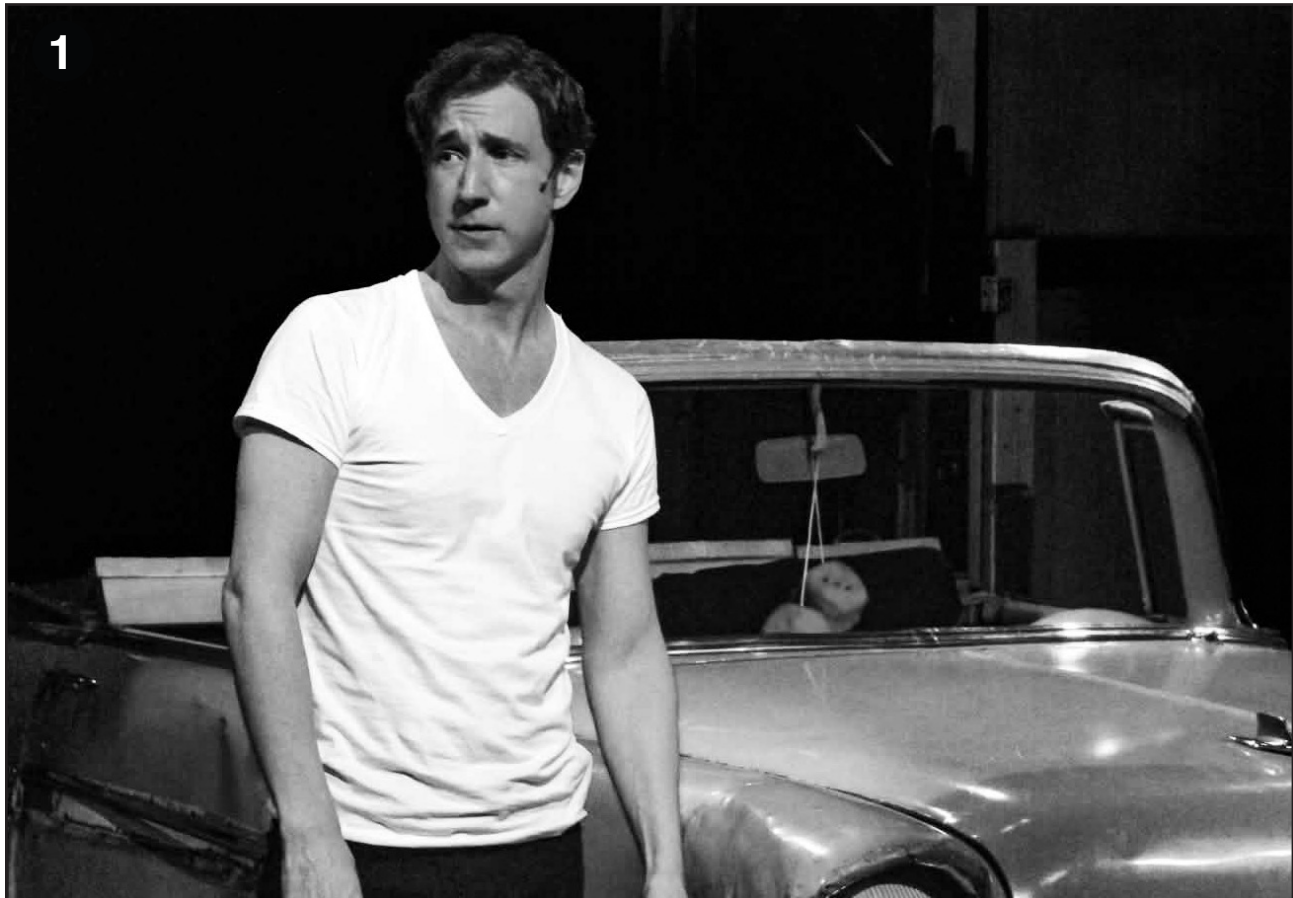
Although Horton never imagined becoming a firefighter — nor could he predict the setbacks he faced along the way — he said the career path has provided him with a “sense of purpose.”

He’s also inspiring others — including his almost 3-year-old son. The toddler has a newfound fascination with fire trucks.

PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
**Firefighter Zachary Horton earned his spot as valedictorian of his 26-person fire recruit class last month. On June 22, Horton endured the heat outside of Fire Station 10 on Oglethorpe Street as part of his first day to conduct practice exercises.**

# SNAPSHOTS

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**PHOTO 1** — Blake Leslie as Danny Zuko rehearses a scene from Theatre Macon’s production of “Grease” Tuesday night. The show runs July 10-25, and tickets can be purchased at [Theatremacon.com](http://Theatremacon.com). *Photo by Tyler Yeomans*

**PHOTO 2** — Kaylee Freeman as Jan rehearses a scene Tuesday night from Theatre Macon’s upcoming production of “Grease”. *Photo by Maggie Greer*

**PHOTOS 3-6** — The annual Fourth of July parade passes through the Ingleside Historic neighborhood in Macon, Ga., on Saturday, July 4, 2026. Sponsored by Riverdale Friends and the Historic Ingleside Neighborhood Association, the event brought the community together to celebrate Independence Day as the nation marked its 250th anniversary. The annual neighborhood parade started on Riverdale Drive at 10:30 a.m. and then traveled down Overlook, Belvedere, and Albemarle before returning to Riverdale. *Photos by Jessica Gratigny / For The Melody.*

**PHOTO 7** — Macon-Bibb Fire Chief Shane Edwards poses for a picture with Lisa Holmes-Hughes during a retirement party for her last week. Holmes-Hughes, the fire department’s administrative support operations director, is retiring after 28 years with the Macon-Bibb County Fire Department. *Photo courtesy of Macon-Bibb Fire Department*

# Insurance rates fall and tort reform earns itself a well-deserved victory

Few of Gov. Brian Kemp’s policy initiatives have sparked as much controversy as his efforts to rein in rampant lawsuit abuse. He began championing this in 2023, and at the time, Georgia had one of the country’s most problematic civil justice systems — particularly burdening insurers and consumers.

A 2023 study even found that the broken tort system annually resulted in about 124,000 fewer jobs locally and it increased costs on each Georgian by about \$1,200. Despite this, opposition — largely from the Democratic caucus and trial lawyers — mounted, and their message was consistent: the governor’s tort



Marc Hyden

reforms won’t help Georgians.

Kemp and company pressed ahead anyway and ultimately prevailed by the narrowest of margins. In 2025, he signed the proposals into law, and while it can take many years to determine the success of any public policy, early returns appear incredibly promising to the dismay of naysayers who claimed they would invite disaster.

The doomsday predictions were curious given the scope of the

reforms. As I wrote previously, the measure in question — Senate Bill 68 — simply aimed “to curb lawsuit abuse in many ways, including limiting attorneys from cherry-picking more favorable judicial jurisdictions; permitting juries to consider seat belt usage in car accident cases; ending jury awards for phantom damages; and reforming premises liability so that companies are not unfairly held responsible for injuries that occur near their businesses.”

To most people, these probably sound like common-sense approaches. However, tort reform

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# Ga. job tax credit program: big money but no oversight

At the end of my recent post on Georgia’s Job Tax Credit program, I asked readers to stay tuned, that there was more to come. The story was one that spawned a multitude of loose ends that I had to leave on the cutting room floor. This piece is about one of those loose ends, albeit a very big one: the simple question of who, if anyone, is making sure this thing works.

So I asked. And the first clear answer I got came from the person who manages the program at the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The entire reply, verbatim: “There is no oversight process.”

Before we get into the oversight void, it’s worth noting just how big the Job Tax Credit (JTC) program has become. I now have JTC reports from 2009 forward (except for one missing year, 2011). In 2009, businesses claimed about \$24.4 million in job tax credits for the creation of 4,409 jobs. From there through



Charlie Hayslett

2016, the annual total bounced around — up one year, down the next — and landed at \$53.4 million for 20,017.

Then it exploded. In 2017, JTC claims jumped to \$225.7 million and kept climbing, with a brief COVID-era pause in 2020 and 2021. In the first batch of reports the Department of Revenue (DOR) sent me earlier this year, the program peaked at \$929.6 million in 2023. The revised, “corrected” reports they sent me a few weeks later knocked those numbers down substantially, but they still show a staggering increase in the past few years.

The basic story is simple: a program that quietly handed out a few dozen million dollars a year at the beginning of this period is now

shaving several hundred million dollars off Georgia companies’ tax bills every year, all in the name of “job creation.”

Maybe I’m naïve, but I figured that somewhere along the way, as the program ballooned from tens of millions to several hundred million, it might have occurred to somebody to build a proper set of brakes and gauges. I would have been wrong.

As it turns out, though, I’m not the only one to ask that question. A 2006 performance audit by the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts of corporate income tax credits, including the Job Tax Credit, concluded that the Department of Revenue “cannot ensure that the credits have been accurately and consistently earned and used” because it relies heavily on taxpayer self-certifications, has limited doc

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# Family game night brings a tale of treachery and pride

Monopoly is widely recognized as the world’s most popular board game. Conservative estimates say that 500 million people enjoy this tabletop pastime.

Who knows how many families have been ruined and friendships destroyed with a piece landing on the Boardwalk space while it’s adorned with a hotel.

A standard game of Monopoly typically lasts one to three hours, according to the rule book. One documented game however, lasted about 70 days and was certainly played by people who devoutly loved each other or severely wished to see the other die an agonizing death. Nothing, and I mean nothing, should ever last that many days.

This innocent game of property investment and driving your competition to the poor house has a long, twisted back story.

It began as anti-capitalist propaganda, a way to promote wealth redistribution and oppose land owning monopolies. That was in 1908, and people quickly realized that a game that nobody wins is not a game at all. And why wouldn’t you want to be a land tycoon?

So, about a quarter of a century later, another person, who clearly had a better sense of humor and



Kyle Dominy

drive to make money, changed the rules of the game to glorify the very thing it was created to destroy.

The Parker Brothers company bought the concept, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Now there are several variations of Monopoly, even one that glorifies the cheating that many players are prone to do anyway, all with the same goal of bankrupting your opponents.

Somewhere along the way, the notion of a family game night was touted as a way for parents and children to connect with each other, probably by board game companies seeking to gain more market share in an entertainment/leisure industry that embraces all things electronic.

Regular events of families gathering around the table to enjoy a game supposedly has great benefits. It boosts cognitive development, relieves stress and creates familial bonds and routines that last a lifetime.

I love a good tabletop game, board, card or otherwise. I’ve spent countless hours over the years while

ing away the hours with a game, some of which become very competitive and even divulged into arguments (Note: If you are related to a college professor, never agree to a game of Trivial Pursuit, unless you like feeling stupid).

However, I’m sad to report that I seldom get up from a family game night happy to have held a family game night.

The depravity of man comes on full display when my children roll the dice. The desire to win, at any cost, prevails over all the manners and sensibilities I have instilled over the years. We can’t get a game of checkers in, let alone a round of Monopoly.

I blame myself. I don’t go easy on my offspring. What better way to teach the harshness of life than by kicking their butts at a board game? Yes, I charge full rent when they land on my hotel-developed Boardwalk square.

The game is called “Monopoly,” not “be nice to your free-loading children.”

We should probably take up family walks.

*Better known as “The New Southern Dad,” Kyle Dominy writes for The Courier Herald.*



## The Macon Melody

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**Laura E. Corley** » Senior Accountability Reporter

**Casey Choung** » Community Reporter

**Alaysia Ezzard** » Community Reporter

**Jason Vorhees** » Photographer

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

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### LEGALESE

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# Heat poses risk for Atlanta’s World Cup workers

BY EMILY JONES  
WABE and Grist  
wabe.org | grist.org

*This coverage is made possible through a partnership between WABE and Grist, a non-profit environmental media organization.*

At a church across Northside Drive from Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, people working this summer’s World Cup games can find shade to cool off in, along with water, electrolytes, cooling towels and other supplies and resources.

It’s much-needed relief, according to Lucia Gambino of the workers’ rights group Sur Legal Collaborative.

“Workers reported heat exposure, lack of drinking water, lack of shade or cooling areas, and lack of breaks,” she said.

Sur Legal Collaborative is part of Play Fair ATL, the coalition of human rights and advocacy organizations providing this resource center. They’re conducting a survey of the workers who visit them about the working conditions and how they’re handling the heat. But beyond the survey responses, Gambino said she’s also seen people “visibly affected by the heat,” red in the face and reporting a lack of access to water or shade.

This kind of heat isn’t just uncomfortable; it’s dangerous, putting workers at risk of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Several World Cup host cities fell under the heat dome that settled over eastern North America last week, with brutally hot temperatures and heat index

values in Atlanta, Miami, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Philadelphia, New York and Toronto.

Heat has been a major concern throughout this year’s World Cup, and organizers have built hydration breaks into games designed to help players stay safe. And some stadiums — including Atlanta — have air conditioning. But that doesn’t necessarily help all the people selling concessions, cleaning the stadium, working security or parking lots outside, and a host of other critical event jobs.

“It’s just a little bit ironic that FIFA is recognizing that the athletes need water, shade, and breaks to stay safe and to be able to play, but we don’t see that recognized for the workers as well,” Gambino said.

Scientists warned this risk was coming in a paper published ahead of the tournament, with climate change worsening heat and workers particularly vulnerable to the risks. Those who travel to work the tournament or who are doing different work than they usually do may not be acclimatized to the heat, the paper warned, increasing their risk. And unlike athletes in peak physical shape, workers are more likely to have underlying health issues, said study co-author Andrew Grundstein, a geography and atmospheric sciences professor at the University of Georgia.

The workers also aren’t all employed by one organization, he said, adding to the complexity. Some may be employed directly by the stadiums, while others work for contractors or subcontractors.

“So I think it’s a really challenging thing to come up with this uniform heat policy for all the different workers,” Grundstein said.

This year’s far-flung tournament further complicates things, according to study co-author Maggie Morrissey of Providence College and the heat safety-focused Korey Stringer Institute. The games are taking place in three different countries, which have different laws around heat and worker protection. Those protections — or lack thereof — also vary by state within the United States.

“It’s very much reliant on the organization or company themselves or the state regulation,” said Morrissey on the information and protections available to workers. “But I do think FIFA has a really important job to do to have people recognize that workers are at risk of heat injuries as well.”

In a statement, FIFA laid out its “tiered heat mitigation model” for the tournament. When the forecast predicts elevated temperatures, venues add more cooling capacity, including shaded areas and water distribution, the organization said.

“Work-rest cycles for staff and volunteers are adapted accordingly, and first-aid readiness is reinforced with clear triage and escalation pathways for suspected heat illness,” the statement read. “These measures scale dynamically based on real-time conditions before and during each event.”

FIFA also said it has a heat illness mitigation task force. Most host cities and stadiums referred questions to FIFA.

The city of Toronto has a heat stress policy, and “additional, job-specific safe work procedures have been developed for roles that have an increased heat risk,” according to a statement from chief people officer Tobie Mathew. Protection measures include hydration, limiting sun exposure, and cooling measures like fans and air conditioning.

A spokesperson for Atlanta’s stadium ownership group said in an email that heat wasn’t affecting events there as much as other host cities because the stadium is indoors.

But the air conditioning inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium doesn’t protect all the event workers, Gambino said. Some jobs, like parking lot attendants, are outdoors. Others aren’t directly associated with the events at all, like the vendors in nearby parks selling merchandise or painting fans’ faces.

Stronger regulations to protect workers from the heat could help keep people safe, Gambino said. She also said formal collaborations with the stadium or the city could help boost worker assistance efforts like Play Fair ATL’s resource center — and she hopes that can happen for future big events.

FIFA could also require worker protections in the agreements that the global organization signs with host cities, Morrissey said.

“We wouldn’t have the World Cup happening if we didn’t have workers,” she said. “It’s sort of like a call to action for FIFA to say they need to elevate the protection for workers.”

*Frida Garza of Grist contributed to this story.*



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES / THE MELODY  
**Atlanta’s Mercedes-Benz Stadium and the surrounding area were decorated heavily before the World Cup. Now that the tournament is in the knockout rounds, there is some concern on the dangers posed by heat for workers at the event.**

# Data center, power plant accused of building generators without permits

BY EMILY JONES  
WABE and Grist  
wabe.org | grist.org

*This coverage is made possible through a partnership between WABE and Grist, a nonprofit environmental media organization.* The Georgia Environmental Protection Division has issued notices of violation to two companies over a new power plant that environmental groups said is being built without permits, according to the Southern Environmental Law Center. The plant is for a planned data center in the Atlanta area.

Microgrid company VoltaGrid and data center company Serverfarm have applied for state permits to build a pop-up power plant and a data center with backup generators in Covington, southeast of Atlanta. The power plant, which would be the first of its kind in Georgia, would consist of 33 internal-combustion engines providing “alternative, rapidly deployable prime power” to the data center, according to Voltagrid’s permit application.

Public comments on the request have raised concerns about air pollution from the diesel- and natural gas-fired units. But several environmental groups now claim construction is already underway without the necessary permits even being issued.

In a letter to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, the Southern Environmental Law Center, Altamaha Riverkeeper, and Sustainable Newton urge the agency to investigate and take enforcement action.

“The construction activities at VoltaGrid in particular are troubling,” the letter reads. “In short, by jumping the gun, VoltaGrid and Serverfarm are ignoring not only EPD’s legal requirements, but are wholly disregarding the public participation process and the concerns of those living downwind of the facility.”

Data centers aren’t inherently a problem, said Nancy Schulz of Sustainable Newton. There’s already a large Meta data center in the area and an Amazon one under construction. She described both of those companies as good community partners in her view.

“We want them to be responsible and accountable to our community, and that means following the rules and following our state laws and our federal laws,” Schulz said. “That means get your permits before you construct.”

The letter includes aerial photos of what the groups describe as the engines that make up the pop-up power plant and emergency generators for the data center, some completed and some under construction. They request that EPD order a halt to “all prohibited construction activities” and assess penalties for alleged violations of Georgia law and the federal Clean Air Act. The agency issued notices of violation after inspecting the facility, SELC said Tuesday.

Georgia’s recent data center boom has provoked opposition on many fronts. While some municipal and economic development officials around the state are eager for the investment and tax revenue that a data center offers, residents and local leaders have opposed them in many places due to their environmental impacts and other concerns.

Data centers, especially the large ones known as hyperscalers that drive generative AI, run on enormous amounts of electricity and use lots of water to cool their banks of computer servers.

Georgia Power is adding ten gigawatts of energy to power new demand coming mostly from data centers. That expansion has upset advocates and customers, who are worried ordinary households and other businesses may end up covering some of the costs. Some also worry that most of the new energy will come



PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL A. SCHWARZ / SELC  
**Engines at the VoltaGrid power plant construction site in Covington, Ga, which environmental groups say were built without the necessary state permits.**

from climate-warming fossil fuels.

A project like the one VoltaGrid and Serverfarm have proposed could address the first concern by bypassing electric utilities — meaning there isn’t new infrastructure that could potentially show up in customer rates or fuel charges — though it’s unclear whether the plant is intended as a permanent solution. The idea of data centers bringing their own energy instead of relying on the grid has been suggested by officials and advocates as the Georgia Public Service Commission and state legislature have grappled with the centers’

sky-high energy needs.

But bring-your-own power plants for data centers don’t necessarily address critics’ concerns about climate-warming emissions. The engines for the VoltaGrid-Serverfarm project would be powered by diesel and natural gas, both fossil fuels. Some tech companies are pursuing small nuclear reactors to power data centers, but that technology is still years away, meaning such projects are likely to rely on fossil fuels for energy at least in the near term.

VoltaGrid, Serverfarm, and the Georgia EPD did not reply to requests for comment.

# Mosquito trap in Atlanta tests positive for the West Nile virus

BY ELLEN ELDRIDGE  
GPB News  
gpb.org

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it's seeing the earliest start to the West Nile virus season in the United States with the highest number of human disease cases reported by this time of year since 2004. Fulton County Board of Health Environmental Health Director Dr. Brandon Leftwich said mosquito control staff recovered positive mosquito

samples for West Nile virus from a trap at a location within the county. The positive test result was reported in the Grant Park area of Atlanta and indicates the presence of infected mosquitoes in the area. The mosquito-borne illness causes disorientation, fever, headache and in severe cases, encephalitis or meningitis. Officials documented 54 confirmed cases and five deaths in Georgia in 2024, but actual incidence may have been higher; 24 blood donors later

tested positive for the disease. "Mosquitoes can be dangerous if infected and may pose a serious health risk to people in our area," Leftwich said in a news release. "We want to make sure communities are aware and take necessary precautions to protect themselves." The 5Ds of mosquito bite prevention can help prevent mosquito bites and breeding:

- Dusk/Dawn — Avoid dusk and dawn activities during the summer when mosquitoes are most active.
- Dress — Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and pants to reduce the amount of exposed skin.
- DEET — Cover exposed skin with an insect repellent containing DEET, which is the most effective repellent against mosquito bites.
- Drain — Empty any containers holding standing water — buckets, barrels, flowerpots, tarps

— because they are breeding grounds for virus-carrying mosquitoes. Doors — Make sure doors and windows are in good repair and fit tightly and fix torn or damaged screens to keep mosquitoes out of the house. Also, trim or remove overgrown grass or weeds, experts say. If there are any infected mosquitoes reported in an area, the Fulton County Board of Health said it works with a mosquito control vendor to eliminate the pests. Then, they visit the surrounding neighborhoods to spread awareness about the positive test results in that area and educate the community on preventing mosquito bites and breeding areas around their homes.

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



PHOTO FROM UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
**Southern house mosquitoes are the vectors of West Nile Virus.**

# DOJ can't subpoena Fulton election workers' information

BY MAYA HOMAN  
Georgia Recorder  
georgiarecorder.com

A federal judge has quashed a subpoena from the U.S. Department of Justice seeking personal information from the nearly 3,000 Georgians who served as Fulton County election workers and volunteers during the 2020 election, dealing a blow to the Trump administration's escalating effort to uncover alleged voter fraud in Georgia.

The ruling, issued Tuesday by Trump-appointed Judge William M. Ray, ends a monthslong effort from the Department of Justice to obtain the names, positions, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of election workers in Georgia's most populous county. Lawyers for the Justice Department argued the records were needed to investigate possible election law violations.

But in a 28-page opinion, the judge pointed out that the statute of limitations for any election-related crimes committed in 2020 has expired and cautioned against allowing sensitive information

to be divulged without a "legitimate law enforcement purpose." "Should a private company fail to protect such information from electronic thieves, such company would most likely be sued in a data breach class action lawsuit," Ray wrote. "Thus, everyone, whether you support the President or you do not, or whether you believe the 2020 Election was fair or believe that it was not, should be concerned about the DOJ's ability to utilize the power of the Grand Jury to appropriate your private information without a legitimate purpose."

Fulton County Commission Chair Robb Pitts celebrated the judge's strongly worded ruling, which called the subpoena into the county's 2020 election records "unprecedented," "troubling" and "problematic."

"Fulton County will continue to do all that is needed to assure Georgia citizens that our election process is fair and proper and to show that the attacks against it are baseless," Pitts said in a statement.

Fulton County, which is home to much of the city of



PHOTO BY JILL NOLIN/GEORGIA RECORDER  
**A Trump-appointed blocked the Department of Justice from obtaining the private information of election workers and volunteers in Fulton County in 2020.**

Atlanta, was at the center of President Donald Trump's baseless claims that the 2020 election was stolen in Georgia, despite three counts — including one hand count — that affirmed former President Joe Biden's narrow victory in the state. Previous investigations into the 2020 election did not find any merit to the claims of rampant voting fraud or intentional misconduct by Fulton election workers and leaders.

The ruling also comes in the wake of the Federal Bureau of Investigation reassigning hundreds of analysts to an ongoing investigation

into Fulton County's 2020 election records, which were obtained during a January raid on Fulton County's elections hub. Each analyst will be expected to check a total of 708 records by July 17, with weekend and holiday overtime pay authorized, according to a memo obtained by MS NOW.

Department of Justice officials did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

*This story was originally published by the Georgia Recorder on georgiarecorder.com.*

**HAYSLETT**  
Continued from Page 5

umentation requirements, and audits only a small fraction of credits.

Three years later, a 2009 follow-up review by the same office found that "no steps have been taken to begin collecting data for evaluating the costs and benefits" of corporate tax credits, despite the 2006 recommendation that Georgia start doing just that. In that follow-up, the auditor noted that the state had forfeited roughly \$644 million in corporate tax credits from 1999 through 2007 — without building the data systems needed to assess whether those tax expenditures were paying off.

The 2009 report did give DOR some credit for procedural improvements: an audit procedures manual for corporate tax credits, checklists for documentation, some training for auditors, and plans for an Integrated Tax System that would consolidate tax-credit administration. But on the big questions — collecting program-level data, requiring supporting documentation up front, and building a quality-assurance process for approvals and denials — the verdict was blunt: "Not Implemented." DOR continued to argue that requiring documentation when businesses claim credits was not its job and that any decision to collect and analyze tax-credit data was a "policy decision for the General Assembly's consideration."

Fast-forward to 2022, and the Department of Audits and Accounts is still worrying aloud about whether the JTC program actually works. A tax-incentive evaluation of JTC found that the state does not collect the data it would need to know whether the credit is truly producing net new jobs and better outcomes in the counties it is supposed to help, and that credits have been granted without clear evidence of cost-effectiveness.

Instead of tightening oversight and finally building the data needed to answer those questions, the Department of Revenue has gone in a very different direction: it has made the program less transparent than ever.

For roughly 35 years, DOR produced JTC reports showing, by county and by credit type, the number of jobs claimed and the amount of credit used. As I reported in my last post, that changed recently, after I asked for the latest JTC reports and submitted a handful of questions about seemingly odd JTC claims. DOR discovered "errors" in its data and then replaced 129 pages of detailed, county-specific entries with four 10-line statewide summary tables. The new reports aggregate

every single JTC claim into statewide totals and strip out all county- and credit-level detail.

In the course of that exchange, I sent Amy Bushyeager, the DOR attorney who oversees the agency's public information office, several questions, including this one: Other than routine tax audits, does DOR perform any oversight of the JTC program or JTC claims? Anything to ensure that the jobs being claimed have actually been created and maintained as required under the law?

I've received no answer. For a department that now insists it cannot let the public see even county-level JTC statistics, that silence speaks volumes — especially in combination with DCA's "no oversight" acknowledgement.

Bottom line: Georgia now probably has the least transparent job-tax-credit program in the nation — a program that has quietly grown from a few dozen million dollars a year to hundreds of millions — administered by a Revenue department that hides basic statistics and a Community Affairs department that freely admits "there is no oversight process."

If this were a direct spending program, say a half-billion-dollar grant line for "job creation," lawmakers would expect annual reports, performance measures, county-level breakdowns, and at least some assurance that the jobs being paid for actually exist.

Because the Job Tax Credit operates inside the tax code, those expectations seem to vanish. The dollars have exploded, the data has disappeared, and there is no visible oversight. As a result, taxpayers have no way of knowing how much of their state's so-called job-creation money is actually landing in their communities.

Stay tuned. I've still got a few more JTC loose ends to tie up — and a few rabbit holes to go down — before this story is done.

\*DOR's 2018 report showed 606,000 jobs created in Clay County — population roughly 2,800. Removing that obvious error and substituting the ~800 jobs implied by the county's reported \$2.81 million credit at the statutory rate yields a corrected statewide total of about 97,000 jobs. DOR did not respond to my request for clarification at the time.

*Charlie Hayslett is a mostly retired journalist and communications counselor now working on a book about the costs and consequences of the decline of rural Georgia. He blogs occasionally on these subjects at [www.troublein-godscountry.com](http://www.troublein-godscountry.com).*

**HYDEN**  
Continued from Page 5

critics suggested that they would prevent victims from receiving justice and big companies would financially benefit from these reforms without passing the savings onto customers. One outspoken activist even said that insurers don't reduce premiums after tort reform. They simply pocket the savings. Those predictions sound concerning, but do they hold water?

Fast forward to 2026, and the sky has not fallen. In fact, plaintiffs continue to have their days in court and get the justice that they deserve, which is essential in a fair and balanced judicial system. As for the other charge, one tort reform opponent asserted, if lawsuit reform worked, then we would see premiums falling. If only we had data to address this claim. Oh wait, we do.

In late 2025, Georgia's Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner announced that Liberty Mutual planned to reduce premiums by an average of 5.7%, State Farm by a total average of 10% from the previous year and Safeco by around 5%.

In February of this year, Allstate filed plans to reduce rates by 5%.

In April, Travelers Property Casualty Insurance Company introduced plans to reduce premiums by over 10%, and in June, filings showed that USAA would "lower rates, on average, by 4.7% at Garrison Property and Casualty Insurance Company, 4.5% for USAA Casualty Insurance Company and 2.4% for USAA General Indemnity Company," according to WSB-TV. And so on and so on.

This mirrors the success of tort reform elsewhere, and while the expectation from insiders was that tort reform would at the very least slow the rate of premium increases, they are coinciding with rate decreases. Correlation is not causation, and there are a host of factors that influence insurance rates. Yet tort reform has been one of — if not the — most significant policy changes affecting Georgia insurers in recent years.

According to Georgia's Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John King, it is undoubtedly one of the primary drivers. In an op-ed, he wrote, "Georgia took meaningful steps to restore balance to

its legal system, while preserving the right of every Georgian to seek justice when they've been wronged [...] One year later, the early results are not just encouraging, they are measurable. Insurance costs are beginning to stabilize and, in many cases, decline."

MARTA provides further evidence of this. In its fiscal year 2027 proposed budget, the transit agency forecasted the need for \$27 million for casualty and liability costs, compared to \$69 million in fiscal year 2025. The reason for this drop was — per a MARTA spokesman — "a reduced risk profile due to tort reform."

No one can predict how long insurance premiums will remain on this downward trajectory. Rates result from complex calculations that represent risk, and if risk exposure increases — say due to a spate of large natural disasters — then rates will too. That aside, given the early results following tort reform, it seems amazing that this was ever controversial.

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

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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: K equals L

SFDOQX MC FD FKKQXOBI  
XQFIRBMD CXMN GFKABDO  
FNMDO RMM NFDL SFBTLKBAQ  
CKMGQXT: FD FTRQX-XBTA.

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### SCRAMBLERS

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

Precise  
**PREPOR**

Cheerleader  
**COMATS**

Flounder  
**LOWLAW**

Lure  
**CODEY**

**TODAY'S WORD**

It's the oddest sort of pain — it goes away as soon as I see a \_\_\_\_\_!

by Dave T. Phipps

by Gary Kopervas

by Jeff Pickering

by BUD BLAKE

BY HENRY BOLTHOFF

HOCUS-FOCUS



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

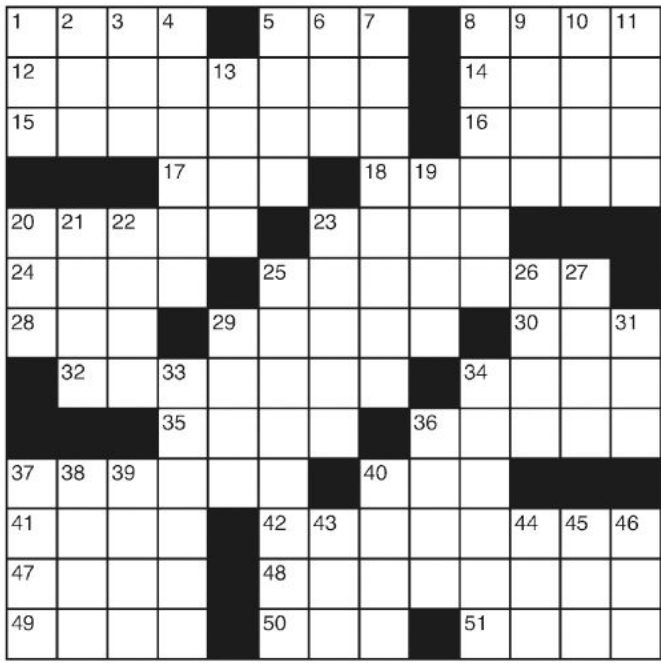


Differences: 1. Pocket is missing. 2. Ear is different. 3. Handle is smaller. 4. Leg is moved. 5. Bush is smaller. 6. Blanket is added to pot.

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Gas station fixture
- 5 Doo follower
- 8 Rabbit's tail
- 12 Pantene's business
- 14 Peddled item
- 15 Figure out
- 16 "Das Lied von der —"
- 17 Indian lentil stew
- 18 iPod accessory
- 20 Cool veggies
- 23 1504, in old Rome
- 24 Fr. holy women
- 25 Evening affairs
- 28 Bit of ink
- 29 "SNL" segments
- 30 Wager
- 32 Stockings
- 34 Ham's dad
- 35 Resort near Snowbird
- 36 Tubular pasta
- 37 As a whole
- 40 Duo's pronoun
- 41 Hoopster Malone
- 42 Strongman of myth
- 47 Needle case
- 48 Implanted
- 49 Lavish affection (on)



- 50 ACLU issues
- 51 Shakespeare title starter
- 10 Language of Pakistan
- 11 Ticked (off)
- 13 Tax prep pros
- 19 Broadcasts
- 20 Chicago winter hrs.
- 21 Beehive State
- 22 High-fat diet
- 23 Kelly of "One Tree Hill"
- 25 Courtroom artist
- 26 Black, in verse
- 27 Penn or Astin
- 29 Missile shelter
- 31 Chance — Rapper
- 33 — Mae (loan offerer)
- 34 Poet Pablo
- 36 Brownish purple
- 37 Scratched (out)
- 38 Post-WWII alliance
- 39 Very dry
- 40 Spheres
- 43 911 responder
- 44 "Bad" cholesterol
- 45 Sushi fish
- 46 Radical '60s gp.

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Weekly SUDOKU

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| 6 |   |   | 1 |   | 3 |   | 4 |   |
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Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦

- ♦ Moderate
- ♦♦ Challenging
- ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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FiveSpot™

Mood Setter

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- Redecorate in a way
- Luxurious fabric
- Impediment to accessibility
- Oscar's milieu on Sesame Street
- "\_\_\_ so good"
- Dentist's admonition

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

FiveSpot is a trademark of Michael McLinden. See more at [www.sproutspuzzle.com](http://www.sproutspuzzle.com)

02647



Solution time: 22 mins.

Answers

King Crossword

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

- TELEVISION: What is Walt White's codename in the drama "Breaking Bad"?
- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: Which month of the year has the fewest letters in its name?
- U.S. STATES: Which state is known as the Prairie State?
- LANGUAGE: What is the British term for a bike's training wheels?
- ASTRONOMY: What is the Earth's only natural satellite?
- FOOD & DRINK: What is a more common name for the fruit sometimes called "alligator pear"?
- MOVIES: What kind of creature is Thumper in the animated movie "Bambi"?
- LITERATURE: What is the name of the python in "The Jungle Book"?
- GEOGRAPHY: Which countries and islands make up the geographic area known as Oceania?
- ANATOMY: What is a more common name for cerumen?

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DOCTOR

Today's Word

- 1. Proper
- 2. Mascot
- 3. Wallow
- 4. Decoy

SCRAMBLERS

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| H | S | U | R | B |
| S | T | R | U | H |
| H | S | A | R | T |
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Solution

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| 1 | 8 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| 9 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 8 |
| 7 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 3 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 1 |
| 9 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 2 |
| 6 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| 3 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| 4 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 9 |

Weekly SUDOKU

Danger of an allergic reaction from walking among too many daisy-like flowers: an asterisk.

CryptoQuip

- Heisenberg
- May
- Illinois
- Stabilizers
- The Moon
- Avocado
- Rabbit
- Kaa
- The four regions are Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia
- Farwest

## Peach season in Middle Ga.

Georgia peaches are part of my heritage. During my childhood, they were a symbol of summertime, when my dad — a traveling insurance agent — would follow the peach crop from South to North Georgia to provide our family with fresh peaches for most of the summer. Often, our family would travel to pick-your-own farms and pluck peaches straight from the trees.

Although Georgia is known as The Peach State, it ranks behind California and South Carolina in total peach production. Still, more than 130 million pounds of peaches are produced annually between May and August in Georgia.

While home gardeners across the entire state are able to grow peaches, there are two commercial peach-growing regions. The largest is in our own backyard: Middle Georgia has 1.6 million trees and accounts for 75% of the state's peach production.

Unsurprisingly, the roots of Georgia's commercial peach industry are here. Samuel Rumph, a peach grower in Marshallville, developed a new variety named "Elberta" in



Kathy Hensley

honor of his wife. The variety was not only of high quality but also shipped better than previous varieties. Rumph's inventions of an icebox for peach crates and the refrigerated train car rapidly expanded the Southern fruit industry. Today, most of the more than 50 varieties of peaches currently grown in Georgia were bred from the Elberta.

While truly tree-ripened peaches may have the best flavor, they are fragile. Because of this, growers must balance optimal quality with the durability needed for transport.

They train harvesters to pick peaches at the proper time based on color, flesh firmness and lab testing of the juice for the best ratio of sugars to acids. Fruit that is to be shipped longer distances is harvested earlier than what will be sold locally.

There are three peach packing

SEE PEACHES  
PAGE 10

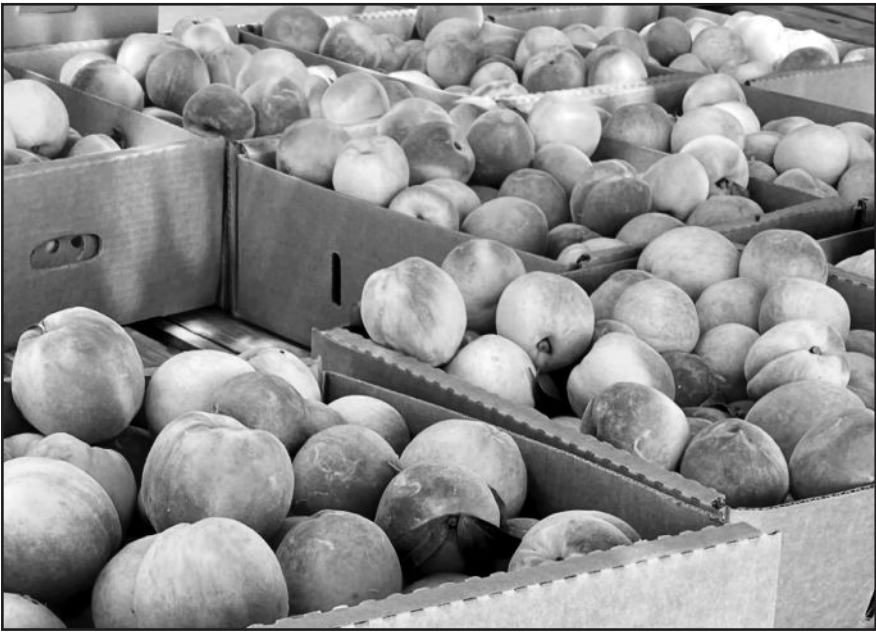


PHOTO BY KATHY HENSLEY

More than 130 million pounds of peaches are produced annually between May and August in Georgia.

## Going on vacation? remember these 7 health must-haves

Have you ever arrived at your destination only to realize you packed three pairs of shoes but forgot your prescription medication or sunscreen? It's an easy mistake to make when you're focused on the excitement of getting away.

Summer is travel season. Whether you're heading to the beach, exploring the mountains, visiting family or embarking on a cross-country adventure, packing is often part of the excitement. We carefully think through our outfits, chargers, toiletries and travel documents, making sure nothing important gets left behind.

But amid the excitement of preparing for vacation, one essential item is often overlooked: our health. The good news is that staying healthy while traveling doesn't have to be complicated. In addition to your suitcase, consider packing these seven health essentials before you head out the door.

### 1. Your medications

If you take prescription medications, be sure to bring enough for your entire trip, plus a few extra days in case of unexpected travel delays. Keep medications in their original labeled containers and carry them with you rather than packing them in checked luggage. If you have chronic medical conditions, it can also be helpful to keep a list of



Joy L. King

your medications, allergies and emergency contact information readily available.

### 2. Hydration

Travel often means spending more time outdoors, walking through airports or exploring new destinations in the summer heat. Even mild dehydration can contribute to fatigue, headaches, dizziness and decreased concentration. Carrying a reusable water bottle and making hydration a priority throughout the day can help you feel your best while enjoying your vacation.

### 3. Sun protection

Whether you're spending the day at the beach, attending a ballgame or simply sightseeing, remember that sun protection isn't just for pool days. Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, wear sunglasses that provide UV protection and consider a wide-brimmed hat if you'll be outdoors for extended periods. Your skin will thank you long after your vacation ends.

### 4. Movement

Hours spent sitting in a car or air

SEE TRAVEL  
PAGE 10

## Macon's 478 Creatives celebrates five years of connecting local artists



PHOTO PROVIDED BY 478 CREATIVES

Attendees listen at a recent 478 Creatives gathering at the studio of Mercer University associate art instructor Eric O'Dell. The grassroots arts group will celebrate its fifth anniversary July 17 with a party, gallery show and information meeting at 6 p.m. at Tanglewood Arts Studios, 1080 Third Street, Suite 500.

Macon's grassroots gathering of artists, 478 Creatives, celebrates five years this month with a celebration at 478 founder Erin Hawkins' recently opened Tanglewood Art Studios July 17.

All are invited to the new studio-gallery and it's a great way — even for introverts — to mix, mingle and get to know more about 478 Creatives. The featured artist is Adrienne Berkland, whose solo exhibit, "Crushed It," has been on display. While the event is free at Tanglewood, organizers are inviting a \$5 donation for the group's five years.

Hawkins is well known by her business name, Mama Hawk Draws. Under this name, the local artist has designed many on-the-street, school and residential murals as well as other artwork such as cards and stickers.

Co-founder Cara Heard is a self-taught mixed-media artist who does social media work through her business, Cara Heard Co. She's founder and former owner of Lush Art in Perry. She relocated from Houston County to Macon in 2025.

I got in touch with Hawkins and Heard to talk about the anniversary and the 478.

These responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

### Erin Hawkins

*Q: What's the purpose of 478 Creatives?*

A: "Our mission remains the same as at the start: to cultivate a thriving ecosystem where creativity flourishes, connections deepen and artistic endeavors thrive. We believe artists don't thrive in isolation; they thrive in community. When creatives know one another, they share opportunities instead of competing for them. They collaborate on projects, mentor emerging artists, solve problems together, strengthen local businesses and ultimately create a richer cultural landscape for everyone. 478 Creatives exists because we recognized a gap in our community and chose to fill it."

*Q: How did the group get started?*

A: "In April 2021, I was commissioned to paint a mural inside a residential swimming pool. I quickly realized I couldn't do it alone and invited six local artists to help. It took just a few days to complete, but something unexpected happened. Between painting sessions, we found ourselves talking



Michael W. Pannell

about our work, sharing frustrations about the creative industry, celebrating wins, asking for advice and dreaming about what was possible. We weren't just painting a mural — we were building community. When the project ended, I realized how much I needed more of those conversations."

*Q: What was the initial response, and how has it grown?*

Hawkins: "In July 2021, we launched the very first Creative Conversations — that was our original name — at Fall Line Brewing Co. Our first gathering was a handful of people, and we had attendees "speed date" one another through a series of guided conversations. The goal wasn't networking in the traditional sense; it was creating genuine connection. We wanted artists to leave knowing someone new, feeling inspired and realizing they weren't building their creative lives alone."

*Q: So at its core, 478 is about building camaraderie and relationships among artists?*

A: "Yes, and that spirit has remained at the heart of everything we've done. Every event, workshop, panel discussion, artist talk, studio visit and community gathering has been planned because we believe creative people deserve spaces where they feel seen, supported and connected."

*Q: What are some examples of things 478 Creatives does? Do you partner with others?*

A: "During our first year, we hosted grant workshops, behind-the-scenes tours of The Grand Opera House, marketing and storytelling sessions, artist talks and countless opportunities for creatives to gather around ideas instead of competition.

"Over the past five years, we've collaborated with organizations including Macon Film Festival, Bragg Jam, NewTown Macon, Capricorn Sound Studios & Museum, Wesleyan College, Mercer University and numerous local businesses and creative spaces. In 2024, Macon Arts Alliance became our fiscal sponsor, allowing us to pursue grant funding for the first time.

"Since then, we've received three grants that have helped us expand programming, pilot an artist residency, create professional development opportunities and improve the public art experience throughout Macon. Since our very first gathering, we've facilitated 53 events serving hundreds of artists and creative professionals."

*Q: Is it still a grassroots volunteer organization?*

A: "That's what makes 478 Creatives different. It's grassroots. It's artist-led. It wasn't created for creatives — it was created by creatives who understood exactly what was missing because they were living it themselves.

"While our community has wonderful arts organizations, there wasn't a consistent, artist-led space where creatives from every discipline could simply come together to learn from one another, build relationships and feel like they belonged.

"Instead of waiting for someone else to create that space, we decided to build it ourselves. What many people don't realize is that Cara and I have built all of this as volunteers."

*Q: How did you and Heard get connected?*

A: "Near the end of that first year, Cara reached out with a simple offer: 'If you ever need assistance with this, I'd love to help.' Neither of us realized how much that one conversation would shape the future of 478 Creatives. Since then, we've worked side by side to grow the organization into a collaborative network that connects Middle Georgia artists across disciplines while building partnerships throughout the community."

### Cara Heard

*Q: What drew you to get involved?*

A: "I knew Anna Richards, an artist and yoga instructor who initially helped start 478 Creatives, and I got to know Erin from Instagram. Anna became less involved and moved away. I went to the first meetings after COVID, and then one day asked Erin if there was anything I could do to help. She came back with, 'Well, as a matter of fact ...' and we hit it off."

*Question: What has been a highlight for you?*

A: "There have been a lot of great

SEE ARTIST  
PAGE 10

BILLY’S LET’S EAT REVIEW

# Eatery in former Len Berg’s location feeds new generation

There are certain buildings in Macon that almost seem to have a heartbeat. Long after the lights go out and the last customer leaves, the stories somehow remain. One of those places sits quietly at 440 Walnut Street. For nearly a century it was home to the legendary Len Berg’s Restaurant, where generations of Macon families gathered over fried chicken, homemade peach ice cream and enough memories to fill a cookbook. After Len Berg’s closed in 2005, Kimchi Factory carried on the tradition of serving the community from the same location. Now another chapter is being written inside those familiar walls. Welcome to Saucy’s Kitchen.

As if Macon wasn’t already the world’s biggest small town, I discovered another funny connection shortly after I ate at Saucy’s. Macon native and Saucy’s co-owner Julie Koo just happens to be childhood friends with one of my fellow flight attendants. Leave it to Macon for everyone to somehow know everyone.

The story behind Saucy’s Kitchen is one that a lot of people can relate to. Jeremy Nguyen and Julie were living in Atlanta, working hard but finding themselves stuck in the cycle so many young families experience. The cost of living kept climbing, the dream of starting a family seemed further away and Jeremy knew he wanted to build something of his own instead of continuing to work for someone else. They packed up, moved to Macon and decided to bet on themselves.

Neither of them came from restaurant backgrounds. Jeremy worked as a warehouse manager in Atlanta and still travels as a field technician servicing point-of-sale systems. Julie worked as a nanny.



PHOTO BY BILLY HENNESSEY  
**Saucy’s Kitchen, located on Walnut Street in the former Len Berg’s building, serves chicken gyros, as well as wings, cheesestakes and more.**



**Billy Hennessey**

Opening a restaurant wasn’t exactly the obvious career move. Jeremy admitted that every day has been another lesson. The learning curve has been steep, but watching first-time customers become regulars makes every challenge worthwhile. That sense of community is exactly what they hoped to build.

“Watching Saucy’s gaining regulars makes me and my wife so happy because we’re becoming a part of the Macon community,” Jeremy said.

When I asked what makes Saucy’s different from every other restaurant in town, Jeremy’s answer surprised me and immediately earned my respect. “That’s not up to me to answer. That’s up to my customers.” He continued, “I’m not trying to compete with anyone. I’m just here to do my thing, feed my community and stay focused on providing for my family.”

That may have been my favorite answer I’ve heard from a restaurant owner all year. There wasn’t a hint of ego. Just a desire to build something lasting. And Jeremy’s right! Restaurant owners don’t define restaurants — we do!

Jeremy and Julie created a menu with something for just about everyone, including burgers, wings, Philly cheesesteaks, gyros, shrimp, fish, tenders, salads and more.

Of course, I couldn’t let Jeremy get away without asking about the restaurant’s name.

“I don’t believe in dry rubs,” he laughed. “That’s why we call it Saucy’s.”

Jeremy said every one of their nine

wing sauces is made in-house because they want customers licking their fingers when they’re finished. I’d say that’s a pretty solid mission statement.

Our conversation eventually drifted back to the building itself. I asked whether people still come in talking about Len Berg’s, and Jeremy’s face immediately lit up. He genuinely enjoys listening to longtime Macon residents reminisce about birthdays, family dinners and memories made inside those walls. Rather than trying to replace that history, he embraces it.

“History will live on at Len Berg’s,” he said.

He isn’t trying to erase what came before him. He’s trying to honor it while creating memories for a new generation of diners.

Now, let’s eat.

I ordered the Chicken Gyro Combo for \$10.39, which included a mountain of crispy crinkle-cut fries and a fountain drink. I’ll admit it, my first reaction was skepticism. At that price, I expected a pita with about three lonely pieces of chicken hiding inside.

I was completely wrong. The pita was absolutely stuffed with chicken, lettuce, tomatoes and onions, all topped with a fantastic house sauce. I watched everything being prepared fresh, and the chicken was juicy, tender and perfectly seasoned.

Jeremy said one menu item he wishes more people would try is the lamb gyro because many diners are hesitant about lamb. After tasting the chicken version, I’m already planning another visit to see what I’ve been missing. Their biggest sellers have been the wings and the Philly cheesesteaks, especially the Chicken Philly, which is seasoned with their own proprietary blend.

I asked what hobbies Jeremy and Julie enjoy outside of work. They both looked at each other and laughed: “Our daughter.”

Saucy’s Kitchen feels exactly the way Jeremy hoped it would. Welcoming. Comfortable. Nostalgic. It’s the kind of neighborhood joint where regulars know each other’s names, and in a city like Macon, that’s exactly the kind of place we need.

I have a feeling this won’t be my last stop there. There are still plenty of items on the menu calling my name.

Until next time, Macon... Let’s Eat!

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

PEACHES

Continued from Page 9

houses near Macon where visitors are welcome to watch the packing process and to purchase ripe peaches, as well as other goodies, like fresh peach ice cream. Yum! Two of these, Pearson Farm and Lane Southern Orchards, are in Fort Valley. Dickey Farms is in Musella. These farms also supply local grocers.

Georgia peaches are currently at the peak of their season. Most of the varieties that ripen in July are “melting-flesh” cultivars, which continue to ripen after harvest. If stored incorrectly, they can easily turn mealy or dry.

When purchasing them, choose peaches with a strong, sweet smell and a yellow “ground” or background color. Keep in mind, a red blush does not guarantee ripeness. Peaches should be firm with a slight

“give.” Avoid soft, bruised, or overripe fruit.

If your peaches need to ripen, place them in a paper bag at a temperature above 51 degrees, not in the refrigerator. Once they have fully ripened, they may be stored in the refrigerator for several days. For the best flavor, serve them at room temperature.

This July, savor some sweet, juicy Georgia peaches and support Georgia farmers. Perhaps they will become part of your summer memories, too.

*Kathy Hensley works for the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service in Bibb County. The county office provides resources for gardeners as well as educational services and community support.*

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

TRAVEL

Continued from Page 9

plane can leave you feeling stiff and sluggish. During long trips, aim to move at least every four hours to help reduce the risk of blood clots, especially on extended road trips or flights. Take opportunities to stretch, walk around when it’s safe to do so or stop for short walks if you’re driving. Physical activity doesn’t have to stop just because you’re on vacation. Exploring a new city on foot, taking a scenic hike or enjoying a morning swim are all great ways to stay active while making lasting memories.

5. Healthy snacks

Vacation is certainly a time to enjoy local cuisine and favorite treats, but balance is still important. Packing nutritious snacks such as nuts, fruit or protein bars can help keep hunger at bay between meals and may prevent impulsive choices when healthier options aren’t readily available. Remember, enjoying vacation and making healthy choices aren’t mutually exclusive.

6. Rest

Ironically, vacations can sometimes leave us feeling exhausted. Early flights, packed itineraries and late nights can take a toll. While it’s tempting to see and do everything, remember that rest is an important part

of wellness. Give yourself permission to slow down, enjoy the moment and recharge.

7. A Preventive mindset

Perhaps the most important thing you can pack doesn’t take up any room in your suitcase. A preventive mindset means listening to your body, making smart choices and recognizing that your health is what allows you to fully enjoy the experiences you’ve been looking forward to. Small decisions like staying hydrated, wearing sunscreen, taking a short walk or getting enough sleep can make the difference between simply taking a trip and truly enjoying it.

As you prepare for your next getaway, remember that the best souvenir you can bring home is your well-being. A little preparation before you leave can help protect your health and allow you to focus on what matters most: making memories with the people and places you love. So before you zip up your suitcase and head out on your next adventure, take a moment to pack the one thing you’ll use every mile of the journey: your health. Safe travels!

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

ARTIST

Continued from Page 9

events, but the highlight has been the people. I love that creative people come together — whether they consider themselves “artists” or do what is traditionally thought of as “art.”

“I love when people who are creative in their own way come together. Especially introverts. Erin and I both are introverts, and many creative people are, so we work to make our gatherings a good place for them. It’s good seeing creatives help one another, push one another, make friends and build a positive community together. So many people don’t consider themselves creatives but live a creative lifestyle. We’re here for all sorts, not just visual artists but writers, photographers, theater people, dance people — all sorts. We welcome everyone and embrace views from different creative perspectives. It’s always a thrill to see new people showing up.”

*Question: Is July 17 a good time to experience that?*

**A:** Adrienne is closing her show at Tanglewood then, and we’re celebrating the anniversary. It’s at 6 p.m. and is an open format — come in and out, stay and go as you please. We will be talking about the 478 and asking for feedback and ideas for the future. We’ll be gathering ideas and talking about how to make 478 sustainable for the future. At things like this, Erin and I like to get around and talk to everybody we can, and we love it

when we can connect people with other people and their projects.”

*Question: There’s another 478 Creatives event in late July. Can you share any details?*

**A:** “It’s July 30 from 6-9 p.m., and we’re calling it ‘478 Creatives: Insider’s Studio.’ We hope it’s the first in a series celebrating creative people and places through behind-the-scenes looks into the homes, studios and creative spaces of artists, collectors, designers and cultural leaders. Our inaugural evening will be inside The Turk House, where homeowner Claire Turk and interior designer Courtney Moss will share the story behind creating a home that thoughtfully blends art, antiques and everyday living. It’s a chance to enjoy and learn in one of Macon’s most beautiful private residences.”

*Question: How do people learn more and sign up to participate?*

**A:** “Come to our anniversary party! Or find out more and how to contact us through our Instagram account: @478creatives. This is one of the few 478 events we are charging for: \$25 per person, and reservations are required. Spaces are limited and we expect it to sell out fast. Our events are typically free, but this is a rare, charged event.”

Tanglewood Art Studios is at 1080 Third Street, Suite 500.

*Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at mwpannell@gmail.com. Find him on Instagram at michael\_w\_pannell.*



# The Macon Melody

## Summer has just begun!



### Catch a glimpse of upcoming concerts, events and more in a special Melody summer section coming July 17



# Georgia Amputee Golf Tournament creates opportunities, relationships

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

When Jim Young visited Macon back in 1999, he certainly wasn't thinking about golf.

The West Virginia native was going through a turbulent period of his life. Young had been in a bad motorcycle accident in the 1980s that forced him to spend three years in the hospital. After 20 operations on one of his legs, it had to be amputated.

Young had to adjust to his new life. He worked with a prosthetist, a health professional who helps design, fit and care for artificial limbs, to get a new leg.

"While that was happening, it kinda of dawned on me that, 'Hey, I could do this,'" he said. "I thought, 'What do I have to do to become a prosthetist?'"

So Young went to school at Northwestern, getting the necessary degree to help other amputees. Then came residency.

The options were Jonesboro, Arkansas; West Palm Beach or a little place called Macon.

"Well, you go to Jonesboro, you get one look at all that tornado warning system. ... If it happens that often, it's a no go," Young said. "Then with the place in Florida, (it) didn't seem like me."

So the newly-minted prosthetist — or prosthetist in training, rather — ventured south to Macon. He was not thinking about golf, but the sport would find him in a way that would change his life.

**Camaraderie and competition**

The Ray Rice Sr. Memorial Golf Tournament, also called the Georgia Amputee Golf Tournament, has been running for nearly 30 years. The event is hosted in Milledgeville and brings together amputees from across the state to compete on the golf course.

The tournament really started back in the late 1960s, though, according to lead coordinator Bill Eason.

"We originally played up in Warm Springs back around 1968, then moved it to Milledgeville when I moved there," Eason said. "Ray Rice's family eventually wanted to honor their father, so we named it in his honor."

Young will compete in this year's edition of the tournament, now in its 33rd year. In 1999, he more or less stumbled upon the event.

"It just so happened to be going on when I visited and it felt right to go," he said.

Young met other amputees — ones who had prosthetic legs like him, yes, but also men missing arms or missing both legs. It was a tight-knit group that Young embraced from the get-go.

As warm as the camaraderie felt, though, Young was just as enamored with the skills of the golfers.

The event is sanctioned by the U.S. Adaptive Golf Alliance, which helps make golf more accessible for people with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM YOUNG  
Macon prosthetist and amputee Jim Young, center, golfs with friends at a past iteration of the Ray Rice Sr. Memorial Golf Tournament. Young says the tournament drew him in as soon as he moved to Macon.

The organization hosts events and also has a ranking system for golfers that participate in their tournaments.

"Even I have a ranking from participating. Now, it's something like 18,000th place, but I have a ranking," Young said.

It was the competitors at the top of the table that wowed him. Young recalled how a player named Frank Culpepper who was paired with him the first time he attended the tournament, and how

Culpepper ripped a drive about 300 yards.

"God, he hit that ball so pure. I couldn't believe it," Young said. "Another year, a (Vietnam war veteran) who was missing one of his legs came up to the tee box on crutches, he didn't have a prosthetic. ... So he crutches up there, tees the ball up, dropped the crutches and hit the ball balanced on one leg. He knocked that ball about 150 yards."

Eason said the skill level of the

tournament has grown with the tournament's size.

"We've had a huge growth since the 1990s. We'll have close to 100 people this weekend. People have played with us for their entire lives," Eason said.

**'A family reunion'**

Over the years, Young has kept

SEE AMPUTEE  
PAGE 12



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES  
Central Fellowship's Joshua Sanders makes a play on the ball during CFCA's heated game against Brentwood last season. The star eighth grader has now officially transferred to Peach County.

## NOTEPAD

# Macon Bacon players in All-Star Game; CFCA standout transfers

BY MICAH JOHNSTON  
Sports Editor  
micah@maconmelody.com

The Macon Bacon had multiple players selected for the Coastal Plain League's annual All-Star Game, which took place this week in Florence, South Carolina.

Stewart Puckett was the clear standout from the Bacon. The designated hitter and infielder from South Alabama University had a .521 batting average en-

tering the All-Star Break, one of the best marks in the league.

Puckett was one of the top hitters on Macon's roster coming into the 2026 campaign. He was a top player at USA, earning Second Team All-Conference honors in the Sun Belt Conference with a .312 batting average and a .901 OPS.

The former South Florida player also earned the CPL Player of the Week award for one week in June after he hit a whopping .688 with three home runs over the course of a week.

Bacon Manager Jesse Litsch told The Melody before this season that Puckett would be a top player.

"He might get drafted, there's a possibility of that," Litsch said.

The Bacon's other All-Stars were right-handed pitcher Ryland Bozenhard, first baseman Grant Jordan and outfielders Camden Williamson and Dawson Mock.

SEE NOTEPAD  
PAGE 12

# A memorable baseball moment on the Fourth

During an Atlanta Braves game last week, one shared moment might have been a better celebration of America's 250th birthday than any fireworks show or patriotic picnic blessing.

That's no easy task. Independence Day is not a simple holiday in these times. Each American anniversary conjures complex thoughts about the tenor of our nation nowadays.

There's a lot of division in our country. Feelings of animosity boil over when discussing politics or America's identity. It's hard to consider our nation's legacy without considering some of the huge problems we face today.

We are not together. Bigotry is more prevalent, and more accepted, than ever before.

So. Let's talk about baseball.

What a shift. How can one think about a frivolous sport like baseball, a "boy's game," as so many of the men fortunate enough to play it professionally have called it, on a day so treacherously spring-loaded with 250 years of baggage?

Well, one reason is easy to pin down: It's a distraction. Sports are often an escape from the stresses of life.

Even when the Braves are slumping — and they have been for about a month now — catching a game has this wondrous, almost medicinal calming effect for many. It's just a great thing to watch after a long day.

But then, baseball is also America's pastime. It reflects our country in a way unlike any other



Micah Johnston

sport. The pastiche, the bespoke cadence, the almost pastoral aura of it — compared to the bruisingly urbane nature of football and the indoor ruckus of basketball — feels more historic than other sports. Heck, it is the oldest of America's major sports.

Baseball is such a tonic for our toil because it is a struggle itself. In more than a century of trying, the greatest athletes in the world still haven't figured out how to consistently get a hit more than 40% of the time. (Except for Ted Williams, and he only did it once.)

The struggle to make contact with a baseball using a bat, however, is not a result of capitalistic turmoil or systemic oppression — it is hard instead because people have gotten so unfathomably good at spinning their pitches. The ball moves faster, curves more sharply and darts more imperceptibly than it ever has before. There's practically a new pitch every year.

The challenges of everyday life are ugly. The challenges of baseball are stunning, iridescent mirrors of our existence that fascinate as much as they frustrate.

And just like America, it's more complicated than that. What about kids who yearn to play the game but cannot afford a bat? How many children fall in love with the game on television, a luxury not afforded to all (and a service inexplicably being gradually but ruthlessly diminished by MLB's TV blackouts)?

These are unfortunate aspects of reality that seep into our national pastime, yes, but that's

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