

The Houston Home Journal

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\$1.00 • Volume 155, No. 104

hhjonline.com

Weekend, December 13, 2025

Four displaced after Tuesday morning fire



Fire crews work on scene of a mobile home fire in Byron on Tuesday, Dec. 9.

Courtesy: Shane Shifflett

See FIRE page 7A

Mann sentenced for Houston County public indecency spree

By BRIEANNA SMITH
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Mann

HOUSTON COUNTY — A man was sentenced to prison earlier this month after a public indecency spree across the county in 2024, according to a press release from the Houston County District Attorney's Office.

Demarcus Mann, 30, was sentenced on Dec. 5 after pleading guilty to three counts of public indecency. He will face 15 years, with the first ten years served in prison.

Originally a misdemeanor, public indecency becomes a felony after two prior convictions. The case was Mann's sixth conviction.

According to case evidence Mann went on the indecency spree in sum-

mer 2024, with reports coming in on June 13, July 13 and July 29. Each victim identified Mann by a tattoo of a pitchfork between his eyes.

The DAs Office said Mann walked into three Houston County insurance agencies

See MANN page 7A

Bloom Events and Marketing helps senior citizens with resource fair

By OWEN JONES
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PERRY — Husband and wife duo Gayla and Joshua Germundsen created Bloom Events and Marketing, LLC, based on Gayla Germundsen's expertise in creating community events. As part of their mission, they organized a senior resource expo on Tuesday, Dec. 9, at the Perry Events Center.

"[We] just want to put the information out there for not only seniors, but their children because if the seniors don't have any resources and they need help, the children need to know what the resources are," Gayla Germundsen said.

See FAIR page 7A



Community partners gather at a senior resource expo on Tuesday, Dec. 9, hosted by Bloom Events and Marketing, LLC.



PERIODICAL

Board of Education recognizes more AP Scholars, presents donation to Central Georgia United Way

By OWEN JONES
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PERRY — The Houston County Board of Education recognized students from Northside High School and Veterans High School who scored a perfect five on their AP exams.

"Several years ago, we used to be able to have from all five high schools in one board meeting. This year, it took three [meetings] to be able to have enough space," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Richard Rogers said.

Northside Principal Dr. Dustin Dykes said the school brought 10 students last year, and the goal this year was to fill up the school bus. This year, 19 students from Northside were recognized.



The Houston County School District presents its annual donation to the United Way of Central Georgia during its Tuesday, Dec. 9 meeting.

"I'm very proud of these Eagles, and we really appreciate your continued support removing that obstacle of that financial burden for the testing," he said.

Veterans brought 60 underclassmen who fit the criteria. Principal Dr. Amy Barbour said in 2024, 16%

See BOARD page 8A

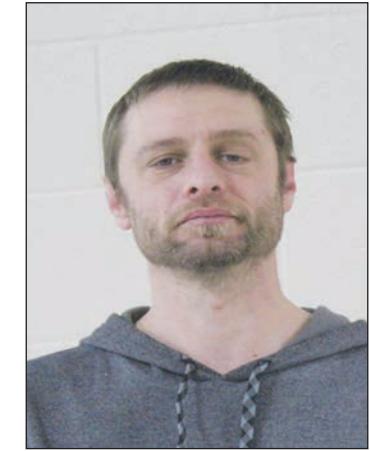
Houston County man convicted for possession of child sexual abuse material, methamphetamine

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ
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HOUSTON COUNTY — Bryan Travis Santiago, 43, pled guilty in the Houston County Superior Court to two separate cases on Monday, Dec. 8. He was sentenced to a total of 30 years, with the first 10 years to be served in prison, according to a press release from the Houston County District Attorney's Office.

As part of Santiago's probation, he will have sex offender conditions as well as drug offender conditions. Upon his release from prison, he will be required to register as a sex offender. The Houston County Sheriff's Office investigated both cases.

The first case Santiago pled guilty to stems from a traffic stop that occurred



Santiago

in August 2022. Sheriff's office deputies stopped Santiago after he was observed not wearing a seatbelt. Santiago consented to a search during the traffic stop, where Sgt. Paul Cumpston found methamphetamine and distribution paraphernalia.

See CONVICTED page 8A

Word of the Day

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly. — Proverbs 14:29 (NKJV)

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COMMUNITY

Community comes together for 'Christmas at the Crossroads' to celebrate the meaning of the holiday



Perry Methodist Church Assistant Pastor Rob Ray (holding guitar) leads the congregation in singing Christmas Carols during "Christmas at the Crossroads" on Sunday, Dec. 8.

By BRIEANNA SMITH
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PERRY — "Our worship is not predicated on the piece of ground we stand on. Our community of faith is going to be a good community of faith to the degree where we, as the church that meets in Perry, Georgia, put Christ in the center of all we do and the way we're unified together."

Those were words from Grace Church Pastor Don Caulley at a community worship service last Sunday night.

"Christmas at the Crossroads," an inclusive yearly event held by the Perry Ministerial Association, is typically held outside. This year, rain moved the event indoors to Grace Church, but the message of the Christmas season remained the same.

The service featured pastors from several area

churches, as well as Mayor Randall Walker.

Walker said the event is a chance to hear the Christmas story before the holiday hustle and bustle. He also asked attendees for three favors this year:

"Be kind to each other. Help somebody that's less fortunate than you are. And please pray for world peace," he said.

First Baptist Church of Perry Pastor Thomas West read the Christmas story from the gospels of Luke and Matthew. Perry Presbyterian Church Pastor Daniel Stanphill delivered the sermon, based on 1 Timothy 3:16, saying the heart of Christmas wonder can be linked to Christ, the heart of Christian faith.

"As we think about this mystery that is at the heart of this time of year especially, we pray that You would give us ears to hear the good news of the gospel,

we pray that hearts would be open and that we would behold and meditate upon the glory of our Savior," Stanphill prayed.

Stanphill hinged his message on two concepts: The first was that Jesus Christ is not optional. The second was that Jesus Christ must be welcomed.

Compared to other belief systems, Christ first came down to save humanity, offering hope that is celebrated at Christmastime, Stanphill said.

"Ultimately, if there's any divine help, it's gotta be supplemented by the effort and the work of man, but not so with the Christian faith. Christianity says unequivocally, and we feel it, especially this time of year, that God Himself has condescended to save sinful humanity. God Himself has taken the initiative," he said.

God's method of manifestation was a method

that would have defied human reasoning, Stanphill explained.

"The wisest minds in the world would have never figured out that sinners would be saved through a savior coming into the world like this, born as a vulnerable infant being manifested in the flesh," he said.

Stanphill explained that being born in the flesh meant dying in the flesh, part of God's plan for atonement. Jesus verified the plan during His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

"No other way of salvation was possible for people in the flesh. A savior had to come in the flesh to die," he said.

Jesus's birth, his sacrifice, and his approval by God prove that salvation



Perry Presbyterian Church Pastor Daniel Stanphill delivers the message during "Christmas at the Crossroads."

is necessary, according to Stanphill.

"Jesus was revealed as the Son of God to human eyes at his birth, but he was proven to be the Son of God at His resurrection, not only dying for sinners, not only entering the tomb, but coming out of that tomb on the third day. That tells us that the sacrifice he gave in the flesh was approved by God. It was accepted by God Himself."

"What this tells us is that Jesus is not optional. He is absolutely necessary. He said it Himself, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' If you would know this salvation, if you would taste and see that the Lord is good, it must be through this one who came in the flesh, who was manifested

in the flesh," Stanphill said.

Stanphill said he noticed interplay between the spiritual and the human world in the Christmas story, with the angel Gabriel announcing his birth. He also said Jesus was accompanied by angels during His ascension and taken up to the right hand of the Father in glory.

"This one who came as a vulnerable infant is this very moment, seated enthroned on high as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, he was welcomed back into the throne room of heaven. But the question for you tonight, right? And that's really the question for everyone. Have you welcomed this Jesus?"

The services featured traditional Christmas carols as well as fellowship.

Warner Robins announces Warming Shelter availability ahead of cold temperatures



Special to The Journal

WARNER ROBINS — With temperatures expected to drop in the coming days, the City of Warner Robins is activating a community Warming Shelter to provide a safe, warm place for individuals in need.

The Warming Shelter will be open on the following dates, beginning at 6:00 PM each evening: Sunday, December 14 and Monday,

December 15.

Location: Haven Hope House, 79 Green Street, Warner Robins, GA 31088.

To ensure accessibility for those without transportation, a shuttle bus will depart at 6:00 PM to bring homeless neighbors to the shelter. If you know someone in need of transportation, please contact: Brian Wise at (478) 538-5115.

The City of Warner Robins

extends its gratitude to the volunteers, partners, and community members whose continued generosity makes this resource possible. Your support ensures that those facing hardship have a warm and safe environment during severe weather conditions.

For additional updates, please follow the City's official communication channels.

BILL'S PRODUCE

LOCAL HONEY

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FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

CHRISTMAS TREES

COLORFUL WINTER PANSIES & FIREWOOD

The Georgia Store

Carrying small batch products locally grown / produced in Georgia!

401 S. Houston Lake Rd.-Next to Lowe Toyota

Heritage
BAPTIST CHURCH

*Candlelight
Communion
Service*

*Christmas Eve,
6:00 PM*

**TO BE LIVESTREAMED ON
theheritagechurch.org**

Rejoice!

257 Lake Joy Road,
Perry, GA 31069

Wayne J. Edwards, Pastor

CALENDAR

OBITUARIES

Lions Interest Meeting Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church

The Houston County Lions are sponsoring an Interest Meeting for community-service minded people who would like to join hands with others to solve problems and help people in our community. The Interest Meeting is at 7:00 pm, Monday, December 15th at the IHOP restaurant at 2710 Watson Blvd. in Warner Robins.

All Saints Christmas Services

All Saints Episcopal Church, located at 1708 Watson Blvd, Warner Robins invites all to our annual Christmas Services.

Advent Program: Thursdays, December 4, 11, 18. Starting at 5:45PM with a service in the Sanctuary, followed by a light potluck and our program "The Will to Dream" in our Parish Hall at 6:00PM.

Christmas Eve Services: 5:30PM Family Christmas Eve Worship. 8:00PM Musical Introit followed at 8:30PM Festal Christmas Eucharist

For more information, please contact the church office at 478-923-1791.

Community Calendar

Email your information to:
brieanna@hhjonline.com

Houston Home Journal

1210 Washington St. Perry, GA 31069

478-987-1823

Courtney Hodges Mason

Not everyone born in a town as small as Perry, Georgia, has the privilege of a long life enriched by many varied and rewarding experiences, both in this country and elsewhere in the world. But Courtney Hodges Mason was one of those people.

Born on June 9, 1924, to Thomas Dovert Mason and Edna Hodges Mason, Courtney Hodges Mason was named for his uncle, General Courtney Hicks Hodges, a decorated senior officer in the United States Army who served in World Wars I and II. Like his uncle, Courtney also served in World War II. After attending Gordon Military College, he joined the military and flew B-24 Liberators and B-25 Bombers with the Tenth and later Fourteenth Air Force, completing airlift missions over "the Hump" in the Himalayas from Assam, India to Kunming, China. Those crews flew four trips over the Hump to acquire supplies (mostly fuel) necessary to make one bombing run. The canyons through which they



flew were shrouded in fog, with only charts, speed and headings to guide them through the soup. One day, Courtney flew through the canyons without the fog and was astounded to see how close they had come to the mountain walls. Yet his recollection was that they would have fought for the chance to do it all over again. He also flew B-29 Superfortress aircraft later in the war.

In his civilian life, Courtney was a restaurateur in Fort Worth, Texas. He recalled that Billy Graham and Pat Boone were among his patrons—before they became famous. Undoubtedly, this culinary experience fostered his talent as a superb cook. His

pastries and yeast rolls were legendary and always coveted at family gatherings. From 1968 to 1994, Courtney was a rural carrier for the United States Postal Service, after which he retired. Although he was plagued with macular degeneration, he never let it stop him—still continuing to cook, watch *Gunsmoke*, be a great husband and father, and function as fully as possible. Courtney was long-time member of First Baptist Church in Perry, where he taught Sunday school for many years.

Courtney was married in 1964 to his beloved Juanita May Satterfield Mason, and they had a son, Dr. Stephen D. Mason. He became the devoted stepfather of Linda Satterfield Corbett (Jim) of Atlanta and Janice Satterfield Vandergrift of Elko. He was predeceased by his brothers, Thomas Dovert Mason, Jr., and Edward Mason, both of Perry, and his son-in-law, Dr. Bill Vandergrift of Elko. Although his dear wife predeceased him in 2013, he is survived by his son and two stepdaughters. Courtney is also survived by numerous extended family members,

for whom the memory of their years with him will forever be cherished.

Courtney fought a brave fight at the end of his life, battling numerous conditions associated with his longevity. To the end of his life, he maintained his sharp intellect and wit. He passed away peacefully at Summerhill Nursing Home in Perry.

Visitation will be Friday, December 12, 2025, from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. at McCullough Funeral Home.

Courtney will be laid to rest in Evergreen Cemetery with a graveside service at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 13, 2025.

Flowers will be accepted or donations may be given in memory of Courtney to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, www.stjude.org - Donate or Tunnels to Towers Foundation, <https://t2t.org/donate/>

Go to www.mcculloughfh.com to sign the Online Registry for the family. McCullough Funeral Home and Crematory has the privilege of being entrusted with these arrangements.

Savannah Sallette. One great-grandchild: Harper Jane Southerland (Bryce and Kate). One nephew, Michael Sallette (Pat) and a special cousin, Chrystal Long (Jerry).

The family would like to express a special thank you to Homespun Hospice and Tapestry Hospice for their special care and support. In addition, the family would also like to thank Williams Funeral Home of Eatonton, GA for their services.

A memorial service is scheduled for 1:00 PM on Saturday, December 13th, 2025, at Crossroads Baptist Church, 106 S. Wesley Chapel Road, Eatonton, GA. The family will receive friends from 12 noon until the service begins.

We're freezing base rates for the next 3 years.

Everywhere you look, costs are climbing, making it harder to plan and budget. We all need relief, so that's why we are freezing our base rates for the next three years. While fuel and storm recovery costs will be adjusted in 2026, current projections suggest these changes could result in a decrease to your overall bill.

Whether you're managing a household or running a business, you can count on a stable, predictable energy budget through 2028.

We're here for Georgia, and we're here for you.

For more information, visit georgiapower.com/ratefreeze.



VIEWPOINTS

The Houston Home Journal

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A division of the Georgia Trust for Local News

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Our Goal

The Houston Home Journal is published for the citizens of Houston and surrounding counties by a division of The Georgia Trust for Local News. Our goal is to produce quality, profitable, community-oriented newspapers that you, our readers, are proud of. We will reach that goal through hard work, teamwork, loyalty and a strong dedication towards printing the truth.

The Houston Home Journal is a periodical, mailed (ISSN 471) in Perry and is published Wednesday and Saturday by Houston Home Journal P.O. Box 1910, Perry, GA 31069; 478-987-1823

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: P.O. Box 1910, Perry, GA 31069.

Subscription Rates:
In county - \$88
Senior Citizen (60) - \$78
Out of County or State - \$98
Online Access only - \$58

Share Your Viewpoint

There are three ways to submit a Letter to the Editor: Email it to brianna@hhjonline.com, mail it to Houston Home Journal at 1210 Washington St., Perry, GA 31069, or drop it off at the same location between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number (the last two not to be printed). The newspaper reserves the right to edit or reject letters for reasons of grammar, punctuation, taste and brevity.

P.O. Box 1910
1210 Washington Street, Perry, GA 31069
478-987-1823

Don't sue me Santa! Make sure you clean up before Christmas

NEW SOUTHERN DAD

KYLE DOMINY



It was the night before Christmas, and I was asleep on my back, but someone was prowling, a fat guy with a sack.

He broke into my house to spread Christmas cheer.

But what happened instead is still a little unclear.

While creeping across to the living room tree

To leave a present, or two, or three,

Santa must have fell over something, or his feet lost their grip.

For he shouted and stumbled as he took a big slip.

As he fell to the floor there arose such a clatter.

I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

I pulled on my clothes as I walked through the door

And there was the jolly old elf, sprawled out on the floor.

I ran to his side to see what shape he was in

Santa shouted, "I'll sue your ass to debtor's prison."

I helped the man up and dusted off his coat.

He huffed and puffed and cleared his throat.

"Now calm down, man, don't be so hasty,

You're supposed to be jolly, not hateful and nasty,"

I said to the elf who invaded my house.

And by then he'd also awokened my spouse.

"My knee," moaned Santa, "my Anterior Cruciate!"

I tripped over your furniture, clearly meant to aggravate."

I knew this event was nothing but tragic.

Then Santa disappeared with some holiday magic.

The last thing I heard as he flew out of sight,

Was, "Merry Christmas you jerk. Get a lawyer

tonight."

There is no shortage of attorneys in this great state of ours. Those lawyers, apparently, have massive advertising budgets.

You can't view content on television or online, without a guy in a suit asking you if you've been in an accident or hurt at work. Our roadways are lined with billboards, with large headshots, phone numbers and slogans showing tough guys in suits ready to get you "what you deserve."

One such billboard, several really, caught my attention recently while driving along I-75. The massive advertisement, towering above several lanes of traffic in Macon and Atlanta, depicted Santa Claus, sitting awkwardly on the floor, disoriented and injured. The sign advertised the "premiere fall attorney," or something along those lines.

Forget peace on Earth, good will toward men, even Santa will take you to court.

Leave it to a lawyer to come up with something like that. I hope that guy, whoever it was, ends up on Santa's naughty list, though I'm sure he's not afraid to file litigation whenever he finds his stocking empty on Christmas morning.

My mother always told me that Santa didn't come to a dirty house, and every Christmas Eve my brother and I were handed a long list of chores to be completed by supper time. I always thought mama was just using the jolly fat man as an excuse to get a little help around the house, but it seems she was covering her bases.

Don't sue me Santa, I'll make sure the floor is clear before you come to my house.

I visited this topic some years ago, but things don't seem to have changed.

RING! RING! RING!
"Beep! Beep! You have reached the offices of Santa Claus and Associates at the North Pole."

"Hi, my name is Dick Yarbrough and I would like..."

"In order to better serve you, please listen to the following options. If you wish to place an order, please press 'One.' If you are calling about your current order, please press 'Two.' If you would like to make a payment, please press 'Three.'"

"Actually, I just want to talk to someone about my Christmas wish list."

"If you wish to continue this conversation in English, please press 'Four.' Si desea continuar esta conversación en Español, presione 'Cinco.' Si vous souhaitez continuer cette conversation en Français, veuillez appuyer sur 'Six.'"

"English is fine, thank

"One voice can make a difference"

The war on Christmas

COLUMNIST

KELLY BURKE



Y
es, I'm for a war on "Xmas." Not a war on Christmas, of course, but I don't care for the lazy and demeaning use of Xmas to denote the birth of Jesus.

A learned friend (well, can you really be learned if you went to Florida State?) recently opined that Xmas wasn't a problem because it means the birth of Christ in ancient Greek. First, I'm not in ancient Greece. Second, even Greeks don't use the Xmas term. They use Χριστούγεννα, or "Christmas."

Can one make the case for Xmas? It's tortured, but yeah, it's possible. I'm not really interested in writing a dissertation on the use of Xmas, so an abbreviated explanation follows. In the Greek language, the character "X" can refer to Christ, so Xmas would be Christ's birth. The 'X' comes from the Greek letter Chi, which is pronounced like the letter "K," followed by a vowel sounding like "eye," thus, like "Kai," which is the first letter of the Greek word Christós (Ancient

Greek: Χριστός, romanized: Khristós, literally 'anointed, covered in oil'), which became Christ in English.

The defenders of Xmas point out that its usage goes back to the Middle Ages, but so does the bubonic plague and I don't hear anyone calling for its return. Lazy is lazy. Xmas may not technically be a war on Christmas, but it is to me. There isn't a "Merry Xmas" greeting card or ornament ever being generated at the Gallaher-Burke household.

Incidentally, I've never written about "AP style," but I try to follow it, except when I don't. My sister, Kathy, does my editing, mainly because I missed the day in school when the proper use of commas was discussed. For her, she relies on AP style, or technically, the Associated Press Stylebook. Sometimes she'll tell me what AP style says about some aspect of my writing, and sometimes I'll follow it. But not always.

But the AP agrees with me. "Never abbreviate Christmas to Xmas or any other form."

They go on to give additional journalistic advice. "Christmastime is one word." "Capitalize Christmas Eve and Christmas Day." "Lowercase seasonal greetings (except for Christmas): Have a happy new year, wishing you a merry

Christmas, happy holidays from the team."

So I'm wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Err, nope. I'm wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! I've always capitalized that. Not going to change now.

But I will never, ever, use Xmas.

Kelly Burke was born in Knoxville where he spent his younger years, followed by high school years in Atlanta where he graduated from Georgia Tech, and Mercer Law School. He has been in private practice, a magistrate judge, and an elected district attorney. He writes about the law, politics, music, and Ireland. He and his wife enjoy gardening, playing with their Lagotto Ramanolo named George Harrison, and spending time with their grandchildren. To see this column or Kelly's archives, visit www.kellyrburke.com. You can email Kelly at dakellyburke@gmail.com.



You'd better watch out: Santa Claus has joined the information age

COLUMNIST

DICK YARBROUGH



you, but here's what I want to ask..."

"Wenn Sie dieses Gespräch auf Deutsch fortsetzen möchten, drücken Sie bitte 'Sieben.' Si velis ad hanc conversationem Latine, placere premere 'Octo.'

"Look, I don't speak German and the only Latin I know is 'E. Pluribus Unum.' I just want to talk to a live person about my Christmas wish list – Frosty the Snowman, an elf, Bing Crosby – I don't care."

"Actually, I just want to talk to someone about my Christmas wish list."

"If you wish to continue this conversation in English, please press 'Four.' Si desea continuar esta conversación en Español, presione 'Cinco.' Si vous souhaitez continuer cette conversation en Français, veuillez appuyer sur 'Six.'"

"Your call is very important to us. Currently, all of our representatives are

busy serving other customers. Please stay on the line.

Your wait time is currently

six hours."

"Six hours! You've got to be kidding! In the past, I just called up and talked to whoever answered the phone. It looks like you have automated everything now. I'm sure it saves you money but it is very impersonal and unbecoming of Santa Claus. I would strongly suggest that you..."

"Your call is very important to us. Currently, all of our representatives are

busy serving other customers. Please stay on the line. Your wait time is currently

seven hours."

"This is ridiculous! I have a great mind to..."

"Did you know you can place your orders and track them by going to our website: www.santaclausworkshopnorthpole.org, backsplash, 'good little boys and girls,' forward slash, 'Ho. Ho. Ho.' Or you can find us on Twitter at 'hash tag, dash away, dash away all.'"

"I think I'll just forget the whole thing. All I wanted was..."

"CLICK! "Hello, my name is Siddharth. To whom am I speaking?"

"Thank goodness! I am finally talking to a real person! Listen, Siddharth, I need to check on..."

"This call may be monitored for quality assurance purposes."

"That's okay by me, Siddharth, but all I want is..."

"May I have the last four digits of your Social Security number, please?"

"Yeah, sure but all I want is..."

"Have you shopped with us before?"

"See YARBROUGH page 5A

LIFESTYLE & FAITH

Graves burst open... dead came forth

During the mid-1940s, a group of young teenagers decided to enliven a dull downtown Perry on New Year's Eve. To celebrate, they set off a package of firecrackers near the confederate monument. Within moments, policeman Cap' Arnold came roaring down Carroll Street with his sirens blasting and spotlight scanning. (Perry only had two permanent police officers: Captain Arnold and Police Chief J. B. Hawkins).

The teens hid in the shrubbery at the old county courthouse until Cap passed through town. Then, they made a mad dash toward Evergreen Cemetery where they hid among the darkened tombstones until Cap returned to the police station.

I wondered how frightened the boys would have been, after entering the cemetery, if one particular Biblical event had taken place. I refer to Saint Matthew's account of Jesus' death on the cross in chapter 27: 50-54.

After Jesus expired at 3 p.m. Friday, it reads: "The tombs broke open, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised to life; they came out of the tombs after his

PARABLES TO PONDER

BILLY POWELL



resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many."

The graves burst open, because an earthquake shook the landscape after Jesus expired. Some commentators believe the saints immediately went into Jerusalem.

Others contend the saints did not enter the Holy City until Jesus arose 30 to 36 hours later. (Note: Jesus was buried just before 6 P.M. Friday and arose Sunday morning before daybreak. The Jewish day started at 6 A.M. and ended at 6 P.M.).

The residents of Jerusalem were terror stricken. They may have thought the resurrected individuals were the initial residents of the "Kingdom of God," to which Jesus spoke of many times.

You will recall the mother of James and John came to Jesus and requested He appoint her two sons

as co-leaders of His coming kingdom (Matt 20: 20-28). The citizens of Jerusalem could have regarded this bodily resurrection as a signal the earthly kingdom was about to be created.

It goes without saying that those who saw the formerly dead individuals were scared beyond measure—as if they had seen a ghost.

If this had occurred in the Perry cemetery, the young boys would have dropped dead of fright. Did these saints eventually die again? Well, Lazarus did, Jairus' daughter did, and the son of the Nain widow did, so these saints of Jerusalem probably died again too.

I close with this prayer for you and for me: "Dear God, it is our most fervent hope that someday we might share in the glorious resurrection of Jesus, that we too might have eternal life and dwell forever with You."

Santa, Coke and Charlie Brown

It's nearly impossible to imagine the festive season without the sight of Santa Claus's cheerful, cherry-red suit, or a holiday advertisement featuring the iconic, refreshing taste of Coca-Cola. While many believe the brand's association with Christmas began with the charming polar bears, the truth is that the history between the soft drink giant and the jolly gift-giver runs much deeper—and it's a history driven by a cold, hard business problem.

As early as the 1910s, Coca-Cola faced a major conundrum: how to convince customers that soda was a year-round pleasure, not just a summer thirst quencher.

"During the chilly winter months, the company faced a major problem: how do you convince customers that soda is not just a summer beverage, but should be enjoyed year-round?" states a curator from the National Museum of American History, where a 1929 Coca-Cola Santa ad is set to feature in the new American Enterprise exhibition.

The company's solution was brilliant: leverage the most popular winter figure available, Santa Claus, to forge an unbreakable link between the beverage and the holiday spirit.

While Santa Claus had already evolved significantly in American culture—from the "little old driver" described in Clement Clarke Moore's 1822 poem to the human-sized character popularized by cartoonist Thomas Nast in the 1860s—his appearance still varied widely. Artists occasionally tweaked the color of his robes and the amount of "girth" around his middle.

The defining transformation came in the early 1930s when Coca-Cola commissioned artist Haddon H. Sundblom of the D'Arcy Agency to design a new Santa.

Sundblom redrew Santa Claus as the quintessential Christmas figure we know today: a plump, cheer-

ALL ABOUT ANTIQUES

JILLINDA FALEN



ful man with snow-white hair, based initially on his friend, retired salesman Lou Prentiss. Crucially, Sundblom dressed him in red and white—colors already associated with Santa, but which perfectly complemented Coca-Cola's signature brand identity.

He even created a Mrs. Claus, modeled after his own wife. The result was an overwhelming success.

In an astounding three months, A Charlie Brown Christmas was completed. When it aired on CBS for the first time on December 9, 1965, nearly half of America's television audience tuned in, instantly establishing another powerful, Coca-Cola-sponsored Christmas tradition.

The holiday season is now intrinsically linked with the red-and-white branding of both Santa and the famous soft drink. What began as a strategic business move to solve a winter sales

slump ultimately gave the world its most recognizable Christmas icon and helped launch a timeless holiday classic. Happy Collecting!

YARBROUGH

From page 4A

"Well, kinda. I used to sit on Santa Claus's knee every year and tell him what I wanted for Christmas, if you consider that shopping. Every year, I asked for a pony. I always wanted a pony but I never got one and I am hoping this might be the year that Santa Claus ..."

It hampered, slowed down, stopped and frustrated what we were trying to do.

This holiday season don't let red lights stop you. (Except traffic stops, you silly goose!) Fix what needs to be fixed ... relationships, anger, bitterness, thanksgiving shortsightedness, et cetera ... so that you can get your life back where it needs to be, moving forward toward happiness and joy.

Jesus said, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14b)." Some scholars believe he was seeing in his mind's eye the city of Sepphoris, how when he was a young child living in his hometown of Bethlehem he could look out and "Herod's jewel" lit up the night sky from afar.

This holiday season don't let your light be hid under a bushel (Matthew 5:15 and Luke 8:18). Help those in need. Love. Give. Sacrifice. Be the light!

"I haven't decided yet if I am going to order anything,

Siddharth. As I mentioned, the reason I am calling is I would like to know if."

"I see here that you don't have one of our Santa Claus Affinity Cards. You might wish to know that for every \$50 you spend, you accumulate points that can be used to purchase airline tickets, discounts at the gasoline pump or a jet ski. May I send you a card, Mr. Yardburger?"

"It's 'Yarbrough,' Siddharth, and the answer is 'no.' All I want is."

"It has been a pleasure talking to you, Mr. Yardburger. Please stay on

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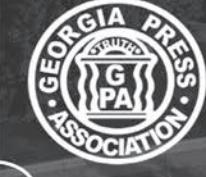
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Battling against water retention

YOUR HEALTH

WADE YODER



Most of us have probably had this come up either personally or with someone we know. Water retention is something that, if we can bring it back into balance, can yield fairly rapid weight loss. But when it is done in a forced or unhealthy manner, it will not look good and certainly will not be healthy.

There is always an underlying reason behind the retention of fluid, and it should be addressed rather than simply pitting laboratory-designed chemicals against our body's natural hormonal and chemical regulatory systems.

There are a few important

things we should look at to help keep fluid levels in balance naturally, and two of the main ones are:

1. Staying hydrated
2. Keeping our sodium and potassium in balance

When we get dehydrated, the body activates survival mechanisms to protect our

fluid levels. It concentrates the urine (making it much darker) to conserve water for blood plasma and cellular activity.

The pituitary gland monitors our plasma levels, and if they drop—often along

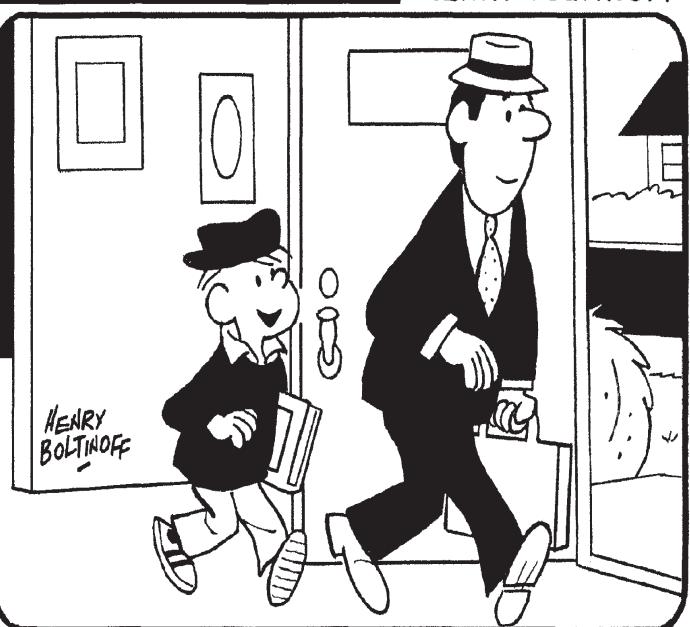
See YODER page 8A

ENTERTAINMENT

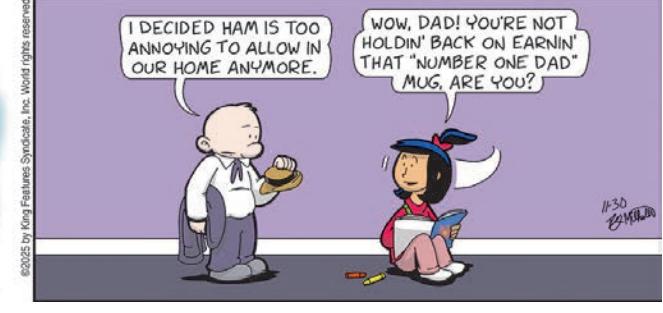


HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Out on a Limb

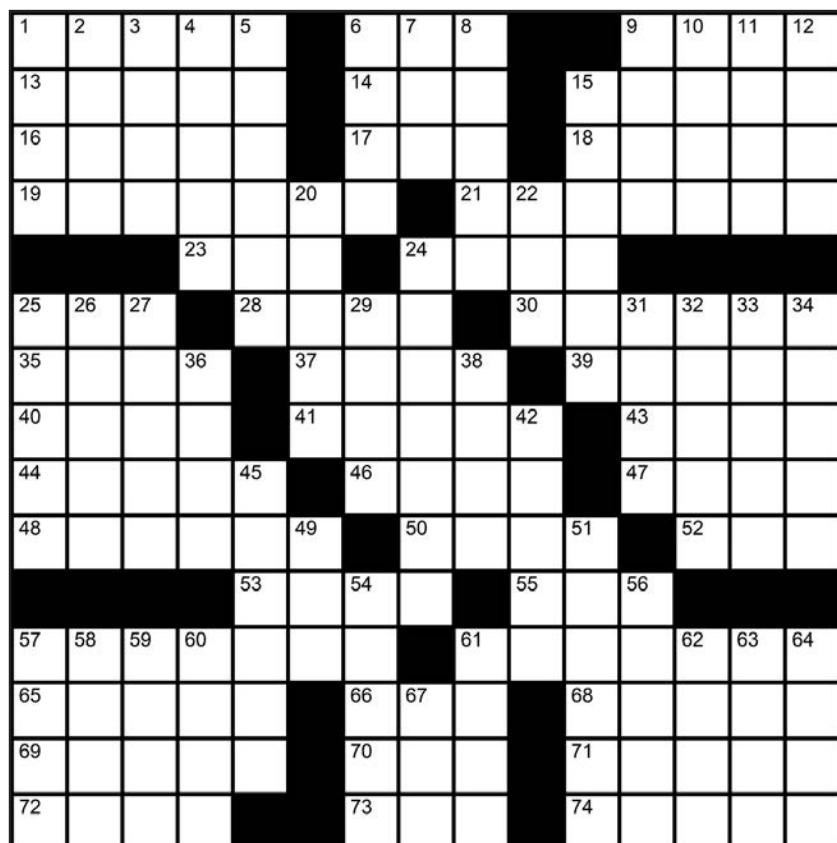
by Gary Kopervas



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Differences: 1. Picture frame is higher. 2. Door knob is larger. 3. Hand is moved. 4. Collar is missing. 5. Stripe is added to sleeve. 6. Book is smaller.

CROSSWORD 12-13-25



CLUES ACROSS

1. W.E.B Du Bois' org.
6. Rascal
9. Ho-hum
13. "Pomp and Circumstance" composer
14. Tropical constrictor
15. Forgo
16. Tequila source
17. + or - atom
18. Reason by deduction
19. *Trade war "weapon," pl.
21. *2025 MLB World Series winners
23. ____-tzu
24. C&H crop
25. Dunce
28. Western necktie
30. Catch in a snare
35. Ginger cookie
37. Master of his castle
39. Use a razor
40. British slang for donkey
41. Arch and ball locations
43. Winglike
44. March celebrants
46. *Arthur Sze, 2025 ____ Laureate
47. Dam-like structure
48. *Beyoncé's "Cowboy ____," 2025 Grammy winner
50. King Kong and Curious George, e.g.
52. Like a fox
53. What Pinocchio did
55. *Florida Panthers won this org.'s '25 championship
57. **Wicked: ____ ____
61. *Late environmentalist and chimpanzee expert

65. German submarine destroyer

66. *2025 Ryder Cup loser

68. Manuscript sheet

69. Brazilian coins

70. Roll-your-own one, for short

71. To the left, on a boat

72. Orpheus' instrument

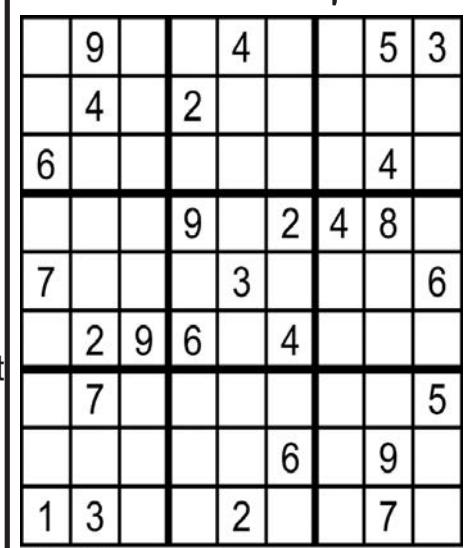
73. Geological time period

74. They are cut by Federal Reserve

CLUES DOWN

1. At room temperature, bar order
2. Algae, sing.
3. Petri dish filler
4. Raise trivial objections
5. Ready to be assembled
6. Avian wader
7. Farm sound
8. China's goodwill "____" diplomacy"
9. Collision, onomatopoeically speaking
10. *Taylor Swift's "The ____ of a Showgirl"
11. Affirm solemnly
12. Third-person possessive pronoun
15. Makes broader
20. Why do they fall in love?
22. *Aryna Sabalenka's seed
24. Auto contents
25. Pertaining to osmium
26. *2025 Academy Awards Best Picture winner
27. Faquir, alt.spelling
29. Pilot's stunt
31. Spring event
32. Pneumonia symptom, pl.
33. Be of use
34. *Blue Origin's 2025 singing passenger
36. Boll weevil, e.g.
38. * ____ Seek
42. Shorthand typist, for short
45. Serfs
49. 2016 Olympics host, for short
51. Ram's horn at a synagogue
54. Draw a conclusion
56. Parkinson's disease drug
57. Roll up
58. Heed
59. Lion sound
60. Dorothy's last name
61. *Lady of "The Mayhem Ball"
62. Tons (2 words)
63. Lira, pl.
64. Land parcels
67. *Gary Oldman received this honorific in 2025

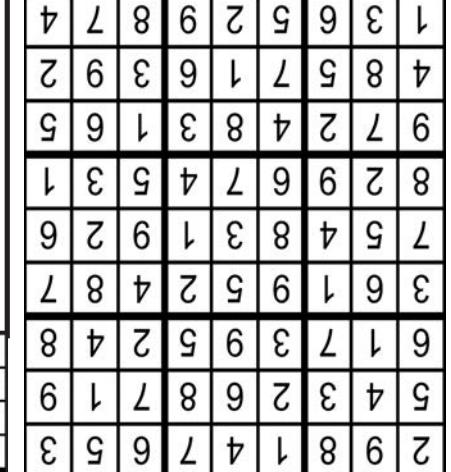
SUDOKU



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Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!



Sudoku answer featured above. Crossword answer featured to the left.

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AgGeorgia Farm Credit grant helps Thomson Middle School FFA grow community garden project



Courtesy: AgGeorgia Farm Credit

Special to The Journal

PERRY— Students at Thomson Middle School are getting hands-on experience in agriculture and community service thanks to a project supported by AgGeorgia Farm Credit's Community Mission Fund. The school's FFA chapter received a \$5,000 grant in 2024 to establish a community garden designed to educate students about sustainability, teamwork, and healthy living while providing fresh produce to those in need.

Located in Centerville, Ga., Thomson Middle School serves approximately 800 students in grades 6–8 and is home to a thriving FFA program with about 270 members. The FFA chapter's mission is to foster agricultural education, leadership, and personal growth through real-world learning opportunities.

With the support of

AgGeorgia's grant, the Thomson Middle School FFA completed the development of its community garden, which now serves as a living classroom. Students have gained hands-on experience planting, cultivating, and harvesting a variety of fruits and vegetables while learning the importance of food production and environmental stewardship.

Beyond the classroom, the garden has had a positive ripple effect throughout the local community. Fresh produce grown by the students is shared with area food banks, supporting local families and reinforcing the value of service. The project also brought together students, teachers, and community members, fostering a stronger sense of connection and collaboration.

"Our community garden has become so much more than a teaching tool—it's a place where our students

can grow as leaders and learn the impact of giving back," said Kenneth Ford, Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor at Thomson Middle School. "AgGeorgia Farm Credit's support helped us create a lasting space for hands-on learning that benefits both our students and our community."

In total, AgGeorgia Farm Credit awarded \$53,800 in 2024 through its Community Mission Fund to twelve nonprofit organizations across Georgia. Launched in 2023, the grant program supports projects that promote the future of agriculture and enhance the quality of life in rural communities, with grants of up to \$5,000 awarded per project.

To learn more about AgGeorgia's Community Mission Fund and explore past and current grant recipients, visit www.aggeorgia.com/community-mission-fund.

FIRE

From page 1A

Fire crews worked into Tuesday morning extinguishing hot spots. The Red Cross has also been notified

to assist the displaced residents.

Stoner believes fire crews did a phenomenal job in their response.

"Unfortunately, the fire had gotten to the point where half [of the] home is

damaged but I think the response aspect went very well," he said.

Stoner said his thoughts and prayers go to the household as they try to rebuild and recover.

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Marjorie Taylor Greene fires back at Trump, who called her a traitor

By TYTAGAMI
Bureau Chief
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene criticized President Donald Trump in a televised interview recently, saying he had abandoned his MAGA followers to help "major industries" and "big donors."

During her nearly 14-minute interview on the CBS News program 60 Minutes, the Rome Republican criticized Trump and gave one reason why she had decided to step down next month, a year before her term expires: safety.

After she had broken with the president over several political issues — the release of the Jeffrey Epstein files chief among them — Trump had publicly called her a traitor. Then, both she and her son had experienced threats of violence, a pipe bomb against her home and death for her son.

The subject line of the threat against her son bore the same words Trump had uttered: "Marjorie Traitor Greene," she said, telling interviewer Lesley Stahl that the threat therefore was "directly fueled" by Trump.

Greene said that when she told Vice President J.D. Vance about it, he told her they would investigate. But when she told Trump, he

responded with words she wouldn't repeat, sharing only that the president "wasn't very nice" and was "extremely unkind."

Stahl and her crew visited Rome for the interview after Greene's surprise announcement late last month that she would be leaving Congress Jan. 5, a year before her term expires. Greene said her decision was in part due to her vehement disagreement with Trump over the Epstein files.

She wanted them released. He did not.

She said Trump had told her the release of the files would "hurt people ... I don't know what that means," she said. "I don't know who they are."

Greene said she had been deeply moved by watching Epstein's victims tremble as they gave their first media interviews, and she said they deserved the full release of the files that they had been seeking.

Greene also broke with Trump over his decision to bomb Iran for Israel, for his support of the cryptocurrency industry and for his administration's decision to allow vaccinations for Covid-19, which she deemed to be a nod to the pharmaceutical industry.

Greene, who was an ardent supporter of Trump, often wearing a red MAGA cap, said she is not MAGA any-

more. That term belongs to Trump, she said. She is "America First."

When Greene criticized the toxicity of contemporary politics, Stahl interjected, noting that Greene herself had contributed. Greene pushed back, saying Stahl was being accusatory.

Greene said that Republican members of Congress were terrified of crossing Trump and of being targeted by a "nasty Truth Social" post from him, but she said they ridiculed him behind his back, openly siding with him only after he won the Republican nomination last year.

Greene said her decision to leave politics was a transparent one, noting that few believe it, giving her a wink when she says she has "zero" interest in running for president or for the Senate and that she is not running for Georgia governor.

But she said it is true. She has no grand designs.

"Surprise, surprise," Greene said. "I'm not your politician with a whole itinerary of plans or political ambitions."

This article is available through a partnership with Capitol Beat News Service, a project of the Georgia Press Association's nonprofit, tax-exempt Educational Foundation.

students have really stepped up to the challenge."

The Board also presented a check to United Way of Central Georgia, to which the district has been a long-time supporter. This year, the District raised around \$204,000.

Rogers pointed out that students cannot focus on learning if their basic needs are not met.

"[United Way] provides food at our Lindsey Student

Support Center, and that food goes to our families here in Houston County," he said. "I'm so proud of the staff and employees of Houston County for the amount of money we continue to raise each year that goes back into this local community. Because our challenge here is no matter why you move to Houston County, we're going to take care of your needs, whether it's the most academic rigorous course or you needing

They also encourage the reabsorption of sodium so that the body can retain more fluid and avoid a repeat of the dehydration it just experienced.

Once a person has hydrated adequately and vasopressin begins to fall, the opposite occurs: the body releases the extra water along with the sodium it was holding. I like to think of it this way—once the body is thoroughly convinced that we are not in a drought, it will

stop storing extra water and release it according to the level of satisfaction reached.

Alcohol is a very strong diuretic. If someone binge drinks, it can lead to several days of rebound fluid retention, especially if proper hydration is not restored afterward.

We react no differently as individuals when we "store up" for uncertain times. This is often in proportion to the level of hardship a person has experienced,

CONVICTED

From page 1A

The second case Santiago pled guilty to stems from a tip received by the Houston County Sheriff's Office from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) division.

ICAC discovered peer-to-peer sharing of suspected child pornography using an IP address associated with Santiago's address. Sgt. Gary Andrews was assigned the case and obtained a search warrant for the residence.

When he searched Santiago's residence, he found multiple electronic devices. Those devices were then sent to Lt. Darin Meadows, who downloaded their contents and discovered multiple images containing child sexual abuse material.

Assistant District Attorney Mike Smith and Assistant District Attorney Justin Duane prosecuted the case. Duane commented on the sentencing.

food on your table."

The district was then on the receiving end as Flint Energies donated \$82,000, a symbol of the continued partnership between the two.

In Board Member comments, Dave Crockett spoke on the holiday season right around the corner. He said this time is for celebration, reflection and togetherness.

"To our students, you're the heart of everything we do. Your enthusiasm, curiosity and dedication to learning are gifts that you share with us," he said. "As we break for the holidays, we encourage you to take time and recharge, reflect on your achievement and set new goals for 2026."

Crockett also thanked the parents for trusting them in their children's education, the support staff for being

"If you download and share naked pictures of little kids, our law enforcement will find out. Mr. Santiago was found out and will spend the next ten years of his life in prison and the rest of his life on the sex offender registry."

"Although we do not believe that Mr. Santiago personally knew any of the children in the photos, a child is victimized every time their picture is viewed. Thank you to G.B.I. and the Sheriff's Office for helping discover this heinous behavior and getting Mr. Santiago off the street," Duane said.

District Attorney Eric Edwards also provided comments:

"These two cases taken together paint a troubling but important picture of why aggressive, coordinated law enforcement work matters. Mr. Santiago was not only dealing dangerous narcotics in our community, but was also actively participating in the exploitation of children through the possession and sharing of

child sexual abuse material. These are precisely the kinds of offenders who pose a serious and ongoing threat to public safety."

"I want to commend the Houston County Sheriff's Office for their diligent investigative work in both the narcotics and ICAC components of this case, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for their critical role in identifying and referring the child exploitation activity for prosecution. I am also proud of the work of Assistant District Attorneys Justin Duane and Mike Smith in securing a substantial prison sentence and lifetime registration requirements that will continue to protect this community long after Mr. Santiago's release."

"Let this case serve as a clear warning: whether the crime involves drugs, the exploitation of children, or both, our office and our law enforcement partners will pursue it relentlessly and hold offenders fully accountable."

kits for those 18 and under during winter break. These kits will be served at Bonaire Middle School, Langston Road Primary, and Northside Elementary.

"These snack packs are perfect for traveling families or for kids who may need quick, easy snacks while adults are at work," Rogers said. "Remember, we are here to take care of all and some struggle with food when we're out of school for two weeks."

The next Houston County Board of Education meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at the Board office in Perry. The full agenda of this meeting can be found at simblieboardsolutions.com/SB_Meetings/ViewMeeting.aspx?S=4089&MID=130825.

3. Eat potassium-rich foods

Some foods rich in potassium include bananas, apricots, cantaloupe, honeydew, oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, prunes, leafy green vegetables, root vegetables, legumes, potatoes, lima beans, almonds, sunflower seeds, and molas.

We should aim to keep our urine a pale yellow. Dark yellow means we're not drinking enough water. Completely clear urine may mean we are drinking too much, which can wash out important minerals like sodium and potassium and lead to fluid imbalance.

There has been an over-demonization of sodium and an over-emphasis on drinking massive amounts of water. The key is balance:

1. Monitor your thirst
2. Prepared foods usually contain plenty of sodium, but if you cook at home, don't be afraid to salt your food—salt is essential

Our body not only has a well-designed immune system but also an equally well-designed survival system that will retain water according to the level of "drought" we have subjected it to.

PUBLIC NOTICE

December 2025

DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Houston County School District, Student Services Department, intends to destroy specific records that were collected, maintained, or used in the provision of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities. This notice is in compliance with all policies and procedures that were approved as part of the Georgia Special Education State Program Plan and are consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (20 U.S.C. 14111420)

Special Education records scheduled to be destroyed include records which are no longer needed for educational purposes for prior students enrolled in special education programs who have birthdays that fall between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 1998. This includes Speech records for students who were enrolled in speech only programs. The system plans to destroy these records on January 16, 2026, unless there has been a request for a due process hearing. If you, as the student or parents of the student, want copies prior to destruction, you should contact the office of Dr. Dana Wiggins, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, at 478-988-6200 X 3370.

BOARD

From page 1A

of 902 exams were fives and in 2025, 18% of 944 exams were fives. Barbour added that they are estimated to give over 1,100 AP exams this school year.

"I think that's a testament to what our district does in teaching and learning, what you guys do to support the program and our teachers and students," she said. "Our

YODER

From page 5A

with our blood pressure—it triggers the release of arginine vasopressin (an antidiuretic hormone). This stimulates the adrenal glands, which sit on top of the kidneys, to release aldosterone.

These hormones signal the kidneys to reabsorb fluids that would have become urine, concentrating the urine so as little water as possible is lost.

They also encourage the reabsorption of sodium so that the body can retain more fluid and avoid a repeat of the dehydration it just experienced.

Once a person has hydrated adequately and vasopressin begins to fall, the opposite occurs: the body releases the extra water along with the sodium it was holding. I like to think of it this way—once the body is thoroughly convinced that we are not in a drought, it will

stop storing extra water and release it according to the level of satisfaction reached.

Alcohol is a very strong diuretic. If someone binge drinks, it can lead to several days of rebound fluid retention, especially if proper hydration is not restored afterward.

We react no differently as individuals when we "store up" for uncertain times. This is often in proportion to the level of hardship a person has experienced,

and it can turn some people into genuine pack rats. Our body's subconscious survival mechanisms work the same way.

I like to think of sodium as a mineral that draws water in and potassium as one that helps release it. Imagine a room that keeps allowing people in but has a poorly functioning exit door—it can get uncomfortably full.

We need both sodium and potassium in balance to allow proper hydration, but when we consume large amounts of salt with very low potassium intake, the body will continue to hold water, resulting in what we recognize as fluid retention.

Many clinical trials show that increasing potassium intake (preferably through food) and keeping sodium at moderate levels can support healthy blood pressure and reduce the risk of

heart attack, heart failure, and stroke. Recent studies suggest that improving the potassium-to-sodium ratio could prevent millions of deaths per year worldwide.

Most adults do well with moderate sodium intake—often around 3–4 grams per day—unless their doctor recommends otherwise. Potassium intake should be increased primarily through whole foods. At the same time, monitor your water intake and increase it during times of heat, sweating, or physical activity.

There has been an over-demonization of sodium and an over-emphasis on drinking massive amounts of water. The key is balance:

1. Monitor your thirst
2. Prepared foods usually contain plenty of sodium, but if you cook at home, don't be afraid to salt your food—salt is essential

Our body not only has a well-designed immune system but also an equally well-designed survival system that will retain water according to the level of "drought" we have subjected it to.

PUBLIC NOTICE

HOUSTON COUNTY LOGIC & ACCURACY TESTING/ EARLY VOTING SCHEDULE AND EARLY TABULATION OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

SPECIAL ELECTION FOR STATE SENATE, DISTRICT 18

REGISTRATION DEADLINE – December 22, 2025

Logic and Accuracy testing on the voting equipment to be used for the January 20, 2026 Election will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, December 19, 2025, and continue each day until complete. Testing will take place at the Houston County Board of Elections, 2030 Kings Chapel Road, Perry.

EARLY VOTING SCHEDULE

BOARD OF ELECTIONS/HOUSTON HEALTH PAVILION CONF CENTER

Dec 29-Dec 31 (Mon-Wed) 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Jan 2, 2026 (Fri) 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Jan 3, 2026 (Sat) 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Jan 5 – Jan 9, 2026 (Mon – Fri) 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Jan 10, 2026 (Sat) 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Jan 12 – Jan 16, 2026 (Mon – Fri) 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

ELECTION DAY, January 20, 2026 – Polling Locations (Houston Co. Annex, Centerville City Hall, Feagin Mill Middle, Mossy Creek Middle, Ted Wright Park, Thomson Middle) open 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

Please check your MVP page, www.mvp.sos.ga.gov, for your assigned location

PURSUANT TO O.C.G.A. § 21-2-386 (a) (3) (4), This is to notify the citizens of Houston County that the Houston County Board of Elections will begin tabulation of mail-in absentee ballots cast in the January 20, 2026, Special Election for State Senate, District 18 at 5:00 P.M. on January 20, 2026 at the Board of Elections Office, Houston County Government Building, 2030 Kings Chapel Road, Perry, GA.

This 11th Day of December, 2025.

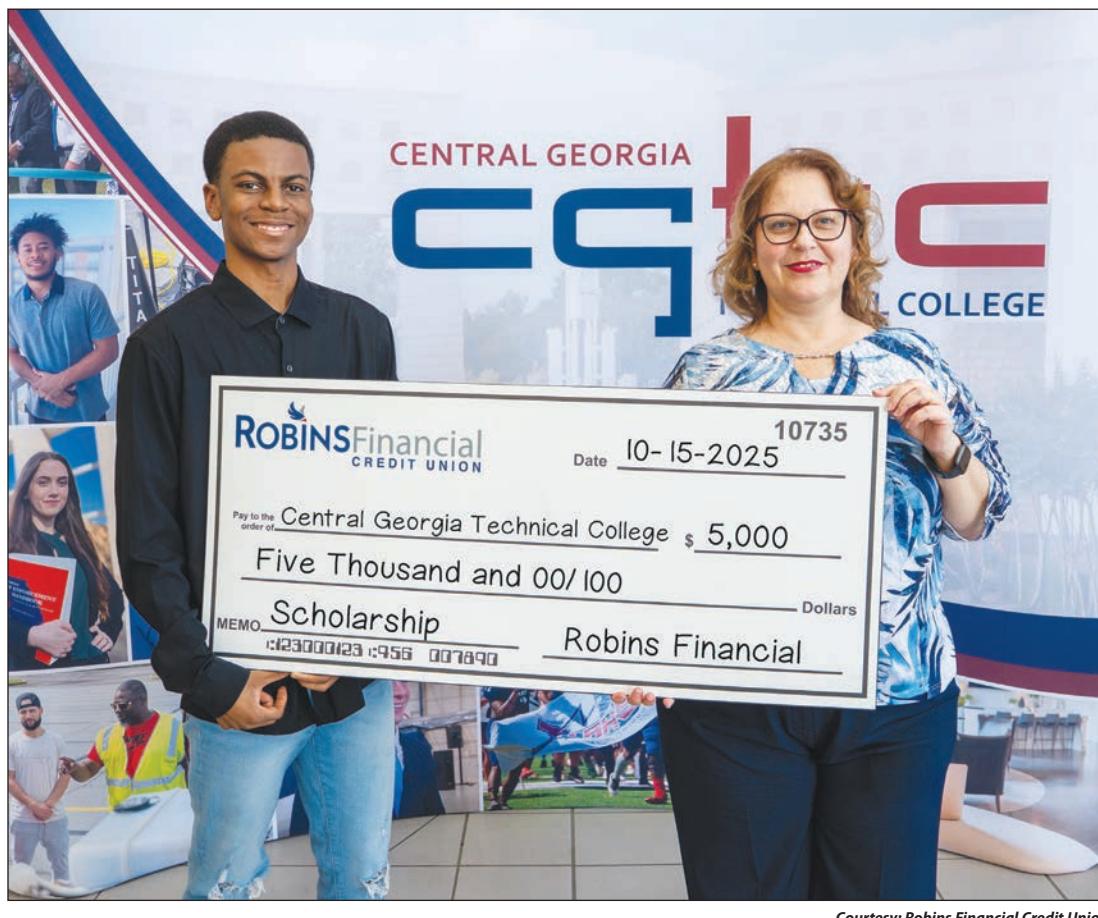
HOUSTON COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Robins Credit Union donates \$25k to support local college scholarships



Ljubica Quinn with Robins Financial Credit Union presents a scholarship check to Zechariah Haskell, student at Central Georgia Technical College.

Special to The Journal

WARNER ROBINS — Robins Financial Credit Union recently donated \$25,000 to support scholarships at four local colleges, reinforcing the credit union's commitment to education and community growth.

The funds were distributed to the following institutions: Middle Georgia State University.

Central Georgia Technical College, Fort Valley State University, and Georgia Military

College.

"At Robins Financial, we believe that education plays a vital role in shaping strong

communities," said Christina O'Brien, President & CEO of Robins Financial Credit Union. "We're proud to invest in the future of our students and to give them the opportunity to achieve their dreams."

These contributions will help provide financial assistance to students as they pursue their academic and career goals.

"This scholarship from

Robins Financial Credit Union has contributed to my educational success as an aspiring IT Cybersecurity Specialist, giving me financial security," said

Zechariah Haskell, recipient from Central Georgia Technical College. "This scholarship will allow me to focus on my courses instead of how I will pay for them."

Robins Financial Credit Union is honored to partner with these local institutions to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students across Middle Georgia.

Tips for dealing with holiday pop-up shops

BBB TIPS

KELVIN COLLINS



During the holidays, many retailers set up temporary pop-up shops or booths to sell their merchandise. This allows shoppers to browse unique holiday gifts and other merchandise in person. However, alongside the holiday cheer, BBB hears from consumers who run into problems with these temporary retailers.

The BBB receives complaints each year about temporary retail locations and pop-up shops. Consumers report everything from poor-quality merchandise to online purchase scams when ordering from the pop-up retailer's website. They also report having difficulty obtaining refunds after temporary stores have closed their doors.

Pop-up shops can be fun, but keep these tips in mind if you choose to buy from one of them:

- Ask how long a store will operate. If you are buying from a seasonal store, ask whether it will be open after the holiday and whether it will accept returns when the season is over. If not, consider buying elsewhere or taking more time to be sure the item is exactly what you want before making the purchase.

- Review purchase policies. Determine the company or vendor's refund and return policies before you buy. If pop-up shops cannot offer concrete commitments on how they will handle any potential problems you may have with their products or services, reconsider doing business with them.

- Be careful when placing orders. If the pop-up shop offers to place a special order for an item you're looking for, take extra steps to ensure it is legitimate. Before placing the order, ask the seller for their contact information and confirm it works. Get details

on how you will receive the order and when you should expect it to arrive and ask for a receipt and/or a copy of the order confirmation. Pay with a credit card so you have additional protection in case you never end up receiving the item.

- Pay attention to quality. Occasionally, pop-ups sell counterfeit products, so be cautious when purchasing designer goods or the latest "must-have" gifts. Prices that are dramatically lower than regular retail stores may be a red flag that the items are either stolen or counterfeit.

- If shopping online, do your research first. If you are interested in trying a new or unfamiliar online merchant, do your research. Ask the company for its physical location (address and phone number) so you can check its BBB Business Profile at BBB.org. Check to see if the business is BBB Accredited so you know whether dealing with a trustworthy business.

- Know the terms of any product or service guarantees. If you are purchasing anything that comes with a manufacturer's warranty, ask how you will be able to get the product serviced if needed.

- Guard your personal information. For small items, you might be better off paying in cash, so you don't have to share any personal information. Just be sure you understand that you probably won't have any recourse if something is not right. For larger items, paying with a credit card can provide additional protection if there are problems and the retailer disappears. Make sure you hang on to the receipt to match it against your credit card statement.

- Consider whether the gift is for a hard-to-please recipient. If you are planning a gift for someone who

might need or want to return it, consider buying from a retailer with a long-standing business, strong reputation, and well-established return policies, instead of a pop-up shop. Look to BBB Accredited Businesses to shop from a vetted, trusted business. When possible, ask for a gift receipt that would make a return or exchange easier, if necessary.

- If shopping online, do your research first. If you are interested in trying a new or unfamiliar online merchant, do your research.

- Ask the company for its physical location (address and phone number) so you can check its BBB Business Profile at BBB.org. Check to see if the business is BBB Accredited so you know whether dealing with a trustworthy business.

- Online purchase scams are very common during the holidays, so if you're unsure about a retailer, look for online reviews and search for any scams. Remember that deals that seem too good to be true are often scams.

- Shop around. Pop-ups often focus on unique or high-quality gifts that you may not find elsewhere, but some are simply mini versions of discount retailers, offering holiday-themed goods that may be available for less at a traditional retailer.

For more BBB holiday tips, visit our BBB Holiday HQ at BBB.org.

Kemp: November tax revenues up 0.9%

Special to The Journal

ATLANTA — The State of Georgia's net tax collections during the month of November totaled almost \$2.4 billion, for an increase of \$22.4 million, or 0.9%, compared to FY 2025, when net tax collections approached \$2.38 billion for the month. Year to date, net tax revenue collections totaled nearly \$13.28 billion, for an increase of \$262.7 million, or 2.0%, compared to November 2024, when net tax collections approached \$13.02 billion.

Year-to-year comparisons were affected by the motor fuel tax suspension due to Hurricane Helene in October 2024. Net of motor fuel tax changes, revenues for the month of November were

down 2.1% from the same month a year ago, while year-to-date collections were up 1.4%.

The changes within the following tax categories account for November's overall net tax revenue increase:

Individual Income Tax: Individual Income Tax collections during November totaled roughly \$1.13 billion, which was down from a total of \$1.18 billion in fiscal year 2025, for an overall decrease of \$46.7 million or 4.0%.

The following notable components within Individual Income Tax combine for the net decrease:

Individual Income Tax refunds issued (net of voided checks) increased by \$3.8 million or 5.5%

Income Tax Withholding payments for November decreased by \$39.9 million, or 3.4%, from FY 2025

Individual Income Tax Return payments declined by \$5.2 million, or 15.3%, compared to FY 2025

All other Individual Tax categories, including Non-Resident payments, were up a combined \$2.2 million

Sales and Use Tax: Gross Sales and Use Tax collections in November totaled \$1.64 billion, for an increase of \$38.6 million, or 2.4%, over FY 2025. Net Sales and Use Tax increased by \$23.5 million, or 3%, compared to last year, when net Sales Tax revenue totaled \$791 million. The adjusted Sales Tax distribution to local gov-

ernments totaled \$820.7 million, for an increase of \$18.6 million, or 2.3%, over last year's adjusted distribution total of \$802.1 million. Sales Tax refunds declined by \$3.5 million compared to FY 2025

Corporate Income Tax: Corporate Income Tax collections for November declined by \$38.3 million, or 130.4%, compared to last year, when net Corporate Tax revenues totaled \$29.3 million.

The following notable components within Corporate Income Tax make up the net decrease:

Corporate Income Tax

refunds issued (net of voids) were up \$24.8 million, or 78.9%, over FY 2025

Corporate Income Tax Return payments decreased by \$8.3 million, or 48%, from FY 2025

All other Corporate Tax payments, including Estimated Tax payments, were down a combined \$5.2 million

Motor Fuel Taxes: Motor Fuel Tax collections for the month increased by \$70.2 million compared to last year, when Governor Kemp's Executive Order to suspend motor fuel tax collections in

the aftermath of Hurricane Helene was in effect over a two-week period beginning October 3rd, thereby reducing state motor fuel tax receipts in November.

Motor Vehicle - Tag & Title Fees: Motor Vehicle Tag & Title Fee collections for November declined by \$4.1 million, or 13.4%, compared to last year's total of \$30.5 million, while Title ad Valorem Tax (TAVT) collections increased by roughly \$3.7 million, or 5.1%, from fiscal year 2025's total of nearly \$73 million.

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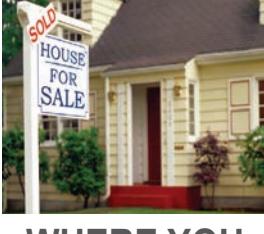
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Northside Basketball

Lady Eagles 6-1 for first time since 2021 with 59-point win over Rutland

By CLAY BROWN
HHJ Sports Editor
clay@hhjonline.com

WARNER ROBINS — The Northside Lady Eagles are 6-1 for the first time since 2021 as they continue to turn the program around under head coach ChoRhonda Gwaltney-Harris.

Their 59-point, 79-20 win over Rutland (4-5) is the second this season of 50 or more points, and third of 40-plus. A five-point lead ballooned into 26 by half-time, and Northside continued to pour it on in the final two quarters as they held the Lady Hurricanes to just three baskets in the second half.

A year ago Gwaltney-Harris said their 3-0 start was not indicative of how good the team was, though she seems to feel differently this time around.

"The teams we played weren't up to par last year.

This year I feel like we're much better than we were last year," Gwaltney-Harris said. "We beat Union Grove at the very first game, that's a quality team... which was a big, big thing for us... We lost to Westside [Macon] because we didn't have enough energy, we didn't play hard enough that game... The rest of the games we've kind of ran away with."

After Forest Park (0-8) next week the schedule gets much harder, though. Perry is having a decent season under first-year coach Austin McIntyre. Valdosta comes to town and then Northside-Columbus before region play starts.

The Lady Eagles look night and day different from last year. Their fundamentals, particularly on defense are much improved. They don't foul as much playing defense nor do they have as many careless turnovers.

Several years ago

See more photos at
hhjonline.com

Northside was a program that fell into the "doesn't know how to play basketball" category, but now they've clearly separated themselves from those kind of teams.

Gwaltney-Harris isn't satisfied just yet, however.

"We're not where we need to be," she said. "We're just finding our way right now, and we're working on being together as a team and rotating. Tonight we've seen a little bit of that, we got better at that... [but] we're not where we need to be."

UP NEXT

Northside will host Perry on Saturday, Dec. 13 at 3:30 p.m. as a part of their final five region games.

Rutland will travel to Howard on Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 6 p.m.



Clay Brown/HHJ

Lady Eagles Jordyn Hicks (white, left) and Madi Burch (white, background) double team Rutland sophomore Xeny Thomas (12) on the sideline to force the Lady Hurricanes to take a timeout.

Northside routes Rutland at home behind defense and team-high 18 points from Elijah Patmon

By CLAY BROWN
HHJ Sports Editor
clay@hhjonline.com

WARNER ROBINS — Northside (5-2) never trailed in their 79-47 rout of the Rutland Hurricanes (1-8), marking the Eagles' best start through seven games since the 2020 season.

The defense shined, providing Northside with a bounty of takeaways and fast break opportunities that were necessary for a struggling half court offense.

That was one of the positive observations head coach Buck Harris had on a night where he wasn't pleased with the whole effort.

"Defensively we can be pretty good at times," Harris said. "We didn't do the stuff that I needed us to do, which was do the little things. Get the 50-50 ball, get more deflections, get more steals. I'm trying to get some guys to buy into what we're doing defensively, and if I can get three or four more guys to do that, I think we could be a pretty good basketball team."

Rutland was not cautious

with the ball and gifted the Eagles some turnovers throughout the game. Bad outlet passes and driving into multiple defenders were a couple of ways. But Harris gave his team some credit, too, for forcing some of those turnovers with ball pressure and aggressiveness in the passing lanes.

"I think it was a little bit of both. One of the keys on the board, I said, we got to create havoc. We got to turn them over, and I thought we could do that," Harris said.

"What I try to emphasize is that if we turn them over we ain't got to come down and call plays. You get the freedom to rebound and run and go make a play for yourself or your teammates... We're trying to create an offense from my defense."

Northside found most of their early success in transition, but in the second quarter they created some separation by getting it down to Elijah Patmon in the post.

Patmon is listed at 6-foot-4 and 293 pounds, is a four-star Texas A&M commit and Region 2-5A Defensive Lineman of the Year.

That kind of size isn't something you see every day on a high school basketball court and that was apparent in the way he was able to push through and shrug off defenders at the basket.

Nine of his 18 points came in the second quarter to help the Eagles to a 39-22 halftime lead.

"He catches the ball very well, and when he decides to get off his big behind and jump he can make some layups for us," Harris said. "He told me [Monday], he said, 'I'm gonna get a double double.' I don't think [double-digit] rebounds but he had 18 points. Outside of [Houston County center] Braylin Mills he's one of the biggest guys in our region size wise... He gives us what we need down there."

Harris still wants more from his center, though, in the form of physical dominance.

"I said [to Patmon], 'I don't understand how you a football player and you don't seem very physical. Guys coming in there, you have zero fouls right now,'" Harris said. "But he gives us



Clay Brown/HHJ

Northside's Kingston Davis (left) and Javion Williams (right) fight to steal the ball from Rutland's Richard Fisher (14) during the Eagles' 79-47 non-region win.

a presence when [the team] understands what we need to do, which is feed him on the inside. It's gonna open everything else up on the outside. He's been a joy to

have right now."

UP NEXT

Northside will host Perry in their first county matchup of the season on Saturday, Dec. 13 at 5 p.m.

Rutland will look to snap their five-game losing streak when they hit the road to Howard on Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 7:30 p.m.

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Veterans Softball

Three Lady Warhawks selected to Georgia Athletic Coaches Association All-State teams

By CLAY BROWN
HHJ Sports Editor
clay@hhjonline.com

Softball season may be over, but that doesn't mean the accolades are done rolling in for a few players at Veterans High School.

Every year the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association

recognizes players through their All-State selections. There are usually 30 selections per classification, with a Player of the Year, Pitcher of the Year and 28 selectees split between first and second teams.

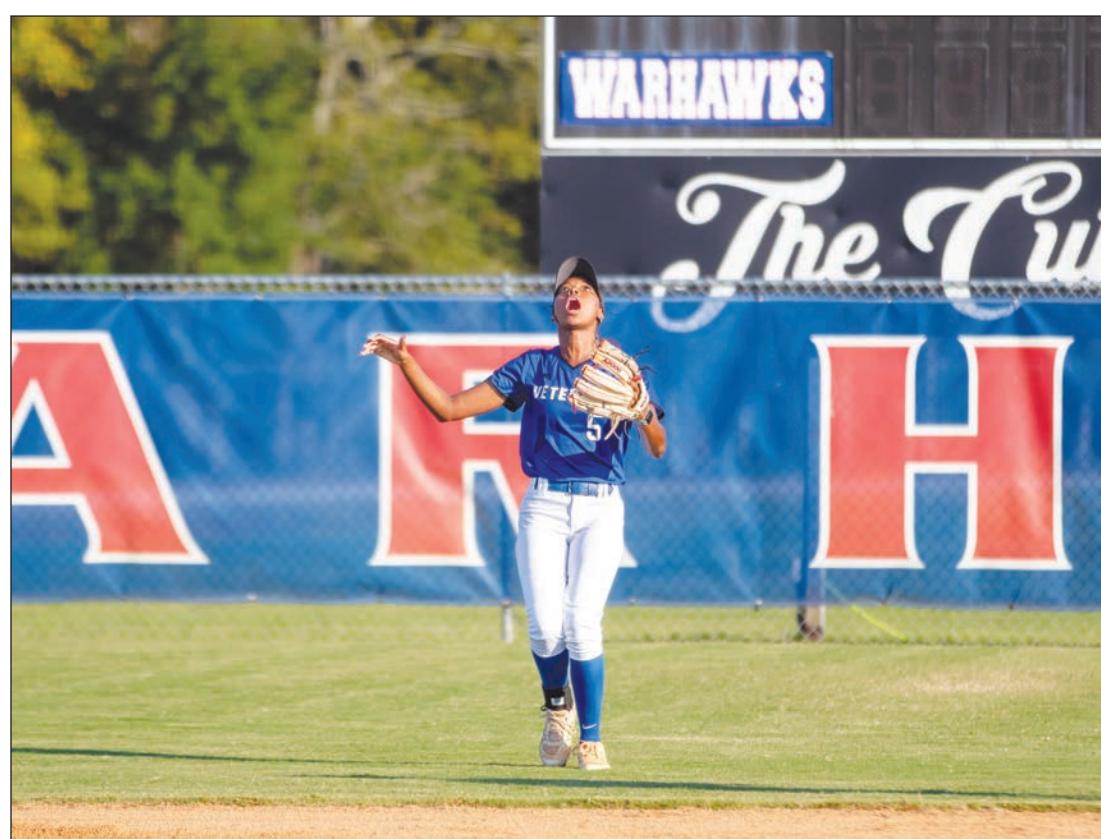
This year, after a historic season, Veterans has three members on the list:

See more photos at hhjonline.com

Rizzy White, Senior Middle Infielder, 1st Team
Rayven Hodridge, Senior Outfielder, 1st Team
Caidence Scott, Junior Pitcher, 2nd Team



Senior middle infielder Rizzy White was selected to the 2025 GACA All-State 1st Team.



Senior outfielder Rayven Hodridge was selected to the 2025 GACA All-State 1st Team.



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Staying active during the cold winter months is essential, but doing repetitive workouts gets boring! Change things up this season with fun exercise routines that mimic famous winter expeditions.

These routines are fine alone, but they're best with a big group! Even though you'll be working inside with temperature-controlled rooms, you'll feel like an explorer off to discover new adventures in the Arctic.

Sailing Across the Bering Strait

Credited as the first Russian to "discover" the western edge of the American continent, Vitus Bering undertook a voyage in 1725 towards what is now Alaska.

He used several ships and crossed thousands of miles by land and by sea. Have fun replicating the skills needed for this journey of exploration!

- Start with a warmup that includes upper and lower body stretching.
- Time to row! Even though Bering's ships had sails, the crew needed to row during calm weather or in emergencies. Use a rowing machine for 10 minutes at your local gym, do seated rows with free weights, or use resistance bands. If you're using weights, try for three sets of 12 reps each.

- After rowing, it's time to hike. The trek included walking across rocky terrain at times, so use "high knees" during your walking time to avoid tripping over the obstacles. Try to walk for 10 minutes!
- Cool down by stretching both your upper and lower body.

Pearny's and Cook's North Pole Expeditions

In 1908, two different expeditions headed to "discover" the North Pole. While both Cook and Peary separately claim that they reached this northernmost spot, their records are inconclusive.

Winter Survival Training

No matter the expedition, having winter survival skills was essential. Complete this fun training course to move your body and practice the activities you might need if you're trekking in polar climates.

- Start with a warmup that includes upper and lower body stretching.
- Time to practice compass navigation. If you need basic compass-reading instructions, this guide is great: www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/navigation-basics.html Once everyone in your group knows the skill, it's time for a relay.

- Do a set of these three exercises, eight reps of each move. Rest for 3 minutes, then repeat the set two more times.

- Do this set of seated core exercises for 10 minutes: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyaX-TpBifY.

- Cool down by stretching both your upper and lower body.

- Split into two teams and start in the center of the room. Each team gets one compass and a roll of colored tape. Keep furniture and obstacles for an additional challenge. Have a game leader call out a compass direction (use this online generator: www.randomlists.com/random-direction). The first person on each team navigates as fast as they can to that spot and puts a piece of their colored tape. The next team member from each group follows the same process, but with a new direction. Every team member should have at least three turns.
- Have a game leader call out a compass direction (use this online generator: www.randomlists.com/random-direction).
- The first person on each team navigates as fast as they can to that spot and puts a piece of their colored tape.
- The next team member from each group follows the same process, but with a new direction.
- Every team member should have at least three turns.
- After compass reading, it's time to strengthen the muscles for building a survival ice cave. You'll need a strong upper body and core to carve out the ice and crawl inside. Do a set of these three exercises: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyaX-TpBifY>, eight reps of each move. Rest for 3 minutes, then repeat the set two more times.
- Do a set of these three exercises, eight reps of each move. Rest for 3 minutes, then repeat the set two more times.

- Do this set of seated core exercises for 10 minutes: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyaX-TpBifY.
- Cool down by stretching both your upper and lower body.

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Northside Basketball

Eagles freshmen earning playing time as coach Buck Harris searches for buy-in from team

By CLAY BROWN
HHJ Sports Editor
clay@hhjonline.com

Northside boys head coach Buck Harris praised his team's defensive potential after their home win against Rutland on Tuesday, but also said there's a need for more buy-in on defense.

Harris has expectations for his players, and when they don't meet them that production has come from elsewhere in the early season.

"We got some guys in some areas that I thought didn't come to play tonight, but we got some other guys that stepped up and played well for us," Harris said after Tuesday's win over Rutland. "But that's why it's called team basketball and collectively, it was a total team effort. Some guys that I was counting on didn't play well, some other guys did. I'm glad we can do that."

Whenever something like that happens it opens the door for players like freshmen Caden Lowe and Kingston Allen.

Lowe played more out of the two on Tuesday, and despite fouling out, garnered praise from Harris.

"Freshman Caden Lowe played well for us with the exception of fouling out," Harris said. "We're still young in some areas, but we're getting better. We just try to hang our hat on playing defense and getting better defensively each and every night."



Northside freshman Caden Lowe (22) handles the ball at half court for the Eagles in his nine-point night against Rutland.

Getting varsity minutes as a freshman is a big deal almost no matter the program, and getting Harris' seal of approval as a guard means those two provide something to the team and have great upside.

"Caden Lowe is physically ready for high school on the defensive end. He can defend," Harris said. "He's too aggressive sometimes, proved tonight when he fouled out, and he's confident, and you can't take that away. If some of my other guys were just as confident as him, ain't no telling how good we could be, because he believes he belongs on the court...He earns it every day."

Allen isn't quite the defensive stopper that Lowe is, but he provides a boost to the Eagles' offense.

"He can score the ball. He can put the ball in the hole," Harris said. "He can shoot when he gets ready

to shoot, but it's just the mindset."

That mindset Harris is referring to is focus, which he said Allen didn't have on Tuesday. That kind of thing is what separates freshmen from upperclassmen, though Harris said he's not scared to play either Lowe or Allen despite the ups and downs that'll inevitably bring.

"Both of them are typical freshmen. It's gonna be a roller coaster ride all year because you're gonna be up and down," Harris said. "Kingston Allen tonight [Tuesday], was a typical freshman. Just up and down, not ready. I told him, 'You're not focused, you're not ready to play... I'm patient with him and I understand freshmen being freshmen, [they're] gonna have days like that. But when they're on and locked in they got a chance to be pretty good for us."

Lady Eagles still finding their way in the early season, embracing defensive culture in 6-1 start

By CLAY BROWN
HHJ Sports Editor
clay@hhjonline.com

Behind the Northside girls' 6-1 start, their first in four years, is an improved defense that's held opponents to 20 points or less three times so far.

In those games the Lady Eagles have outscored opponents 225-52. It's not a prolific offense helping the scoring, either. They still move slowly, work the ball around and prioritize paint touches for Taylor Johnson and other bigs.

Instead their aggressive and zealous defense nets them transition opportunities and makes every basket difficult for the opposing team. Transition defense could use some work, but their rebounding (at least against Rutland) helps nullify that.

Head coach ChoRhonda



Freshman center Ana'ja McClendon (34) fights for positioning under the rim with Rutland sophomore Amber Ellington (0).

Gwaltney-Harris has preached hard work and defense since she arrived last year, and she's starting to see that culture seep in throughout the team.

"My older kids understand what I want and what I need. My freshmen, they're having trouble with the times and not making them," Gwaltney-Harris said. "My older kids from last year, they're on it. They're making their times and they're trying to do what I ask them to do on a regular basis."

Those underclassmen have gotten more on-court opportunities recently because of players missing for various reasons.

"I just got a few kids back from flag football, so they've been in and out all season," Gwaltney-Harris said. "So I don't have exactly a whole team. We had some punishments going on, some other

stuff, so I don't have a whole team exactly."

Freshman center Ana'ja McClendon had a double-double with 10 points and 11 rebounds on Saturday at Rutland in a 49-32 victory. Though she missed a lot of shots at the basket on Tuesday, she was still a rebounding force with Johnson off the floor or operating in the high post.

Another freshman Gwaltney-Harris mentioned was Kendall Smith, who finished with six points on Tuesday.

Her length and defensive effort made her stand out, even if she's still figuring things out.

"I call her my baby giraffe, because she don't have a clue what she can do. She gets her hands on a lot of stuff," Gwaltney-Harris said of Smith. "My young kids are coming along and they're playing better."

Some upperclassmen have proven their enthusiasm for defense, like Jazmine Burgess who picked up the ball handler at half court plenty on Tuesday.

Another thing worth noting is Johnson being much more vocal on both ends of the floor. That was one of the things Gwaltney-Harris expected of her entering the season, and in her senior season the team goes as she goes.

"Taylor was not very good on Saturday, but she was good tonight. She was poised, she was under control, and that's what I need from her," Gwaltney-Harris said. "That's why I told her, 'When our leader plays well we play well.' She was poised... she was under control and I think the rest of us followed [Tuesday]."

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