

# The Houston Home Journal

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\$1.00 • Volume 156, No. 26

hhjonline.com

Weekend, March 21, 2026

## 'Important to get this right'

### Perry councilmembers speak out against rate increases, discuss comprehensive plan



Sandra Hernandez/HHJ

Councilmember Amy Fouse and others vouch against rate or fee increases in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2027 budget during Tuesday night's meeting.

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ  
HHJ Staff Writer  
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PERRY — The Perry Comprehensive Plan update was presented at Tuesday night's Perry City Council meeting, and the council wants to start hearing from citizens.

Tuesday's first required public hearing kicked off the comprehensive planning process. City Manager Robert Smith anticipates the plan will be completed by February 2027.

According to council documents, the comprehensive plan guides future land use and development decisions in the city. It will also provide direction for related elements such as housing, transportation, and infrastructure. The plan will set the long-term vision for the city's future.

During the regular meeting, Smith discussed the plan provided by Community Development Director Joe Duffy.

He shared that the city has completed a joint comprehensive plan with Houston County and nearby cities, which has been a success.

However, it has fallen short of influencing staff and council decisions, Smith said, adding that the plan had not been tailored to the city's specific needs.

For that reason, the city will be completing its own comprehensive plan, which will be combined with the Houston County comprehensive plan. Smith said it should work towards providing the city with something more forward-thinking and useful in application.

Smith explained that there will be a strong emphasis on receiving input from

citizens. He said the plan will be referenced often and will make sure they make well-reasoned decisions.

The project goals include:

- Exceed the state of Georgia requirements
- Integrate city documents into a unified synthesis
- Build a truly comprehensive plan
- Engage the community with efficiency and creativity

Smith said a problem is that many plans are sometimes not used or referenced. With this plan, he hopes to take a lot of what is already in place and use it to inform the comprehensive plan, he said. This includes housing, downtown development and the city's strategic plan.

There will be five phases in the comprehensive plan, including:

See PERRY page 2A

## Police make arrest in Perry shooting



Culler

By BRIEANNA SMITH  
HHJ Managing Editor  
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PERRY — Law enforcement has made an arrest in connection to a deadly shooting in Perry last week.

See ARREST page 3A

## Renita Duncan aims to be the change by running for Georgia House of Representatives, Dist. 147

By SANDRA HERNANDEZ  
HHJ Staff Writer  
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HOUSTON COUNTY — Renita Duncan, a lifelong public servant dedicated to uplifting her community, is running for the Georgia House of Representatives, District 147, to bring her commitment to service to the state level.

Duncan, "rooted in service," is eager to help. Though not originally from the area, she and her family have made Houston County home and she hopes to contribute to its growth.

When she graduated from high school, Duncan went straight to the Army Reserves. A year later, she left while serving due to a personal event.

Ten years later, after surgery, Duncan watched

the 9/11 attacks on "Good Morning America" and felt compelled to act. She returned to the military, noting it was becoming more diverse.

"We were caring about the culture of every member. [We looked] at our soldiers as individuals and not this conglomerate group of mass power houses. I don't want Americans to be numbers or statistics because we are people," she said.

Duncan retired from the Army Reserves to care for her father during his cancer diagnosis. She later moved to Warner Robins, left, and returned in 2022 to support her newly retired mother.

When she returned, she saw an opportunity to reapply for a federal job after her previous civil service work. However, she took a

deferred resignation, feeling she could not continue government work after the November 2024 election.

"My values just don't fit with the government at this point, which is why I'm running for office. I'm running because I really want to be the voice of the [people], boots on the ground, living in the trenches, living in the city. A real paycheck-to-paycheck people," she said.

Duncan described herself as a regular person. She shared that she is also a domestic violence survivor and continues to advocate for victims, which is her passion. She said this was why she wanted to enter the civil service: she had always wanted to help.

When she and her parents moved to Warner Robins,

See DUNCAN page 2A



Duncan



PERIODICAL

## Warner Robins Council hears crime stats, rezoning petition

By BRIEANNA SMITH  
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WARNER ROBINS — The police department gave its year end update and another set of homes got the green light from the city of Warner Robins at their

latest meeting on Monday. According to planning and zoning manager Darin Curtis, a four-acre property, located at 1302 Feagan Mill Road, was previously zoned for county agricultural. Council approved

See CRIME page 3A



## Sheriff's Office sports patriotic new badges



Courtesy: Houston County Sheriff's Office

The sheriff's office's new badges symbolize America's 250th birthday.

By OWEN JONES  
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HOUSTON COUNTY — The Houston County Sheriff's Office has revealed new badges they will be wearing for the remainder of the year. These badges will be worn to commemorate the United States of America's 250th birthday which will be on July 4, 2026.

"It's a big anniversary for the United States, and [this badge] is something to honor the military members that help keep us free and the law enforcement officers that keep us safe here in the states," Sheriff Matt Moulton said.

Moulton said responses from deputies have been very positive, and community members around the

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### Word of the Day

Sing to the Lord, For He has done excellent things; This is known in all the earth.

— Isaiah 12:5 (NKJV)

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# COUNTY UPDATES

## County Commissioners hear from Perry Methodist Church, receive thanks from Emory Healthcare

By OWEN JONES  
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**WARNER ROBINS** — The Houston County Commissioners heard from Reverend Tom Carruth, Senior Pastor of Perry Methodist Church.

Before serving as Senior Pastor, Carruth was the youth minister at First Methodist Church of Warner Robins. He was hired by Tommy Stalnaker, who was Chairman of their Board at the time.

"I lived in Warner Robins from 2004-2007, went to seminary as a Methodist preacher, then moved back to Houston County in 2021," Carruth said.

He posed the question if politicians or preachers have the worst reputation. The popular answer would be politicians; however, Carruth pointed out that people assume that there's a "motive or an agenda all the time".

"Being at Perry Methodist, I've gotten to know some other political leaders, and I found out that they're just human beings trying to do the best they can," he said.

Carruth then read Matthew Chapter 5, which is Jesus' sermon on the mount. He said the sermon starts with us keeping our promises.

"How much greater would it be if we went back to just what Jesus taught which is: yes is yes and no is no, that's it. Anything more from that comes from the evil one," he said. "I'm saying that for myself and for all of us that we need to be more of a community."

Carruth said one reason he loves Houston County is that he feels more at home.

"We're trying to actually be human, friendly and have relationships with each



Commissioners hear from Rev. Tom Carruth of Perry Methodist Church at their Tuesday meeting.

Owen Jones/HHJ

other," he said. "The only way that this thing is going to work and not completely come off the rails is for me to be able to talk to you and you talk to me and say 'yes' or 'no'."

Commissioner Shane Gottwals said we can learn from Jesus' sermon on the mount in politics as well as in our daily lives.

"We appreciate you being here and bringing that word.

You do great work, and I appreciate your impact on this community," he said.

Commissioner Gail Robinson said she hopes everyone could take Carruth's words to heart.

Members of Emory Healthcare, Warner Robins, and Perry expressed appreciation to the Board of Commissioners for their investment in the hospital, as they allocated \$2 million in

ARPA funds.

CEO Kevin Splaine said they have used these funds to upgrade X-ray equipment and CT scanners.

"The technology that you've allowed us to acquire is not only faster or more accurate, but also allows us to build for the future," he said.

With the funds given to them, he said they were also able to include new software that will allow them to do

advanced cardiac imaging.

"As we bring more advanced cardiac specialists here, the technology is waiting for them," he said. "It's an important building block for the community and the services here."

Director of Radiology, Kendra White Brown, said they appreciate the ARPA funds sent as they now have three new CT scanners at all three of their facilities in the

county.

"This technology has brought us to the highest end of technology here for Houston County and in this Middle Georgia area," she said. "It will give us the ability to improve patient throughput, improve throughput through the ED, but it also gives us an opportunity to expand in the heart and vascular service line here, so that we have the ability to keep our patients here and not have to go up to Bibb [County] or Atlanta."

Manager of Radiology for Emory Warner Robins, Jeff Engel, said he was born and raised in Houston County and works with "heroes on the frontline".

"When we get this opportunity to get this new equipment in a place where the technologists don't have to struggle a lot, patients get a smoother transition and better diagnostic scans," he said. "The technologists told me to say thank you as they all appreciate it so much."

In new business, the Board approved a professional services agreement to redesign the county website. According to the agenda, the website was redesigned in 2016 and will need an update to "meet the current accessibility standards and improve usability".

The county will enter into a Professional Services agreement with Third Wave Digital out of Macon and is required to meet the "WCAG 2.1 accessibility by the April 24, deadline".

The next Houston County Commissioners meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 7, at 9 a.m., located at the Houston County Courthouse in Perry. The full agenda of this meeting can be found at [www.houstoncountygga.gov/minutes/2026-03-17%20Department%20Head%20Copy.pdf](http://www.houstoncountygga.gov/minutes/2026-03-17%20Department%20Head%20Copy.pdf)

### PERRY

From page 1A

- Project foundations
- Community assessment
- Vision and goals
- Element development
- Implementation and adoption

Smith shared that the city council has sought to increase community engagement and hopes the plan and process will provide.

Smith said the city will try to gather as much input as possible through various activities. One of the ways the city will inform the public is through a website where they can learn more about the plan and how to get involved.

Under the "how to get involved" tab, they include events where they can provide their feedback. An upcoming event is the Perry

Wine Tasting on April 17, during which city staff will hand out flyers. There will also be a survey that people can complete on the website.

Councilmember Amy Fouse encourages the community to share the website, noting that more events and a survey will soon be available on the new site.

During the pre-council meeting, Councilmember Willie King noted that not all citizens are tech-savvy and suggested receiving their input without technology. Duffy said they will look for ways and rely on the council to spread the word to their constituents.

Smith mentioned distributing print brochures and allowing people to drop off their input at City Hall.

The city will host another meeting in May for citizens to provide comments.

Another step in the process is planning for their first public workshop.

"This is going to be a very, I hope, exciting process. We hope to get as much engagement as we can from the public on this. Ultimately, I think the product that will be produced is going to be exceptional," Smith said.

Mayor Randall Walker said they want as much public engagement as possible and will continually look for ways to connect with every citizen.

Councilmember James Moody agreed with both Walker's and Fouse's comments, saying he wants the survey to be publicly available at every city event. He said they want input from all demographics.

During council comments, Councilmember Dan Peterson emphasized that the comprehensive plan will be

the city's "north star" for how it navigates decisions.

To learn more about the comprehensive plan and provide feedback, visit: <https://www.planningperrytogether.com/>

Towards the end of the council meeting, council members said they would not vote for any rate increases.

Fouse was the first to share her comments, saying that over the past few years, citizens have seen many fee increases. She said that as they move into budget season, she will not support or vote for any budget proposals that include fee or rate increases for next year.

"I know that we have work to do in our city and I know there's a lot that goes into that. I want our department chairs to have plenty of time to plan accordingly as that's concerned, because our citi-

zens can only take so much and we're at that point. We do not have an appetite for more of that. That's where I stand on that," she said.

Councilmembers Robert Jones, Moody and Peterson agreed with Fouse. Moody said affordability is a big issue for everyone. He noted the Georgia Legislature is also aware of these issues and is working on solutions.

"The citizens of Perry are well aware of the cost of living. I would echo my sentiments, too, that I am not in favor of any rate or fee increases for the fiscal 2027 budget, only as an absolutely last resort," he said.

Peterson again reminded the community that it is budget season and believes it will be the most important budget to pass in the city. He said they are going to deal with more revenue, debt, develop-

ment and people that need city services.

"It's a super important time for us to get this right. I join some of my other colleagues who've expressed their opinion. I appreciate that. I'm also not in favor of using additional rate increases or fee increases to try to cover our budget," he said. "I think that's important for all the staff, the department heads to be considering that as you formulate your budgets."

Mayor and Council will hold their pre-council meeting at 5 p.m. and the regular council meeting at 6 p.m. on April 7. Everyone is invited to attend, and the agenda is available at [perry-ga.gov/subscribe-agendas-minutes](http://perry-ga.gov/subscribe-agendas-minutes). Both meetings are also livestreamed on YouTube: [youtube.com/@PerryComms](https://www.youtube.com/@PerryComms).

### DUNCAN

From page 1A

her father told her he could help her.

"I believe that statement and I believe that Houston County is great. I want to be a part of the evolution of where we're going," she said.

Duncan is putting down roots by starting businesses and nonprofits. She sees community needs overlooked or politicized and aims to change that during her campaign.

If elected, her main priorities include women's rights, another issue she advocates for, citing concerns that women will lose their right to vote or face barriers to voting.

She mentioned the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act. If passed, the proposed legislation would require proof of citizenship to register to vote for federal elections.

Duncan is concerned about bodily autonomy due to current abortion laws. She stresses the importance of safeguarding women's rights and showing women they can be leaders.

Veterans Support Services is another priority. As a veteran, she wants to address transportation gaps she experienced firsthand through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I would love for our state to provide or our county to be

able to support that better in this rural area because it is so spread out. There is no public transportation so I really want to take a look at that," she said.

Turning to the local job market, Duncan highlighted that Warner Robins Mayor LaRhonda Patrick is leading positive change in the area. She also noted during her drives down Watson Boulevard that there are many opportunities for small businesses to thrive.

Duncan plans to engage the community through town halls and a hands-on approach.

"We cannot make change if we don't hear what people want. I feel like many times decisions are made without checking on the community. I am an advocate for the community because that's how we're going to grow," she said.

She is running her campaign independently and previously ran for Congress in California during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She ran as an independent because she felt her values did not align with either party at the time, but now they closely align with the Democratic Party, which she is excited about.

"I want to be clear that I do stand for the people. I want the people to understand that I am their representative," she said.

To reach a broad audience,

Duncan hopes to engage everyone in her campaign by knocking on doors and using technology, such as virtual meetings with youth and Facebook Live sessions.

"I can't run if I don't hear from the people," she said.

Duncan is also aiming to help in the community by donating to local causes.

Duncan said she believes every individual deserves a representative who listens. By aiming to be a true voice for the community, she hopes constituents will trust her to bring their concerns and interests to the Georgia State Capitol.

Duncan described herself as a servant leader, meaning she has a hands-on approach to leadership. She said many people describe themselves as "mama bears," but she considers herself more of a "black panther," explaining that she knows when to be still and when to fight.

"I will fight for our county," she said.

Duncan believes the area is often overshadowed by counties in Metro Atlanta because the city is well-known. However, Houston County is also important, she believes, and she said she will ensure the area is not forgotten by securing county initiatives through grants.

"I want to make sure that I'm in the fight for that and I won't back down," she said.

Duncan's fighter spirit

comes from going through things in her personal life. She believes this has equipped her to continue fighting to make Houston County a better place.

"All those things have made me the fighter that I am and I think have equipped me to fight for our community. I'm not saying we're struggling right now, I'm saying it's time to evolve and that's what I bring to the table," she said.

The Georgia House of Representatives continues to have steady leadership in

the State Capitol. If elected, Duncan aims to listen and speak up because she is a leader, she said.

"I'm going to ask the questions, I'm going to do the research and I'm going to stand on what my community says that they need and what they want. I'll stand 10 toes down on that," she said.

Duncan said residents of District 147 should vote for her because she will be the change they want to see.

"If you want to see change, if you want to see true leadership and you want to see

someone who is out there in the trenches with you, vote for me because I am for the community," she said.

Duncan encourages anyone interested to contact her via email at [voterinitaduncan@gmail.com](mailto:voterinitaduncan@gmail.com).

Duncan will be running against Tim Riley and incumbent Bethany Ballard. To see if you are in District 147, visit: <https://www.house.ga.gov/media/Services/Documents/Maps/2023HD147.pdf>.

The General Primary Election is May 19.

## 2025 HOUSTON COUNTY WATER REPORT AVAILABILITY

### DOWNLOADABLE

<https://www.houstoncountygga.gov/business/public-works.cms>  
<https://www.houstoncountygga.gov/business/waterreports.cms>

### HARD COPY

Perry Ho. Co. Utility Office: 2020 Kings Chapel Road, Perry, GA 31069  
Ho. Co. Water Treatment: 1601 Feagin Mill Road, W.R., GA 31088 953-1110  
Ho. Co. Water Billing Office: 200 Carl Vinson Pkwy, WR, GA 31088  
Henderson Fire Department: 225 GA Hwy 26E, Henderson, GA 31013  
Elko Post Office: 2601 Elko Road, Elko, GA 31025  
Haynesville Fire Department: 3004 S Highway 341, Haynesville, GA 31013  
Clinchfield Post Office: 2620 South US Highway 341, Clinchfield, GA 31013

# CALENDAR

## A Walk in Oaky Woods

March 21 | 8:30 a.m.  
801 Oaky Woods Rd,  
Kathleen

There will be a hike in Oaky Woods hosted by John Trussell, Founder of Save Oaky Woods, starting at the Oaky Woods check station.

We will see the sand dollar cliffs, the old moonshine still, and other natural sites.

Participants must be in good physical condition and be able to walk 1 mile on uneven ground. Hikers may encounter snakes, ticks and other wild creatures. Ages 12 and up are welcome, and kids must be accompanied by parents.

This is a free hike. Those interested must sign a waiver of liability form and register by noon on Friday, March 20.

To register, call (478) 957-7411.

## Sky Zone Grand Opening

March 21 | 9:30 a.m.  
815 Russell Parkway,  
Warner Robins

Sky Zone Warner Robins will host a Grand Opening event this weekend! We will have a Chamber ribbon cutting (Perry and Warner Robins), then doors will open at 10 a.m. Pastor Matt Walls will attend to give prayer of blessing.

We will have \$10 Jump Tickets all day, a live DJ, free socks to the first 1,000 guests, door prizes and more! Join us for our grand opening!

## Now When We Rise

March 23 | 6:15 - 7:30 p.m.  
1201 Washington Ave,  
Perry

All are invited to join our Tactical Civics Chapter to Learn How "We The People" can execute our God given American duties with the "Now When We Rise" video series. Topic: (X)ecution and Perseverance.

The presentation takes place in the Perry Public Library meeting room.

## Houston County Celebrates Earth Day

April 18 | 10 a.m - 2 p.m.  
2030 Kings Chapel Road,  
Perry

Houston County will celebrate Earth Day at the Houston County Extension Pavilion. This free family event will offer learning stations, craft projects, educational exhibits, face painting, and more.

Two exhibitors will bring wildlife and be available to answer questions. Vendors will also be onsite to offer a variety of items for sale, including plants.

Earth Day has been observed since 1970 to promote protecting the environment and raise awareness about preserving Earth's resources.

For more information, call the extension office at (478) 987-2028. To learn more about the UGA Extension office, visit [www.extension.uga.edu](http://www.extension.uga.edu).

## 21st Annual Old Book Sale

April 23 - April 25  
Thu. & Fri. 9 a.m - 7 p.m.  
Sat. 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
401 Golden Isles Pkwy,  
Perry

Houston County Friends of the Library is hosting the 21st annual Old Book Sale at the GA National Fairgrounds in the Georgia Grown/Baby Barn Building.

Over 90,000 books in 60 categories will be in the building ready for sale.

Admission will be \$10 on Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon and \$5 from noon to 7 p.m.

Admission will be free on Friday and Saturday. All items half price on Saturday!

Cash, check, credit, and debit all accepted. Convenience fee for electronic transactions.

For more information, please email: [hocofriendsofthelibrary@gmail.com](mailto:hocofriendsofthelibrary@gmail.com) or, visit [houpl.org](http://houpl.org), click "Support the Library, click "Friends of the Library".

Find us on Facebook: Houston County Friends of the Library.

## St. Christopher's Easter Services

1207 Macon Road, Perry

Lenten Bible Study  
Wednesdays until March  
25 | 4:30 p.m.

Palm Sunday Service  
March 29 | 10:00 a.m.

Good Friday Service  
April 3 | noon

Easter Service  
April 5 | 8:00 a.m.

## All Saints Lenten & Easter Services

1708 Watson Blvd, Warner  
Robins

Stations of the Cross  
Feb 25 - March 25 | noon

Thursday Evening Lenten  
Program  
Feb. 26 - March 26 | 5:45  
to 7:15 p.m.

The Lenten Program will feature an evening prayer, light potluck and the "We Confess" video series, (rooted in the ancient practice of confession, reminding us that Lent is not a season of condemnation, but a time of striving, with God's help, towards healing, wholeness, and the peace God longs for us to receive).

Palm Cross Workshop and  
Parish Workday  
March 28 | 9 a.m.

Palm Sunday Worship  
March 29 | 10:15 a.m.

Maundy Thursday Service  
April 2 | 7 p.m.

Good Friday Service  
April 3 | 7 p.m.

Easter Vigil Service  
April 5 | 6:30 a.m.

Easter Breakfast  
April 5 | 9 a.m.

Easter Egg Hunt  
April 5 | 9:30 a.m.

Easter Service  
April 5 | 10:15 a.m.

All Saints Episcopal Church invites all to our Lenten and Easter Services. For more information, please contact the church office at 478-923-1791.

# Warner Robins Police Department to host first town hall of 2026

**Special to The Journal**  
WARNER ROBINS — The Warner Robins Police Department invites the community to attend the first Town Hall of 2026 on Tuesday, March 24, at 6:30 p.m. The event will be held at the North Houston Road Sports Complex, located at 900 N. Houston Road.

This Town Hall offers residents an opportunity to

engage directly with Police Department leadership, ask questions, share concerns, and hear updates on department initiatives, crime prevention efforts, and community programs. As the first Town Hall meeting of 2026, the department will also provide an overview of recent accomplishments and share priorities and goals for the year ahead.

"We value every opportunity to connect with our community," said Chief Wayne Fisher of the WRPD. "Town Halls allow us to hear directly from our residents and work together to keep Warner Robins safe and strong."

All residents, business owners, and community partners are encouraged to attend.

# Lindsey Student Support Center March events

**Special to The Journal**  
HOUSTON COUNTY — The Lindsey Student Support Center (LSSC) will host the following events for students and their families. All will be held at the LSSC unless noted otherwise. Registration is required for all events.

Clinic Day: March 24th from 9:00 a.m. — 4:00 p.m.

The LSSC and the Georgia Department of Public Health - North Central Health District are partnering to bring health appointments to the families in Houston County. Appointments are available on a first come, first served basis and pre-registration is required. The appointments will be free or low cost for families. Nurses are able to treat mild/moderate conditions, high blood pressure, diabetes, and more. Health screenings, physicals and vaccines can also be provided. Prescriptions will be given as needed. Middle Georgia Community Action Agency will be available to assist with prescription resources. Medications will

not be on-site, and dental services will not be available.

Youth Sewing Class: March 26th from 4:00 p.m. — 5:30 p.m.

For students in grades 4-12, learn basic sewing skills and make simple projects in this fun and creative sewing class.

Community Garden: March 26th from 4:30 p.m. — 5:30 p.m.

Come join us for some horticulture therapy and help tend to the community garden while receiving tips and tricks to help your own garden thrive. This is an adult class.

2026 Annual Parent Involvement Survey for Georgia Families Raising a Student with a Disability.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is surveying parents of students with disabilities throughout Georgia. Individual answers are kept confidential. Each response will be coded by number, not name. In order for all students to graduate prepared to achieve a lifetime of success, families need to

be an important part of the school team. It is critical that the GaDOE assist local school systems in partnering with families to raise the achievement rate for students with disabilities. Completing the survey will assist in achieving this goal. Please complete the online survey to make your voice heard.

Upcoming April event - Emory Healthcare Youth Cooking Class: April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th from 4:00 p.m. — 5:00 p.m.

For aspiring chefs in grades 4-12, learn how to make healthy recipes and delicious meals that are heart healthy!

To register for classes and for all event information, including accessible flyers in English and Spanish, visit the LSSC event calendar webpage: [hcbe.net/lindseycalendar](http://hcbe.net/lindseycalendar).

The Lindsey Student Support Center is located at 81 Tabor Drive in Warner Robins. For more information about what the Center offers, visit [www.hcbe.net/lindseycenter](http://www.hcbe.net/lindseycenter).

## CRIME

From page 1A

annexing the land into the city and changing the use to multi-family residential.

During work session, Curtis said the city's joint comprehensive plan supports suburban residential development, and planning and zoning gave a favorable recommendation.

Initially, the county objected, but later retracted its stance, Curtis mentioned.

"I believe that to be on the basis that the owner and the engineer were able to illustrate to [the county] the merit of their project," he said.

The developers revised the site plans to include 54 townhomes in a gated community, complete with a dog park, playground, and pavilion.

Responding to questions from Mayor LaRhonda Patrick, Curtis said the units will be attached to one another, like townhomes and duplexes, and range from two to five units per building.

While the plans are still in the concept phase, Curtis predicted the units will most likely be for rent unless a public right-of-way is created on the property.

Councilman Kevin Lashley asked about the construction's timeframe; developer representatives said it would be as soon as possible.

Also during pre-council, the city heard year-end statistics from the police department, which said crime is on a decline.

According to police Chief Wayne Fisher, in 2020, the department took around 17,000 incident reports, with just over 8,000 classified as group A crimes — offenses against people or property.

Fisher said in 2020 that around 8,800 people were considered victims,

or about 1 in 10 of the city's population, given the city's population of around 80,000.

By 2025, the population had increased to 87,000. Fisher said the department took in around 15,000 reports, involving about 7,300 victims and 6,100 group A crimes, almost 2,000 fewer than five years ago.

"We are having a positive effect in crime reduction impacts within our community, while, in fact, we have growth within our community: population increase and density increases. Normally, you would see a trend of an increase of crime," he explained.

Fisher cites the decrease in part due to fostering relationships with the community, educating local youth, and using technology to support law enforcement efforts.

"It's through these collaborative efforts within the community, the city government, and our law enforcement partners through the Middle Georgia area and Houston County, that is reflected into the reduction of crime and these numbers coming through," he said.

Fisher said law enforcement took an approach focused on reducing systemic issues. He used Operation Wenden Way Blockade as an example, an operation in 2024 that investigated drug trafficking and gang activity. The operation led to 30 arrests.

While crime is down overall, Fisher said crimes seeing increases are embezzlement, fraud and forgery.

Fisher also said domestic violence was at a high level, consistent with national trends. He said both crimes are more difficult to prevent, but education is key.

To view the meeting's agenda and supporting documents, visit the city's website: [wrga.gov/](http://wrga.gov/)

[documents/agenda-center/23988678](http://documents/agenda-center/23988678)

A full look at the meeting can be found on the city's Facebook page: [facebook.com/CityofWarnerRobins1](https://www.facebook.com/CityofWarnerRobins1)

The next Warner Robins City Council Meeting will take place Monday, April 6, 4:30 p.m., at Warner Robins City Hall, 700 Watson Boulevard.

## BADGES

From page 1A

county have been very supportive of them.

The new badge embodies patriotism and Moulton could not be more proud of his staff for wearing them. He believes it is of utmost importance for law enforcement to show their patriotism, and these badges give them a chance to do so.

"[Patriotism] means everything and it is the reason we can do what we do today," he said. "We live in a big military town with Robins Air Force Base, and honoring them is not a once a day thing; it's every day."

## ARREST

From page 1A

In a press release, the Perry Police Department said its Criminal Investigations Division made the arrest Wednesday.

Officers reported to the Houston Lake Apartments around 9:30 p.m. on March 12. On scene, police found a deceased male victim with gunshot wounds. He was later identified as Diandre Oates.

Police arrested Alexander Culler, 29, of Macon on a murder warrant in connection to the homicide case. He was booked into the Houston County Detention Facility.

Anyone with more information is encouraged to contact detective Sgt. Aaron Conner at (478) 988-2829 or Macon Regional Crimestoppers: 1-877-68CRIME.

## Community Calendar

Email your information to: [brianna@hhjonline.com](mailto:brianna@hhjonline.com)

Houston Home Journal 478-987-1823 1210 Washington St. Perry, GA 31069

# LIVE MUSIC

### SATURDAY, MARCH 21

**GRAY**  
• Uncle Earl & Friends:  
The Lazy Frog - 7:30-10:30pm

**FORSYTH**  
• Halfgrass: The Den -  
8-11pm

**MILLEDGEVILLE**  
• Josh Courson:  
Duke's Dawg House - 8pm

**WARNER ROBINS**  
• Glenn Lewis: Pub 96 - 4pm  
• Rivertown Breakdown:  
Wild Wing Cafe - 9pm  
• Cam Vance: Pub 96 -  
9:30pm

**MACON**  
• Gray City Limits:  
Parish on Cherry St. -  
11am-2pm  
• Affinity: American Legion -  
7-10pm (\$10/\$5 for Veterans)

/ Free for member Veterans)

• An Evening w/  
Emmylou Harris:

Grand Opera House -  
7:30pm (\$99.50-175)

• NyteByrd:  
Mr. E's Sports Bar & Grill -  
9pm

• Caleb Walston:  
Wild Wing Cafe - 9pm

• Kindred Valley:  
Grant's Lounge - 9pm

• Medal Militia  
(Metallica Tribute):  
Hummingbird - 9:30pm

**HAWKINSVILLE**  
• Powersville Opry -  
390 Perry Hwy:

--> House Band -

4:15-6:45pm

--> Guest Band - 7-9pm

**GORDON**

• Open Acoustic Jam:  
Jelly Elephant - 8pm

**PERRY**

• The Music Side of Town  
Blues Band:  
Perry Farmer's Market -  
9am-1pm

**SUNDAY, MARCH 22**

**MACON**

• Big Mike Trio:  
The Society Garden - 4-7pm

2nd & 4th Sunday

• Open Mic/Jam Session:  
Grant's Lounge - 9pm

# VIEWPOINTS

## The Houston Home Journal

See us online at  
www.hhjonline.com

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

# Judge Lukemire war stories

Houston Superior Court Judge Edward D. Lukemire is retiring. Called Eddie by his family, and Ed by the Bar, he was always Judge Lukemire in the courthouse. He has served as our superior court judge for 30 years with distinction, professionalism, and integrity.

I was elected to replace him when he left the district attorney position to fill the then-vacant superior court slot created by Buster McConnell's retirement. Ed cruised to a crushing win over several notable local attorneys. He never had opposition after that, because who wants to get crushed?

Ed has a gruff reputation, which he probably planted, but in all my years as DA and then in private practice, he never displayed having a mean bone in his body—unless you've been convicted of a heinous crime against a child. You don't want to be in front of him for that.

While he and I never knocked heads, we disagreed more than once. But it was never personal. It was just a difference of opinion about the law. That's what judges do, they interpret the law as they understand it. And Ed understands the law as well as any judge I've ever appeared before. Enough with the accolades, let's get to a few stories.

Ed was presiding over a drug trial. It was a real scam of a trial, with one Atlanta attorney who was not bound by normal decorum. The county drug investigators were the main witnesses. Affectionately known as the Fat Boys, they



COLUMNIST

KELLY BURKE

were large gentlemen, but their testifying on the stand was wonderful.

On the second day of the trial, I was in the courtroom early when the jury brought in a box of doughnuts and handed it to me. I said I couldn't accept them but they said the box of doughnuts weren't for me, it was for the investigators. She wouldn't take them back. So I went into chambers and told Ed and opposing counsel what had happened. He immediately said I had to return them.

I said, "No sir, you return them. I'm trying to win the case and I'm not going to insult the jury." Everyone laughed. Ed let the court staff enjoy the doughnuts, and he told the jury why I couldn't accept the doughnuts.

Ed ran a punctual courtroom. After a case had gone to the jury, there was a complicated resolution offered. The victims' mothers didn't know what to do. I understood, but I was doing my best to satisfy them.

Ed's bailiff, Leon Martin, kept knocking on my conference room door telling me that Judge Lukemire was waiting. Finally, I told Leon to tell Ed to cool his jets, as I'd be out when I was out. Leon said he would tell Ed what I had said. The victims accepted the plea offer shortly thereafter. I never asked if Leon told Ed what I had said.

One time I tried a child molestation trial. All are awful but this one was hyper bad. The jury came back with a guilty verdict, and they stayed for sentencing!

Ed sentenced the defendant on Count One to 20 years, but only 5 years in prison. Fifteen years of sex offender probation, fines, and such.

The defendant turned to his attorney and said "Five years, I can do that." She wisely said "I don't think he's done." Ed then gave him multiple all-serve sentences, to run consecutive, to that first count. I think it was 115 years in prison total. Well deserved.

One time I was doing my closing argument in a three-man murder trial. It was the longest closing argument I ever did. By the end I was sweating bullets, thinking that the bright lights were causing my dripping sweat.

When I got done, Ed told us to approach the bench. He said that maintenance would have the air conditioning going in about an hour, so he was going to let the jury go until then. I said I thought it was my brilliant closing that made me so hot. He said sorry, it wasn't that at all, he didn't want to interrupt me.

Last story out of hundreds. I had a case in which

See BURKE page 5A

## A haunting picture: Another ghost story

The picture looked innocent enough. It was old, portraying a gray image of a young man in a suit, clean cut, hair neatly combed, on thick paper yellowed with age.

But the electromotive force meter, pointed at the innocuous portrait, was reading through the roof. Could this brittle, decaying photograph, tucked away in the attic of the office that is my windowless dungeon (where I hammer away at a keyboard crafting awe-inspiring sentences) be the source of other worldly occurrences? It would explain the strange noises, creaks and bumps often heard with no explanation.

This adventure had started as a lark one recent afternoon. At lunch a friend and colleague of mine commented on seeing an EMF meter, commonly used in ghost hunting, at a discount shop. No need to buy anything, I told him, and with a few clicks on my smart device, I was equipped to investigate the paranormal. Yes, there is an app for everything.

Back in the office, I put my telephone/spirit detecting device to work. At first everything appeared normal. Pointing the device upward, however, caused a great disturbance on the machine. The screen turned a bloody red color and indicated a reading related to the paranormal.

NEW SOUTHERN DAD

KYLE DOMINY



Assembling a small team, we mounted the old stairs into the building's attic. The meter led us around stacks of boxes, old furniture and the discarded tools of the newspaper trade, everything from ancient typewriters to old computer monitors, straight to the photo in question.

A haunted picture is nothing new in the events of human history. There are countless tales of supernatural happenings tied to great works or art and unexplainable images that have been captured on film.

One such masterpiece is "The Dead Mother" by Edvard Munch. The chilling work, painted in 1899, shows a small child, hands to her ears as if in a state of shock, standing before the lifeless body of her parent. The work has been in the collection of the Kunsthalle Bremen in Germany since 1918. The owners of the piece, current and past, report that the child is always watching. The eyes follow people near-

by. The sounds of rustling sheets and footsteps emanate from the canvas. Some have reported looking up to the artwork and the girl is gone altogether.

Back in the attic, we examined the portrait of the young man. He looked innocent enough, nothing in his appearance hinted at anything sinister. But looking closer, there was another picture underneath. We moved the young man aside and discovered another portrait.

On crumbling paper, blackened around the edges, was the photo of an old man. His hair was disheveled, pointing from his balding head in every direction, his chin was adorned with a long beard and his eyes were wild, rife with what looked like a peer of pure hatred.

The EMF reader, still pointed at the previous picture, returned to normal. I moved it toward the old man. The screen turned blood red ...

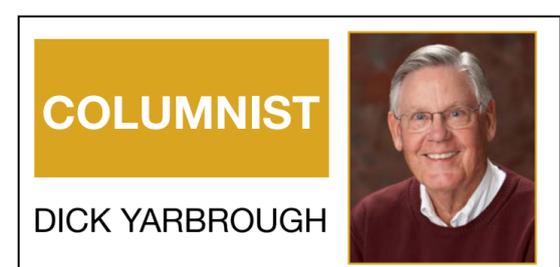


## Leading Okefenokee mining opponent takes issue with county commissioner's rationale

Last week, Charlton County commissioner Drew Jones used this space to defend the actions of Toledo Manufacturing in the Okefenokee mining controversy. Comm. Jones, who also runs Toledo's day-to-day operations, says Toledo has gotten a bad rap from me and others over their intentions and wished to clarify their position, which includes how studies are done and by whom on whether or not to permit mining on Trail Ridge, adjacent to the swamp. He also emphasized the economic pressures being currently felt by forestland ownership. Toledo owns some 50,000 acres in Charlton County where Trail Ridge is located.

Now, attorney Josh Marks, president of Georgians for the Okefenokee, a statewide group focused on protecting the Okefenokee from mining, has his say:

"Drew Jones's comments professing dedication to



COLUMNIST

DICK YARBROUGH

independent science for safeguarding the Okefenokee Swamp were simply jaw-dropping in their audacity. The truth is Toledo and its owners, led by Jones and his uncle Joe Hopkins, have no interest in science unless it supports mining along the swamp's edge, and accordingly they remain the most serious threat to the Okefenokee.

"Here are the facts: Toledo has been pushing for mining of its 30,000-plus acres along the swamp's edge for over 30 years. Toledo leased 23,000 acres to Dupont Chemical in the 1990s despite numer-

ous independent scientists saying mining could damage the swamp. And in 2024, Hopkins was quoted saying: 'I honestly wish Chemours [DuPont's successor] was in Twin Pines' place right now,' referring to Twin Pines Minerals, the company that tried and failed to open its own strip mine immediately south of the Toledo land. That sure sounds like solicitation.

"During the Twin Pines saga, scores of independent scientists, none of whom received compensation from

See YARBROUGH page 5A

Read YOUR VIEW in the HHJ

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: SEND THEM TO BRIANNA@HHJONLINE.COM TODAY!

## LIFESTYLE &amp; FAITH

## Let go of the controls

A young female pilot was making a training flight. Since she always seemed to panic during engine stalls, her instructor asked her to attempt another stall recovery. Determined to get it right this time, she cut the engines.

The next thing she knew, her Cessna 150 was hurling toward earth in a twisting, wing-over-wing spin. As she wrestled with the controls, she remembered her instructor's words, "If you ever get into a spin in a Cessna 150, just let go of the controls. It's built to pull out of a spin on its own."

Yet she was still fighting the controls with all her strength and wouldn't let go of her hands. In desperation, she shouted to herself, "Let go!" but her hands still clutched the controls. Calling on God and using every ounce of willpower, she finally threw her hands up in the air and held them there.

After some wild yawning and pitching, the aircraft straightened out and returned to level flight. She had fallen nearly half a mile, but she was safe—because she had let go.

Just as the pilot recovered from the tailspin, God is always in control, even when things seem to be spinning out of control. The trials and tribulations of life are many.

## PARABLES TO PONDER

BILLY POWELL



People universally face disappointment, rejection, sorrow, grief, and frustration.

A young man I knew received the dreaded pink slip. His company was downsizing, and he got caught in a reduction-in-force. He was crushed, despondent, and didn't know which way to turn.

I advised him to aggressively seek reemployment with other companies with all the resources he could muster. I also cautioned him that he would surely hit brick walls along the way, but when that happened, to turn everything over to God, for only He could move them. I further stressed that he seek God's will, for God had a good and perfect plan for his life.

When we go through difficult times in our lives, we, too, need to let go of the controls. As the old saying goes, we need to "let go and let God." That's exactly what God said through the Psalmist in verse 46:10: "Be

still and know that I am God."

In this passage, God is urging us to cease striving on our own, to trust Him in difficult situations, to let go, and to let Him handle things. We can do that with assurance because Psalm 46:1 declares: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."

Jesus knew that John would face martyrdom and need a special grace when it occurred. The Master told John, "Truly, truly, I say to you when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."

Jesus then said to John, "Follow me." There will be times in life when we must travel a path we would rather not take. It is then that we must turn to Jesus and follow him.

## A 'note'-able effort to make someone's day

Thank you notes.

My wife made banana bread for some of the folks at work last week. Out of the seven, only one sent a thank you note (via text, but it was an animated "thank you" meme, so she counted it).

It reminded me of a story in the Bible - more on that to come later - and my son getting married this past Saturday (so very blessed and honored to be able to perform the ceremony).

They're honeymooning in Alabama - the highlight: camping on the highest mountain to look at the Milky Way through a telescope. It won't be long before they're back and they will be writing "thank you" notes.

Also, my wife and I were shopping at Goodwill on the Saturday before. Lo and behold, what was on the shelf? "Thank you" notes.

Her: "Do you think we should get these for them?"

Me, in all my years and years of wisdom: "Uh huh."

So, "thank you" notes are on my mind. Somewhere buried in my treasure trove of junk is a "thank you" note from then-President Bill Clinton (uh, yeah), thanking us for our 20 years of military service.

"Thank you" notes date back to the 1400s, according to Bing: "when Europeans began exchanging greeting cards with family and friends. This practice was a new form of social expression, and before that, Chinese and Egyptian cultures had been writing messages on papyrus to communicate goodwill. In 1856, Pouis Prang, a German immigrant, brought thank you notes to the United States."

They have an opposite: The dreaded "nastygram." Too often today, that's what we experience and see, especially on social media. I.e. I

## HHJ PUBLISHER

DON MONCRIEF



was searching for "Georgia" people to connect with on TikTok, so I made a video. I managed to connect with several dozen, but then there was "I DESTROY BEANS," who posted a meme on my link: "Didn't care. Didn't ask. Plus your (sic) gay."

I've had verbal messages from church folks that basically left me shaking my head in "unbelievable" fashion just minutes before stepping up into the pulpit, but never a "note" from a parishioner like one an anonymous pastor I read about received. All eyes closed, it was slipped into his hand during prayer. His first inclination was that it was a "thank you" note. "Aw. How sweet."

Nope. It was from a woman who had tried to see him that Friday, his day off. "She took offense at my absence and blasted me with hateful accusations."

Church folk, am I right?

Surely what the world needs now is not the "nastygram." It's the "thank you" note. (By the way, I'm glad you're a subscriber. Not because I want your money - okay, so there is that - but because there are so many things in the newspaper I'm glad we get to share; to be educated on some things, entertained on some things, be part of a community together, just hopefully consider us family with you. Yes, that's a sincere "thank you" note.)

ble" video.

Ed was always a great judge to try a case in front of. He made decisions quickly, didn't tolerate a bunch of whining, and trials moved quickly. I don't recall a trial case getting overturned on appeal because of a mistake he made.

Despite his no-nonsense reputation, he was always approachable about anything, whether it was court or personal issues. I hope he sticks around as a senior judge but only after he dispenses with grandchildren duties first. Congratulations, Judge Lukemire, on a job well

As mentioned at the beginning, this began as a reminder of a Bible story: the time when 10 lepers came to Jesus with the plea: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Jesus: "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed, it continued. If you know the story, only one came back with a "thank you" note, albeit a verbal one. (In fact, it says he threw himself at Jesus's feet and thanked him).

Jesus, in a follow-up to his act of worship: "Were not all ten cleansed? Has not one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (He was a Samaritan, which, if you know, was looked down upon by the Jews.)

Did you give God a "thank you" note this morning? Praise Him? Thank Him for all of the blessings (things, things and more things; i.e., possessions, health ...) He has given you?

We're typically very good at that, but this time, why not take it a step further? Look around you at the people who have supported you, cared for you, loved you, and were there for you - in good times and bad.

Today, like the leper, let's all take the time to go back and give them a "thank you" note.

And ... "thank you" for that.

done.

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.kellyburke.com](http://www.kellyburke.com). You can email Kelly at [dakellyburke@gmail.com](mailto:dakellyburke@gmail.com).

## Collecting vintage books

Are you a bibliophile? Do you love the look, feel and smell of a vintage book? Do you totally reject reading books on a Kindle or tablet? Well then, perhaps you would like to become a collector of old books!

I have a cousin in Michigan who sells rare and unusual books online. One of his best finds was a book at a thrift store for \$3 that he sold for \$300! I remember Amazon started years ago buying and selling college textbooks online and look at them now! I am certainly not an expert on old books but I can usually recognize a first edition or very old leather bound book.

Here are some tips for you if you would like to start a collection:

Decide what category of books you would like to collect and read all you can about how to value and recognize old books. Some

## ALL ABOUT ANTIQUES

JILLINDA FALEN



people choose a particular author, the classics, children's books or first editions.

As always, condition and rarity are everything. If you have the original dust cover, or any original inserts, those will be worth more. Old book sales, thrift stores, estate sales and yard sales are great places to search. Beware of books that may have silverfish in them or stains, mold, mildew or missing pages. Super rare books CAN be restored and it is very expensive but it

may be worth doing for the increase in value.

Make sure you keep your books stored safely and where you can see and enjoy them. Handle them with gloves or the oils in your hands may cause damage. Please don't store them in damp basements, hot attics or in direct sunlight. You can get your little ones started on collecting Little Golden Books to give them something to search for alongside you on your treasure hunts. Happy Collecting!

## Burning fat snacks from our fatty deposits

We have an internal survival system, much like we prepare externally for a time of famine or drought, and when something happens that scares our insides, such as staying hungry for too long or dehydration, it will prepare itself to protect the body against future stress of this kind.

For example, when we fear a coming food shortage, we may start buying a few extra cans of food beyond what we normally need before our next grocery trip. These will simply go into our storage closet or pantry and will be stored there until we have a famine. However, if we keep adding to this storage for too long and never have a food shortage or famine to use it up, our stored food can get out of hand.

When our storage area fills up, we have to start looking for new places to store the food as it comes in. It's at this point that we start to realize that all this extra food is making our house less functional than it used to be, making it harder to move around. And when food is stored too long, it begins to spoil and age, creating a really bad environment inside our home.

Our body's reserve energy storage system works in much the same way. It will store the extra food we eat beyond what we need in our fat cells for use in case we cannot eat. One pound of fat is approximately 3,500 calories, and our body goes to this storage area and extracts needed calories when we skip a meal or two. Fat is often seen as some-

thing we don't like, but it's our body's calorie pantry, designed by our Creator to sustain us through lean times when we need extra calories and cannot access food. This extra fat we have is a prior investment in excess food intake, so we don't necessarily have to pay for a bottle of fat burners to burn it off.

We can look at the cost of a meal and the number of calories it provides. Divide and multiply that by the amount of fat we need to lose to measure the investment we have in stored food in our bodies.

For example, if we normally eat a meal that provides 700 calories at a cost of \$6.00 (there are approximately 3,500 calories per pound of fat), it would mean that each extra pound of fat on our body should be worth \$30 in the 5 meals it could provide.

Each of us has a certain number of calories we need on average per day to support digestion, body temperature regulation, vital organs, skeletal muscle, and changes in activity throughout the day. Our body simply seeks fuel to meet these needs. If we suddenly drop

our calorie intake very low for one or two days, or skip one or two meals, it forces the body to tap into its storage pantry and extract calories.

If your daily need is 2,000 calories and you consume only 1,000, your body will try to make up the 1,000-calorie deficit by drawing on stored energy.

You do not want to do calorie restriction like this for too long, or the body will think this is the amount of food it has to get used to every day, and it will simply start burning some muscle to lower its metabolism and become more efficient, burning calories more slowly.

Usually, if someone skips eating for only 18-24 hours or goes low-calorie for 2-3 days and then gets their calorie intake back up to a regular level, there should be no muscle loss, and they will only burn fat for energy!

Note: Keeping blood sugar levels low is key to unlocking stored body fat and enabling your body to convert it into usable energy. Anytime we get a sharp spike in blood sugar, the energy from fat storage is shut down, which stops the fat-burning process.

## YARBROUGH

From page 4A

project opponents, produced hundreds of pages of data and reports showing mining would damage the swamp.

"These scientists also repeatedly criticized Georgia EPD, the state's mining regulator, for repeatedly using faulty methods in its analysis of TPM's project, which criticism was joined by former EPD employees. EPD's failure could be explained by its lack of any groundwater hydrologists or that the agency answers to Governor Kemp, who received over \$150,000 from Hopkins, Twin Pines and other mining interests. Either way, the regulators Jones thinks deserve our deference have instead been proven incapable of doing the job.

"UGA released a rigorously prepared peer-reviewed study in December 2025 proving that pumping of groundwater would draw down the swamp's surface, and because any mining on Trail Ridge would require groundwater pumping, shows mining would damage the swamp. Not a single scientist with the requisite expertise said that Twin Pines' project could be done safely or has challenged the UGA study. Toledo's response? Silence.

"If Toledo truly supported independent, rigorous science, why has it ignored the independent scientific consensus, especially the UGA study, and the criticism of EPD?"

"The only possible explanation: money. Toledo and the extended Hopkins family would make hundreds of millions from mining. And to be clear, they're not poor, but are in fact incredibly wealthy. Toledo's and Hopkins's land holdings collectively exceed \$30 million in value.

"And yet Jones, Hopkins, et al have repeatedly claimed that a scientifically supported prohibition of mining on Toledo's land would destroy their property rights. That is simply ludicrous. Toledo's lands have generated millions from decades of timber harvesting and can continue generating millions via timber, appropriately designed residential development and conservation strategies like stream mitigation.

"Not only is the Hopkins family wealthy, but they also exert outsized political influence. As a Charlton County Commissioner, Jones endorsed the Twin Pines project in 2019 despite Toledo having a direct interest in seeing mining approved in the county and the eventual windfall that would create. He chose not

to recuse himself despite the apparent conflict of interest. Not exactly a paragon of transparency.

"Jones and Hopkins testified twice against the Okefenokee Protection Act, even though the bill would protect the swamp and the over 800 jobs and \$90 million in annual revenues the swamp generates and was supported by nearly 100 bipartisan Georgia House members. And they are leading the opposition to the Oke's World Heritage Site designation, even though such recognition will generate more visitation and improve his community. Why have they done all of this? Take one guess.

"The bottom line: if Toledo Manufacturing really believes in environmental stewardship, they should follow their own advice, listen to the independent scientists, abandon the pursuit of mining and sell or donate their land for conservation. That would be a tremendous gift to Georgia and the world and cement the legacy of the Hopkins family for present and future generations."

There you have it. Both sides have spoken. Now, it is your turn.

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at [dick@dickyarbrough.com](mailto:dick@dickyarbrough.com) or at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139.

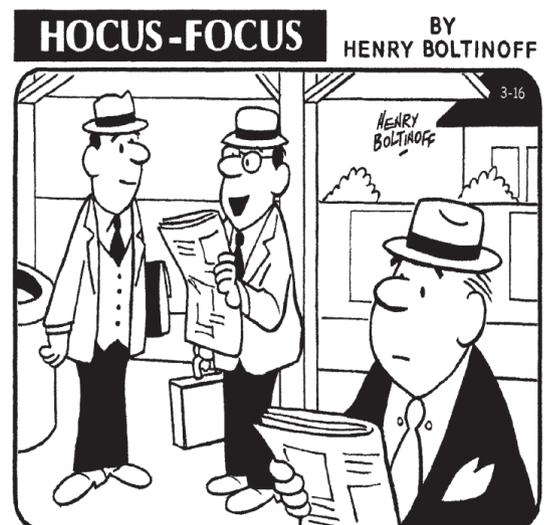
## BURKE

From page 4A

a police officer was shot in the line of duty. I had three different police videos synchronized together, no small feat back then. Each officer testified, and I showed their patrol video.

Then I tried to introduce the synched video. The defense objected. Ed ruled it was cumulative (he was right), and ruled I couldn't play it. I objected. He asked for my reason. I said, "it's a cool video." He agreed, but said it is a "cool inadmissi-

# ENTERTAINMENT



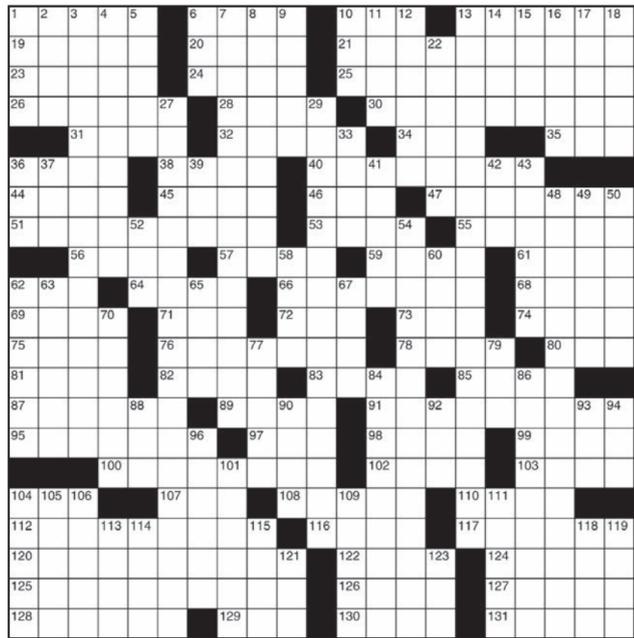
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Hair is different. 2. Briefcase is different. 3. Vest is missing. 4. Elbow patch is added. 5. Newspaper is larger. 6. Bush is moved.



## CROSSWORD 3-21-26



### CLUES ACROSS

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- 6 Pines' cousins
- 10 Google Play buy
- 13 In recent times
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- 20 All over
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- 23 Hot and bubbling
- 24 All over
- 25 Adds a little dash to?
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- 61 Back of the neck
- 62 Revolutionary Guevara
- 64 Baking pans
- 66 Tall conifer of California
- 68 Revise copy
- 69 -- -Cola
- 71 This instant
- 72 -- Zedong
- 73 Grand -- wine
- 74 Clamors
- 75 Cyber-chuckles
- 76 French painter Manet
- 78 1996 running mate Jack
- 80 Once named
- 81 Rival of Hertz
- 82 Long period
- 83 Haiku, e.g.
- 85 Gavel noise

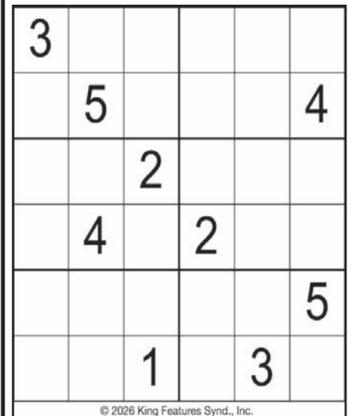
- 87 Low-status, as labor
- 89 Treatment tablet
- 91 Like fattening food
- 95 Be the chairperson
- 97 Plato's "T"
- 98 Toward the mouth, to an anatomist
- 99 Bungee, e.g.
- 100 Large plant with fronds
- 102 Hershey's toffee bar
- 103 Long periods
- 104 Turkey Day tuber
- 107 -- -mo
- 108 Slack-jawed
- 110 Actress Chaplin
- 112 Strangely beautiful quality
- 116 German for "genuine"
- 117 Quick-to-build house
- 120 Very strictly organized
- 122 Rx orders
- 124 World-weary
- 125 Navy aerobic team
- 126 A Great Lake
- 127 Singer Goulding
- 128 Sloping
- 129 Decompose
- 130 Oct. preceder
- 131 Bob of folk

### CLUES DOWN

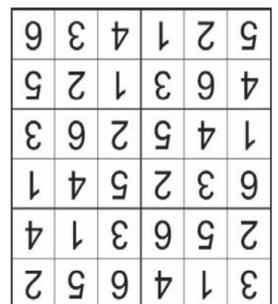
- 1 "Do I need to draw you --?"
- 2 Garage job
- 3 Recession
- 4 Maine's state bird, e.g.
- 5 Of the sun
- 6 Craze
- 7 By a single decisive action
- 8 "Get Shorty" actress
- 9 Cuss
- 10 Burnt residue
- 11 -- ed (gym class)
- 12 Flip-top's relative
- 13 1995 war film with Danny Glover and Ray Liotta
- 14 Fish features
- 15 Emmy winner Remini
- 16 Second part of a play
- 17 Singer -- Marie
- 18 Ruhr Valley city
- 22 "Suppose ..."
- 27 Ancestry via the father's side

- 29 Event at which people enter frigid water
- 33 With 57-Across, singer with the 1994 #1 hit "Stay"
- 36 Tarnish
- 37 Pal, in Paris
- 39 Olive of comics
- 41 "Baloney!"
- 42 Goof up
- 43 Held in check
- 48 Likely to run into adversity
- 49 Of Swiss peaks
- 50 African fly
- 52 Wrestling pad
- 54 Wall Street fluctuation
- 58 Witty Bombeck
- 60 Lacerated
- 62 Letter-shaped vise
- 63 Vacuum cleaner brand
- 65 Lymph --
- 67 Dingbat
- 70 Help
- 77 Form a group
- 79 Golf norm
- 84 Planet's livable zone
- 86 Overly modest type
- 88 Smog soils it
- 90 Actress -- Flynn Boyle
- 92 Philosopher -- -tzu
- 93 Investment option, in brief
- 94 Investment options, in brief
- 96 Trapping morays, say
- 101 Promote
- 104 California's -- Buena Island
- 105 Skating leaps
- 106 Media bigwig
- 109 Peaks

## SUDOKU



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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# Georgia legislation raises concerns about public access to police videos



Ashlin Barker/Capitol Beat

Sen. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough, on the Senate floor in the Georgia Capitol in Atlanta on Friday, March 6, 2026, the day his legislation to restrict access to mugshots and law enforcement videos passed to the state House.

By **TYTAGAMI**  
Bureau Chief  
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — Four words added to legislation that targets mugshot mills have free speech advocates worried the public could lose access to videos that hold police accountable for their conduct.

Legislation that started in Georgia's Senate as a solution to the reputational harm caused when booking photographs circulate online after charges are dismissed has evolved into a much broader measure.

Senate Bill 482, supported by sheriffs across Georgia, pits personal privacy of the accused against the public's right to examine government use of force.

Blake Feldman, senior policy counsel with the Southern Center for Human Rights, said it raises a red flag when "a law enforcement agency that wields incredible authority to stop and detain people and dis-

charge firearms at people" seeks to withhold footage from body-worn cameras.

He and advocates for free speech and for newsgathering operations, including broadcasters and the newspaper industry, argued that the requirements would pose a barrier to such access.

The legislation started as a requirement for anyone who wants a mugshot to obtain it in person, with a notarized statement that they would comply with existing law intended to protect people in those images.

In 2013, Georgia made it illegal for websites that publish mugshots to make subjects who were not convicted pay to take their picture down.

But that law did not solve the problem, so the next year Rep. Brian Strickland, R-McDonough, pushed through a law requiring operators to promise in writing that they would abide by the takedown require-

ments.

That still didn't fix the problem.

So, this year Strickland, now a state senator, introduced SB 482, intending to make it harder to get mugshots in the first place.

Along the way, he added the four words to his bill that have the free speech advocates concerned: "or law enforcement video."

Not only would news organizations have to drive across the state to get an official copy of a police video from a far-flung community, but they arguably could be forced to identify everyone in the video they are seeking, said Sarah Brewerton-Palmer, a lawyer with the Georgia First Amendment Foundation.

"In order to get this footage, you have to name everybody who's in it," she said. But there could be bystanders in a video of an altercation between police and a suspect, she said, "and before you see it, you

don't know who those people are."

Brewerton-Palmer said bodycam videos of a shooting by police during a protest would effectively become exempt from the state open records act.

She and others are less concerned about the proposed restrictions on releasing mugshots because of the way their enduring presence online has upended the lives of innocent people.

At a Feb. 18 Senate committee hearing on Strickland's bill, a representative from the Georgia Justice Project, which helps people reintegrate into their communities after tangling with the criminal justice system, said it remains a common issue among their clients.

It was at that hearing where videos entered the conversation.

(The Georgia Press Association was among the news organizations that raised concerns. Capitol Beat is a project of the association.)

Forsyth County Sheriff Ron Freeman, president of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, told senators on the committee that his colleagues across the state complain about bulk requests for mugshots and videos that are then exploited for profit.

Ashley Henson, the sheriff in Paulding County, said the accused who have their cases dismissed go on to get "destroyed" on social media. He said that when he tried to intervene to ask for removal of material, the publishing organization did not respond.

"Monetization of someone else's misery is not right," Henson said. "We are not here to give these YouTubers content."

Strickland said in an interview that he was moved to action against mugshot mills by a teacher

who noticed her students passing around her booking picture of her. The charges against her had been dropped, so she had contacted the publisher and paid to take it down, he said. But then the photo popped up on another site.

Strickland described it as a "whack-a-mole" problem.

Publishers were not honoring the takedown requests they had submitted in writing per the 2014 law. And even when they did, out-of-state or even international actors beyond the reach of Georgia law enforcement were republishing them.

"Once the image is there, it's there forever," he said.

So, now he is proposing to restrict supply by forcing those who want mugshots — and police videos — to request them in person. Requiring requesters to identify the subjects in those images would cut down on the number of bulk requests, which tend to be by profiteers, he said.

At that February committee hearing, he agreed with another senator who said the public could still obtain pictures and videos, they just had to "go through the legwork" to get them.

The committee passed SB 482 unanimously, sending it to the Senate floor, where it also passed unanimously on March 6, and now awaits hearings in the House.

The Senate floor vote occurred on "crossover" day, the deadline to move bills from the Senate to the House and vice versa. It is an exceptionally rushed time during any legislative session, when mountains of legislation are getting votes, giving lawmakers little time to read the language.

Democrats backed the measure without question, except for one raised about an unrelated part of the bill. That might have been due to the backing by Democrats. They had voted

it out of committee, and two had co-signed it back when Strickland had introduced it — before he added those four words about videos.

Reached by phone, one of those two co-sponsors, Sen. Kenya Wicks, D-Fayette, said she was unaware of the new language.

"I don't think I can comment because there are a lot of amendments to this bill," said Wicks, who voted for SB 482 with the other Democrats when it reached the full Senate.

Strickland said he is willing to work with advocates to address their concerns, perhaps by changing his bill to require that those seeking a video must identify only the officer who took it or the time and location where it was shot.

But it is unclear whether a compromise can be reached, at least on the video language.

Brewerton-Palmer said she sympathized with Strickland's concerns. The internet and, now artificial intelligence, have stripped away privacy, she said.

But the public's right to know outweighs that harm, she said. "There needs to be a thumb on the scales in favor of access."

Feldman said his organization supports the new restrictions that Strickland wants to impose for access to mugshots, but he said applying those same obstacles to the release of law enforcement videos would be an indirect way to erode the state open records law, something his organization opposes because of the erosion of transparency around police encounters with the public.

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

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# BUSINESS & FINANCE

## Warner Robins named Top 25 dog-loving city by PetSmart

PHOENIX (PRNewswire) — The U.S. is going to the dogs in the best way possible. In 2025, dog adoptions at PetSmart Charities® in-store adoption events surged 11 percent over the prior year, surpassing 90,000. Ahead of PetSmart Charities National Adoption Week from March 23-29, PetSmart today unveiled the top 25 dog-loving cities where residents are adopting the most dogs and spoiling them generously with toys, treats and pampering products from PetSmart.



Credit: PetSmart

While cats have gained popularity in recent years, dogs continue to spend longer time in shelters across the nation than pre-pandemic levels, according to Shelter Animal Count. Large dogs are especially in need of loving homes. In response, PetSmart has added more opportunities with Adopt Joy™, monthly in-store adoption events in partnership with local shelters to help more dogs find families faster, with positive results.

"From metropolitan areas to growing suburbs and smaller communities across the country, these 25 cities show that love for dogs is universal and can transform pets' lives, and also their own," said Aimee Gilbreath, president of PetSmart Charities. "We hope these cities will take pride in this distinction and encourage those with room in their hearts and homes to discover the joy of adoption at in-store PetSmart Charities events."

These are the top 25 U.S. cities where residents are most invested in their love for dogs, based on an index encompassing PetSmart Charities dog adoptions and sales of dog treats and pampering products purchased from PetSmart.\*w

1. Midland, TX
2. Bloomington, IL
3. Florence, KY
4. Lexington, KY
5. Falls Church, VA
6. Portland, OR

7. Winter Garden, FL
8. Parker, CO
9. Warner Robins, GA
10. Plymouth Meeting, PA
11. Glendale, CO
12. Yuma, AZ
13. Amarillo, TX
14. New York, NY
15. Sunset Valley, TX
16. Johnson City, TN
17. Woodbridge, VA
18. Daly City, CA
19. Fort Collins, CO
20. Antioch, CA
21. Olathe, KS
22. Queen Creek, AZ
23. Pensacola, FL
24. Vienna, VA
25. Germantown, MD

These cities are "top dog" when it comes to adopting in their communities with the help of PetSmart Charities. For more than 30 years, PetSmart Charities has been a bridge between adoptable pets and pet parents, working alongside local shelters and rescue partners to make adoption accessible. From March 23-29, during PetSmart Charities National Adoption Week, local animal shelters will bring adoptable pets to PetSmart stores across the country. Potential pet parents will have the chance to interact with adoptable pets while staff and volunteers share pet care information and adoption resources. Don't wait – visit a local PetSmart store to adopt a new best friend and help the community move up in the ranking.

\*Top Dog Cities are home

to passionate pet parents who treat their dogs like family, and we're seeing that reflected in how they shop," said Matt Byrnes, senior vice president of merchandising at PetSmart. "From tail-wagging toys and treats to stylish gear and premium health and wellness essentials, these top cities are making thoughtful purchases that help their dogs live happier, healthier lives."

Dog parents can find everything they need for their pups in stores, at PetSmart.com or in the PetSmart app. To learn more about PetSmart Charities National Adoption Week, visit PetSmartCharities.org.

\*Disclaimer: Rankings are based on internal PetSmart data from January 8, 2025, through January 7, 2026. Cities were evaluated using two key metrics: the number of pet adoptions recorded in PetSmart Charities' Adoptions Database and customer spending on select dog product categories, including treats, Salon services, toys, collars and leashes, beds, and apparel. To ensure fair comparison, results were adjusted for the number of PetSmart store locations in each city and indexed against national performance. Final rankings were determined using a weighted formula: 37% adoptions and 63% product sales as not all stores hosted adoptions in that timeframe.

## BBB urges caution in wake of recent storms

In the aftermath of our recent storms, the BBB urges the public to exercise caution when hiring a contractor to repair damages. Natural disasters can bring out the best in people; unfortunately, it also brings out con artists looking to capitalize off of others' grief.

Property owners will want to make repairs to their home or business as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, unscrupulous contractors or scam artists may take advantage of the post-disaster chaos to scam unsuspecting property owners out of money or provide shoddy materials or substandard work.

BBB offers these tips for selecting a contractor to repair any damage:

- Check with your insurance company about policy coverages and any specific filing requirements the company may have.

- Don't act in haste and never sign anything you do not understand. If someone is insisting that you sign immediately, this is a red flag that you need to find another contractor.

- Make temporary repairs if necessary. For major permanent repairs, take time to shop around for contractors, get competitive bids, check out references, make sure the contractor is properly licensed, and check out their BBB profile at bbb.org. Be suspicious of out-of-town contractors looking to make a quick buck off of your misfortune. Will they still be around if a problem arises later?

- Try to be patient. When an area has extensive damage, it may take some time for a local contractor to get to you. While this can be frustrating, this is where scam artists can come in and manipulate your anxiety to their advantage. Do

BBB TIPS

**KELVIN COLLINS**

not be pressured into making a snap decision.

- While being patient, also act promptly. Insurance policies require you to take action to prevent further damage to your property. You may need to move your personal belongings to a different location, cut off the water supply, or have a tarp placed on your roof (but only if this can be safely done). Thoroughly clean out mud and residual material from heating and cooling units, and let the units dry out before determining whether the equipment is functional or needs repairs.

- Get a written agreement with your contractor that outlines the repairs to be done, the types of materials to be used, and the price breakdown for both labor and materials. Review it carefully before signing. Insist that the contractor obtain all necessary permits and avoid anyone who asks you to provide your own permits. The person obtaining the permit is the one responsible for ensuring that all work meets code requirements. That needs to be the contractor, not you.

- Be wary if a contractor asks you to sign an estimate. Many unscrupulous contractors have you sign what you think is an estimate but in reality, is a binding contract. Also, watch out for cancellation fees, sometimes referred to as liquidation damages.

These are fees charged to a homeowner if they decide to use a different contractor. If you are unsure what you are reading, ask the contractor to spell it out for you.

- Never pay for all repairs in advance, and do not pay cash.

Disasters are stressful events. Victims should never feel forced to make a hasty decision or to choose an unknown contractor. Start With Trust! For reliable information, lists of BBB Accredited Businesses by industry and BBB Business Reviews you can trust, visit BBB.org.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Website: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org

## Foundation awards local schools, organizations

**Special to The Journal**  
The Flint Energies Foundation has awarded \$20,000 in grant funding to four school programs within Houston County Schools, supporting hands-on learning, student athletics, and program enhancements.

The foundation has also awarded more than \$30,000 in grant funding to six organizations serving Houston County, supporting initiatives focused on education, food security, housing, and community well-being.

Northside High School AFJROTC was awarded \$5,000 to construct an outdoor garden building, providing students with hands-on learning experiences and leadership development opportunities.

Veterans High School Cross Country received \$5,000 to help cover the cost of uniforms, entry fees, and safety equipment, ensuring student-athletes have the resources needed to compete safely and successfully.

Feagin Mill Middle School FFA was awarded \$5,000 to purchase materials that enhance hands-on learning within the school's agriculture program, giving students practical experience in agricultural education.

The Houston County High School Athletics Department received \$5,000 to upgrade its training room and provide essential equipment to better support student-athletes.

The H3O Group was awarded \$5,000 to sponsor STEM events at the Museum of

Aviation and host ACT/SAT Boot Camps to help students prepare for college and career opportunities.

The Middle Georgia Community Food Bank received \$10,000 to purchase food for distribution through partner agencies serving individuals and families facing food insecurity.

The Family Counseling Center of Central Georgia was awarded \$5,000 to provide 100 mental health counseling scholarships, offering free services to clients with limited financial resources.

The Nece Hopson Memorial Foundation, Inc. received \$5,000 to support outreach initiatives and produce promotional materials for community events.

Houston County Habitat for Humanity was awarded \$5,000 to support its Repair Corps Program, which assists veterans with disabilities by ensuring their homes are safe and well maintained.

Finally, Cozy Kidz received \$3,500 to provide winter coats for children in need through its Coats for Kids initiative.

Through grants like these, the Flint Energies Foundation continues its mission of strengthening communities by investing in programs that improve quality of life and provide meaningful support to those in need.

The Flint Energies Foundation provides grants to local non-profits such as this one using money

donated by Flint Energies Consumer-members through Operation Round Up®. The electric cooperative's Members contribute \$175,000 annually to the Flint Energies Foundation, which supports worthy causes in the counties it serves. Operation Round Up is a way for participating Members to support multiple charitable organizations by simply allowing Flint Energies to round up their bills to the nearest dollar. Donations to Operation Round Up, which average only about \$6 per year per member, are tax deductible. About 40% of Flint's Membership participates in Operation Round Up, but that percentage continues to decline. If you are a Flint Energies Consumer-member and wish to contribute, you can sign up at [www.flintenergies.com/ORU](http://www.flintenergies.com/ORU) or by calling 1.800.342.3616.

The Flint Energies Foundation, a state-chartered, non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, disburses all contributions to approved projects; Member contributions are not used for administration costs. Foundation Board members include Chair Joanne Hamlin, Lizella; Vice Chair Eloise Doty, Butler; Secretary Connie McCutchen, Midland; Treasurer John Luppino, Warner Robins; Gina Fink, Fort Valley; Charles Harrison, Grovania; Pat Bartness, Warner Robins; Traci Kemp, Warner Robins; Betty Chase, Oglethorpe; Roger Sinyard, Mauk; and Ian Russell, Fort Valley.

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 <b>DAVIS, MAKHI</b> <small>WANTED BY THE FORT VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPOS POLICE DEPT. FOR BURGLARY- 2ND DEGREE, CRIMINAL DAMAGE TO PROPERTY, 2ND DEGREE, AND CRIMINAL TRESPASS.</small>	 <b>DAY, MARIAH</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR FELONY THEFT BY CONVERSION.</small>	 <b>GLOVER, JAQUAN</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR BENCH WARRANT/ RACKETEERING.</small>	 <b>GRAY, ARCHIE</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR FAILURE TO APPEAR/ SIMPLE BATTERY.</small>
 <b>HOWARD, TODD</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR THEFT BY TAKING- FELONY.</small>	 <b>JORDAN, TRAVION</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR BATTERY SUB PHYSICAL HARM.</small>	 <b>KING, JAHEIM</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR SIMPLE BATTERY.</small>	 <b>NELSON, TANGIE</b> <small>WANTED BY THE HOUSTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR EXPIRED REGISTRATION/ FORGERY - 1ST DEGREE /GIVING FALSE NAME, DOB, ADDRESS TO OFFICER/ OTHER DRIVING OFFENSES.</small>
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## Perry earns first shutout victory of 2026 with 5-0 final against New Hampstead



Perry's Blye Chu (black) comes up behind New Hampstead's Mario Geroud (10) to challenge for possession.



Perry midfielder J.D. Arnette scored two goals and assisted on another during a 5-0 region win against New Hampstead, head coach Nathan Dooley's 250th win at Perry High School.

By **CLAY BROWN**  
HHJ Sports Editor  
clay@hhjonline.com

**PERRY** — Perry's (5-6, 4-2 Region 1-4A) start to the 2026 season wasn't easy but they seem to have found their groove as of late, now 4-1 in their last five after a 5-0 victory over New Hampstead (5-6, 2-4 Region) on Wednesday.

Junior J.D. Arnette had a big night in the midfield, moving up to attack often; he rocketed two goals into the net and assisted on the Panthers' last one with five minutes left.

Arnette and most of his teammates had a rough first

half in terms of putting their shots on goal. Two of his, including a penalty kick, sailed clean over the crossbar.

"Big thing I said at half-time, really the only negative I could say, was us not finishing some of those balls. But they corrected that in the second half and the score showed that," Head coach Nathan Dooley said.

But early in the second half Arnette finished a counter attack by shooting a laser through the left side of the net from about 30 yards out to make it a 2-0 game. He bolted past the line to chase a through ball and send another shot screaming

through the left side with 15 minutes left, all but sealing the Panthers' victory.

At 6-foot-2 Arnette towers over a lot of players on the pitch, which helps him be so versatile for Dooley.

"He is a player that other teams have to watch out for because of his physicality, his size, his ability as well," Dooley said. "He's kind of our playmaker that we play through, and he can do a little bit of everything. He can help us in possession, he can help us with the scoring and assisting, so he's just that all-around player."

The team as a whole performed well to Dooley's standards, particularly in

the second half. They were aggressive challenging the ball and maintaining possession; New Hampstead rarely got sustained opportunities on the attack and instead were forced to play on their heels for much of the game.

They also put plenty of through balls out for their strikers and forwards. Those saw more shots on goal and scores in the last 40 minutes.

"What I told the boys before the game is we wanted to keep our shape, which they did well, and try to work the ball quickly with quick passes, which they did well," Dooley said. "Tactically we wanted to

hold possession because we had a feeling they may sit back deep defensively, and so we had to create those passing lanes for the attack and the through balls and stuff like that."

The defense deserved flowers from Dooley, too. The back line held firm and routinely redirected the Phoenix's attempted clears back to the midfield and up into the attack. There's been a lot of experimentation in regards to lineups from Dooley, but he might've found something to stick with after the shutout.

"This is game 11 or 12 and I think we've had 11 or 12 different starting line-

ups. But the defensive line-up we had tonight was really strong with having our captain Noah Wendler back there," Dooley said. "He's kind of the anchor of the defense, and then Andrew Hart was the other center back. He's kind of moved into that role the last couple of games and [with] them working together, we're starting to see some of the positives of that pairing."

### UP NEXT

Perry will host Ware County next on March 20 at 7 p.m.

New Hampstead finishes their three-game road trip on March 20 at Wayne County.



Panthers defender Nigier Spence releases a throw in during a region game against New Hampstead.



Perry's Caden Arnette zips the ball into the box during a region game against New Hampstead.



Panthers defender Grant Vickers (8) stops the ball and starts his dribble before sending the ball back on the attack.



Perry midfielder Carson Camp (4) pushes the pace on an offensive deep in New Hampstead territory.

# Westfield's eight uncharacteristic errors doom district opener in 14-3 loss to Calvary Christian

By **CLAY BROWN**  
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PERRY — As Westfield head coach Ryan Wetherington said after Tuesday's region opener, defense is something the Hornets pride themselves on.

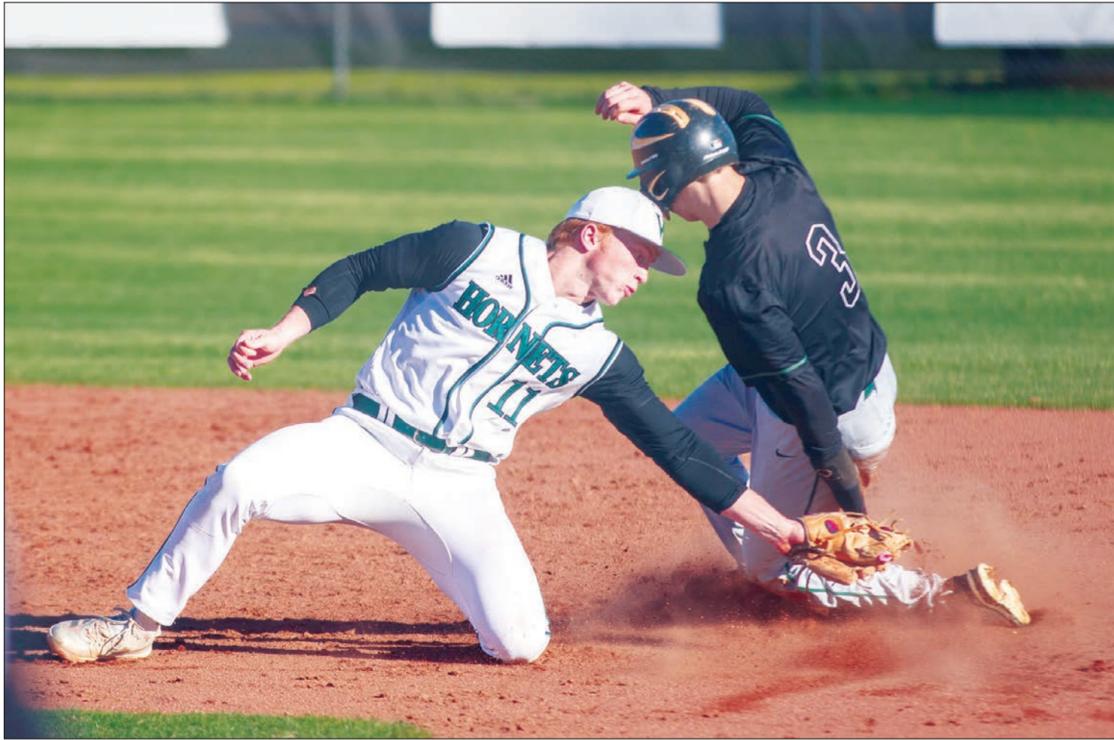
Unfortunately for Westfield (6-4, 0-1 GIAA District 5-4A/3A) error after error piled up in the third inning as Calvary Christian (3-7, 1-0 District) scored 10 runs to seal their 14-3 win in the district opener.

"I thought the other four innings we played decent defense, not our best. That one inning is what killed us," Wetherington said. "I think they had two balls that were hit out of the infield that inning [when they] scored 10 runs. I don't know if it was lack of mental focus...but we pride ourselves in good defense and obviously that didn't happen tonight."

"Our pitcher's up there battling, doing everything they can and we let him down...We're going to rebound. We'll get back after it again tomorrow at practice and hopefully go in Thursday with a better outcome."

This was the Hornets' fourth game with multiple errors, but eight was by far the highest total this season.

The infield had trouble fielding ground balls and



Westfield shortstop Brock Johnson (11) reaches behind to his left in attempt to tag a runner out during the Hornets' district opener against Calvary Christian.

a pair of hit-by-pitches didn't help. The Knights scored their 10th run after a diving outfielder couldn't come up with the ball, clearing the loaded bases and giving Calvary Christian a seven-run margin.

After getting the final strikeout, Westfield lined out and struck out twice in four at-bats; Brock Johnson popped up but got on because the short-

stop dropped it. The miserable inning seemed to go as quickly as it came. The offense didn't find their first-inning juice again, but the very next inning the Hornets made defensive plays they hadn't just three outs ago. Two infield grounders resulted in outs and Carter Black picked off the sole runner to quickly dampen the Knights' offense.

But that ended up being the difference. Westfield followed a rough defensive top of the first inning by scoring all three of their runs. Brooks Bentley and Win Hoots drew a hit-by-pitch and a walk respectively for Brock Johnson, who knocked a single into left field to put the Hornets up 2-1 after a wild pitch scored Bentley. Matt Molina's sacrifice fly scored the third and

final run, but after that they couldn't capture that same production. "[Colton Silvestri] did a good job at keeping the ball down in the zone, and I'm not sure exactly what pitch it was, some type of off-speed pitch that we kept chasing out of the zone," Wetherington said. "We didn't make a good adjustment on that pitch, and when we did hit it [we got] weak contact fly outs

here or there. Just got to do a better job of stringing some things together."

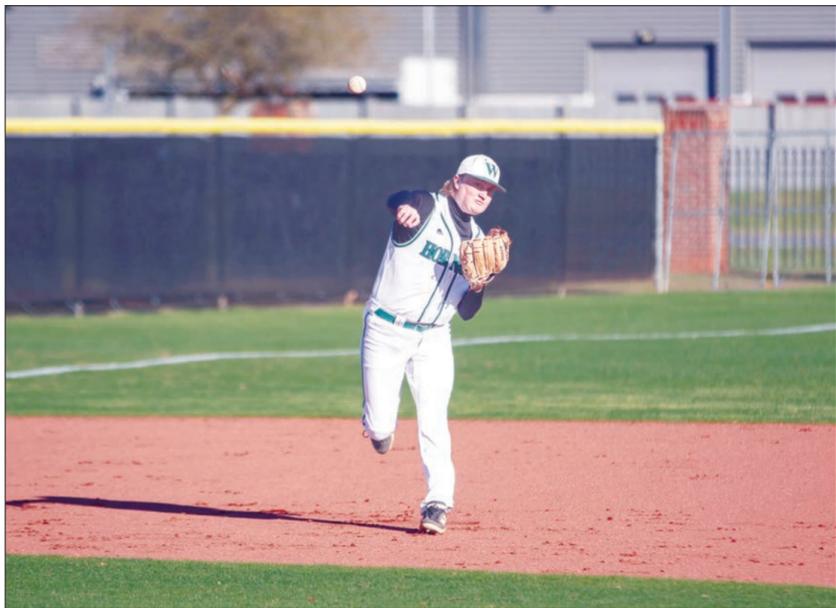
One positive, despite a short 2.2 innings on the mound, was Cooper Kennedy's competitiveness.

The first inning wasn't easy and Kennedy came off of the mound frustrated. But when he returned in the second he earned three strikeouts in five at-bats. He only allowed one earned run in his time.

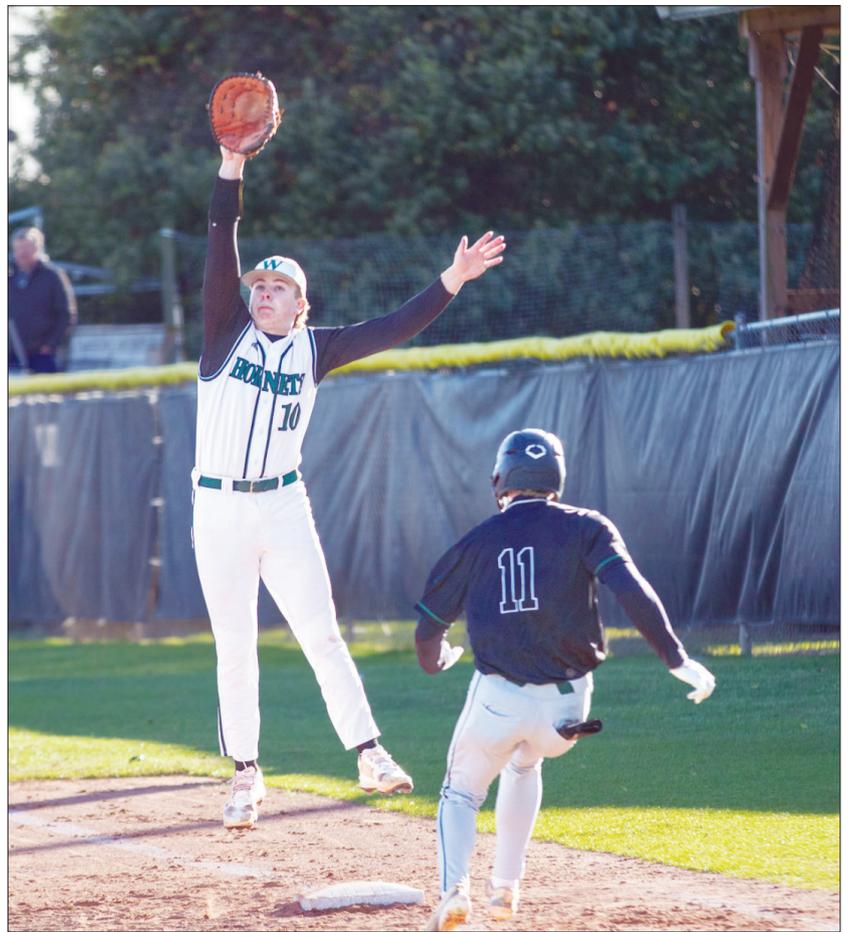
At one point the freshman drew his defense in for a mound visit, a testament to his efforts at being a leader regardless of his age and varsity experience.

"Cooper has done great for us all year, and he did it again [tonight], pounding the zone. He's just a freshman and goes out there and is a leader, tries to lead and do what he can," Wetherington said. "It's easy in a situation like that, when your defense isn't behind you, they're constantly making mistakes, runs are scoring on you, to get a bad attitude or show yourself. He didn't. He stayed composed, tried to keep pounding the zone and tried to get us out of it...I was proud of how he pitched today and I thought he did a good job."

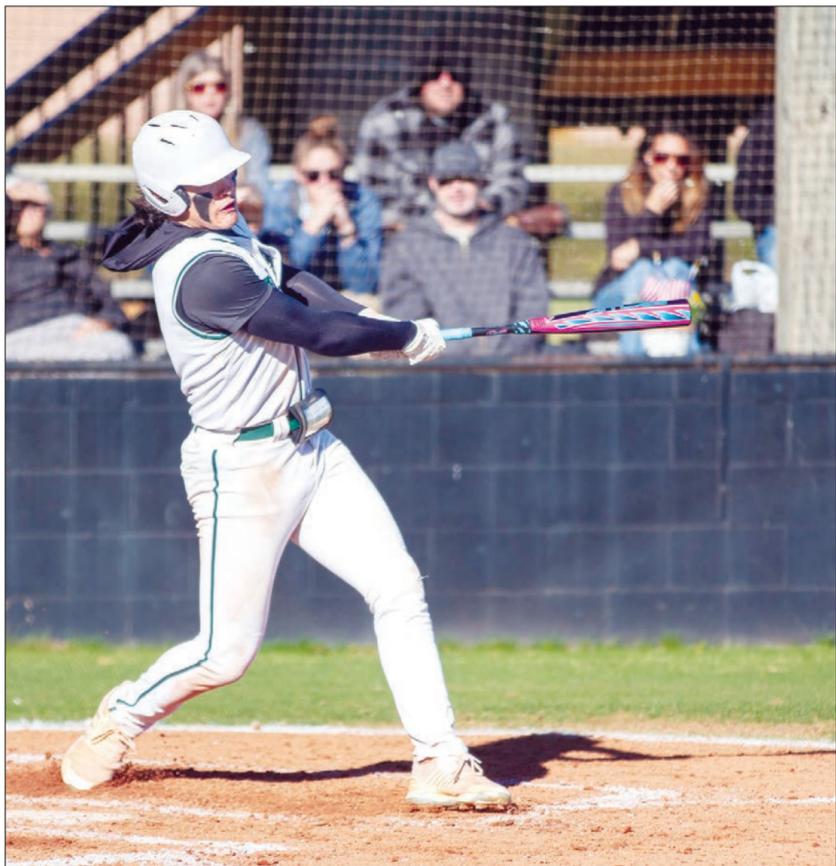
**UP NEXT**  
Westfield will get back at it in the doubleheader at Calvary Christian on March 19 at 5 p.m.



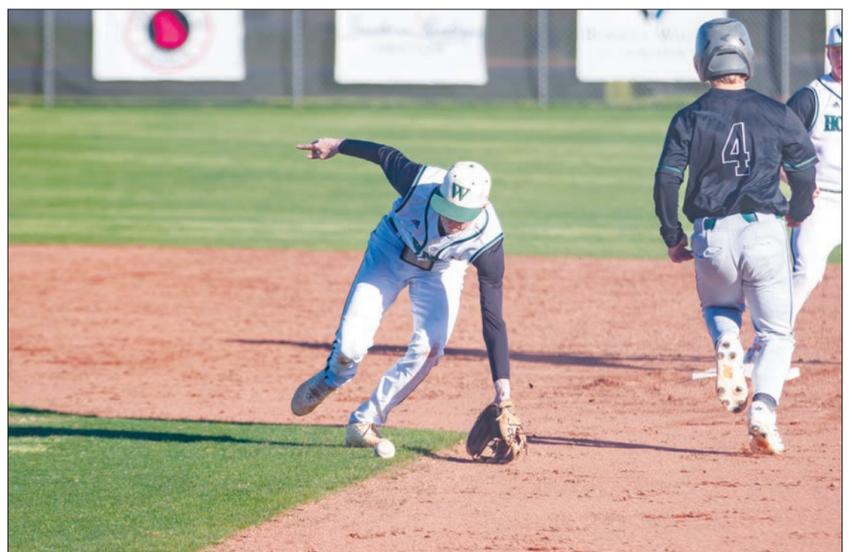
Westfield third baseman Will Canterbury tosses the ball to first base with a Calvary Christian runner on the way.



Hornets first baseman Brooks Bentley (10) jumps up to attempt and secure an errant throw while a Calvary Christian runner approaches.



Westfield's Matt Molina follows through on his swing during a 14-3 district loss to Calvary Christian.



Westfield's Blake Loden (white) reaches down to scoop up an infield grounder against Calvary Christian.

# DOUBLE DUTY DOOLEY

## Head soccer coach Nathan Dooley reaches 250 wins at Perry High School with sweep of New Hampstead



Clay Brown/HHJ

Perry head soccer coach Nathan Dooley (center) poses with the boys and girls soccer teams after winning his 250th game at Perry High School. Dooley took over the boys program for the 2011-2012 season and added the girls in 2020-2021.

By **CLAY BROWN**  
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The 250-win mark is an accomplishment many coaches never reach, much less while leading two programs at the same time.

Nathan Dooley has coached both the boys and girls soccer programs at Perry High School for six years now, and after Wednesday night's pair of wins against New Hampstead the Houston County native eclipsed 250 wins with the school.

Rewind to the early 2000s — Dooley never played soccer. In fact, he didn't even play sports in high school.

Like many he took part in a myriad of athletics growing up but that stopped once he got to Warner Robins High School.

His time as a Demon was spent off the field, and after graduating in 2002 he pursued a teaching career. In 2007 he was hired at Westside-Macon where he met then boys soccer coach Brian Aplin.

"He asked me if I would come on board and be his assistant, and I told him I never grew up playing soccer. I played basketball, baseball, a little bit of football," Dooley said. "He said, well, if you know basketball it's a lot of the same tendencies and passing patterns and stuff like that, and he said he would teach me."

Despite never touching the sport growing up, it was love at first sight for Dooley.

"[I] fell in love with the sport right away. Just the free flowing-ness of the game once it starts," He said. "Other than changing personnel the coaching, it's kind of on the

players. There's no timeouts...I just really like that about it."

Dooley stayed on as an assistant for two seasons from 2007 to 2009 before taking over the girls program at Westside in 2010.

He accepted an offer to head Perry's boys program in the 2011-2012 school year. The first fully recorded year on MaxPreps was 2014-15, which showed a decent 12-10-1 team that snuck into the playoffs and lost to Cairo 2-0.

They made it past the first round for the first time in 2018 with a 3-0 victory against Hardaway, but fell in a penalty kick shootout to Druid Hills in round two.

It wasn't until he took over both programs that they started to truly see success.

Perry's girls program in the MaxPreps era, pre-2021, struggled to say the least. Not once from 2015 (the first fully recorded season) to 2020 did they finish above .500. They also failed to finish with more than five wins even once; the closest they came was a 5-5 finish in 2020 after COVID-19 abruptly ended the season.

Perry parted with their head coach after that, but by October then athletic director Arthur Billings hadn't found a replacement.

Dooley agreed to guide both programs for one year while they continued the search.

"Then that first year, I think we broke every school record," Dooley said with a smile. "We scored over 120 goals on the season, we went undefeated in [the] region, we made it to the Elite Eight for the first time in school history. I guess the rest of that is now history as we're on

year six of doing both."

The Lady Panthers' 17-3-2 record was more wins than their previous four seasons combined.

Their season opener was a 10-0 demolition of Peach County. After Feb. 19 of that year they shut out six out of seven opponents. The one that scored was Howard, who lost 13-1.

A 10-0 final against Westover moved them to round two and a 2-1 win against LaGrange, as Dooley recounted, pit them against an Elite Eight opponent for the first time in program history.

Since then both programs have seen significantly more success, but the girls specifically have cemented themselves as some of the best in school history.

This year they're hunting for a sixth straight region championship and itching to get past that Elite Eight record.

This much success doesn't come without challenges, of course. The main one Dooley noted was doubling everything you're responsible for as a coach, as well as the emotions of teenage boys and girls.

"It does present its challenges, but honestly it's the players," Dooley said on his reason to keep coaching both programs. "It's the girls and the boys that we've had over the years, and their work ethic and their love for the sport and buying into that we do as a coaching staff and our philosophy."

"It's the coaches I surround myself with...the support from the admin at the school that's allowed me to keep doing it," He continued. "It's definitely [also] the support I have at home with my wife and

family, because without that I definitely couldn't do it."

Coaches don't usually get caught up in accolades or milestones like win counts, but it's come fast for Dooley especially since taking over both programs.

"When I took over at Westside as the girls coach I don't think they had won a game in five

years, and we won one game that year," Dooley said. "I think it was first year when I took over the [Perry] girls when I hit win 100, and so over the last six years it's gone from 100 to now 250. It's more about the kids, less about me, but it is something that as a coach and school we can be proud of."

"It means the world to me. Perry High School has

been like a second home for me." He said. "I never knew much about Perry, but the closeness of this community and the people that live here, it's just an awesome place. It's the reason why I'm still here and able to get to this accomplishment. So it means a lot to me, the program, and to this city, and I'm just glad I could play a small part in it."

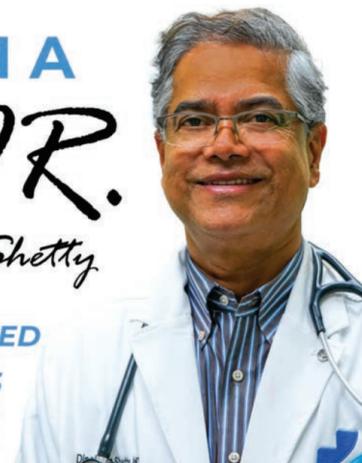


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# Lady Panthers force early submission in 10-0 victory over New Hampstead



Rylee Beasley (15) fights off a New Hampstead defender to maintain the attack during a 10-0 region win.



Tinley Eubanks (8) holds up her hands for high fives from Reagan Milby (4) and Madilynn Foster (1) after a score in the first half of a 10-0 region victory over New Hampstead.

By **CLAY BROWN**  
HHJ Sports Editor  
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PERRY — There was only about 32 minutes of actual game time played on Wednesday during Perry's (7-3, 5-0 Region 1-4A) 10-0 domination of New Hampstead (0-8, 0-4 Region).

Within the first six minutes and change the Lady Panthers already held a 4-0 lead with three different players, Yaibeth Rivera, Mia Mathis and Rylee Beasley, scoring.

Mass substitutions came with 28:55 left in the first half and the reserves forced an early halftime with 21:16 still on the clock. A goal each from Madilynn Foster, Reagan Milby and Madelyn Mason made it 7-0 at the break.

The Lady Phoenix offered very little resistance on the ball and Perry was free to move it however they wished. They made sure to move it around and maintain possession, working for the best shot. That was one thing head coach Nathan

Dooley emphasized before what ended up being their fifth straight region win.

"I thought they did a really good job. That was one thing I told them coming into this game that we wanted to work on," Dooley said. "Possessing the ball and moving the ball around, and not just taking any shot but taking quality shots. And I felt like all the girls, whether it was the starters or those coming off the bench did a really good job of that."

It wasn't long after the

second half clock started that Beasley slipped another score into the net. Her shot skipped off the arm of a New Hampstead defender and past the goalkeeper to make it 8-0 1:08 into the half.

Ansley Parker scored the ninth and Foster stretched her leg out to sneak in the 10th, ending the game by mercy rule, with 7:18 left on the shortened second half clock.

The Lady Panthers have won five straight region championships and with Wednesday's victory they

are 5-0 in the region and gearing up for a sixth. Good play on both sides of the ball has been key for Dooley's squad.

"Really coming together and trying to be methodical in what we do as a team when in possession of the ball and not just playing so direct," Dooley said on what his team has done well in region play. "We like to possess a little bit and open up those through balls and passing lanes to get those good shots and crosses." "We can't take away

anything from the defense that's played solid when we have been under pressure. I think we've only given up only one region goal all season," Dooley continued. "We have a freshman keeper [Emersyn Preast], she's been solid for us this season. So it's just been a total team effort."

**UP NEXT**

Perry will host Ware County on March 20 at 5 p.m.

New Hampstead will head back home to play Ware County on March 24.

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