

The Macon Melody

\$2.00 » VOL. III, NO. 1 » JULY 24, 2026 » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Regional Communications Manager Suzanne Lawler with the Red Cross holds up donation signs as Rick Treptow donates blood.

Red Cross seeks blood donations

A blood shortage means donating matters.
For more info, see Page 3.

Forsyth Rd. tenants still irked by poor cell service

BY CASEY CHOUNG
Community Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

More than a month after a cell tower was knocked down, residents are still frustrated by spotty service around Vineville Avenue and Forsyth Road with no finish line on repairs in sight.

A storm took out a Verizon cell tower off Charter Boulevard in late May near the Piedmont Macon North hospital.

A portable, vehicle-mounted cellular tower now sits in the hospital's parking lot, meant to ensure consistent service around the area where the tower once stood, according to a Verizon spokesper-

son.

But some people working at the Rivoli Crossing shopping center have said their coverage is still spotty. Kailee Rowland, studio manager at Orange Theory, described it as a "hole" in service that stretches down Forsyth.

A lot of the members who work out at the studio ask to get onto the WiFi because they don't have service, she said, adding that her weekly meetings over Facetime sometimes drop because of poor cell reception.

Emily Turner works at the beem Light Sauna in the shopping center. She said it's hard to make calls when not on the WiFi in the office. Her coworker, Taylor Braswell,

said she can't get service heading toward Wesleyan College or further north near Tattnall Square Academy.

Verizon said it is working with the landowner on the site of the tower to make repairs. A taller tower should improve coverage, the Verizon spokesperson said. It's the site owner, not Verizon, who is responsible for completing the work, the spokesperson said.

The lot is owned by the hospital. "As they are still finalizing their plans, a definitive timeline for the permanent tower replacement has not been established yet. We are in ongoing communication with them," the spokesperson said.

REMEMBERING A MACON LEGEND

Friends and colleagues of Alan Walden, music manager and local icon, reflect on his legacy

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

One thing is clear to Newton Collier: Macon's legacy as a breeding ground for talented musicians and the birthplace of Southern Rock might not exist without the Walden brothers.

Phil Walden, a trailblazer in music, died in 2006. Thursday, his

"If it weren't for Phil and Alan, music would not even be what it is today in Macon, Georgia."
-Newt Collier

younger brother, Alan Walden — a music manager, promoter and publisher — died of cancer. He was 83.

The Walden brothers were a force to be reckoned with in the music industry. Not only were they key in launching the career of Otis Redding, they were pioneers in Southern Rock, a genre that propelled the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd to stardom.

"If it weren't for Phil and Alan, music would not even be what it is today in Macon, Georgia,"

said Collier, a legendary trumpet player who performed with Sam & Dave. If not for the Waldens, "a lot of the guys that got a chance to go on the road would have never gotten it."

Collier, 81, was barely a teenager when he met Alan Walden in the late '50s.

While over at his aunt's house in Tindall Heights one day, Collier heard music emanating from a house nearby and saw a short, red-headed teen waiting by a shiny car. It was Alan Walden. Phil was inside, working a band practice with Johnny Jenkins, renowned as the leader of The Pinetoppers.

"I went down and started talking to Alan," Collier said. "He found out I was a horn player and one thing led to another."

"He liked to nurture songwriters and poets and stuff like that. ... He just had that side to him."
-Chris Hicks

The friendship, unusual during a time of racial segregation, was instant and evolved into a lifelong brotherhood.

Collier, who is Black, began



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Alan Walden, a legendary music manager and producer who helped launched the careers of Otis Redding and others, pictured in his home in 2019. Walden died last week after a battle with cancer.

tagging along on tours with the two white brothers. He learned licks on the horn from trumpet player Samuel Coleman. Later, when Coleman was unable to make a gig, Collier filled in for him.

"Here I am, a little kid, going out with the big boys," Collier recalled.

Later, in the 60s, Collier went on to tour with Sam & Dave, playing trumpet on hits like "Hold On, I'm Coming" and appearing with

the band for performances on "The Ed Sullivan Show."

Collier and Alan Walden bonded over their shared passion

SEE WALDEN
PAGE 6

Periodical — Mail Label

For Macon's mayor, it's Nu-Way or nothing



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Macon mayor Lester Miller chats with another customer as he enjoys lunch at the Nu-Way Weiners location in Bloomfield on Monday. Miller has made his love for Nu-Way a part of his identity, bringing Macon's iconic hot dog restaurant everywhere from the Capitol to New York.

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON
Features Editor
evelyn@maconmelody.com

Road, Lester Miller chows down on a bright red hot dog slathered in chili, onions and a layer of slaw.

It's not a rare sighting to see the two-term mayor at a Nu-Way. Like the classic hot dog, his connection to

the local diner chain is "all the way" marinated in history, family tradition and civic pride.

He eats Nu-Way hot dogs with his family, serves them at parties and even puts them on ice to send

to relatives in New York. While in hospice, his grandfather requested two Nu-Way dogs as one of his last

SEE NU-WAY
PAGE 3



Special Content furnished to the Macon Melody.

PLAYFUL WAYS TO STAY ACTIVE OUTDOORS THIS SUMMER



Sponsored by: **Carlyle Place**
A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent

Maybe it's the longer evenings or the cooler morning air, but there's something about this time of year that makes outdoor activity feel irresistible.

According to the American Heart Association, time spent in nature can support mood, stress levels, and overall mental health. Summer and early fall are the perfect time to take advantage of this fact by moving your recommended weekly physical activity sessions outside.

You don't need an intense workout plan to feel the difference. A little movement, sunlight, and fresh air can go a long way. Here are some ideas for staying active this summer while enjoying all the rewards of the great outdoors.

1. TAKE A "NO DESTINATION" WALK

Not every walk needs a goal; you don't have to count steps, track mileage, or turn it into a personal challenge.

Instead, head outside, turn on some music, and let yourself mindfully wander. Take the side street you usually skip, walk through a nearby park, or pause to look at a garden, tree, dog, or anything else that catches your attention.

A slower walk can give your mind room to relax. You're moving your body, but you're also giving your brain a break from constant planning and screen time.

2. TURN BALANCE PRACTICE INTO A GAME

You don't need special equipment or a formal routine to work on balance — a lot of balance practice can happen naturally while you're already

outside doing other things.

Maybe you stand on one leg for a few seconds while watering plants, walk carefully down the curb in front of your home, or shift your weight side to side while tossing a ball around with a friend.

Little moments like these wake your body up in a different way. You start paying more attention to how you move, how you plant your feet, and how your body reacts. It's a simple way to feel steadier and more focused without a full workout.

3. STRETCH SOMEWHERE WITH A BREEZE

Stretching indoors isn't very exciting, making the practice easy to skip. Stretching outside feels a little more inviting.

Take five minutes in the morning to loosen your shoulders, neck, and back on the porch. After dinner, sit outside and stretch your legs while the air cools.

You don't even need a full routine or special equipment; the point is to create a quiet pause in your day. A few gentle stretches outside can help you feel more awake in the morning or more relaxed at night.

4. WALK ON UNEVEN GROUND

Flat sidewalks are useful, but walking on uneven ground gives your brain more to do.

Walking on grass, dirt paths, sand, or easy trails challenges your balance and coordination in a new way. Your body has to keep making small adjustments to keep you upright, which naturally

sharpens your focus. It also slows you down. Instead of moving on autopilot, you pay closer attention to where you're stepping and what is around you.

Just make sure you're wearing sturdy shoes before you take the scenic route.

5. DANCE WITH THE WINDOWS OPEN

Open the windows, put on music and move around while you cook, fold laundry, or clean the kitchen. Don't worry; you don't need to look like a professional dancer.

Dancing adds a playful kind of movement to the day, and that matters. When movement feels enjoyable, you are more likely to return to it without needing to force yourself.

6. END THE DAY OUTSIDE

Summer and early fall evenings offer an easy invitation to step away from the couch for a few minutes.

A short walk around the block, a slow bike ride, or a few stretches in the yard can help clear out the mental clutter that builds up during the day. You don't have to overhaul your entire routine to feel better — sometimes, your brain simply needs a little sunlight, fresh air, and movement to reset.

The best part is that these moments don't have to feel like a workout. A walk around the block, a few stretches outside, or even a dance around the kitchen can all help you feel a little more focused, balanced, and refreshed before the day is done.

Bibb school district to seek private loan, add salary raises to budget

BY CASEY CHOUNG
Community Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

The Bibb County Board of Education is seeking out a private loan to cover monthly expenses in anticipation of a lack of cash flow through October, and will also bring back scheduled salary increases after taking them off the budget in June.

The board unanimously authorized district financial staff to begin the process of obtaining a tax anticipation note (TAN), or a loan to cover expenses while it waits for tax disbursements.

CFO Eric Bush said the TAN arises from a "cash flow mismatch."

The Bibb County School District spends upwards of \$30 million a month, but funds available to the district could dip as low as \$15 million in October, according to the district's presentation.

Bush told board members the fund balance will need to remain above \$35 million to ensure the district can safely meet all of its spending obligations.

The note, if approved next month, would allow the district to take out at most \$35 million in loans to be paid out by the end of the year and would incur \$400,000 to \$500,000 in interest.

The move to keep the fund

balance well-fed comes as the school district faces added costs from state mandates and dwindling enrollment.

"Other districts [use a TAN] regularly," Bush said. The loan will be sought from a private source.

But Bush said it's likely the district will have to acquire another tax anticipation note next year if it continues to operate at a deficit or without any property tax increase.

Board members tacked more back onto that deficit when they voted 7-1 to reinstate \$1.7 million in step increases for all staff members, with board president Daryl Morton as the lone nay, walking back a cut made in an earlier budget meeting.

Board member Myrtice Johnson asked the board to reconsider the structured salary bumps to recognize teachers working on the front line. The salary increases reward teachers and staff who stay in the district.

Johnson had originally voted to maintain the step increases for teachers in June, but the board was deadlocked in a 4-4 split before doing away with the salary bumps to reduce the deficit.

Based on the latest tax digest, maintaining the millage rate, effectively raising taxes, could bring in \$9 million in additional tax revenue, Bush told The Melody.

"The taxpayers should be a little more open to funding this school system," Johnson said. "Nobody wants to raise the taxes but sometimes it's a necessary evil."

Board president Daryl Morton told board members that money is not "found money" and he can't support the step increase if it ultimately means raising taxes.

"I would like to see us look and see if we could find that money somewhere else," Board member Barney Hester said. "I certainly think the teachers need it."

The board approved a slew of contracts including ones with Gordon Food Service to supply meals and Atrium Health Navicent for staffing and supplying nurse's offices.

The district will also join an ongoing lawsuit against Meta, TikTok, Snapchat and Google. School districts nationwide have joined the lawsuit and argue the cluster of corporations intentionally addict teenagers to their products, which negatively impacts their mental health.

Now the Bibb County School District will seek financial compensation for what it believes are damages caused by social media addiction.

The board will also meet within the next two weeks to discuss potential closures.

Summer lunch program feeds hungry students across Macon



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUNE O'NEAL

Friends of June O'Neal pack lunches at a church in Bolingbroke on Monday. The program helps bridge the gap between summer school and the regular school year starting and feeds hundreds of hungry kids across Macon, O'Neal says.

BY CASEY CHOUNG
Community Reporter
casey@maconmelody.com

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, June O'Neal has helped serve lunches to kids while school is out, bridging the food-less gap between when summer school ends and when the next school year begins.

O'Neal previously gave out lunches and performed other charitable endeavors through the Mentor's Project, a nonprofit partnered with the Bibb County School District to pair adult mentors with teenagers.

But she retired from her longtime post at the Mentor's Project two years ago, and she was asked whether the meals would continue

this summer.

"I wasn't with the Mentor's Project but my mother always said God will make a way in no way," she said. "I just felt like that was the right thing to do."

Volunteers will deliver meals to students through the end of July.

O'Neal's friends and their children get started packing lunches at 8 a.m. every Monday at a church in Bolingbroke. They make sandwiches and throw in snacks like beef jerky and watermelon.

All students across all public schools in Bibb County are eligible for free lunch under the federal Community Eligibility Provision. School districts with high poverty rates utilize the provision to provide lunch and breakfast

to all of their students.

A district's eligibility is determined by the percentage of students who receive meals from programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or are homeless, migrant or Head Start children. Nearly 60% of students in Bibb County fall into this group.

In June, the district's nutrition program served 32,000 meals to students attending summer school across the district, according to Donnanique Washington, executive director of school nutrition.

"While not every student participated, the program successfully reached a significant number of children throughout the community," Washington wrote.

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

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

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

Carlyle Place

A Life-Plan Community of Atrium Health Navicent



Atrium Health Navicent

5300 Zebulon Rd. | Macon, GA 31210

6192_3

NU-WAY

Continued from Page 1

meals.

Miller handed out Nu-Way at his 2020 election night watch party. Earlier this year, he brought coolers of chili dogs to the Georgia Capitol.

The city’s highest official makes pitstops at Nu-Way locations all over town, giving himself a brief spell to both escape the pressures of office and connect directly with the community.

For Miller, who grew up in Bloomfield and remembers visiting the iconic eatery as a child, Nu-Way Weiners is a red-roofed time capsule. Little has changed in the Bloomfield diner, from the off-white Formica countertops to the faded chrome stools. Customers still stop by for a chocolate malt shake and fries to dip in it.

On this particular afternoon, Miller doesn’t even pause to scan the menu before ordering a golden grilled cheese sandwich, crispy fries

and a sweet tea to accompany his hot dog.

Like many other longtime residents, when it comes to the more-than-a-century-old local establishment, Miller bleeds Nu-Way’s secret chili sauce.

That signature red hot stick of dynamite wedged inside a bun has stood the test of time since 1916, making Nu-Way Weiners one of the oldest American hot dog restaurants.

“Sometimes that red throws them off,” Miller said. “That’s why I get it completely covered ... I don’t think about how it looks or how it’s made, I know it tastes good.”

The mayor swears up and down that it’s far superior to The Varsity in Atlanta.

He could probably measure his mayoral tenure in Nu-Way hot dogs eaten. His ballpark estimate clocks in at roughly 1,000 dogs purchased annually.

“I just can’t eat as many as I used to,” he said.

He has cut down his Nu-Way consumption from two times a week to a few times a month. Healthy food and gym workouts offset his visits.

Depending on his schedule, Miller eats at whichever Nu-Way location is closest. He said it’s his “getaway” time where he’s left to his own thoughts and can problem-solve over some greasy brain food. But that doesn’t keep community members from stopping at his table for a quick chat.

“I’m always on the clock,” Miller said.

Maconites have approached him to ask about projects in the works or which official to contact to solve a specific problem. Sometimes, they just want a picture with the mayor.

Miller often finds himself taking out-of-towners or other business officials for a quick bite at Nu-Way. He said they usually enjoy it just as much as locals do.

Nu-Way, he said, is just “something we all can be proud of” in Macon.

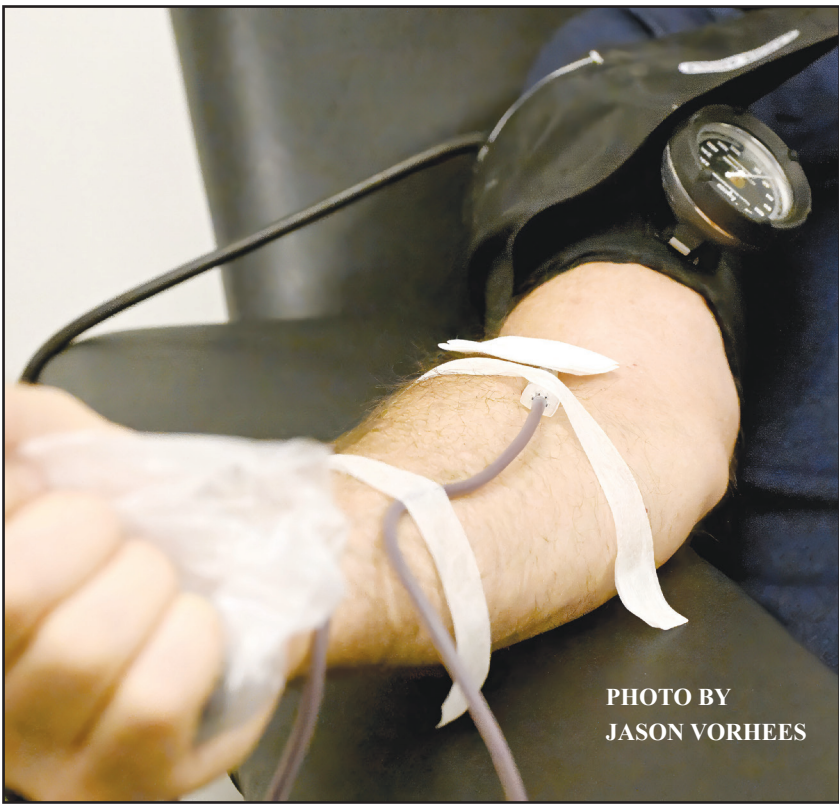


PHOTO BY
JASON VORHEES

Red Cross navigates emergency shortage

BY ALAYSIA EZZARD
Community Reporter
alaysia@maconmelody.com

Last week, the American Red Cross declared an emergency blood shortage. In June, the national blood supply dropped about 25% and hospital need increased by about 3,500 units a week.

“We need you to come give blood,” said Suzanne Lawler with the Red Cross’s Central Georgia chapter. “You’re helping people living with cancer, people living with sickle cell. We’re in the deadliest 100 days of the trauma season right now.”

The trauma season, according to the Red Cross, is the time between Memorial and Labor Day when the need to treat serious injuries often increases. Lawler said it’s not uncommon for a trauma patient to need 100 units or pints of blood. That amounts to a donation from 100 people.

All blood types are needed, but the Red Cross is especially looking for O positive and B negative blood types.

Rick Treptow has been giving blood since the 1970s while he was in college. He doesn’t do a lot of work in the community but gives when he has the time to give.

He encouraged people anxious about giving blood to try and overcome their nerves.

“Everybody should do it,” Treptow said. “It doesn’t take much time.”

If you can’t give blood, Lawler said to encourage your friends to donate.

The Red Cross at 6080 Lakeside Commons Dr. hosts a blood drive every Friday. You can also visit redcrossblood.org and type in your zipcode to find a list of local blood drives.

The Red Cross is also offering a Fandango movie ticket for donating blood until July 31.



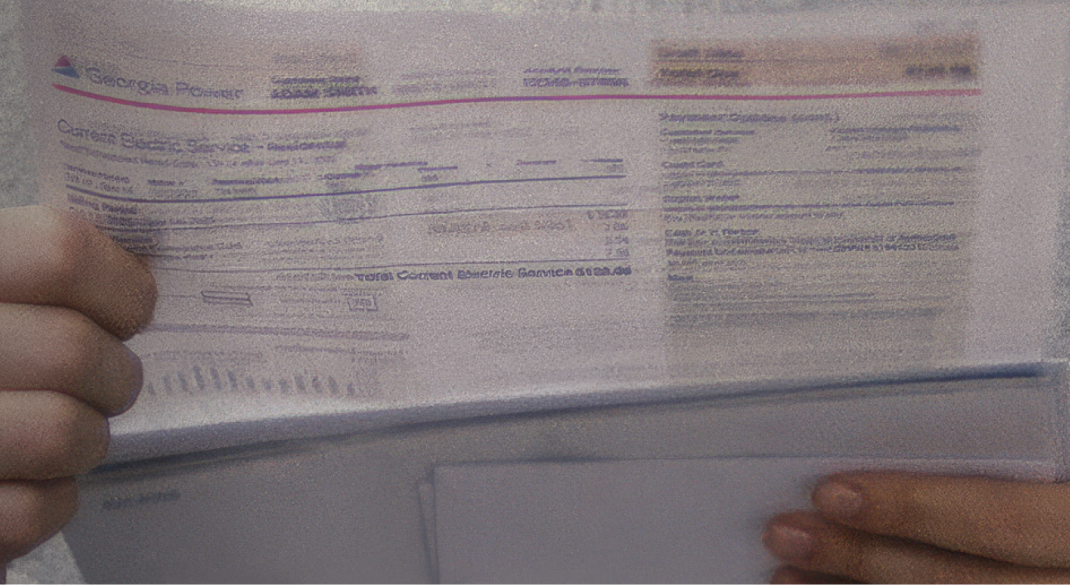
PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES
Lester Miller, surrounded by Nu-Way’s old-school diner vibes, eats his typical order from the iconic Macon hot dog spot: a bright-red hot dog with chili, slaw and onions; a grilled cheese; and a sweet tea.



Georgia Power

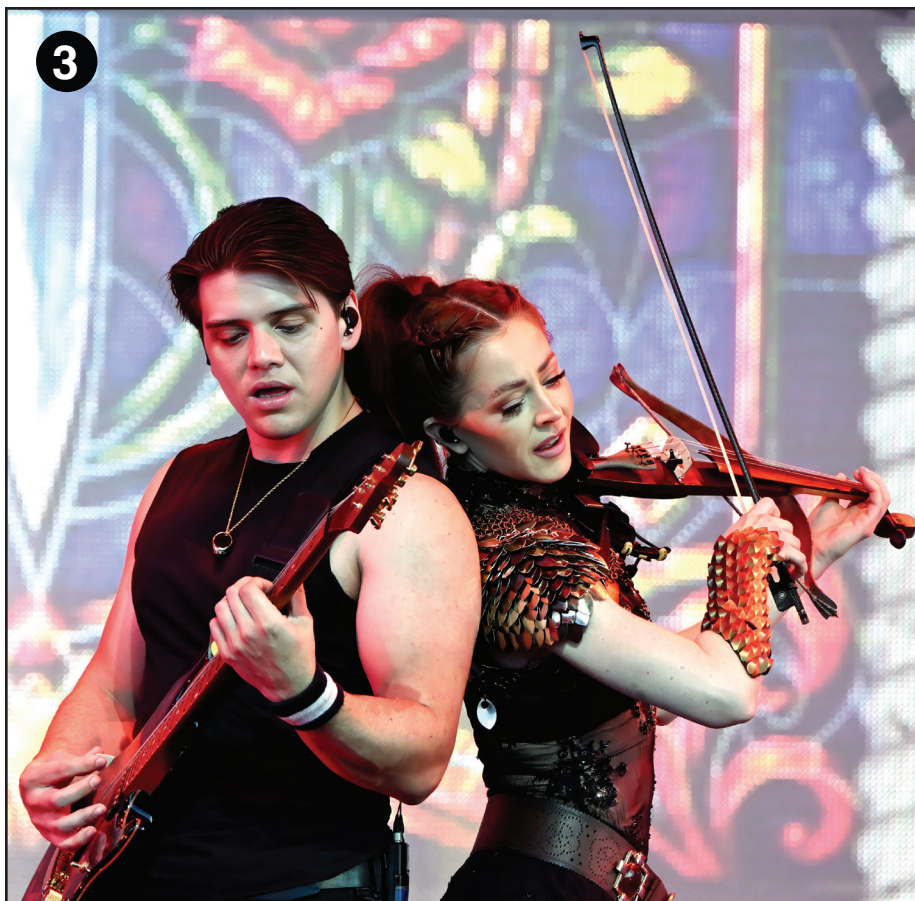
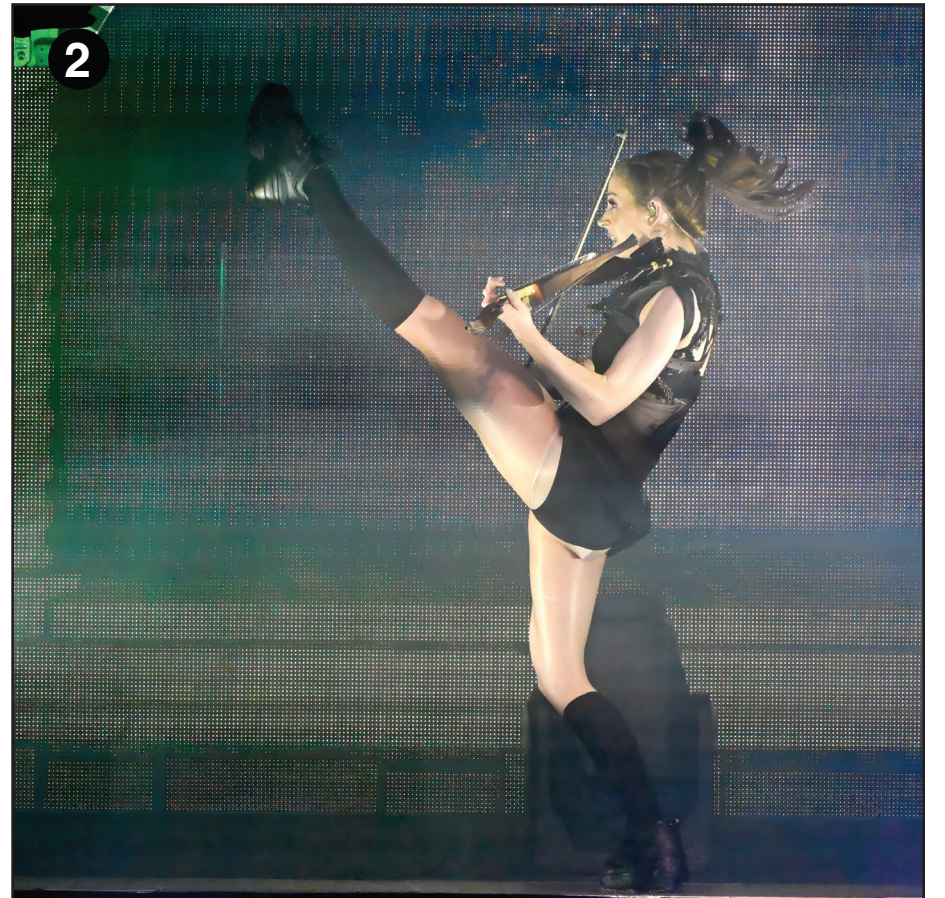
We've Lowered Rates

As part of our ongoing efforts to help keep costs stable, we've lowered rates, resulting in savings of about \$50 per year for the typical residential customer. See how we're taking actions to help keep energy costs stable and predictable at georgiapower.com/LowerRates.



SNAPSHOTS

PAGE 4 » THE MACON MELODY » REPORTING FOR MACON, FROM MACON » MACONMELODY.COM » FRIDAY, JULY 24 2026



PHOTOS 1-4 — Lindsey Stirling performs Tuesday night at the Atrium Health Amphitheater during her “Duality Untamed” tour. Stirling’s music mixes modern classical with dance and electronica. The Goo Goo Dolls are scheduled for the Amphitheater’s next concert on Aug. 27 with tickets available at [Ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com).
Photos by Jason Vorhees / The Melody

PHOTO 5 — Members of the Girls Dig Deeper Initiative, alongside Robins Financial Credit Union, recently volunteered at the Middle Georgia Community Food Bank. The group helped pack 427 boxes containing 6,068 meals for families across Middle Georgia.
Photo courtesy Macon-Bibb County

PHOTO 6 — Volunteers from Macon Pride built toolboxes for Macon Milledgeville Regional Habitat for Humanity on July 18.
Photo courtesy of Macon Milledgeville Regional Habitat for Humanity

PHOTO 7 — The Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon-cutting at Wanna Tuft Studios in downtown on July 15. The Studio located at 1080 3rd St. offers guided classes in making custom tufted rugs, drip painting and more. Classes can be booked at [Wannatuftstudios.com](https://www.wannatuftstudios.com).
Photo courtesy of Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce



The world was meant to meet: 2026 World Cup comes to an end

Airbnb ran a commercial all summer with a line I cannot shake: the world was meant to meet. Six words, maybe the best thing anyone wrote about this tournament, and nobody at FIFA wrote it.

It is all over now, and I already feel a certain emptiness. Thirty-nine days, forty-eight nations, one hundred and four matches, sixteen cities, three countries and 6,810,966 people through the turnstiles, double the record set here in 1994.

Whatever else the summer of 2026 was, it was the largest sporting gathering this continent has ever staged, and some of it happened ninety minutes up the road in Atlanta. We will not see its like again for a long time.

The bronze, the ache and the row

You already know where my heart sits. England went to Atlanta on July 15th and lost a semifinal 2-1 to Argentina, leading with less than twenty minutes to the end. The name of Lionel Messi was linked to both goals, the winner arriving in stoppage time.

I watched it with my head in my hands, like a man at a funeral.

Then three days later in Miami, in a match nobody wanted to play, England beat France 6-4 in a game many are calling the most exciting of the entire six weeks.

Declan Rice scored inside three minutes. Bukayo Saka took a hat-trick. Jude Bellingham dribbled past three Frenchmen to end it.

Ten goals, the most in any World



Christopher Blake

Cup match since 1982. It was ludicrous, and it was our best finish since 1966.

The funeral may be premature. Third is not first, however.

Sixty years of near misses are not redeemed by a bronze medal in Florida. But I have supported this team long enough to take the medal and the ache together and call it a good summer.

Norway gave us the thing I will remember longest. Twenty-eight years away, and they arrived, beat Brazil 2-1, reached a first quarterfinal, and then thousands of strangers sat down on the ground and pulled imaginary oars.

Nobody thought history could repeat itself, but oh, it most surely did. The Viking Row travelled from Norwegian stadiums to Times Square, to escalators in Boston, to a PGA fairway, to the floor of the Norwegian parliament.

And one man refused. Emil Lapen, sitting with his arms folded amid a sea of rowing countrymen, explained to Sky News that the celebration was derivative of Iceland's thunderclap and historically inaccurate.

Vikings, he insisted, did not row like that. I adore this man. A continent in ecstasy, and one Norwegian defending the archaeological record.

That is humanity in a single frame.

Integrity and authenticity matter as much in FIFA football as they do in all of life.

That was the tournament's real gift. Not the goals, or even the matches, but rather the festive nationalism, the way to celebrate the human tribe and still love our own. Flags worn as capes rather than weapons. Cape Verde and Curacao arriving on the biggest stage and belonging there. Whole nations awake at four in the morning. For six weeks the world met, and mostly it liked what it found.

The Americans

And so, what shall we say of the host nation and its team, as FIFA 2026 recedes into history? As for the team, the United States entered ranked sixteenth and lived up to it. They came through the group, and their round of 16 tie with Belgium became the most-watched soccer match in American history before it turned into a 4-1 defeat in Seattle.

We should be honest about what preceded it. Folarin Balogun's red card debacle was one of the low points and shadow realities of the World Cup.

When Infantino got lobbied and the card was suspended, Belgium (indeed, everyone) was outraged and so was I. Belgium won by three, which is its own commentary.

But the team and the nation can stand tall, alongside Mexico and

SEE BLAKE
PAGE 7

Don't blame data centers for failed public policies

Data centers have become a kind of boogeyman among voters lately. Recent polling even suggests that new data center construction is less popular than the IRS. Only 27% of Americans at least somewhat favor new data center construction, according to Gallup. Meanwhile, YouGov found that 28% of Americans have a favorable view of the IRS.

This isn't an apples-to-apples comparison, but anytime an industry polls worse than the IRS, it's probably time to take stock in the situation. However, public sentiment might be missing the point. American data centers are a necessity in the digital age, but problems emerge when they are subsidized and the government doesn't adequately police them. Put simply, many of the complaints about data centers are really complaints about government policies related to them.

By way of background, "Data centers are large facilities that host file servers and networking equipment to store, process, and analyze information — capabilities that are critical for the growing use of AI," according to the Brookings Institution. In short, they enable us to enjoy the conveniences of a rapidly evolving digital world, but Georgians increasingly do not want them here.

Residents in Newnan, Marietta, Garden City, Forsyth and elsewhere have protested proposed data centers, pushed elected officials to reconsider approvals and made data center policy a hot topic in recent elections.

Opposition depends on the individual. Yet the main arguments tend to center around data centers' elec-



Marc Hyden

tricity and water consumption and residential ratepayers subsidizing those needs; the fact that data centers receive generous government handouts; concerns over their environmental impact; and they can be eyesores. These are legitimate concerns stemming from data center development, but government policy often determines who bears the costs.

To begin with, industrial customers, like data centers, enjoy lower electricity rates than residential customers — 6.7 cents per kilowatt-hour vs. about 15 cents — and large load industrial customers are even allowed to shop around for their preferred electric provider. Residential customers are not afforded that privilege and seem, at least on paper, to pay higher rates that benefit Big Industry. These unfair realities stem directly from government regulation.

There has been further concern that residential ratepayers may be required to shoulder much of the costs of building new power plants to support the proliferation of data centers. The Public Service Commission instituted a rule — with ample loopholes — against this, but rules can seemingly change on a whim, leaving Georgians worried.

Georgians have also been up in arms over the handouts that data centers have received from the state. "The policy has cost [Georgia] at least \$1.5 billion in lost revenue since its inception, including nearly \$500 million in fiscal year 2025 alone [...] About 70% of data center

SEE HYDEN
PAGE 7



The Macon Melody

1675 Montpelier Avenue » Macon, GA 31201

Customer Service and General Questions: 478-200-7403

Subscribe online and read more news: maconmelody.com

Sign up for The Riff newsletter: maconmelody.com/newsletter

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

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

Michah Johnston » Interim Executive Editor, Sports and Newsletter Editor

Janisha Rozier » Operations and Special Projects Associate

Evelyn Davidson » Features Editor

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.

ABOUT THE MACON MELODY

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND GUEST EDITORIALS POLICY

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

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

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

Submissions may be sent to news@maconmelody.com.

EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE NOTE

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

CORRECTIONS POLICY

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

SUPPORTING OUR WORK

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

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

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

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

If you would like to make one-time or recurring donations to support our work, those gifts are tax deductible. To do so, visit georgiastrustforlocalnews.fundjournalism.org.

ADVERTISE WITH US

Connect with engaged local readers through The Macon Melody. Send us an email at advertising@maconmelody.com or learn more at maconmelody.com/advertise-with-us/.

ABOUT THE GEORGIA TRUST FOR LOCAL NEWS

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

Cynthia DuBose » Executive Director » cynthia@gtln.org
DuBose Porter » Publisher Emeritus » dubose@ntln.org

LEGALESE

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

“Alan opened doors for us that would have been difficult for us to open on our own. ... He instilled upon us a concept of aggressive style of play. It was Alan’s theory as a musical personality that stealing the show and going after the headliner was the way to do it. ‘Go for the throat.’ ... And we did that. We still do that to this day.”

— Henry Paul, vocalist and guitarist for Outlaws and friend of Alan Walden

WALDEN

Continued from Page 1

for music.

“We didn’t give a damn,” Collier said. “We defended each other, no matter what. If we had to go down, we were going down together.”

Redwal Music

Alan Walden was born in Macon in 1943 to Clemiel Barto “C.B.” and Carolyn Walden.

In the early 1960s, when Alan was 19 years old, Phil left for a stint in the Army. Alan helped manage his brother’s business in his absence and learned it “overnight,” Collier said.

Phil had been managing Otis Redding, who grew up in Tindall Heights with Collier and was a rising star at the time.

“I had 12 hours of training as Otis Redding’s manager and running my brother’s booking agency,” Alan said in “Southern Man: Music & Mayhem in the American South: A Memoir,” a book written with S.E. Feinberg.

“By the time Phil returned from Germany, Otis and I had a string of hits,” Alan wrote. “Phil congratulated me on what a good job I had done and wanted to know if I wanted to stay on and work or go back to Mercer. He really wanted me to go back to college. ... But I told him, ‘I can’t see going back to college where I could learn to make less money.’ We immediately began an even stronger push to expand.”

Collier remembers that time well. “Otis was big,” he said. “And Alan is the one responsible for taking it to that next level.”

Redding and Alan became close friends, Collier said. Later, Alan bought a cabin next to the singer’s Big “O” Ranch, a 300-acre estate in Jones County.

“He taught Otis how to ride a horse, and Otis taught him how to fish,” Collier said. “They wrote

songs together. They were close. ... They were inseparable in many ways.”

Redding and the Waldens established Redwal Music together, with big plans. But tragedy struck just two weeks before Christmas in 1967. Redding, 26, was killed in a plane crash over a lake in Wisconsin. Thousands attended his funeral at the Macon City Auditorium.

The loss was deeply felt in the city. And it was devastating for the Waldens, who took a two-year hiatus from the music business.

“The Redding family is deeply saddened by the passing of Alan Walden,” the Otis Redding family said in a statement. “Alan was a cherished friend of both Otis Redding and the Redding family. We are grateful for his friendship, his support, and the lasting impact he made on our family and the music world. Our heartfelt condolences are with Alan’s family and all who loved him.”

“Otis was big. And Alan is the one responsible for taking it to that next level.”
-Newt Collier

Capricorn Days

The Waldens got back to work in 1969. Capricorn Records was created, and the legendary label helped springboard notable Southern rock bands.

Alan described his work with his brother this way: “When a band came down south, they stopped in Macon to see the Walden brothers. When they got to us, we offered management and publishing and booking dates and travel for the musicians.”

But the younger Walden soon broke off from the label and began managing groups like Lynyrd Skynyrd, Outlaws and others.

“He bought Lynyrd Skynyrd to



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Alan Walden, pictured here at the Douglass Theater in Macon in a file photo, was known for his ability to connect with bands in conversation, according to artists and fellow managers that worked with him.

audition for his big brother, Phil, at Grant’s Lounge. Grant’s is famous because it was that audition spot,” said Rex Dooley, a Rock Candy Tours guide and a volunteer at the Allman Brothers Band Museum at the Big House. “Phil didn’t like the lead singer Ronnie Van Zant. He said, ‘Man, no, they’re trying to sound like the Allman Brothers. And the lead singer — he can’t sing, and he’s got an attitude, too.’”

“When Alan was talking to an artist, everyone was paying attention because he knew what he was talking about.”
-Charlie Brusco

Alan was undeterred.

Dooley said he heard that story and others when Alan Walden came to his house for dinner roughly 25 years ago, lured by Dooley’s girlfriend’s Southern cooking.

Henry Paul, the original vocalist and guitarist for Outlaws, recalled the night the band caught Walden’s attention when it played with Lynyrd Skynyrd in 1974. Van Zant called Walden after the show to put Outlaws on his radar.

Walden teamed with Charlie Brusco to manage the band.

“(Alan) opened doors for us that would have been difficult for us to open on our own,” Paul said. “He instilled upon us a concept of aggressive style of play. It was Alan’s theory as a musical personality that stealing the show and going after the headliner was the way to do it. ‘Go for the throat.’ ... And we did that. We still do that to this day.”

Brusco, who started a management company with Alan in Macon in the ‘70s, recalled his partner’s uncanny ability to connect with artists, praising his conversation skills and attention to detail.

“Alan always knew exactly what he wanted from a band. It was

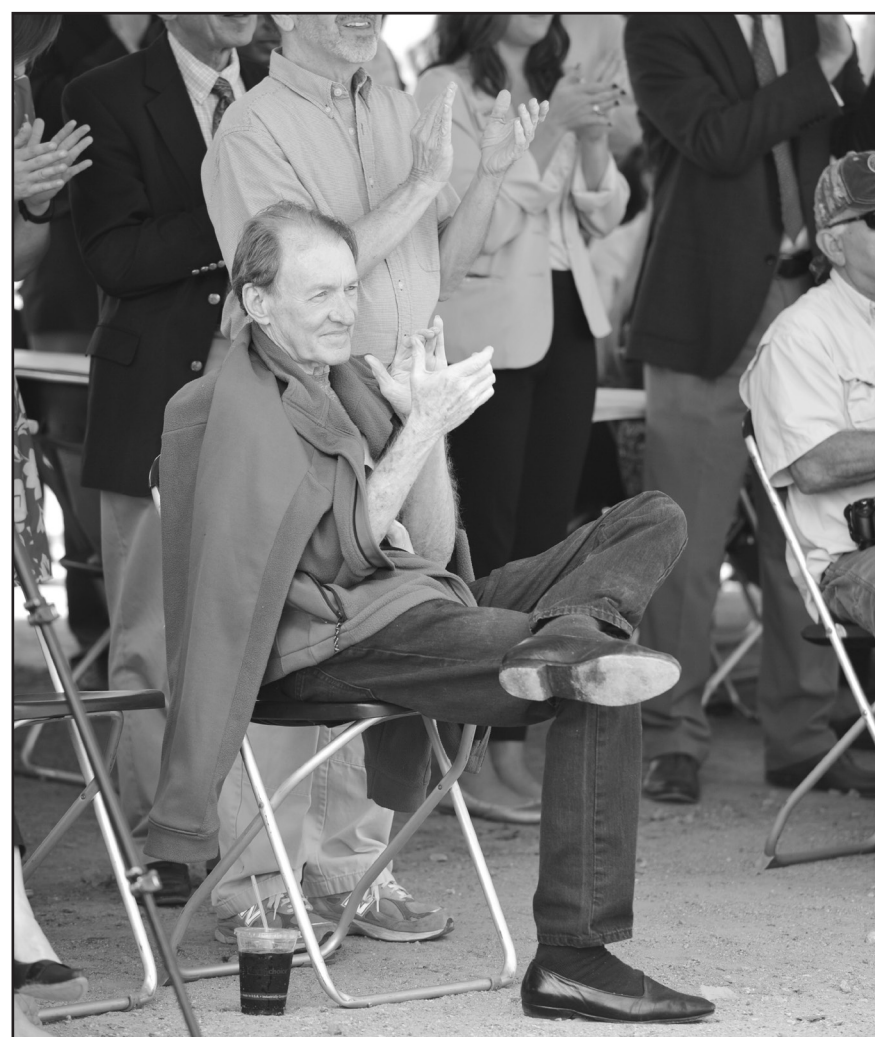


PHOTO BY WOODY MARSHALL

Alan Walden applauds at the groundbreaking of the renovation for Capricorn Studios, which is now a remodeled studio, in 2016.

planned out. A lot of guys back then shot from the cuff. He didn’t just shoot from the cuff,” Brusco said. “When Alan was talking to an artist, everyone was paying attention because he knew what he was talking about.”

“He was real gracious like that. ... He was a good person.”
-Rex Dooley

Dooley said that, while Alan Walden never stood in the same limelight as his brother, he could spot talent. And he was a good man.

He always asked about Dooley’s girlfriend after her daughter was killed in 1999. “He was real gracious like that,” Dooley said. “He was a good person.”

Chris Hicks, who worked with Walden early as a member of the band Loose Change before joining Outlaws and The Marshall Tucker Band, echoed those sentiments about Alan’s kindness.

“He liked to nurture songwriters and poets and stuff like that,” Hicks said. “He just had that side to him.”

Alan’s daughter, Macon Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Jessica Walden, said in a statement that her father’s influence can be felt across the city.

“His love of Macon was deep and wide. He could have lived anywhere the music industry called him, but he chose Macon. Here, he planted his unwavering belief that our story was far from over and that from here, anything was possible. Because of his passion for the place he called home and for the extraordinary local talent he believed in so completely, Macon made its mark on the world, and he

made his mark with it.”

A lasting legacy

Walden and his musical legacy continue to have an impact on Macon. The city’s music culture remains a pillar of its identity, thanks in large part to the Walden brothers.

Macon’s radio station, The Creek 100.9 FM, has tried to honor that legacy since its first broadcast a decade ago, Director of Operations Anthony Ennis said. The Walden brothers, he said, were “some of the most pivotal and key components to making Macon a music scene.”

Photographer Kirk West shot much of the music scene in Macon and, alongside his wife Kirsten, preserved The Allman Brothers Band legacy through ownership of The Big House, the home on Vineville Avenue where the Allman Brothers lived for a time. West owned the house in the early 2000s before selling it to a nonprofit that transformed it into the museum it is today.

West met Alan in the early ‘80s while researching for a book on the Allman Brothers Band.

“He was a character,” West said. “He was a relentless storyteller.”

Others agree too that Alan’s reputation as a charismatic teller of tales was almost as impressive as his knack for finding musical stardom. Hicks said Alan’s interpersonal skills “brought a kind of new respect to the South, of people getting along with each other.”

“I hope that’s what his legacy will be, because that’s one of his greatest accomplishments,” Hicks said. “He was a kind of guy that knew how to put people together to do things.”

Staff writers Micah Johnston and Evelyn Davidson contributed to this story.



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Alan Walden speaks at an event in 2005 in this file photo. Walden, who helped launch the careers of Otis Redding, Outlaws and other bands, had a knack for finding hit songs in artists’ discographies.

Decision time for Okefenokee Swamp’s proposed World Heritage designation

ROSS WILLIAMS

Georgia Recorder
georgiarecorder.com

Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp could soon be elevated to the same level as Yellowstone National Park, the fjords of Norway or Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s World Heritage Committee is meeting this week in Busan, South Korea, with an agenda that includes deciding whether to add the 400,000-acre Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to its list of World Heritage sites.

Established in 1972, the list is intended to aid “in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value,” according to UNESCO.

Being recognized as a World Heritage site would be a major boost for the Okefenokee and Georgia, said Environment Georgia Director Jenette Gayer.

“I think it is recognition that the Okefenokee is really one of a kind, that we are lucky in Georgia to have such a beautiful, biodiverse, special place and it will mean that the entire world recognizes how special the Okefenokee is,” she said.

The swamp is considered a good candidate for selection because it is one of the world’s largest naturally driven freshwater ecosystems

and it serves as habitat for an enormous number of species, including amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds, fishes and invertebrates, according to UNESCO documents. Because it is the source of rivers rather than their recipient and because the land has been well-managed, it remains largely unchanged by human activities compared with other wetlands, UNESCO said.

If it’s approved, it will become the 27th World Heritage site in the United States, with other sites including the Grand Canyon, the Everglades and the Great Smoky Mountains.

A local debate

If you spend enough time out on the Okefenokee, you’re likely to run into Rodney Thompson of St. George, who, with his wife, Tina, runs the YouTube channel Blackwater Outdoor Journeys. The channel showcases the couple’s canoeing, camping and fishing expeditions in the Okefenokee and other locations in Georgia and Florida.

Thompson grew up on the swamp, hunting, fishing and enjoying the natural beauty.

“Me and my dad and my brothers, we grew up, and every Saturday, especially early spring — they say when the yellowflies get to bitin’, the warmouths get to bitin’ also — so when you start seeing yellowflies, you’d start seeing us in the swamps, trying to catch them warmouth, and

we loved doing that,” he said.

Thompson said he first learned about the proposal to make the swamp a World Heritage site when he started seeing opposition.

“I started seeing signs, you know, ‘Keep UNESCO out,’” he said. “I didn’t really understand what it was until I started really doing the research on it and what kind of impact it was going to have.”

Some locals oppose the designation because they say it could draw large numbers of tourists, potentially damaging the swamp and changing the local way of life.

Thompson said he ultimately supports the designation, but he is sympathetic to those arguments. He cited a 2024 Conservation Fund report finding that the number of people visiting the Okefenokee per year could double from 800,000 to 1.6 million by 2035 if it becomes a World Heritage site.

“I don’t know how Charlton County could handle that, Clinch County,” he said. “I mean, Fargo has a Dollar General. That’s about all. They ain’t even got a restaurant.”

Thompson characterized towns like St. George and Fargo as “dying,” but said he hopes increased tourism could inject new life. The Conservation Fund projects the region could see 750 jobs, \$79 million in economic output and \$11.1 million in annual tax revenue.

“Heck, we only got a Dollar General about four years ago,” he added.

“So that tells you how small we are. But I think that if it’s done right and you’ve got the right people behind it, I think that it can have a positive impact on these smaller communities.”

Political football

Others who oppose the designation say they fear association with the United Nations would undermine U.S. sovereignty. An online petition opposing the measure gained over 1,000 signatures.

“A specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO, gains major influence of our region through its World Heritage Committee, comprised of 21 foreign nations, which emphasizes furthering the goals of its parent organization, the United Nations,” the petition reads.

If the classification is approved, the refuge would continue to be owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In a FAQ on its website, the service says the designation would not affect the ability to hunt or fish on the property in accordance with state laws or subject the area to any kind of UN policy. UNESCO monitors sites and potential threats but does not have ownership or management rights over the land.

President Donald Trump has pledged to withdraw the U.S. from UNESCO effective at the end of the year. The U.S. previously withdrew from the organization during

Trump’s first term and re-joined under former President Joe Biden. The nation’s departure is not expected to have an effect on the Okefenokee’s prospects as membership in UNESCO isn’t required for addition to the World Heritage list.

Not an end to the threat

The designation would not stop all threats to the swamp.

Last year, environmentalists celebrated after an Alabama-based company scrapped plans to mine valuable minerals near the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, but the designation would not stop others from developing near the swamp in a way that could harm the ecosystem.

Advocates have rallied behind a bipartisan attempt to protect Trail Ridge from mining.

“The reality is there are still many acres of land that are adjacent to the Okefenokee that we know contain minerals that people want to mine that are not protected, that could be mined without regard to this designation,” Gayer said. “We hope that this would influence regulators to think twice about another effort to mine adjacent to the Okefenoke, but the reality is we still have unprotected lands that people could mine on.”

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

Bankrupt 23andMe to make payment to The Peach State

TY TAGAMI

Capitol Beat
capitol-beat.org

ATLANTA — The genetic testing company 23andMe gave tens of thousands of Georgians insights into their ancestry and health predispositions.

A massive data breach also subjected those Georgians to an invasion of privacy, allowing others an opportunity to see their genetic information after their data was published for sale on the dark web, according to Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr.

Carr announced that 171,125 Georgians were affected by the 2023 breach that compromised the genetic data of 6.9 million

customers worldwide.

The unraveling of the company has led to a settlement between state attorneys general and the bankruptcy trustee for 23andMe that will result in a \$452,232 payment to the state treasury, Carr’s office said last week.

The money comes from an \$18 million settlement fund for participating states. It is separate from a \$47 million class-action settlement with customers, a spokesman for Carr’s office said Tuesday.

The claim period for the class-action lawsuit ended in February.

The company initially denied the breach had occurred, then blamed consumers for exposing

themselves with their account setup or password choices, according to Carr’s office, which said 23andMe initially accepted no responsibility for a “credential stuffing” breach.

Carr joined 41 other attorneys general to hold the company to account.

Their investigation found “unreasonable” data security practices, Carr’s office said, including failure to remediate known vulnerabilities.

The company filed for bankruptcy in March 2025, and its consumer data and other assets were sold to TTAM Research Institute, a nonprofit that was formed by 23andMe founder and former CEO Anne Wojcicki

and subsequently reregistered as 23andMe Research Institute.

Customers can delete their genetic data by signing into their 23andMe account: Start with the user profile in the upper right-hand corner, click “settings,” scroll to “23andMe Data” at the bottom and click the “view” button, then scroll down to the red “Permanently Delete Data” button at the bottom and click it.

Customers can download their data first by clicking the “Request Download” button after clicking the “view” button and before clicking the delete button.

For more information about the class-action settlement, visit 23andmedatasettlement.com.

HYDEN

Continued from Page 5

government and military that develops advanced technology. And Americans should want them housed domestically.

Even the data centers with technology and data that may seem innocuous could be dangerous in the wrong hands. Relying on overseas data centers could subject them to the whims of foreign intelligence agencies — meaning the technologies and all your personal information could be accessed by America’s enemies.

The bottom line is that data centers are not evil. They are vital to our future, and over the long-run, we should want more of them built here. That said, there are myriad public policy failures related to them, which lawmakers have tried and failed to address. Until they do, data centers will continue taking the blame for misguided government regulations and remain as unpopular as the IRS.

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

BLAKE

Continued from Page 5

Canada, in staging simply a fabulous tournament when we met and being wonderful hosts in the process. Except for Boston. Someone had failed to bring enough supplies to the party, and the Scots decided that they would drink the city dry as a result.

Will this beautiful game of football be lifted in the public mind permanently because of the wonderful hosting and the exciting USMNT? Partly.

The last time the U.S. hosted in 1994 was supposed to convert America and instead built a league, slowly, over thirty years. The question was never whether Americans would watch in July. They did, in record numbers. The question is on a wet Tuesday in October. That will remain to be answered in due course.

Parting is such sweet sorrow

Lionel Messi, at 39, the oldest outfield player ever to start a World Cup final, scored eight goals, took the Silver Ball, and walked off at MetLife in tears. Cristiano Ronaldo, in a record sixth World Cup, became the first man to score in six editions, then went out to Spain in Dallas, also weeping.

And Harry Kane, our ‘Arry from England, will be thirty-six when FIFA 2030 kicks off. I wager that England is not going to let Harry leave the room just yet with Messi and Ronaldo.

And then there is the photograph. In 2007, for a Barcelona charity calendar, a twenty-year-old Messi bathed an infant from Mataro named Lamine Yamal. On Sunday night that baby, nineteen now, collected a winner’s medal on the same field.

The game hands itself on whether we are ready or not. Yamal consoled Messi in his arms, as Messi had done nineteen years ago to Yamal. The world is meant to meet, and sometimes in the strangest of ways.

Only a team wins

Kylian Mbappe won the Golden Boot, broke the all-time World Cup scoring record, and flew home short of even the bronze. Messi took the Silver Ball and lost.

Spain conceded one goal all tournament and sent its Golden Ball home with Rodri, a defensive midfielder whose job is to make other people better.

And of course, Spain had Yamal. Spain was not about Yamal. Even as the rest of the world is wanting to make a rock star and icon of Yamal for another four world cups,

I suspect the Spanish Football Association is too clever to fall for that idolizing. Eleven players who each knew where the other ten were standing.

Sometimes Spain seemed a bit boring. That’s what winning teams do, without glamor or stars or magic. Just hard determined and skilled grit, as a team. After 30 years inside institutions, I would put that on a wall: rock stars collect accolades, but only a team wins the thing.

The closing ceremony and the dawn of FIFA 2030

The presentation was, candidly, an odd tableau: Infantino, President Trump, President Sheinbaum, Prime Minister Carney and assorted dignitaries in tailored suits, booing audible beneath the confetti.

The best-dressed men on that field were soaked through, grass-stained and shaking. They had earned the light and that light shines on the path to FIFA 2030.

In 2030 the centenary tournament goes to Spain, Portugal and Morocco, with three opening matches in South America, where it all began in 1930.

Europe and Africa, united in celebrating a flat green field and a round ball, and two teams seeking to enthrall and win. I will be seventy.



PHOTO FROM UNSPLASH

The World Cup games have come to an end. Christopher Blake reflects on how to games brought people around the world together.

My wife and I will find a screen, and we will be there in every way that matters.

Our children are already telling us to forget the screen and start the process of finding tickets for the next magical moment for humanity.

It will be across the Atlantic and it will bring between now and then all the joys and heartbreaks of this very special and beautiful game. Our children are right. We need to be there.

Thank you for allowing me to share my passion with you these past six weeks. I did so because the world was meant to meet. And, meet again we shall.

Christopher Blake is president of Middle Georgia State University. He is a passionate supporter of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, and the men’s and women’s national football teams of England and the United States.

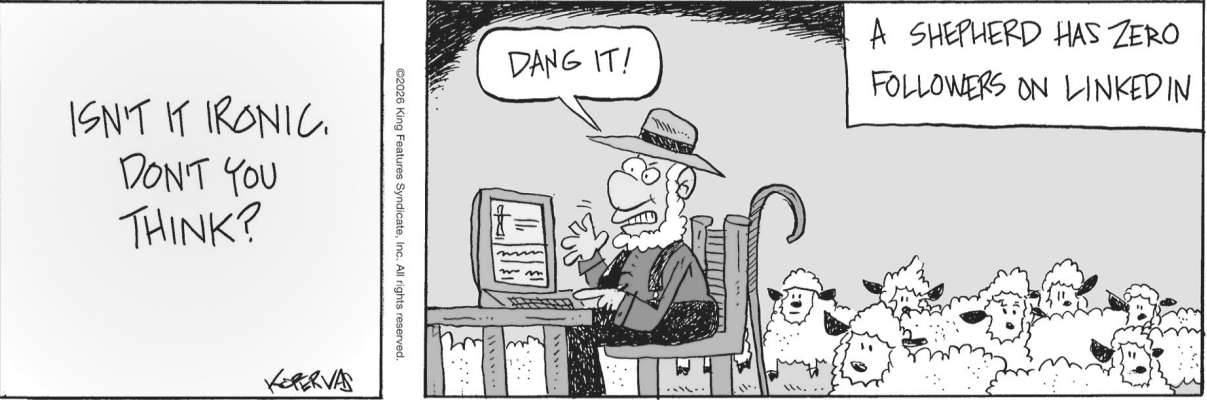
Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



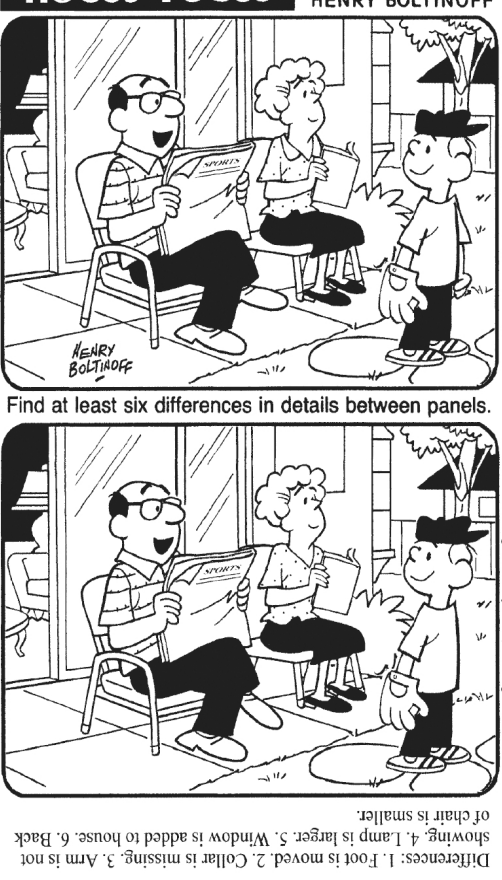
OLIVE & POPEYE

By Randy Milholland



HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINGOFF



Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



CryptoQuip

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

Clue: R equals C

L REXKW FEO OSLFV EJ OSY
FUZY EJ OSUO PUALR
RSYZLRUK AXPAOUFRY.
L SUW UF YKYZYFOUK PKERV.

©2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

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!

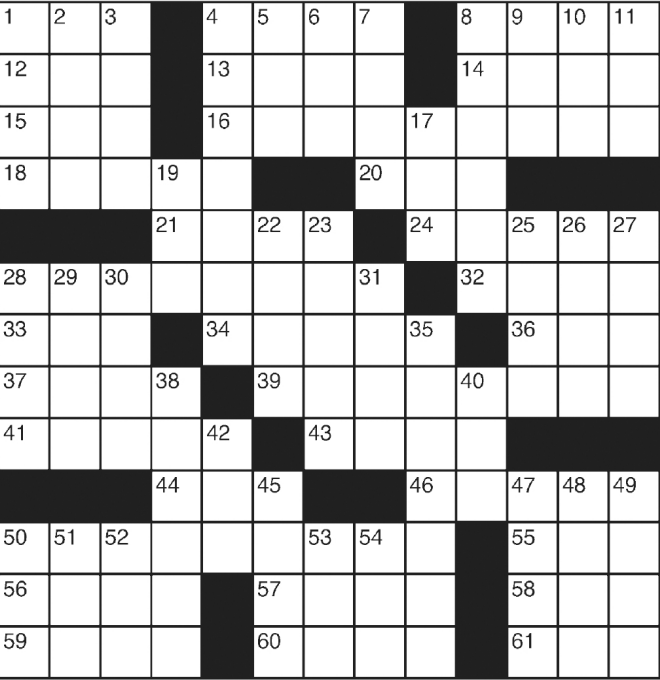
Swarm
VODER
Device
PETRO
Alarm
REINS
Rogue
SLACAR

TODAY'S WORD

King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Efron of "Parkland"
4 "For — the Bell Tolls"
8 Maui's — Highway
12 Rock's Brian
13 Continental coin
14 Petri dish gel
15 Scrape (out)
16 Shakable paperweight
18 Egypt's Anwar
20 Quibble
21 Composer Bartok
24 Informative
28 Hall & Oates ballad of 1976
32 Scarce
33 Galley item
34 Must, casually
36 Plant seeds
37 Radar dot
39 "Gems" found on a beach
41 "Bye!"
43 Poetry contest
44 Vat
46 Foolish
50 Scott Evil actor in the Austin Powers films



55 Blue bird
56 Saab model
57 Nest egg
58 Broad st.
59 Wee songbird
60 Lacking slack
61 Wine choice
8 Summer top
9 Previously
10 Collar
11 Common verb
17 Tonic's mixer
19 Six-pack muscles
22 Novelist Anita
23 Poker pot starters
25 "That — close one!"
26 "No seats" signs
27 Evergreens
28 Weeps
29 Robust
30 Buffalo's lake
31 List-ending abbr.
35 Not for
38 Large constrictor
40 Run after K
42 Summer mo.
45 Telly watcher
47 Slightly open
48 Cathedral area
49 Kept tabs on
50 Cutting tool
51 Chariot trailer
52 Three, in Rome
53 Notable time
54 Vichy water

© 2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

Weekly SUDOKU

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

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!

© 2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

FiveSpot™

Dealer's choice

P	O	W	E	R	Electricity
					Reduce
					Taciturn type
					Copy
					Male relative
					Word with "bag" or "money"

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

02649



Solution time: 24 mins.

Answers

King Crossword

Trivia Answers

1. 33
2. St. Louis, Missouri
3. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show"
4. 1967
5. Off the west coast of Africa
6. "Cape Fear"
7. 2009
8. The scientific study of clouds
9. An echo sounder or fathometer
10. A fawn or calf

RETIRED

Today's Word

3. Siren; 4. Rascal

1. Dove; 2. Trope

Solution

SCRAMBLERS

H	C	N	U	L
E	L	C	N	U
E	N	O	L	C
R	E	N	O	L
R	E	W	O	L
R	E	W	O	L

Solution

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

Weekly SUDOKU

I had an elemental block.

chemical substance.

I could not think of the

answer

CryptoQuip

The green tomato bandit

Few garden pests can cause as much alarm, or overnight devastation, as the tomato hornworm. One day, you have a lush, towering plant loaded with green tomatoes. The very next morning, entire branches are stripped bare, leaving behind leafless stems, scarred fruit and noticeable piles of dark droppings on the ground below. If you wake up to this kind of garden scene, you have likely been visited by this infamous pest.

Profile of a garden thief
Tomato hornworms (*Manduca quinquemaculata*) are the larval stage of the five-spotted hawkmoth. They are voracious eaters, feeding almost exclusively on plants in the nightshade family, which means your tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and potatoes are all on the menu. Because they grow so rapidly, a small handful of these caterpillars can defoliate an entire mature tomato plant in a matter of days.

Following the clues
Hornworms are among the largest caterpillars in Georgia. They can grow up to four inches long and as thick as your thumb, yet they remain masters of disguise. Their bright green coloring offers perfect camouflage against tomato



Morgan Durden

stems, making them incredibly difficult to see. When inspecting your plants, look for the bandit's distinct features: a row of white, V-shaped stripes along its sides and a menacing, yet completely harmless, "horn" at the rear. If the caterpillar itself evades you, hunt for its calling card. Scan the lower leaves or the ground beneath your tomatoes for dark green or black droppings, known as frass. The hornworm is likely feeding right overhead.

Outsmarting the bandit
If you want to protect your harvest from this elusive thief, early intervention is your best defense. Here are the most effective ways to stop the bandit in its tracks:
— Hand-picking: Sometimes the old-fashioned way is best. Once you uncover their hiding spot, simply pluck the culprits from the leaves and drop them into a bucket of soapy water to end their crime spree.
— The midnight stakeout (The blacklight trick): Because they blend in so perfectly during the day, try hunting them at night. Grab a cheap UV flashlight (blacklight)

and shine it on your plants after dark. Hornworms glow a bright, neon green under UV light, making them impossible to miss!
— Organic sprays: If you discover the plot early while the intruders are still small, organic sprays containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) are highly effective. This targeted approach neutralizes the threat without harming your garden's helpful insects.
Gardening in Middle Georgia always comes with a few surprises, and finding a stripped tomato plant is easily one of the most alarming. Fortunately, this elusive pest is no match for an observant gardener.

By watching for early clues and heading out for a nighttime blacklight stakeout, you can stop the destruction in its tracks. Your plants will bounce back safely, leaving this notorious green bandit with absolutely nowhere to hide.
Morgan Durden 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.



PHOTO BY UGA EXTENSION SERVICES
The tomato hornworm can wreak havoc on your tomato plants. These critters are bright green and grow up to four inches long.



PHOTO BY KATHY HENSLEY
Use a blacklight at night to spot the tomato hornworm which will stand out against your plants with its bright neon green glow.

Looking past the surface: Understanding people with visible and invisible disabilities

"The woman standing in line at the grocery store may look perfectly healthy. The man walking through the park may appear to have no limitations at all. Yet both could be living with disabilities that are invisible to everyone around them." What we see on the outside rarely tells the whole story. When many people hear the word disability, they often picture something they can immediately see — a wheelchair, a white cane or a walker. While those images certainly represent some disabilities, they tell only part of the story. Many disabilities are invisible. Conditions such as hearing loss, epilepsy, autism spectrum disorder, multiple sclerosis, autoimmune diseases, chronic pain, mental health conditions and countless others may not be obvious to those around us. Yet they can profoundly affect a person's daily life, influencing everything from work and relationships to routine daily activities.

More than meets the eye
Each July, Disability Pride Month reminds us to celebrate the resilience, accomplishments and contributions of individuals living with disabilities. More importantly, it challenges us to continue building communities rooted in inclusion, accessibility and respect long after the month has ended.



Joy L. King

"Disability is one part of a person's life, not the whole of their identity," says Juliette Simpson, LCSW, chief client services officer at AllHealth CHOICE. That simple statement reminds us that a diagnosis should never define a person's worth, potential or purpose. As a nurse practitioner, one lesson has remained constant throughout my career: appearances rarely tell the whole story. I've cared for patients who looked perfectly healthy on the outside while quietly managing chronic illnesses, mobility challenges or conditions that required tremendous strength simply to navigate everyday life. Their experiences have reminded me that we should never assume we know someone else's story based solely on what we can, or cannot, see.

Choosing compassion over assumption
One of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is understanding. That understanding begins by replacing assumptions with curiosity, judgment with compassion, and impatience with grace. We should "assume ability," Simpson said. Too often, we assume what someone can

or cannot do based solely on what we observe. Instead, let's begin by assuming ability, asking respectful questions when appropriate and recognizing that disability is only one part of a person's story — not the whole story. Sometimes inclusion is found in the smallest gestures, such as asking someone how you can help rather than assuming they need help, allowing extra time without frustration or simply listening without minimizing another person's experience. Not every disability requires visible accommodations, and not every challenge is immediately apparent. A simple act of kindness, patience or understanding may mean more than we realize. The next time we encounter someone whose experience we don't fully understand — whether it's using an accessible parking space, requesting an accommodation or simply moving through the world differently — let's pause before rushing to judgment. We rarely know the challenges another person carries.
Healthcare and community
Healthcare professionals have an important responsibility in fostering inclusion. "Healthcare begins by listening. Person-centered care means seeing the individual before the diagnosis," said Eshonda Blue, RN and

chief executive officer of Innovative Senior Solutions. Person-centered care involves listening carefully, asking patients about their goals and preferences, adapting communication when necessary, and recognizing that every patient deserves dignity, respect and the opportunity to actively participate in decisions about their care. But creating an inclusive community isn't solely the responsibility of healthcare providers. It belongs to all of us — as neighbors, teachers, family members, friends, employers, faith communities and local organizations. Whether it's improving accessibility, creating welcoming spaces, inviting individuals with disabilities to participate fully in community life or offering practical support to caregivers, each of us has the power to make someone feel seen, valued and included.
A community that includes all
Disability is more common than many people realize. Whether through aging, illness, injury or a lifelong condition, most of us will either experience disability ourselves or love someone who does. For many families, that journey also includes the quiet dedication of caregivers who coordinate appointments, medications, therapies, transportation and daily care while

often placing their own needs last. Recognizing and supporting caregivers is another important way we build stronger, more inclusive communities. Perhaps the greatest reminder Disability Pride Month offers is this: every person has value, every person deserves respect and every person's story matters. As healthcare professionals, neighbors, friends and members of our communities, we all have the opportunity to make a difference. Sometimes the most meaningful way to support someone isn't by trying to fix what we don't understand — it is simply choosing to see one another with kindness, empathy, dignity and an open heart. Every act of kindness, every moment of patience and every effort to make someone feel included helps build a healthier, stronger community for us all. Because every person deserves to be seen, heard and valued — not because of their abilities, but because of their humanity.
Healthy reminder: Not every disability is visible. Choosing patience, compassion and understanding can help create a more welcoming and inclusive community for everyone.
Joy King, DNP, MBA, APRN, NP-C, FAIHM, serves as president of the Georgia Nurses Association.

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

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

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

Consumer Cellular®

OVER 50? UNLIMITED
FOR JUST \$35/MONTH.

Backed by #1 Network Coverage and
Customer Satisfaction.*
Switch & Save Today.

833-446-1847

© 2025 Consumer Cellular Inc. Terms and Conditions subject to change. Plans shown above include \$5 credit for Authty and E-rolling. Taxes and other fees apply. Credit approval required for new service. Cellular service not available in all areas and is subject to system limitations. For unlimited plans, high-speed data is reduced after 35GB on single-line plans and 50GB of combined usage on multi-line plans for the remainder of your billing cycle. Unlimited data plans only for customers age 50+. *2025 ACSF Survey of customers rating their own wireless service provider. ACSF and its logo are registered trademarks of the American Customer Satisfaction Index LLC. For more about the ACSF, visit www.theacsf.org.

How closely do you read The Riff?

Test your knowledge of this week's newsletters

Take our weekly Quiz

Macon's top football prospect picks FSU

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

After Howard football star Ta'shawn Poole announced his commitment last week to play with the Florida State Seminoles next year, the school's signature Tomahawk Chop fight song blared in Howard's gym.

It was probably the first time a Seminoles-themed tune has ever graced Howard's campus — after all, the Huskies are rivals with Westside — but the anthem got the large crowd that had amassed there chopping in support of Poole's long-anticipated decision.

"It feels good. I'm just ready to go up there to play ball, man," Poole said after the announcement. "The coaches, man, I felt like a priority for them. They treated me like I was already a Seminole (when I visited)."

Poole, a four-star safety rated as the No. 6 player in the state of Georgia by 247 Sports, has wowed Bibb County with stellar plays on the gridiron in recent seasons. He will be the first Howard football player to play at a Power 4 program, Howard athletic director Latavia Coleman said. That athleticism — showcased not just in his lockdown coverage as a defensive back but also in his plays as a speedy receiver and punt return man — has gained Poole some fans around Macon.

His prospect status also built hype around which school he would attend, but Poole waited much longer than other prospects in the 2027 class to commit. That didn't stop him from keeping the

decision under wraps.

"Even my mom didn't know. Only my coach, my sister and my trainer knew," he said. "I think it felt good having everybody wait and surprising the whole world."

One of the many people who didn't know was Coleman, a Florida State legend and Macon Sports Hall of Famer who dominated as a basketball player for the 'Noles. She grinned from ear-to-ear after Poole donned the garnet-and-gold FSU hat, chopping with fervor when the fight song began. Poole is also Coleman's nephew.

"She's lit right now," Poole said, laughing. "I feel like everybody's excited, I'm excited, too. ... She supported wherever I'd go, so I don't think she (heavily) influenced where I went, but she was a factor."

Coleman said she tried to help Poole through the recruiting process as a former athlete herself. Instead of pushing him toward Florida State, she advised Poole to follow his gut feeling and enjoy the experience. "When you get that feeling, you'll know," she told him.

The athletic director certainly feels her star player made the right choice.

"There's something about that family. I know he's gonna be taken care of. I'm so excited to watch him play," Coleman said.

Smiling almost as wide was head football coach Trey Porter, who took over the football program ahead of Poole's sophomore season. Porter said he was worried about players leaving the program as a new coaching staff took over. Poole was a key athlete who stuck



PHOTO BY DONN RODENROTH

Ta'shawn Poole and his mother (left) do Florida State's "Tomahawk Chop" motion while Howard athletic director Latavia Coleman embraces Poole after the star prospect announced his commitment last week.

around.

"Watching him become a vocal leader has been the biggest thing," Porter said. "I could tell he had some leadership traits early on, because kids wanted to follow him but he didn't necessarily wanna tell them what to do. That's been the biggest growth, just watching him become a man."

As Poole prepared to reveal his college choice to the masses, the shifts in momentum were almost as thrilling as a good football

game.

That's because the timing of the event was dependent not on Poole's pace but on the technological ins and outs of a 247 Sports livestream, which was broadcasting the defensive back's much-anticipated decision online.

The gym would get quiet as Poole's decision approached, only for there to be a delay. Whispers of "Go Vols" or louder barking sounds for UGA echoed off the linoleum as family and friends

waited to hear where Poole would play at the next level.

Before that, there was a heart-felt video from Poole's mother that got laughs. It showcased clips of a much-younger Poole playing pee-wee football, hanging out with family and even reciting an essay for a class.

Aside from all the emotions — the family support, the elation

SEE POOLE
PAGE 12



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Pro pickleballer Eddy Kim darts to his right to return a ball during the 2026 Macon PPA Challenger tournament, the first pro tournament hosted at the Rhythm & Rally facility at the old Macon Mall.

NOTEPAD

Macon hosts pro pickleball, Bloomfield team wins trophy

BY MICAH JOHNSTON
Sports Editor
micah@maconmelody.com

Macon hosted a pro pickleball tournament for the first time ever last week, with talent coming from across the country to compete at the Rhythm and Rally facility at the old Macon Mall.

While Macon had hosted plenty of prior tournaments at its state-of-the-art pickleball complex — still touted as the

largest such facility in the world — the 2026 Macon Pro Pickleball Association Challenger was the first involving the PPA and pro-level players.

Rhythm and Rally General Manager John Roberts, who has a long personal history in sports and has been with the pickleball facility since its inception, said the tournament brought a brand new skill level to Macon's premier courts.

"The movement that these pros can put on the ball, even to the neophyte, with the naked

eye it's pretty clear," Roberts said. "You can immediately see and hear the difference."

Several players ranked on the PPA Tour leaderboards appeared in Macon. On the men's side, No. 47 Tristan Dussault won the singles tournament. Rafa Hewitt, ranked No. 34, also made an appearance. The No. 47 women's singles competitor, Nicole Conard, also

SEE NOTEPAD
PAGE 12

Russell Henley surges to strong British Open

BY MICHAEL A. LOUGH
Melody Contributor

Russell Henley hasn't had many back nines like that.

And he didn't prolong the day when it was prolonged with a playoff — he just ended it.

A sterling approach on the first — and only — playoff hole set up a gimme for one of the game's top putters, and Henley dropped the five-footer for a birdie and the Charles Schwab Challenge championship.

"This is why I practice hard ... to come back to the playoff and do that, I'm still just kind of shaking," Henley said in the post-tournament press conference. "That was as nervous as I've been over a putt in my whole life."

The Macon native and Stratford grad stormed past the \$50 million mark in career earnings with a check worth \$1.782 million in his sixth career win, and second win in a little more than 14 months.

Henley also picked up a new ride, a 1982 Jeep Scrambler.

"The engine was much louder than I anticipated," he said. "My family thinks it's really cool. My kids just probably want to hang out the back or stand up. Going to have to try to get them to get the seat belts on 'em."

The weekend was a bit of a surprise for Henley, who was not on any kind of roll, having tied for 49th in the Cadillac Championship a month ago and tying for 25th in the RBC Heritage.

All that leading up to a missed cut a few weeks ago in the PGA Championship.

But there was a comfort zone

at the Colonial Country Club on the edge of Fort Worth and several good tee shots from Texas Christian University.

He had a pair of 2-under tournaments there, the 2022-23 Schwab and its predecessor, the Fort Worth Invitational, in 2017-18.

Equally surprising about Henley's finish Sunday was that it came after the start he had Sunday.

After opening with an eagle and a birdie, he promptly killed the momentum with three straight bogeys, and another one after three pars, for a 1-over front nine.

"I was feeling a little jittery or quick or something on the front and hit some," he said. "Well, I was hitting the fairway, just some poor iron swings."

"So just very frustrating to turn at 1-over par."

The back nine wasn't spectacular, it was just steady, which is how Henley has reached the upper level of PGA players.

"Andy said, 'Let's reset' and I just kind of calmed down a little bit and started to hit some good shots," said Henley of caddie Andy Sanders. "Felt like I was hitting good putts most of the day and they just went in at the end."

He snuck in a birdie on 11 in the par-filled round, only to birdie the final three holes for a 4-under back nine and 3-under 67 for the day.

Cole got off to a similarly nice start, a pair of birdies. But a double-bogey on 9 dropped him to his own 1-over on the front nine.

SEE HENLEY
PAGE 12

POOLE

Continued from Page 11

from coaches Coleman and Porter, the crowd celebrating — there was also a feeling of relief with the announcement. Poole still has his senior year with the Huskies ahead of him.

“It feels good (to be committed). I’ve been thinking, I’ve been

stressing myself out, been praying and putting God first,” Poole said.

Now, he can focus on football — and keep being a leader, something Porter relishes.

“It’s just about changing the trajectory of this program,” Porter said. “This is one of those things that’s won not on the field but in life. We’ve got a great season ahead of us ... and the other guys on this team can look to him for leadership.”



PHOTO BY JASON VORHEES

Russell Henley, a Macon native and Stratford grad, waits for his next hole at the 2025 Tour Championship in Atlanta. The UGA alum surged to another strong finish recently at the 2026 British Open tournament.

HENLEY

Continued from Page 11

Oddly, he also birdied No. 11, and reeled off pars the rest of the way, unable to find the touch for that one birdie needed to win, having entered the day on top by a stroke.

They tied on 18 when Henley dropped a 17-footer for birdie before Cole’s 15-footer for birdie just missed.

“I was on 15 - let me think, 15 in the rough - after my tee shot, and was just like, ‘Man, I got to save par to not go over par on the day,’” Henley said. “So, yeah, I didn’t really start thinking about birdieing the last three until when I made the putt on 17.

“I knew that I had a chance to put a little pressure if I played 18 well.”

He was right. And then came the playoff hole, and suspense. He and Sanders discussed the tee shot, and stuck with what had been working.

“I hit a great drive, got through the ball really well,” Henley said. “We knew it was playing really short, my lob wedge in regulation went a long way. We played (it at) 135, I think ... and I hit a shot feeling like it was

115, kind of like ball above my feet, down off the right, knew it was going to take a bounce out.

“So we were playing a yardage that was 20 yards short because it was so hot and the ball was going. So (it) just all of it worked out. I feel like I executed both those shots perfectly.”

Henley left himself an easier birdie try from about five feet – “then was able to hit a decent putt under those circumstances; I was very nervous and just tried to stick to my same routine,” Henley said - nearly 10 feet closer than Cole, who gave it a good try.

“The putt was good, I hit it pretty much where I was aiming, I just kind of misread it,” Cole said. “I thought it might start breaking left a little earlier.”

As up and down as the round was, amid the recent “slump,” Henley kept plugging away.

“I think the longer you play this game, the more you want more, you want more success,” he said. “I feel like I’ve just worked harder and harder and I feel like I’ve been a little off just mentally this year, really.

“Just feel like I just fought really hard through the end, so it just felt really good to see an awesome result.”

NOTEPAD

Continued from Page 11

played at the event.

The high-caliber of play also allowed spectators to get a taste of the next level.

“To have this in our backyard, where Macon has such a vibrant pickleball community, it’s huge,” Roberts said. “It’s a great opportunity to see the next level of pickleball.”

Beyond the more competitive play, there’s also the tournament itself, which represents years of growth for the sport and facility alike, Roberts said.

“It’s definitely the next milestone for Macon pickleball. Our first tournament in town going back to 2018, it was entirely local,” he said. “We were putting the thing together with pencil and paper. Just the sophistication of the pro tournament software and watching it come together ... has been gratifying.”

Bloomfield LL team wins trophy

A 10U Macon little league squad from Bloomfield won the USSSA 10U Rec All Star World Series earlier this month, according to a Facebook post from Bloomfield Little League.

The tournament was hosted in Baton Rouge, from July 9-12 and featured teams from across the country, with several from Alabama and Louisiana making up part of the field.

The Bloomfield Pride team actually lost early in bracket play and had to fight through the loser’s bracket to win the 10U championship. The team’s final three wins, which included two wins over the same team to “reset” the bracket, saw Bloomfield score 7, 20 and 11 runs, respectively.

The Facebook post, which showcased the team’s youngsters wearing red, white and blue jerseys reading “Field” with some retro ballcaps to match, included an old adage that proved true for Bloomfield:

“It’s Not How You Start, It’s How You Finish.”

Mercer lacrosse coach resigns

The coach of the Mercer men’s lacrosse team resigned last week, the university’s athletic department announced in a press release.

Head coach Ryan Danehy will leave to be the assistant coach with Ohio State’s lacrosse team, the school said. Danehy had 15 years of experience with various schools before Mercer hired him in Fall 2022, before the 2023 campaign.

“These last four years have given me memories that I would hold close for the rest of my life,” Danehy said in the press release. “I want to express my sincerest gratitude for all of the support that has been given to this program and myself since I arrived on campus in 2022. Mercer will forever have a special place in my heart.”

The men’s lacrosse team went 18-39 from 2023 to 2026, with bookend appearances in the At-

lantic Sun Conference tournament, though the Bears could not pull off wins in the postseason in that span.

Mercer began a search for a coach immediately.

“Ryan led our program to impeccable heights over the last four years, including a historical 2026 season that culminated with a berth into the Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament for just the second time in 11 years,” Mercer Athletic Director Jim Cole said in a press release. “We are incredibly grateful for his dedication and commitment to our program and wish him nothing but the very best in his new role at Ohio State.”

MGA enters next phase of athletics upgrade

Middle Georgia State University will enter the second phase of its move from NAIA to Division II after NCAA Division II officials approved the move to Provisional Year 2 this week, the university announced.

The NCAA requires schools

jumping up to new levels to hit certain benchmarks — like attending NCAA meetings and rules seminars, for example — to continue the process, a press release said. Middle Georgia State met those requirements and got approval to advance to the second year July 10.

“The first year of the transition challenged us to build a strong foundation, and our coaches, staff, student-athletes, and University leadership embraced every expectation placed on us,” MGA athletic director Michael Brown said in a press release. “Advancing to Provisional Year 2 reflects the commitment across our institution to operating at the NCAA Division II level. We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished and look forward to continuing to strengthen our compliance efforts while building on the competitive success our teams experienced during the first year.”