



SEC showdown
Dogs take on Tide
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LOCAL MATTERS



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ALBANYHERALD.COM

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025

Investigators probe two homicides, reported Russian roulette fatality from Thanksgiving weekend

By Alan Mauldin
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ALBANY – The Dougherty County coroner’s office and Albany Police Department are investigating three Thanksgiving-holiday deaths, including a teenager who reportedly died while playing Russian roulette, and two apparent homicides.

Michael Jackson, 15, died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, Dougherty County

Coroner Michael Fowler said. The fatal shooting occurred on Sunday afternoon.

“The ones around him said he was playing Russian roulette,” Fowler said. “They’re still investigating to see if that’s what happened.”

At about 7:25 a.m. on Saturday, the coroner responded to a slaying at an apartment complex at 316 Carriage Lane, where a motorist reported finding a



File Photo

body near the intersection of South West Road and East Broad Avenue in east Albany. Albany police responded to

the scene at about 8:07 a.m., where victim Michael Ray McConnell had been spotted.

Police initially suspected that McConnell may have been struck by a car. An autopsy performed on Tuesday indicated that McConnell, 64, was fatally stabbed, Fowler said.

At about 7 a.m. Saturday, police responded to a reported shooting at an apartment complex at 316 Carriage Lane.

The victim, 19-year-old Javi-on Jackson, suffered a gunshot wound to the head and was pronounced dead at the scene.

“Some of the family members said he got in an altercation with someone and ran outside,” Fowler said.

The holiday weekend homicides bring the number of slayings in Dougherty County to 22 for the year.



Staff Photo: Carlton Fletcher

Friends, and cancer survivors Paige Rice, left, and Shelly Green admire Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital’s Tree of Hope after lighting the tree during a special ceremony Tuesday.

Phoebe tree-lighting event offers hope to cancer patients

By Carlton Fletcher
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ALBANY – Paige Rice said she always attended Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital’s annual Lights of Love ceremony, at which the Phoebe Foundation honors the work of its staff in the Phoebe Cancer Center and citizens in the community who have been impacted by the disease.

Never, though, did she think she’d be the cancer survivor asked to light the hospital’s Christmas tree during the ceremony.

“All the times I came to this event, I thought, ‘Gosh, I hope it’s never me who’s called on for the tree-lighting,’” Rice said. “But tonight, I’m glad it’s me.”

Rice and her close friend Shelly Green, both cancer survivors, were given the honor of lighting Phoe-

See PHOEBE, 2A



Staff Photo: Carlton Fletcher

Paige Rice, left, and Shelly Green were the cancer survivors selected to light Phoebe’s Tree of Hope during Tuesday’s Lights of Love ceremony.

Periodical — Mail Label

Dougherty County Commission proposes 16% tax increase

By Alan Mauldin
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ALBANY – Dougherty County commissioners were divided this week on the appropriateness of imposing a tax increase during a year when revenue declined while also funding a year-end bonus for employees and considering an additional \$1.1 million outlay for a revolving fund for small businesses.

Faced with the impact of legislation passed last year by the state legislature, the county is looking at a reduction in collections of nearly

\$1 million for the current tax season. That represents a 1.4% reduction in the amount collected last year if the tax millage rate, on which taxes are calculated, stays the same.

The commission agreed on Monday to advertise for a 2025 rate of 22.069 mills, up from the current 19.025 mills countywide.

Bills are going out late this year, expected to be mailed on Dec. 26, and when they do, property owners will see a sharp increase. For homes valued at \$125,000, the in-

See TAX, 2A



Special Photo: Ballet Theatre South

Ballet Theatre South performs the classic “The Nutcracker” ballet each year. Dancers are preparing this week for their first show Friday.

Ballet Theatre South’s ‘Nutcracker’ returns to Albany with homegrown stars

By Lucille Lannigan
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ALBANY – During the first week of December, the halls of Albany’s Municipal Auditorium are aglow with stage lights, covered in a blur of pinks, purples, greens

and reds, and bursting with the sounds of classical music.

Dancers in pink tights, shiny slippers and cozy warm-ups fill the auditorium, watching each other glide gracefully across the

See NUTCRACKER, 2A

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From 1A
TAX

crease will be about \$150. According to the county's calculations, the increase would be 16% countywide.

In the same meeting, commissioners voted to fund a lump-sum payment of \$1,000 each for full-time employees and \$500 for part-time workers. The payments will total \$771,313 and will be funded through \$699,187 from the county's general fund, \$48,981 in funds from the special services district and \$23,145 from the solid waste enterprise fund.

"We originally did this after COVID; we said our employees had been superior during COVID," Commissioner Russell Gray said of the salary increases. "After that, it became a habit. Since that habit started, it has not made its way back into the budget."

Gray, who was joined by Commissioner Ed Newsome in voting against the payments, said that during budget discussions it was suggested that the payments be cut in half due to budgetary constraints. The commission also has not budgeted to implement the salary adjustments recommended in a pay study that was conducted several years ago.

"It's a tough decision, but we seriously don't have money to spend outside this budget," Gray said.

Employees are facing hard economic times, Commissioner Gloria Gaines said in response.

"I will say that while we

are in a constrained budget period ... at the same time our workers are in the same place," she said. "The cost of living has increased significantly since budget time. We were not aware of what our employees are now facing."

Commissioners delayed a decision on entering a \$1.1 million contract through which Albany Community Together would administer a revolving loan fund earmarked at assisting small businesses.

In his move to table consideration of the contract, Commissioner Victor Edwards said that he was not envisioning a lengthy delay.

"I don't think we need to kill it, just look at it from a different perspective in 2026," Edwards said.

County Attorney Alex Shalishali advised the board that an item tabled will become inactive if not acted on at the next commission session. At that point Commission Chairman Lorenzo Heard would have to place it on a future commission agenda in order for the commission to consider taking action.

"This was an unbudgeted expense," Gray said. "If it's the board's will, it can be budgeted for next year. I don't think (we should) be continuing to push things in when we're already borrowing from ourselves and increasing the millage rate. We don't have \$1.1 million to give away at this point."

Taxpayers will get the opportunity to weigh in on the proposed millage rate increase during a series of required public hearings. State law required three hearings prior to enactment of a property tax increase.



Dougherty County's tax office will be busy later this month when tax bills, delayed by more than a month, arrive. Property owners will also likely see a hefty hike in their tax bill.

Staff Photo: Alan Mauldin

From 1A
PHOEBE

be's Tree of Hope during a cool Tuesday-evening ceremony on the Phoebe campus outside the Cancer Center.

"I cried, I prayed, I had my doctors and nurses pray with me," Green, who with her husband owns Custom Interiors in Albany, said. "I'm in remission now, and what I've learned in my journey is that I always have this place (Phoebe) in my corner if I need it."

Green's journey began in January 2023 with a melanoma diagnosis. Just months later, Rice was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Before the friends threw the switch to light the Christmas tree Tuesday, several Phoebe officials marked the occasion with comments about the Phoebe Foundation, the Cancer Center and heaped praise on cancer survivors like Rice and Green and the staff in the center who treat cancer patients in the region.

"What we've learned as a staff – and what (Green and Rice) have learned during their journey – is that we get through the difficult times by leaning on each other and leaning on the community," Dr. Jay McAfee with Radiation Oncology Associates said.

Oncologist Dr. Jose Tongol, who has frequently played live shows in the region and has recorded some of the original songs he's written, read part of a poem he wrote for Green and Rice. The poem was titled "Dynamic Duo."

Phoebe Foundation Director Parker Douglas encouraged the attendees and the community to continue their support for efforts like the Tree of Hope by donating to the foundation.

"Donations this year are being directed to the Cancer Center," Douglas said. "By giving, you help us bring hope and healing to our community."

Dr. Davis Kenney wrote a song titled "Lights of Love" especially for the occasion, and he performed it during the ceremony. Lyrics included, "No defeat, we're gonna win this fight. The Lights of Love are gonna shine tonight."

Green said she's sharing her story to give hope to other cancer patients.

"I hope my story will give someone hope as they go through their own journey," she said. "There were a lot of times during this experience when I was without hope."

SCAN CODE TO VIEW SPORTS ONLINE



From 1A
NUTCRACKER

stage as directors and choreographers pause for critiques. Parents bustle around backstage, fixing costumes, handling props and directing dancers to their next spot.

It's "Nutcracker" season, and the dancers of Ballet Theatre South, a southwest Georgia nonprofit dance organization, are hard at work, preparing for opening night Friday.

Performances will take place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the Albany Municipal Auditorium, transforming the

historic venue into a fantasy of sugarplum dreams for the traditional ballet.

For more than three decades, Ballet Theatre South has made it its mission to bring the discipline and beauty of classical ballet to southwest Georgia. BTS has provided local young dancers the rare opportunity to train alongside – and perform with – true professionals.

This year's production features more than 40 school-age dancers from local schools joined by professional, guest artists who take on the marquee roles.

It's a show most dancers

look forward to performing each year.

"It's traditional. It's timeless. Everybody's heard the music before," Alex Wilson, a 17-year-old dancer said. "It's our biggest show of the year."

A homecoming for the Sugar Plum Fairy

Haley Whitman, a 23-year-old artist with the National Ballet of Texas, grew up dancing at Murphy Dance Studio in Albany, and with Ballet Theatre South. She first performed in the company's production of "The Nutcracker" when she was just 8 years old.

Now, she's traveled home from Texas to take on the magical main role of the Sugar Plum Fairy – a role she's played two times before.

"I just love dancing here," Whitman said. "It's fun to come back because this is my home. I feel like I can be very present here and really enjoy my time dancing."

She also joins her younger sister, who plays a rose in the production, as well as her parents, who will play the role of Clara, the main character's, parents – just as they did when Whitman played Clara.

Whitman said "The Nutcracker" is a well-loved tradition among both dancers and audience members.

"I feel like it's very timeless, and a lot of people in the area like to bring their young kids and then it inspires a lot of them to start dancing, which is really special," she said.

Whitman said performing "The Nutcracker" each year means sacrifice for those involved. She said days are filled with rehearsals, which means less time for family and friends during the beginning of the holiday season.

"Luckily, everybody is friends here," she said. "Your friends are at dance."

Student dancers juggle school as well. Wilson, on top of playing multiple roles in the ballet, is studying for exams and performing in her school's dance line team every day. She comes to rehearsal for "The Nutcracker" after an already full day.

"I dance every day," she said.

A grand finale: Graduating senior takes on lead role as Clara

Emily Reese, an 18-year-old home-schooled senior from the Albany area, was cast in the lead role as Clara for her final performance with the ballet.

The senior was recently accepted into Kennesaw State

University, where she plans to major in dance. Reese has danced with Ballet Theatre South for five years, and this is her third year performing in "The Nutcracker."

"I think it's a nice kind of culmination and closing to all the performances that I've done with them," she said. "It's pretty meaningful."

Before she was Clara, Reese played all kinds of roles, from partygoers, to a rat, to flowers and to snowflakes.

"The last time we did that, I was like anything and everything," she said. "It was just dance, quick change, dance, quick change. It's really nice to have one big role to focus on."

This is the dancer's first time dancing with a partner. She said the last few months of rehearsals have been challenging, learning how to trust and flow with another person's movements.

"He's been a saint," she said of her partner, Joshua Ethridge, a professional dancer who is guest performing in the production.

From Florida to Italy to New York and now to Albany

Ethridge, a 26-year-old dancer based in Tallahassee, Fla., has danced ballet since he was 5 years old and traveled across the world to perform. He danced in Charles Hagan's, a ballet master and choreographer at Ballet Theatre South, company as a child, and Ethridge is returning under his leadership to perform in the upcoming production of "The Nutcracker."

The last few months have seen Ethridge traveling back and forth between Albany and Tallahassee to rehearse here while preparing for a separate performance in Florida. Ethridge said he stays organized by keeping a notebook and writing all of his notes on choreography or movement there.

He said "The Nutcracker" marks the Christmas season for him.

"It's a tradition," Ethridge said. "The year doesn't feel right until you've done 'The Nutcracker'."

Ethridge emphasized how much the parent volunteers with Ballet Theatre South change the experience. There are crews for costumes, backstage, props and more. He said he's danced in many shows where the dancers were their own crew.

Laurie Senn, the president of Ballet Theatre South's board, said as a nonprofit, the organization relies on volunteers. Each dancer must have at least one family member contribute volunteer time for the production.

"We don't have a lot of money," Senn said. "This entire company – outside of guest artists, choreographers and directors – runs on volunteers."

An evening of magic, whimsy and fun

Senn encouraged the community to come out to support the dance company and local arts in general.

"It's bringing art to the community that otherwise they wouldn't have access to," she said. "We have other regional ballet companies around us, but no other ballet company in the city. It's something special that inspires people."

Ethridge said the show is a fun time for everyone to enjoy. "It's wonder and whimsy," he said.

Show times are:
Dec 5 -- 7:30 PM
Dec 6 -- 2:30 PM
Dec 7 -- 2:30 PM

Tickets are on sale now. Admission is \$19, and tickets can be purchased online or in person at the box office at the Albany Civic Center (100 W. Oglethorpe Blvd.).

For more information, visit the Ballet Theatre South website.

Albany Area Chamber of Commerce
Visit Albany, Georgia - CVB

112 Albany Welcome Center

STAR BUSINESS OF THE WEEK

The Albany Area Chamber of Commerce proudly recognizes Visit Albany and the Albany Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) as this week's Star Business of the Week. Visit Albany, GA and the CVB work to promote the community to visitors from across the region and beyond. Their mission starts at home – by engaging local residents and businesses to serve as strong ambassadors for the community and all Albany has to offer.

This holiday season, Visit Albany is once again hosting its popular Candy Cane Crawl, a festive citywide bingo-style shopping event featuring participating local businesses offering December specials. It's a fun, family-friendly way to explore Albany, support small businesses, and celebrate the season. The Star Business of the Week is presented by WALB News 10 and Fleming & Riles Insurance, with treats provided by Sugar Mama's Bakery.

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The Albany HERALD

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WSWG

Daily Horoscopes

ARIES (March 21-April 19): A power struggle could arise in communication now, it could be hard to find common ground if egos take over. A friend might push something that is not advisable, check it out before you jump in.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Childlike or sexual energies could come into a financial situation now, making it hard to see what is actually represented by the numbers. Stick strictly to what you've verified for yourself.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Opinions aren't identity, you can profoundly disagree without negating someone's sense of self or doubting your own. A partner could be especially seductive. Finances should be on the upswing.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Your community is both global and local. Participating in a circle of reciprocity builds peace, trust, and new ways forward. If caught in the middle of a power struggle, try to sidestep.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Fun should be on the agenda today, you deserve a break, solo or with homies. Whether you get any fun will depend on the tasks in front of you and if they can be completed with time and energy remaining.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Someone could behave like a spoiled brat in full view, don't let it be you. A housemate could suddenly look like a possible hookup. A narrative could be pushed that is false, dig for facts.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): If someone is clinging with all they've got to their powerbase, you're unlikely to unseat them now. Keep the facts of the case free of banter, flirtation and innuendo. You should have logic on your side.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Money is harder to handle when old scarcity traumas get triggered, do what you can to separate the situation from

the emotions around it. Healing can come when a true connection is made.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): A partner may need to feel like the boss for a few hours, indulge it or not depending on the situation. You could be a serious hottie now, sexy planets and asteroids are moving through your sector of self.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Someone's altruism could have a hidden component, check to see if there are strings attached. Time in prayer or meditation could be called for now and could answer a soul desire.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Playtime could be impacted by some less than healthy competition, or creativity could get dampened by deadlines or other stress. Time with friends could bring the respite you are needing.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Work-life balance could be a topic for a day or two, someone might insist on changes which may not be a real possibility for a while. Keep juggling, eventually the workplace should calm down.

IF TODAY IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: Your birthday month brings extra gifts just in time for the holidays. Your power of animal attraction is dramatically enhanced, and your star-quality — literally the amount of celebrity vibe you bring, is also over the top. There's support for friendship and spending time, and your talents are also on full display. Wow. January also brings opportunity — you should have both big wisdom and big confidence on board. Don't push though. February is a poor month for starting anything new, sit it out for this purpose. By the time you hit mid-March 2026 could be building its momentum for you — many doors can open for fulfillment in many areas of life: Career, financial success, relationships, friends, activities. You are set up for an overall excellent year.



1783: George Washington delivered his farewell address to his officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York City after the American Revolutionary War.

1816: James Monroe was elected the fifth president of the United States.

1861: Queen Victoria of Britain forbade the export of gunpowder, firearms, and all materials for their production.

1918: U.S. President Woodrow Wilson departed for France to attend the Paris Peace Conference, becoming the first American president to travel to Europe while in office.

1969: American civil rights activist and Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was killed during a police raid in Chicago.

1978: Dianne Feinstein

became San Francisco's first female mayor after the assassination of George Moscone.

1980: The British rock band Led Zeppelin announced its disbandment following the death of drummer John Bonham.

1991: Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson, the last American hostage held in Lebanon, was released after nearly seven years in captivity. Also, Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) ceased operations after 64 years as a leading U.S. airline.

1992: President George H.W. Bush ordered 28,000 U.S. troops to Somalia to support a humanitarian aid mission amid a civil war.

1996: NASA launched the unmanned Mars Pathfinder spacecraft to explore the surface of Mars.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I pay no attention whatever to anybody's praise or blame. I simply follow my own feelings."

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, musician (1756-1791)

CORRECTION

This newspaper is committed to publishing fair and accurate information. Errors should be brought to the attention of Editor Carlton Fletcher at (229) 888-9300. Corrections or clarifications will appear in this space.

SQUAWKBOX

squawkbox@albanyherald.com

Who cares if Dougherty County has the highest tax millage rate in the state? The chairman and his fellow leeches want your votes, so they're going to give millions for unwarranted raises. Don't be fooled by the raises; pay close attention to the rising millage rate.

I see where Alabama got lucky again. Seems like 90% of the games they win, there seems to be a lot of luck involved, like referees making calls in their favor. That is why I don't respect Alabama; it seems like the league and officials are always protecting them.

I'd lay down and die before I bowed down to that cowardly traitor.

Albany's long-time citizens would like to extend a warm invitation to anyone that didn't agree with Mr. Revell's article to kindly move away. Immediate departure is encouraged for greedy pastors, able-bodied adults who don't work, chronic litterers, individuals that don't understand the societal value of a muller, people that complain for sport, and those running shady businesses from plastic streetside signs. Alabama is a wonderful place, but North Dakota is even better.

This new AI is supposed to make our lives easier. Will it improve my love life?

Dougherty taxpayers should not be forced to pay extra bonuses that were not budgeted and pay for lobbyist friends of the chairman that don't do their job for our community. We are taxed to death here. Thanks, Mr. Gray, for standing up to these bullies. Our wallets appreciate it.

Impeach the worthless four on the Dougherty County Commission.

The local TV advertising for the suing lawyers from Florida that opened an office in Valdosta and in Albany because of the make-up of the jury pool, now they're advertising they are giving away free food baskets. These people have no pride whatsoever; they just want to get that 40-50% of your settlement. Their greed is astonishing.

Raheem Morris' version of the Atlanta Falcons is a big joke. The franchise needs someone who knows how to manage talent on a football team.

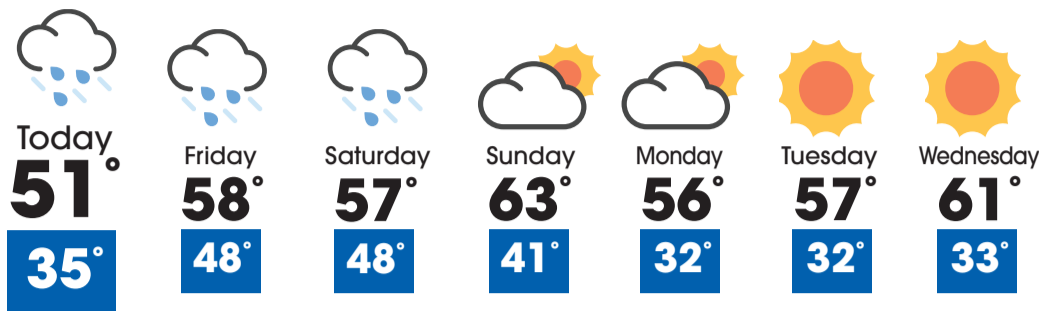
You go, Sherry Stith. We're still behind you.

Heard is an embarrassment to Albany and Dougherty County, a tiny little Hitler who, because he has three other like-minded idiots backing him, does as he pleases. Sounds a lot like Trump; oddly enough the people who hate Trump support the little chairman.

In the 47 years I have lived here, I have watched the education system go from teaching German, Spanish and French in high school to the local colleges having to teach remedial English.

You people who say the True President is showing signs of decline are just trying to put down the greatest president in America's history. Even on his worst day, he is twice as brilliant as any of you.

Weather Forecast



By Frank Stewart
Tribune Content Agency

NORTH			
♠ J 8 7 4			
♥ J 5			
♦ J 9			
♣ Q J 10 9 3			
WEST		EAST	
♠ A 5		♠ 6 2	
♥ A 7 6 2		♥ Q 10 9 4	
♦ K Q 10 7		♦ 8 6 5 4 3 2	
♣ K 5 4		♣ 6	
SOUTH			
♠ K Q 10 9 3			
♥ K 8 3			
♦ A			
♣ A 8 7 2			
South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Dbl	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	All Pass		
Opening lead — ♦ K			
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Daily Bridge Club

Addressing a problem

"Are you still seeing your therapist?" I asked Cy the Cynic in the club lounge.

Cy shrugged and nodded. "What counsel does she provide?" I wanted to know.

"She works with me on my attitude," the Cynic said. "Yesterday, she showed me a glass half full of water and asked me the old question: Was I an optimist or a pessimist?"

"How did you respond to that?" "I drank the water and told her I'm a problem-solver," the Cynic growled.

DIAMOND RETURN

Cy was today's West and led the king of diamonds against four spades. Declarer won, forced out the ace of trumps, ruffed Cy's diamond return, led a trump to dummy and passed the queen of clubs, losing to Cy's king.

Dummy's clubs looked like a threat to give declarer heart discards, but Cy solved the problem. He didn't panic; he counted. South was known to have

five spades and one diamond. Even after five rounds of clubs, he would still have two hearts in his hand. So Cy exited with a club. Declarer had to break the hearts in the end, and he lost two more tricks to go down.

Well solved, Cy.

DAILY QUESTION

You hold: S K Q 10 9 3 H K 8 3 D A C A 8 7 2. Both sides vulnerable. The dealer, at your right, opens one heart. What do you say?

ANSWER: You have 16 good points, and your king of hearts is well positioned and is probably worth as much as an ace. Still, just overall one spade. In modern bidding, a simple overcall can have an upper range of 17-18 points. If your hand were stronger — say you held AQ1093, K83, A, AJ72 — to double, intending to bid spades next — would be reasonable.

South dealer
N-S vulnerable

ADVICE COLUMNIST ■ ERIC THOMAS

Acquaintance is friendly in real life but ignores on Facebook



Dear Eric: I have a friend I've known for four years. We all live in a 55+ community and have moved here from different areas of the country. We are a group of women who get together on a regular basis for outings.

Over the past couple of months, I feel somewhat left out because of a couple of events I wasn't included in. But what I'm trying to understand is why does she not "like" or comment on any of my Facebook posts when she's all over everyone else's with supportive and loving comments?

Again, this is so silly, but I can't help wondering why. When I look back at my posts, I noticed she has never acknowledged any of them, even for my birthday. We are still friends, we work with the same fundraising group, have dinner at each other's house and get invited to the same events. This Facebook thing has got me confused and I don't know what kind of friend she is so I'm getting uncomfortable around her.

So now, what am I doing? Ignoring her posts, which makes me feel so stupid and juvenile. If I wasn't part of this group, which I really like, I wouldn't bother with her. Can you shed any light on her mindset? It's really got me confused.

— Friend Request

Dear Friend: Even though social media platforms are built to echo some aspects of real-life friendships, they also bring out situations and feelings that don't have a real-life corollary. I'm not sure we were ever built to know this many people's thoughts on

every single thing, including every single thing that we post about our lives. It's too much.

So, give yourself a break. It's natural for these feelings to come up. Facebook is designed to show you what your friends are interacting with, so it's natural to notice when your friends aren't interacting with content you post.

The simplest answer may be that her algorithm doesn't show her what you post very often. Everyone's Facebook is tailored to them, to their behavior, and to what the company's advertisers and engineers want each person to do. So, it's very possible that she's simply unaware of what you're posting.

Since you interact socially in real life with no problem, it's best to just believe that and let it go. If you're curious about the nature of your friendship, talk to her, in real life. But keep the conversation focused on real life, not what she does or doesn't do online.

Dear Eric: Christmas is overwhelming for me. I don't enjoy shopping and never have. I don't like giving gifts just for the sake of gift exchanges. I have too much stuff already and frankly, I can't afford that anymore.

I do enjoy giving when I see something that I know will be perfect for the recipient and make them happy, but the pressure of doing it on a schedule is too much. Additionally, my marriage of 27 years fell apart around the holidays about two years ago and it's just not a great time of year now.

I have two older children (21 and 16). I still like to provide a

nice Christmas for them, but how do I relay to my family and friends that I will be celebrating at my place of worship and with my children but don't want to be given any gifts, nor should they expect any from me without sounding like an ungrateful Scrooge? The phone calls, texts and emails asking for my Christmas list are going to start soon and I'm dreading it.

— Not a Scrooge

Dear Not a Scrooge:

Ideally, gift-giving is a bit of a symbiotic relationship in that the wants of the gift giver ought not supersede the wants of the recipient. Now, some people will always show up with a wrapped box or a tissue paper-filled bag around this time of year. Attribute it to love languages or force of habit or just a desire to spread cheer. But the conscientious gift giver can hear "please no gifts" and understand that no gifts is, in effect, the gift.

So, consider your request as less a Scrooge-like edict and more an offering that will better allow your friends to help you.

How to do this? Try the unvarnished truth. "My relationship to gifts has changed as my life has changed recently. So, I don't have a list because, truly, the thought is enough for me. I'm stepping away from gifts, giving and receiving. I hope you understand and know that I still care for you and wish you good cheer."

Another option is to tell people you're just doing cards this year and that you have everything you need so if they want to give you something, they can donate to a charity.

CALENDAR OF OBSERVANCES

- Cabernet Franc Day
- Extraordinary Work Team Recognition Day
- International Cheetah Day
- International Day of Banks
- National Cookie Day
- National Dice Day
- National Sock Day
- Santa's List Day
- Wear Brown Shoes Day
- World Wildlife Conservation Day

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LOCAL NEWS

TODAY'S
BIBLE
VERSE

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."
Psalms 91:1

COLUMNIST ■ MARC HYDEN

Honor Rep. Ballinger: Raise the age of criminal responsibility

Working in government affairs and media, you form many personal bonds with members of the Legislature. Not all of them last. Some officials leave public life, political differences can strain friendships and sadly some depart from this world far too young. This is what happened recently with the passing of Rep. Mandi Ballinger, R-Canton.

She was the chair of the House Juvenile Justice committee and a force within the General Assembly. While she could be reserved and guarded, she treated me with kindness. Not long before her passing, she and I were scheduled to have dinner to discuss criminal justice reform — a favorite topic of hers — but she canceled due to an emergency.

Now I understand what that emergency was, and she leaves a big void under the Gold Dome. Yet if lawmakers are judged by the people they hope to help, then Ballinger stands at the forefront. Her top priority — and the reason she and I knew one another — was working to keep more kids out of the adult justice system. The legislation that would have accomplished this never made it to the governor's desk, but if lawmakers want to honor her memory, they should place it atop their 2026 agenda.

Over the course of several years, Ballinger hosted a study committee on the matter and introduced numerous bills to raise the age of adult criminal responsibility. Georgia is one of only five states, including Texas, Wisconsin, Louisiana and North Carolina, that treats all 17-year-olds as adults in the justice system. Ballinger had hoped to bring the Peach State into alignment with nearly all other states and raise the age to 18, and for good reason.

"It is so much better for the state, better outcomes for offenders, lower overall costs, and lower recidivism rates. It's just the right thing to do," she said via email to me once.

She was right, and it is also inconsistent with the rest of Georgia's laws. You need to be at least 18 years old to buy a lottery ticket, get a tattoo or open a checking account, and you need to be 21 years old to purchase cigarettes or alcohol. The reason for this is that youths can be impressionable and are sometimes not mature enough to make decisions that might haunt them the rest of their lives.

There is plenty of science behind this, too, but Georgia's

criminal code is incompatible with the truth about brain development. In fact, 17-year-olds are still developing. They lack the cognitive maturity to more effectively process cause and effect and tame spontaneous impulses. Anyone who has ever been 17 years old understands this, but the lack of cognitive development calls into question how culpable youths truly are for their actions.

Despite this obvious reality, Georgia treats every single 17-year-old as an adult in the justice system. As a result, minor mistakes made as a teenager can saddle youths with a permanent mark on their background that follows them for the rest of their lives. This can prevent them from ever obtaining good jobs, housing and even higher education. Suddenly a lapse in judgement as a youth starts to look as though it comes with a kind of life sentence.

Their actions can also land them in jail alongside career criminals, and the data behind this is highly concerning. Youths who are incarcerated in adult facilities are more likely to be the target of sexual and violent abuse and to commit suicide than those housed in juvenile facilities. What's more, youths who spend time in adult facilities are more likely to recidivate, in part, because adult correctional centers do not have programming and counseling tailored for juveniles.

Georgia's policy imperils youths and leads to more crime, but the policy may be even more wasteful than just this. Studies have shown that it might cost more taxpayer money as well. A Wisconsin study concluded, "For every 1,000 youths returned to the juvenile system, there will be \$5.8 million in direct savings each year through reduced law enforcement costs, court costs and losses to victims."

Ballinger recognized this, and she hoped to treat youths appropriately for their age and put Georgia on a safer footing. Her bills to raise the age of adult criminal responsibility to 18 would have done just this, but they wisely left open the ability to try certain youths accused of serious crimes as adults on a case-by-case basis.

With her passing, Rep. Beth Camp, R-Concord, replaces Ballinger as chair of the Juvenile Justice Committee. I hope she carries the mantle of reform proudly, and if the Legislature wants to honor the late Ballinger, they can start by working toward the passage of a raise-the-age bill and finish the passion project that she started years ago.



HYDEN

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

COLUMNIST ■ YONATAN HAMBOURGER

The fire that never goes out: Lessons from an Eternal Flame

There are days when inspiration comes easy: a good conversation, a burst of creativity, a moment when we feel truly connected to something larger than ourselves. But what about the days when hope flickers, when routines feel endless, or when the world's noise drowns out our inner spark?

Most of us know what it's like to lose momentum or feel as if our fire is running low.

The sacred isn't found in intensity but in persistence. The heart of a spiritual life is not made up of rare mountaintop moments, but of small, steady choices: How we speak to a colleague, how we listen to a friend, how we move through our daily routines. The real question isn't how brightly we burn at our best, but how we keep our inner flame alive through the quiet, sometimes drafty spaces of everyday life.

In every synagogue, the Ner Tamid — the Eternal Light — burns above the Ark, a glowing echo of the Torah's ancient command: "A continuous fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall not go out." Jewish tradition teaches that this isn't only about an altar long gone, but about the enduring spark within each of us. Our inner flame, our hope, our convictions, our faith, needs tending, especially when life makes it hard to keep burning.

The Chassidic masters, including the Baal Shem Tov, taught that this eternal flame is a living metaphor for the soul. Like a pilot light, it never fully goes out, even when life's demands threaten to dim it. But, as with any flame, it needs fuel, not grand gestures, but consistent care. One kind word, a moment of prayer, a small act of generosity; these are the quiet actions that keep our fire alive.

Picture a lamp burning in a drafty room. If left untended, the oil grows low, the wick too long, and the light weakens. But with a bit of care — trimming the wick, adding oil, shielding it from harsh winds — the flame grows steady, casting warmth outward. Our inner life is much the same. We need moments of honest self-reflection to clear away what clouds our vision, acts of kindness to fuel compassion, and steady habits of growth that replenish our spirit. The Talmud reminds us that even a single positive deed can tip the scales toward goodness in the world. We tend the world's light one small deed at a time.

Yonatan Hamburger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Contact him at y@tasteoftorah.org.



HAMBOURGER

It's easy to think that spiritual fire is only for the extraordinary. But the truth is, the altar's flame was commanded to burn continuously not because it was miraculous, but because its constancy was. The discipline, the devotion, these are what keep the fire alive, even when inspiration runs thin. Each small act, repeated over time, builds a flame that lasts.

This isn't just about personal effort. Our tradition calls us to be bearers of light for one another. The task isn't simply to keep our own flame burning, but to help tend the light in our families, our communities and our world. Every small act of kindness or courage adds oil to a collective lamp that can never be extinguished.

In Jewish thought, this process isn't a one-time achievement but a rhythm we return to again and again. Our spiritual flame is sustained through ongoing care, through honest self-reflection, acts of service, and moments of prayer that remind us of who we are and what we're called to become. The Psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

When we align ourselves with something greater — divine guidance, a sense of purpose — our steps are illuminated, even in darkness.

Even our struggles, the times when our light feels weak, hold a hidden spark, waiting to be uncovered and fanned into strength. The Baal Shem Tov taught that even a tiny spark, nurtured with joy and faith, can illuminate the darkest places. Our spiritual work is not to create light from nothing, but to tend the light already planted by the Creator within us. Even our failings, seen honestly, conceal a spark of growth waiting to be claimed.

So this week, ask yourself: What dims your light? What fuels it? Where can you add oil to your own flame or to someone else's? Maybe it's a quiet moment of gratitude, a gesture of forgiveness, or simply the discipline to show up with kindness, even when you don't feel inspired. These small choices, made consistently, are what keep the fire alive.

May we each become quiet bearers of that light, transforming daily life into sacred ground, and ensuring that the flame entrusted to us never goes out.

COLUMNIST ■ JAY BOOKMAN

What's real and what's not these days in Georgia politics

The lines that separate truth from falsehood, reality from fantasy, have become so smeared in recent years that democracy itself becomes difficult. Edgar Allan Poe, and later the Temptations, gave us the motto for our times: "Believe half of what you see, and none of what you hear."

But which half to believe? We're now witnessing the introduction of high-quality, AI-driven deep-fake videos into Georgia politics, which makes it even harder to tell.

For example, the other day I saw a clip that depicted U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene saying the following: "I would like to say, humbly, I'm sorry for taking part in the toxic politics. It's very bad for our country. It's something I've thought about a lot, especially since Charlie Kirk was assassinated. I'm committed, and I've been working on this a lot lately, to put down the knives in politics. I really just want to see people be kind to one another. As Americans, we have far more in common than we have differences, and we have to be able to respect each other in our disagreements."

Was that real, or was it an AI deep fake? I'm told that it's real, but I'm also told to believe none of what I hear, so...

One way to approach that question is to first ask what we mean by "real." If by real you mean did it actually happen, yes, it's real. Greene actually said those words. She's saying similar things quite a bit these days, to such an extent that she and Donald Trump are publicly exchanging charges that the other person has become a traitor.

But is it real in terms of a sudden change of heart, a transformation by Greene from vicious culture warrior to a champion of peace, love and understanding?

No. It is not. What we're seeing is Greene's reaction to being told the obvious by Trump and other top Republicans, that she has no future in politics beyond representing Georgia's 14th Congressional District. She didn't like to hear that, and what she now frames as enlightenment is better understood as just a different manifestation of the resentment and frustration that has fueled her entire political career.

It's important to remember that as far back as 2023, Greene was publicly musing about her future as U.S. senator, governor or even higher. "I have a lot of things to think about," she told a reporter back then. "Am I

going to be a part of President Trump's Cabinet if he wins? Is it possible that I'll be VP?"

Girl, no. Don't get me wrong, Greene does have some gifts as a politician, chief among them her instinct for the swings and sways of popular opinion within MAGA. That's at play here, too. It's

no accident that she has dared to divorce herself from Trump at a moment when he has become vulnerable. The economy is shaky, his immigration policy is unpopular, the poll numbers are bad and his bizarre mishandling of the Epstein case has made even close allies nervous. Greene seems to sense that if a door has been slammed in her face, fate may be opening a window.

And of course, we have an actual case of deep-fake video in Georgia, created through artificial intelligence, in the U.S. Senate race between incumbent Jon Ossoff and a handful of Republican challengers. U.S. Rep. Mike Collins, the front-runner in the race for the GOP nomination, has released a video in which a deep-fake Ossoff can be heard — and seen — telling voters that he just doesn't care about the impact of the recent government shutdown on farmers, that his only concern is his out-of-state donors.

It looks real. It sounds real. And given the regrettable gullibility of American voters, at least some of them are likely to take it as real. The Ossoff campaign condemned the video, pledging never to produce deep fakes of its own, while Collins dismisses any such concerns.

"It's just new technology, a new way to campaign, and you're going to see a lot more of that out there," he said.

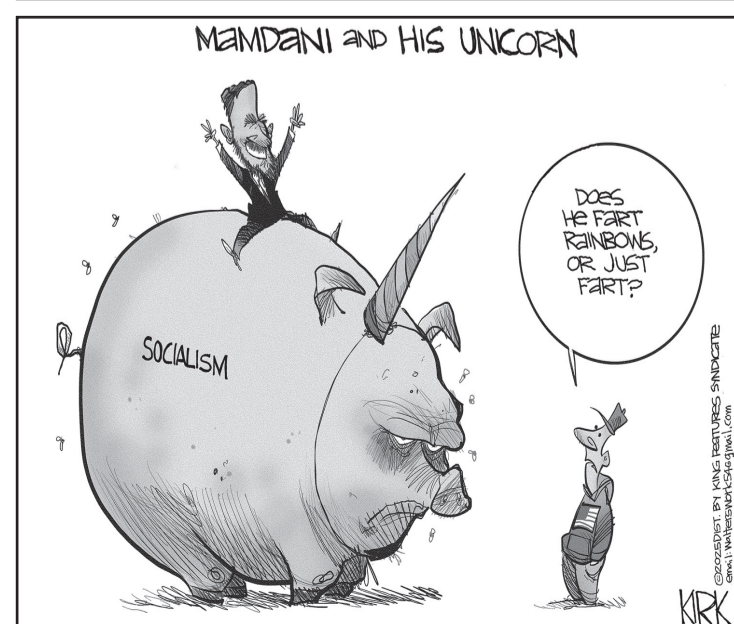
Politics has never been a particularly truthful endeavor, but even then, fake quotes and fake photos have always been considered unacceptable distortions. Like a lot of people these days, the Collins campaign appears to believe that technology voids all those rules. They are living an approach that Trump has driven home, and that MAGA has fully embraced: If the rules and the norms get in the way of victory, screw the rules and the norms, and never ever apologize for doing so. If it works, if there's no voter backlash to Collins' actions, then yes, we will see a lot more of it.

Down that road lies chaos, though, and I'm hopeful that the American patience for chaos is running pretty thin these days.

Jay Bookman covered Georgia and national politics for nearly 30 years for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, earning numerous national, regional and state journalism awards. He is also the author of "Caught in the Current," published by St. Martin's Press.



BOOKMAN



What to watch THURSDAY

December 4, 2025

All times Eastern. Start times can vary based on cable/satellite provider. Confirm times on your on-screen guide.

The Trouble With Angels

FMC, 8 p.m.
In this warmhearted, mischievous 1966 comedy directed by Ida Lupino, two spirited teens — Mary Clancy (Hayley Mills), a sharp-tongued rebel with a flair for trouble and pranks, and Rachel Devery (June Harding), her sweet-natured but equally curious partner in crime — enroll at an all-girls Catholic boarding school run by the dignified yet deeply compassionate Mother Superior (Rosalind Russell). Beneath the laughter and high jinks, the film gently unfolds a story about friendship, guidance and the unexpected places where a young woman might find purpose.

Celebrity Family Feud

ABC, 8 p.m.
In this new holiday edition of the game show, the cast of the new movie *The Housemaid* (including Amanda Seyfried and Sydney Sweeney) plays for charity against fan favorites from *The Real Housewives* reality TV franchise. Steve Harvey hosts.

Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage

CBS, 8 p.m.
Audrey and Mary's (Rachel Bay Jones and returning guest star Zoe Perry) feud rears its head when Georgie (Montana Jordan) needs their help with the tire store in the new episode "A Bus Bench and Faith Out the Wazoo."

Best Christmas Movies Ever!

The CW, 8 p.m.
Join over 50 stars, writers, athletes, directors and critics as they share the spirit of the season and discuss such beloved classics as *Home Alone*, *Elf*, *The Santa Clause*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, *It's a Wonderful Life* and, of course, *Die Hard* in this Christmas special feature.



Do You Fear What I Fear

LMN, 8 p.m. ■ Original Film
When Claire (Ciara Hanna) lands her dream job in the city, she thinks she's finally escaped her picture-perfect Christmas hometown. But her fresh start turns chilling when eerie holiday decorations begin appearing in her apartment — each with a message from someone who knows her too well. Also stars Josh Henderson.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas!

NBC, 8 p.m.
In this original 1966 animated TV special based on Dr. Seuss' classic story, Boris Karloff narrates and voices the titular Grinch, who schemes to steal every material vestige of Christmas from the Whos of Whoville. But the Grinch ultimately discovers he can't remove the spirit of Christmas from the Whos' hearts. The special will encore on Christmas Day.

CATCH A CLASSIC

TCM Spotlight: American Sports Heroes

TCM, beginning at 6 a.m.
Enjoy a day of movies featuring some of America's favorite heroes in the sporting world. There's an Olympic contender in **The Bob Mathias Story** (1954); a tale of football star Elroy Hirsch in **Crazylegs** (1953); baseball greats in **The Babe Ruth Story** (1948) and **The Jackie Robinson Story** (1950); collegiate (and professional) stars in 1940's **Knute Rockne All American** and

Frosty the Snowman

NBC, 8:30 p.m.
Jimmy Durante narrates this classic animated musical special, with Jackie Vernon providing the voice of the "jolly, happy soul" whose old silk hat full of magic brings him to life.

The Great Christmas Light Fight

ABC, 9 p.m. ■ Season Premiere
The holiday decorating competition series is back for a new season as families go all out to win the \$50,000 grand prize and coveted Light Fight trophy. Two episodes, "The Holiday Express" and "Santa's Making His List," air tonight.

Next Level Baker

FOX, 9 p.m. ■ New Series
Gordon Ramsay is joined by Carla Hall of Food Network's *Holiday Baking Championship* and Candace Nelson, cofounder of Sprinkles Cupcakes, to serve as judges and mentors in this three-week holiday edition of *Next Level Chef*. Twelve bakers compete in the three-level kitchen (transformed into a festive winter wonderland) and select their ingredients to capture the flavors of traditional sweets from around the world.

Elsbeth

CBS, 10 p.m.
Elsbeth (Carrie Preston) goes from the squad room to the locker room when a campus murder rocks the world of college basketball in the new episode "Basket Case."



1951's **Jim Thorpe — All American**; and two boxing features, 1956's **Somebody Up There Likes Me**, starring Paul Newman, and 1996's documentary **When We Were Kings** (pictured), chronicling George Foreman and Muhammad Ali's infamous "Rumble in the Jungle."

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



Minions: The Rise of Gru (2022, Children) Steve Carell, Pierre Coffin **E!, 6:30 p.m.**

Atomic Blonde (2017, Action) Charlize Theron, James McAvoy **HBO, 7 p.m.**

Pretty Thing (2025, Suspense) Alicia Silverstone, Karl Glusman **STARZ, 7:20 p.m.**

Anyone But You (2023, Romance-comedy) Sydney Sweeney, Glen Powell **FX, 8 p.m.**

Failure to Launch (2006, Romance-comedy) Matthew McConaughey, Sarah Jessica Parker **MGM, 8 p.m.**

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984, Adventure) Harrison Ford, Kate Capshaw **SHO, 8 p.m.**

Pixels (2015, Comedy) Adam Sandler, Kevin James **E!, 8:30 p.m.**

Dr. Seuss' The Grinch (2018, Children) Benedict Cumberbatch, Cameron Seely **Freeform, 9 p.m.**

My Cousin Vinny (1992, Comedy) Joe Pesci, Marisa Tomei **TNT, 9 p.m.**

The Holiday (2006, Romance-comedy) Cameron Diaz, Kate Winslet **AMC, 10 p.m.**

The More the Merrier (2025, Romance) Rachel Boston, Brendan Penny **Hallmark, 10 p.m.**

Beauty Shop (2005, Comedy) Queen Latifah, Alicia Silverstone **BET, 10:30 p.m.**

Creed III (2023, Drama) Michael B. Jordan, Tessa Thompson **Paramount, 10:50 p.m.**

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What to watch FRIDAY

December 5, 2025

All times Eastern. Start times can vary based on cable/satellite provider. Confirm times on your on-screen guide.

Twelve Dates 'Til Christmas

Hallmark Channel, 8 p.m. ■ New Series
In this series based on a book by Jenny Bayliss, talented Savile Row textile pattern designer Kate (Mae Whitman) lives in the quaint village of Blexford, England, next door to her divorced father. Unbeknownst to Kate, her best friend signs her up for the 12 Dates of Christmas — a holiday-themed matchmaking program filled with Yuletide dating experiences. As Kate wends her way through the 12 dates, she takes a circuitous route to romance while also making some important discoveries about herself. Also stars Jane Seymour and Mary McDonnell.

Penn & Teller: Fool Us

The CW, 8 p.m. ■ Season Finale
Marco Grandia, Sylvain Juzan, Alexander Merk and Keona are among the magicians attempting to outwit Penn & Teller in the Season 11 finale "Can a Bison Buffalo Penn & Teller?"

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

NBC, 8 p.m.
The beloved Rankin/Bass animated production from 1964 continues as the longest-running holiday special in television history. Narrated by Burl Ives, it follows Rudolph and his friends — Hermey the Elf, Yukon Cornelius and others — as they go down in history by saving Christmas.



Sheriff Country

CBS, 8 p.m.
While investigating a brutal assault at Edgewater High, Mickey (Morena Baccarin) uncovers a disturbing web of secrets, lies and abuse of power at the school in the new episode "Glory Days."

Spartacus: House of Ashur

Starz, 9 p.m. ■ New Series
The *Spartacus* franchise is reborn with this new 10-episode series that explores an alternate history in which cunning gladiator and former slave Ashur (Nick E. Tarabay) killed Spartacus. That act made Ashur a friend to the Roman Republic and owner of Spartacus' villa and gladiator school. As Ashur steers his unruly gladiators toward success, he becomes enmeshed in Roman politics all the way up to Julius Caesar (Jack-

son Gallagher). Graham McTavish, Jamaica Vaughan, Ivana Baquero, Claudia Black and Tenika Davis also star.

Fire Country

CBS, 9 p.m.
Sharon (Diane Farr) is blindsided by a visit from her estranged mother (guest star Christine Lahti), whose sudden reappearance stirs up painful family history in the new episode "Best Mom in the World."

Happy's Place

NBC, 9:15 p.m.
In the new episode "Testing Testing," Bobbie (Reba McEntire) notices how much Isabella (Belissa Escobedo) misses school, so she signs them both up for an online course unaware of how seriously Isabella would take it.

Boston Blue

CBS, 10 p.m.
Lena's (Sonequa Martin-Green) pursuit of justice forces Danny (Donnie Wahlberg) into an unexpected role reversal in the new episode "Baggage Claim."

A Christmas Cookbook

Lifetime, 10 p.m. ■ Original Film
Newly single at Christmas, Veronica Cearley (Ashley Newbrough) finds unexpected comfort in a festive club of food lovers who cook, give back and celebrate the season solo. Things change when sparks fly with the club's warmhearted founder (Franco Lo Presti).

CATCH A CLASSIC

Bell, Book and Candle

FMC, 8 p.m.
After James Stewart's and Kim Novak's thrilling roles in *Vertigo* in May 1958, audiences could watch the pair again that November in this much lighter fare. Novak stars as Gillian, a Manhattan witch who's bored with potions and spells until she sets her sights on her handsome upstairs neighbor, book publisher Shepherd Henderson (Stewart). Gillian, how-



ever, gets far more than she bargained for when she casts a love spell on him over the Christmas holidays.

MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE



The Santa Clause 2 (2002, Family) Tim Allen, Elizabeth Mitchell **Freeform, 7:20 p.m.**

Uncut Gems (2019, Suspense) Adam Sandler, LaKeith Stanfield **HBO, 7:40 p.m.**

Deadpool 2 (2018, Action) Ryan Reynolds, Josh Brolin **FX, 8 p.m.**

Do Exactly As I Say (2025, Suspense) Erin Karpluk, Philip Prajoux **LMN, 8 p.m.**

I Wanna Dance With Somebody (2022, Biography) Naomi Ackie, Stanley Tucci **TBS, 8 p.m.**

Jingle All the Way to Love (2024, Romance) Erin Agostino, Romaine Waite **Lifetime, 8 p.m.**

Titanic (1997, Historical drama) Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet **SHO, 8 p.m.**

Nutty Professor II: The Klumps (2000, Comedy) Eddie Murphy, Janet Jackson **BET, 9:30 p.m.**

A Grand Ole Opry Christmas (2025, Romance) Nikki Deloach, Sharon Lawrence **Hallmark, 10 p.m.**

The Flash (2023, Action) Ezra Miller, Sasha Calle **TNT, 10 p.m.**

Trolls World Tour (2020, Children) Anna Kendrick, Justin Timberlake **E!, 10:30 p.m.**

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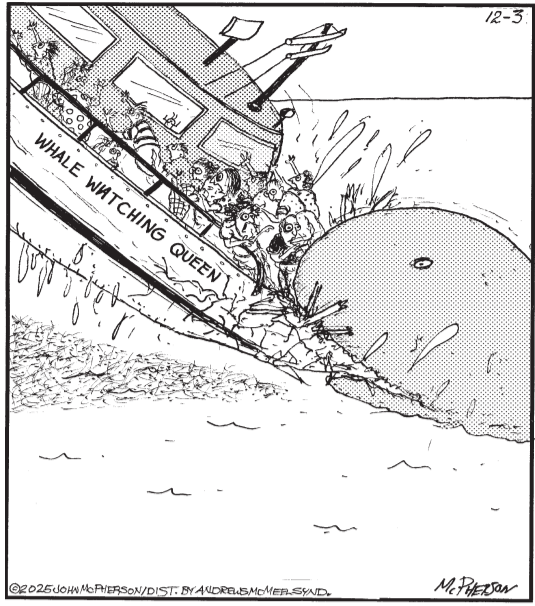
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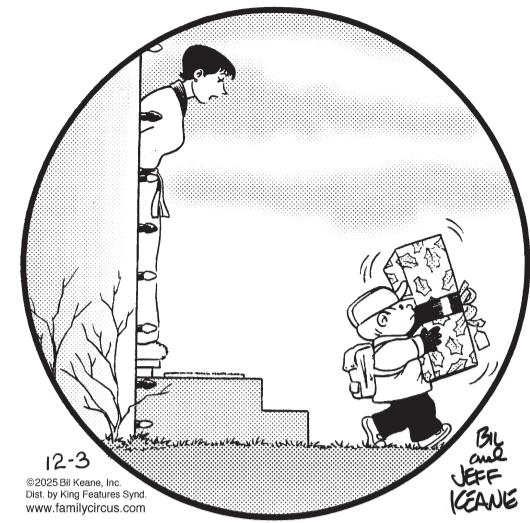
TV - What to watch

CLOSE TO HOME John McPherson



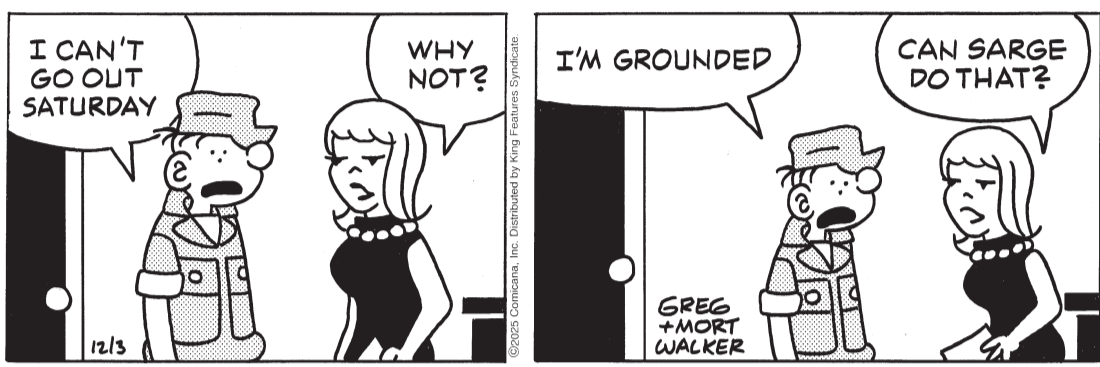
"Bill, give him a Dorito! I think he just wants your Doritos!"

THE FAMILY CIRCUS Bill Keane



"Don't forget to give it to Miss McElfresh."

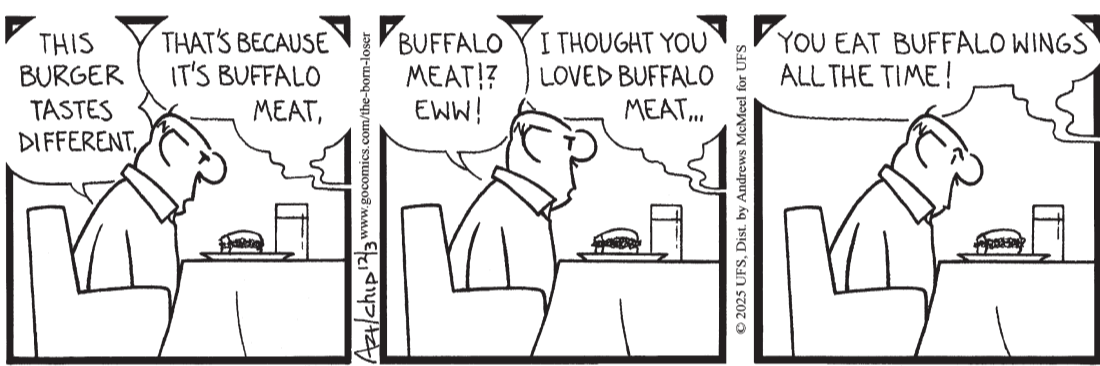
BEETLE BAILEY Mort & Greg Walker



BLONDIE Dean Young & John Marshall



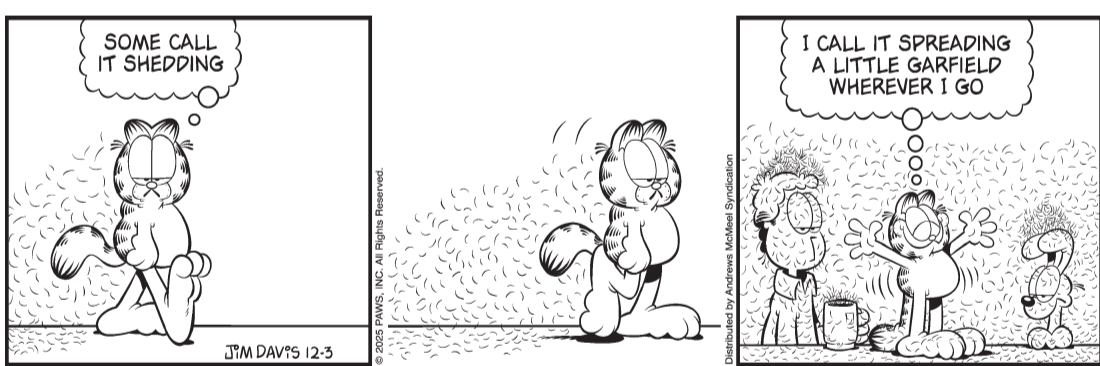
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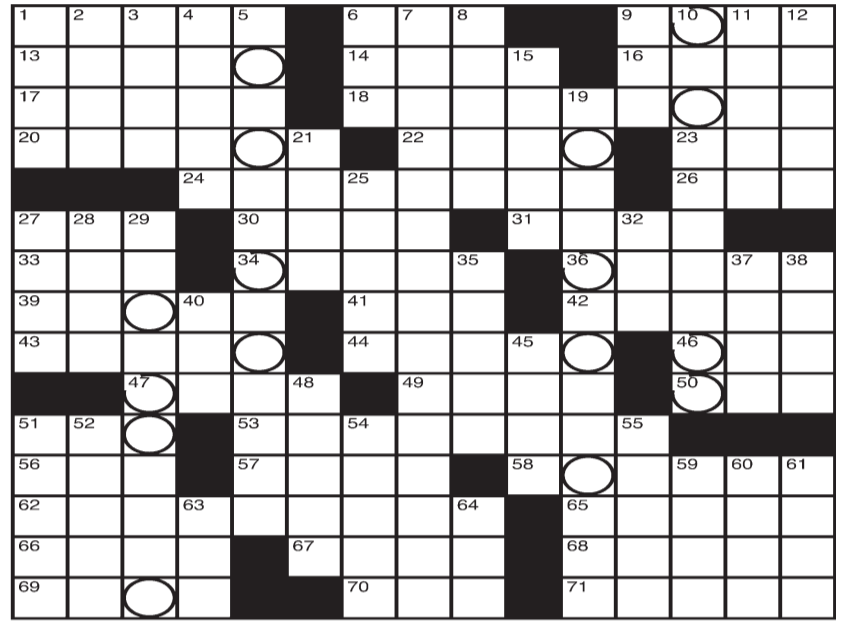
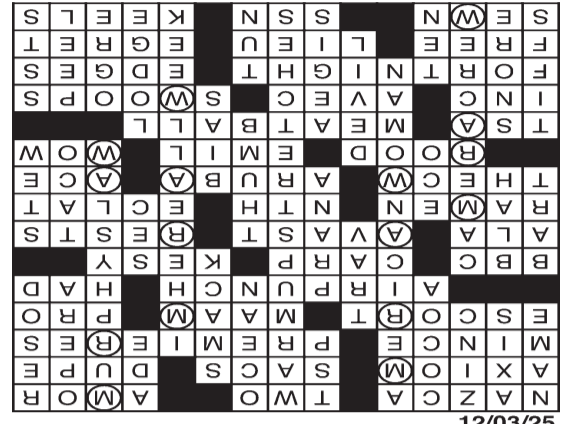


Los Angeles Times Daily Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Patti Varol

- ACROSS**
 1 ___ lines: mysterious geoglyphs in Peru
 6 Couple
 9 Love, in Spanish
 13 Geometry class statement
 14 Ink pouches
 16 Knockoff version
 17 Chop finely
 18 Some Hollywood red-carpet events
 20 Go along with
 22 Formal address
 23 Con's opposite
 24 Celebratory gesture after a success
 26 "You ___ one job!"
 27 TV network based in Central London
 30 Complain
 31 "Claws" actor Jack
 33 In the style of, on French menus
 34 Sailor's "Halt!"
 36 Puts one's feet up
 39 Instant noodles option
 41 Ultimate degree
 42 Razzle-dazzle
 43 "Sullivan's Crossing" channel
 44 Caribbean island near Venezuela
 46 Blackjack card
 47 Crucifix
 49 Track legend Zatopek
 50 ___ factor
 51 AIT scanner org.
 53 Spaghetti topper
 56 "Monsters, ..."
 57 With, on French menus
 58 Dives like a hawk
 62 Taylor Swift hit that aptly spent two weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100
 65 Easy-to-spot jigsaw pieces
 66 Release
 67 In ___ of
 68 Everglades wading bird
 69 Threaded together
 70 Form 1099 fig.
 71 Falls (over)
- DOWN**
 1 Topic of conversation for parents-to-be
 2 Turning point?
 3 Multivitamin element
 4 Drinkable chocolate
 5 The Guess Who song covered by Lenny Kravitz
 6 Cook's meas.
 7 Routine before a race, or what can be found in this puzzle's circled letters
 8 One of a geographic quintet
 9 Summery drink suffix
 10 Principle that anything that can go wrong will go wrong
 11 "Tosca," for one
 12 Fill in, as a bare spot in a yard
 15 Noisy kiss
 19 Comedian's self-deprecating assurance
 21 Chiefs star Kelce, to fans
- 25 Sanskrit for "life force"
 27 Oldest Simpson kid
 28 Ho-hum
 29 Unseen collective character on "The Office"
 32 Min. fraction
 35 Stick out like a sore ___
 37 Food truck fare
 38 Nurse a grade, say
- 40 Green prefix
 45 Slant
 48 New Jersey NHL player
 51 Petty quarrels
 52 "Zzz" sound
 54 Protection
 55 Ski resort building
 59 Fantasy heavy
 60 Banana skin
 61 Retired jets, briefly
 63 Royal flush card
 64 Winery vat

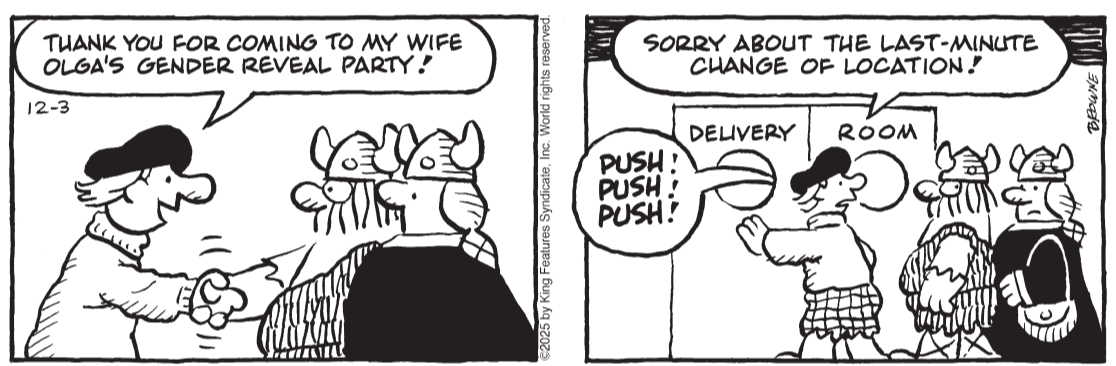
TODAY'S SOLUTION:



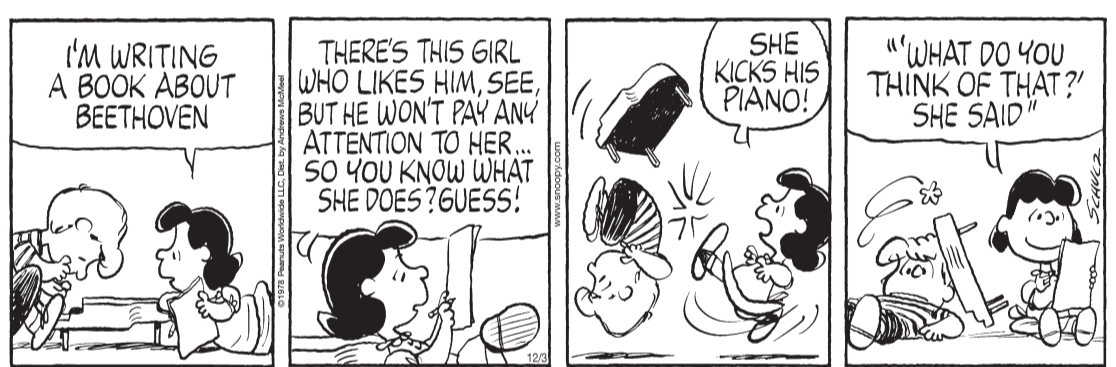
By John Harrington ©2025 Tribune Content Agency, LLC

12/03/25

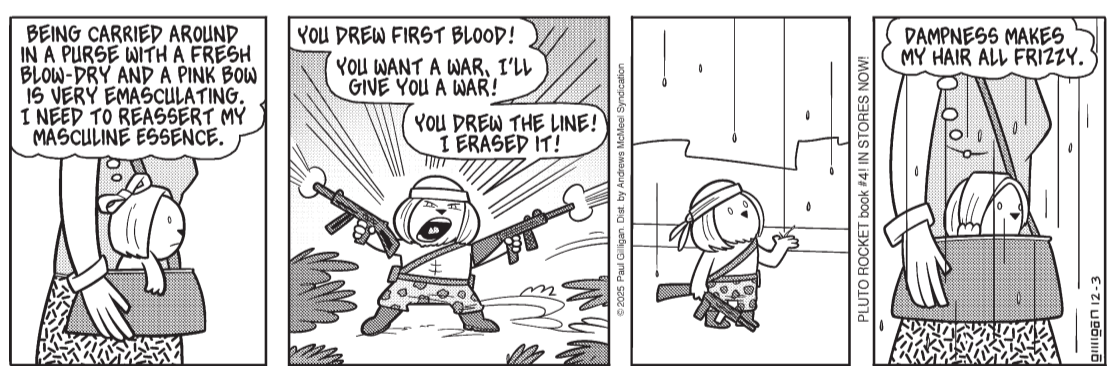
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE Chris Browne



PEANUTS Charles M. Schulz



POOCH CAFE Paul Gilligan



WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

FAMILY GROUP CHATS

Solution: 6 letters

V S C H E D U L E G A S S E M
 C A D N E G A N O I T A C O L
 D S C H O O L N O E D I V A S
 N E R A H S L I A M E I N E U
 I R E (K) T I I J O M E O K N P
 M U C L (N) I S N O S S O C O P
 E T I E D (I) O W S R J L S F O
 R C P S R R (L) N E I E T L A R
 E I E F S A O P S B S E T T T
 T P S I U I T W P N S T X H N
 H H V G S N L A A E I I E E E
 G O H I U L R L V M D S T R M
 U N C A A T P E Y A O A U E M
 A E R C Y N N U F N D M D O O
 D I R E C T I O N S E M A G C

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12/3

Agenda, Aunt, Avatar, Call, Comment, Cousins, Dad, Date, Daughter, Decisions, Directions, Email, Emoji, Father, Funny, Games, GIFs, Jokes, Laugh, Link, Location, Message, Mom, Movies, Name, Online, Party, Personal, Phone, Picture, Plan, Post, Recipes, Remind, Schedule, School, Share, Silly, Sister, Sons, Support, Text, Uncle, Vacation, Video, Website, Wordle

TODAY'S ANSWER: Clever

SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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

WHATZIT?

Find the familiar phrase, saying or name in this arrangement of letters.

A C H I E V E M E N T
 A C H I E V E M E N T
 A C H I E V E M E N T

SUDOKU INSTRUCTIONS:

Each row, column and set of 3-by-3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 through 9 without repetition.

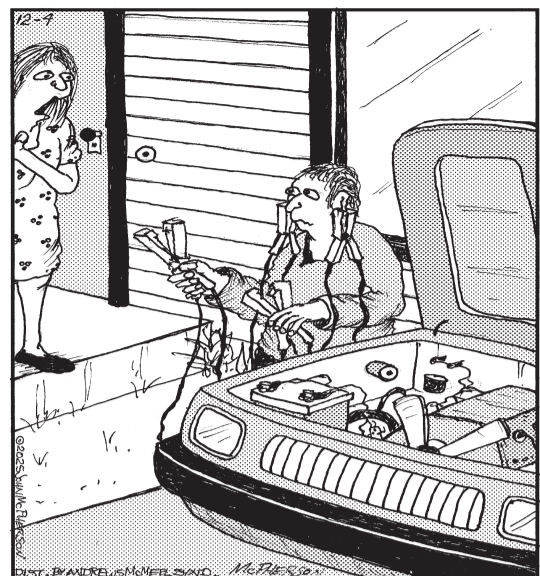
TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION:

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

TODAY'S WHATZIT SOLUTION:

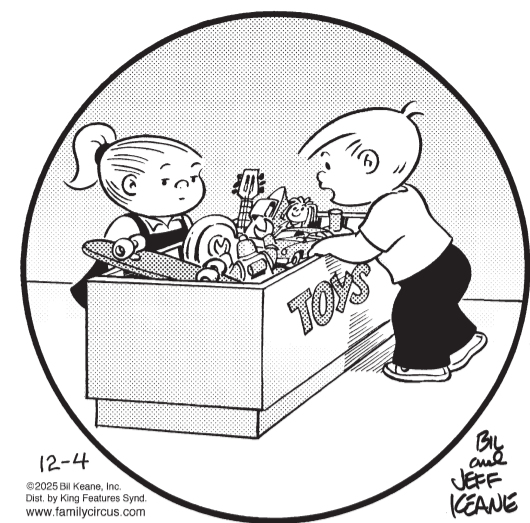
Outstanding achievements

CLOSE TO HOME John McPherson



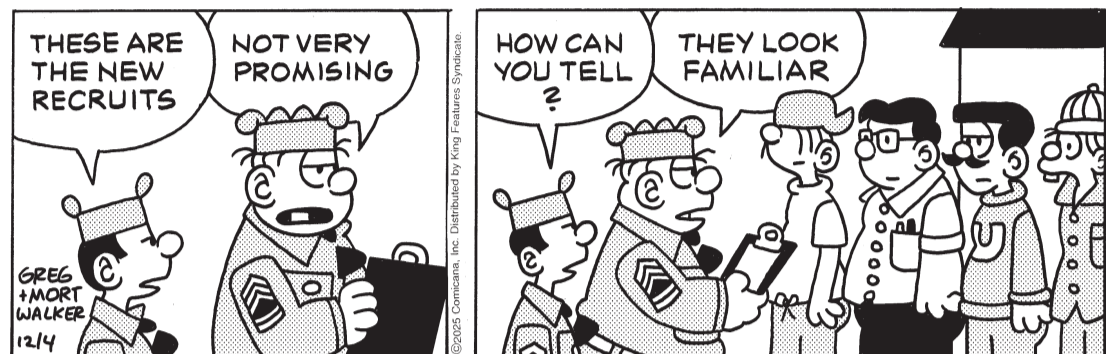
“Seriously?! THIS is the miracle cure you found online to treat your migraines?”

THE FAMILY CIRCUS Bill Keane

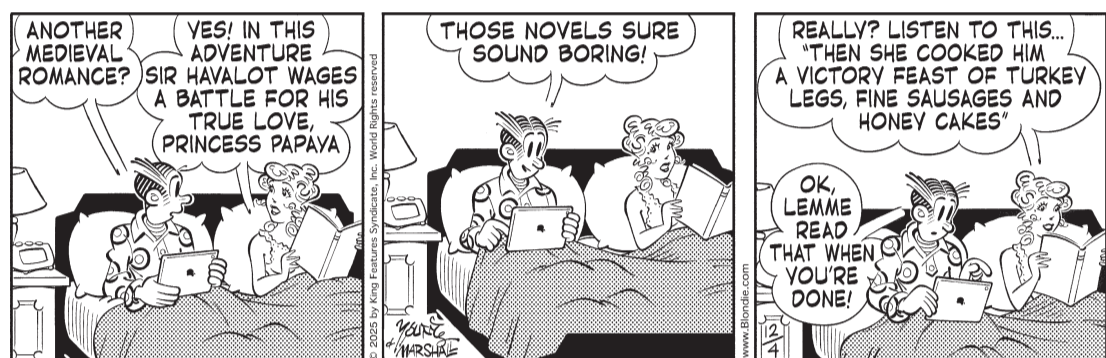


“Christmas is coming just in time. Most of this stuff is out of date.”

BEETLE BAILEY Mort & Greg Walker



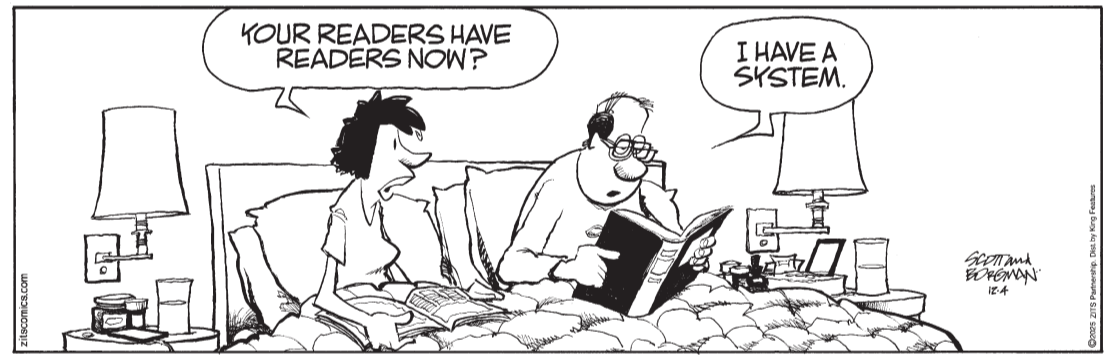
BLONDIE Dean Young & John Marshall



THE BORN LOSER Art & Chip Sansom



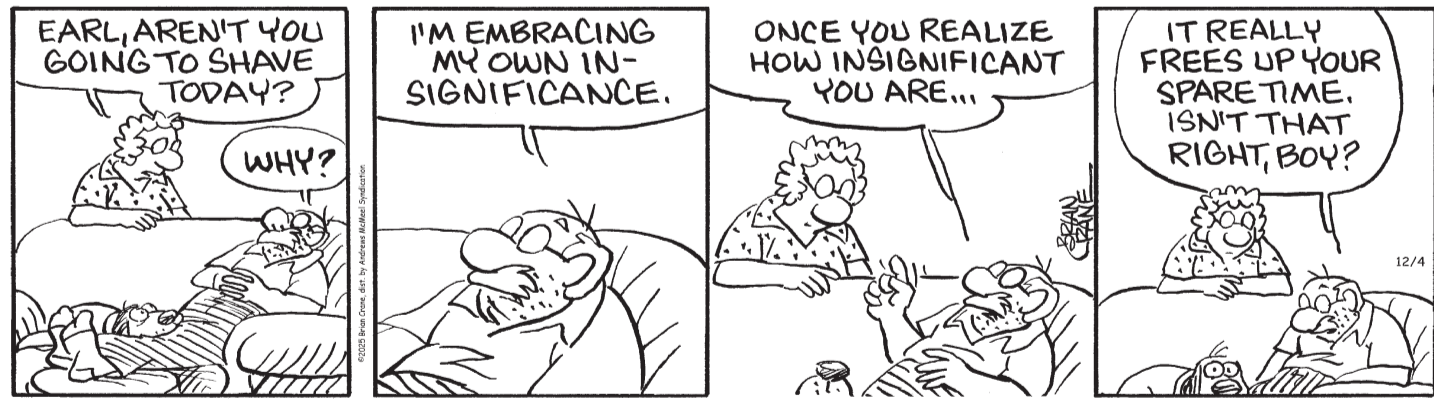
ZITS Jim Borgman & Jerry Scott



GARFIELD Jim Davis



PICKLES Brian Crane



SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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

WHATZIT?

Find the familiar phrase, saying or name in this arrangement of letters.



SUDOKU INSTRUCTIONS:

Each row, column and set of 3-by-3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 through 9 without repetition.

TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION:

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

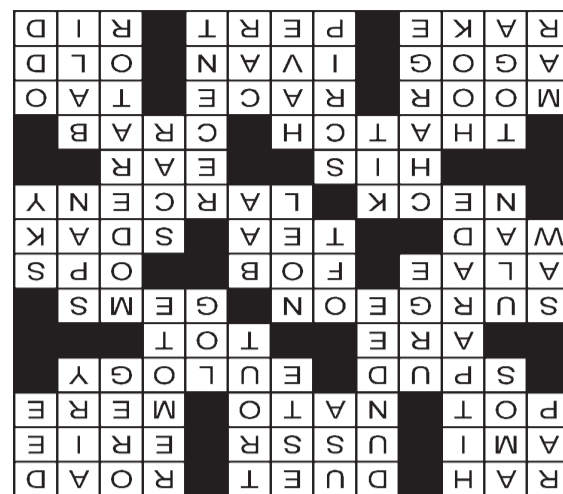
TODAY'S WHATZIT SOLUTION:

Bred in captivity

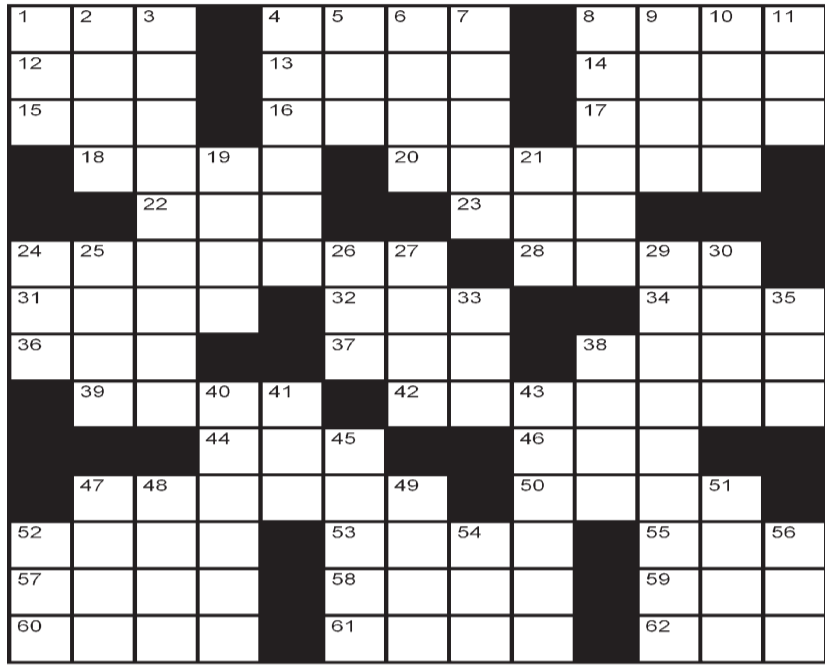
CROSSWORD

TODAY'S SOLUTION:

- ACROSS**
- 1 Fans' cheer
 - 4 Performing pair
 - 8 Highway
 - 12 French friend
 - 13 The Beatles' "Back in the —"
 - 14 Ohio lake
 - 15 Poker prize
 - 16 Alliance acronym
 - 17 No more than
 - 18 Tater
 - 20 Speech at a funeral
 - 22 Exist
 - 23 Kindergartner
 - 24 Sawbones
 - 28 Tiara adornments
 - 31 Wings
 - 32 Watch pocket
 - 34 Harvest goddess
- DOWN**
- 1 Sharp blow
 - 2 Singer
 - 3 Countdown of top tunes (2 wds.)
 - 4 "Crocodile —"
 - 5 Can. neighbor
 - 6 Punta del —
 - 7 Food fish



- 3 Bundle
 - 37 Light meal
 - 38 Mt. Rushmore's state
 - 39 Bottle part
 - 42 Theft
 - 44 That guy's
 - 46 Pinna
 - 47 Roofing material
 - 50 Seafood item
 - 52 Anchor
 - 53 Track event
 - 55 Chinese "way"
 - 57 Excited
 - 58 Infamous czar
 - 59 Ancient
 - 60 Yard tool
 - 61 Saucy
 - 62 Clear
- 8 Distant
 - 9 Portland's state (Abbr.)
 - 10 Ethereal
 - 11 Poor grade
 - 19 Press
 - 21 Like a bump on a —
 - 24 Witnessed
 - 25 — Bator
 - 26 Frequently
 - 27 Holiday song
 - 29 Debate referee
 - 30 Bridge
 - 33 Ovine cry
 - 35 Pie in the —
 - 38 Wound's result
 - 40 Accusation
 - 41 Set of parts
 - 43 New
 - 45 Temporary currency
 - 47 Garment for Caesar
 - 48 Smee's boss
 - 49 Own
 - 51 "— Ha'i"
 - 52 Make imperfect
 - 54 Hot rod
 - 56 Unusual



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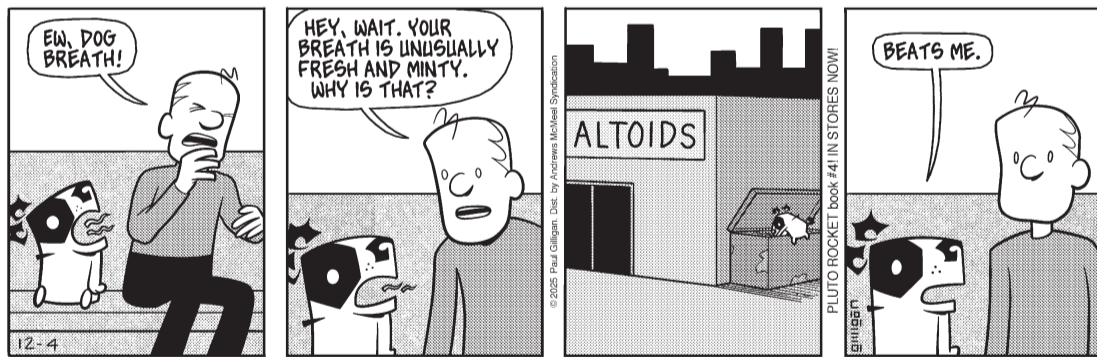
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE Chris Browne



PEANUTS Charles M. Schulz



POOCH CAFE Paul Gilligan



WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

NATIONAL COOKIE DAY Solution: 5 letters

E	D	A	M	E	M	O	H	⊙	L	I	D	A	Y	T
R	D	E	S	S	E	R	T	V	E	R	A	H	S	H
E	E	E	H	G	O	L	D	E	N	R	C	P	R	U
C	L	C	C	P	E	C	A	N	O	N	I	E	E	M
I	I	R	T	O	T	L	E	M	U	H	F	S	T	B
P	C	A	A	R	R	I	A	R	C	A	W	R	T	P
E	I	N	B	A	A	C	E	W	H	O	E	A	R	
N	O	B	I	G	Y	R	T	I	N	U	E	E	L	I
A	U	E	T	U	I	A	N	E	N	I	B	W	P	N
C	S	R	E	S	L	T	G	D	V	G	S	A	Y	T
Y	R	R	P	O	E	G	R	E	X	I	M	I	K	A
D	A	Y	C	R	S	P	I	C	E	S	T	A	E	
N	J	O	A	T	M	E	A	L	F	R	E	S	H	R
A	H	O	N	E	Y	M	E	R	I	N	G	U	E	T
C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S	B	M	U	R	C	F

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Aroma, Bake, Batch, Bite, Candy Cane, Chewy, Chocolate Chip, Christmas, Cranberry, Crispy, Crumbs, Crunchy, Decorate, Delicious, Dessert, Eggs, Festive, Fresh, Golden, Holiday, Homemade, Honey, Icing, Jars, Melt, Meringue, Mixer, Oatmeal, Oven, Pecan, Platter, Raisin, Recipe, Round, Share, Spices, Sugar, Thumbprint, Tray, Treat, Wafer, Winter

TODAY'S ANSWER: Sweet

Albany sorority to host Cluster IV meeting at Albany State

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

ALBANY – Throughout its history, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to uplifting those in need and fostering meaningful connections within the community. Members routinely participate in local events and collaborate with other organizations to maximize their positive influence and promote lasting change.

As continuous proactive leadership training is pivotal for the sorority, President Gail Griffin proudly commends the members of the Delta Eta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha for their unwavering dedication and selfless contributions, which have made a significant impact on Albany and its surrounding communities.

One of the chapter's ongoing and critical community services is addressing hunger among elementary students. The sorority provides week-end snack packages to tar-



Special Photo

The Delta Eta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. will host the sorority's Cluster IV meeting at Albany State University Thursday and Friday.

geted elementary schools in the southwest Georgia area, ensuring that students have access to nutritious food outside of regular school hours.

In addition to serving youths, the chapter hosts monthly luncheons for selected senior citizens. During these gatherings, members celebrate birthdays and review important health topics, focusing on challenges that affect the well-being of seniors in the community.

With a strong emphasis on service, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority actively addresses health issues impacting local communities. The chapter is dedicated to preparing young people for future success, offering a variety of programs through its youth groups.

The chapter's commitment to service is further exemplified by the "Honey-Do Circle," a group of members' spouses who volunteer alongside the sorority whenever help is

needed, demonstrating the sorority's collective spirit of giving back.

Striving for excellence in leadership and community engagement, the Delta Eta Omega Chapter focuses on implementing effective goals that reflect its mission, vision, and strategic plan.

Griffin and Cluster IV Chair Gwen Taylor recently announced that the chapter is preparing to host the Cluster IV meeting at Albany State



Special Photo

Throughout its history, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. has demonstrated a commitment to uplifting those in need and fostering meaningful connections within the community.

University on Thursday and Friday. This event is expected to welcome approximately 900 participants from south-

west Georgia and neighboring north Florida communities, further expanding the chapter's reach and impact.



File Photo

Thomas the Tank Engine will be in Cordele for six days in March.

SAM Shortline plans holiday rides, fun with Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

CORDELE – The historic SAM Shortline excursion train will offer holiday rides for four nights in December and already has scheduled kid-favorite Day Out With Thomas & Friends 2026 in March.

As we move into the heart of the 2025 holiday season, the SAM Shortline has special Cordele Holiday Train outings scheduled Dec. 12-13 and 19-20. The Dec. 12 and 19 dates will include rides scheduled at 5 p.m., 6:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. The Dec. 13 and 20 dates will include rides at 5, 6:30 and 8 p.m. as well, with an extra opportunity scheduled at 3:30 p.m. each day.

The Cordele Holiday Train events will include holiday music, hot chocolate and cookies. Riders will gather at the downtown Cordele Depot at 106 E. 9th Ave. in Cordele.

Tickets are \$27 for adults, \$17 for kids ages 2-12 and \$37 for deluxe tickets. Reservations can be made by calling (229) 276-0755 or at www.SAMShortline.com.

And for parents who like to plan ahead, dates have been set for what has become a tradition on the historic SAM Shortline: A week of visits from Thomas the Tank Engine and all his friends will be featured during the "Let's Rock, Let's Roll" tour.

Thomas and friends will visit Georgia Memorial State Park on March 14-15, 21-22, and 28-29.

Participants can hop on board for a real train ride with Thomas, strike a pose at photo ops and snag something cool at the exclusive gift shop.

Then, keep the beat going at the Music Corner, packed with lawn games, hands-on activities, and music-inspired fun that'll have the whole family dancing.

ABAC alumni return to inspire students seeking law degrees

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

TIFTON – Two successful Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College alumni, attorneys Alexis Holton and Hannah Woods, returned to campus recently to share their law school journeys and professional experiences with current students.

"It was a privilege to welcome attorneys Holton and Woods back to campus to share their experiences in law school and the legal profession," Joseph S. Devaney, a professor of political science and pre-law advisor at ABAC, said. "Their success reflects the quality of preparation our students receive, and their expertise provides invaluable insight and inspiration for those pursuing careers in law."

The event was co-sponsored by the Pre-Law Club and the Department of History and Political Science. Holton, a former Fillies soccer player, graduated from ABAC in 2018 with a degree in rural

studies. She went on to earn a juris doctor degree from Mercer University in 2021 with a focus on tax law and received her master of laws degree in Tax Law from the University of Miami School of Law in 2024. She is an associate attorney at The Mathis Law Group and holds both a Georgia and Florida bar license.

"My professors at ABAC prepared me for the rigors of law school, and I am confident the new classes and programs offered now will further strengthen students aspiring to become attorneys," Holton said. "I'm proud to be an ABAC graduate and grateful for the chance to pour into students the same way I was poured into during my time in Tifton."

Woods was active in ABAC's concert band and the College Republicans before graduating in 2017 with a Rural Studies: Politics and Modern Cultures degree. She earned a juris doctor degree from Mercer University in 2021 and currently serves as an



Alexis Holton



Hannah Woods

associate attorney at Speed, Seta, Martin, Trivett, Subley & Fickling LLC, where she specializes in workers' compensation claims.

"I was impressed by the students' questions and their eagerness to learn more about the legal field," Woods said. "It was exciting to hear about the new pre-law programs ABAC has developed with the help of the same outstanding professors who once taught me. I wish all the current and future pre-law students well, and I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to give back to the ABAC community that gave so much to me during

my time as a Stallion." ABAC's pre-law students are provided with a strong foundation in political science, history, communication, and ethics, preparing them for success in law school and beyond, college officials said. Through hands-on learning, mentorship, and networking opportunities with accomplished alumni like Holton and Woods, students gain the knowledge and confidence to pursue meaningful careers in the legal profession.

To learn more about ABAC's academic programs, contact publicrelations@abac.edu or visit www.abac.edu.

Georgia lottery surpasses \$30 billion in education funds

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

ATLANTA -- Gov. Brian Kemp announced recently that the Georgia Lottery Corporation has raised more than \$30 billion for education in the state of Georgia

since its inception in 1993.

These funds have enabled millions of Georgians to receive essential early learning through the Georgia Pre-K program and provided the opportunity for higher education through the HOPE Scholarship and Grant programs.

Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp were joined by University System of Georgia Chancellor Sonny Perdue, University of Georgia President Jere Morehead, and Georgia Institute of Technology President Angel Cabrera on Friday at the Georgia-Georgia Tech game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium for a ceremonial check presentation from GLC CEO Gretchen Corbin and Board Chairman John Irby to mark the milestone.

"On behalf of generations of Georgians, Marty and I are proud to congratulate the Georgia Lottery on this historic milestone and celebrate its impact on so many students, some of them twice as former Pre-K students and HOPE recipients," Kemp said. "Since 1993, Georgia students from Pre-K to college have been set up for success through the programs funded by the lottery, expanding access to high-quality education in our state. We look forward to seeing that legacy of impact continue for years to come." "Every dollar raised con-



Special Photo

State officials, including Gov. Brian Kemp, celebrate the state surpassing the \$30 billion mark in lottery funds earmarked for education at the Georgia-Georgia Tech football game.

tributes to Georgia's HOPE Scholarship and Pre-K Programs with a wide-reaching impact for students, families and communities," Corbin said. "Reaching the \$30 billion mark is a testament to the continued support from our players, retailers, vendor partners and stakeholders throughout the state."

"Thanks to Gov. Kemp, members of the Georgia General Assembly and our Board of Directors for their leadership in our mission to maximize revenues for education."

With the most recent quarterly transfer of \$414.8 million to the State Treasury's Lottery for Education account, the amount raised for education now totals \$30.2 billion. All Georgia Lottery profits go to pay for specific educational programs, including Georgia's HOPE Scholarship and Pre-K programs.

More than 2.25 million students have received a HOPE scholarship, and more than 2.2 million 4-year-olds have attended the statewide, voluntary prekindergarten program.

Congress votes

By Targeted News Service

WASHINGTON -- Here's a look at how Georgia's members of Congress voted over the previous week.

HOUSE VOTES:

SOCIALISM STATEMENT: The House has passed a bill (H. Con. Res. 58) sponsored by Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar, R-Fla., to denounce socialism in all its forms and oppose the implementation of socialist policies in the U.S. Salazar said, "It is time to denounce socialism in this country because, just like it happened to the Venezuelans, it could happen to the Americans." An opponent, Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., said: "This resolution is



Austin Scott

an embarrassing distraction from the complete and total failure of the Trump administration to deliver actual results for the American people." The vote, on Nov. 21, was 285 yeas to 98 nays, with 2 voting present.

YEAS: Loudermilk R-GA (11th), Bishop D-GA (2nd), Allen R-GA (12th), Scott, Aus-



Sanford Bishop

tin R-GA (8th), Clyde R-GA (9th), Greene R-GA (14th), McBeth D-GA (6th), Carter R-GA (1st), Jack R-GA (3rd), McCormick R-GA (7th), Collins R-GA (10th)

NAYS: Scott, David D-GA (13th), Johnson D-GA (4th), Williams D-GA (5th)

There were no key votes in the Senate this week.

Monroe flag football earns region title, home playoff

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — First-year programs aren't supposed to look like this. They're not supposed to win region titles, post double-digit victories or earn the right to host state playoff games. They're supposed to take their lumps, file away lessons and hope success arrives someday down the road.

Monroe didn't wait. On Thursday evening, the Lady Tornadoes will host Elbert County in the opening round of the GHSA state flag football playoffs, a remarkable

rise for a program that didn't exist until this fall. Monroe will play two playoff games Thursday, and if the Lady Tornadoes advance, a coin toss will determine whether they host again in round two.

Monroe's debut season has been anything but tentative. The Lady Tornadoes enter postseason play at 12-3 overall and, more impressively, 12-0 in region competition, making them region champions in year one. Crosstown rival Dougherty finished second, followed by Sumter County and Worth County — all four advancing to the playoffs —

but it is Monroe that earned the right to bring the bracket to Albany.

The GHSA state championship game will be played at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, the same home used for the boys' state championships. Monroe's path there begins on its own home field.

The sudden success flows through what players call the "Dynamic Duo" — head coach Tracy Drayton and longtime Monroe assistant Paul Jones. If you ask Drayton, though, there's no doubt who deserves

See **MONROE**, 10A



Special Photo: submitted

The Monroe flag football team, coached by Paul Jones and Tracy Drayton, went unbeaten in region play and will now host a first-round playoff session Thursday at Monroe. The girls are 12-3 overall in the first year of the school's program.

Albany State chases history against Newberry

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ALBANY — At this point, history keeps happening so fast at Albany State that it's almost hard to keep track. The Golden Rams have won 12 games for the first time in school history. They've reached the NCAA quarterfinals for only the third time. They've beaten Benedict three times in six weeks. They've become the last HBCU standing in the Division II playoffs.

And if you ask their head coach, he's not entirely sure his players realize any of it.

"This is a special time for our program," head coach Quinn Gray said this week. "I am overjoyed with what our young men have been able to accomplish this season. They are writing their own history of Albany State football. I'm not sure they understand the significance of what they have accomplished. And that's OK. That just allows them to keep playing football."

They'll keep playing on Saturday at 1 p.m., with Newberry College — winners of

nine straight — arriving at Albany State Coliseum for what amounts to a clash of surging powers. The Golden Rams are the SIAC Champions. The Wolves are the SAC (South Atlantic Conference) champions. (Albany State (12-1) enters on a 10-game winning streak, fresh off a 14-12 win over Benedict that was equal parts grit, patience and déjà vu. Newberry (11-1) arrives having just eliminated West Florida, a program that tends to stay in the playoffs until someone makes them leave.

If there's a more interesting matchup left on the Division II board, good luck finding it.

A Quarterback Showcase

Saturday's game features two of the nation's most productive quarterbacks, both operating at full tilt. Newberry's Reed Charpia comes in scorching hot — he threw for 416 yards and two touchdowns in Pensacola last week, and he's already piled up 3,386 yards and 28 TDs on the season. He will be the most aggres-

sive passer Albany State has seen all year.

Gray knows it. "We know what we are going against with this passing attack," Gray said. "We are working on breaking that down now. Our defensive staff does a tremendous job of putting together a defensive game plan, and we will be looking for ways to put him into situations where he has to think instead of just releasing the ball."

That last part is key. Newberry's offense hums when Charpia can make his first read and fire. Albany State's best chance is to disguise, delay, and maybe even frustrate him.

"Our staff does a good job of disguising things and making it so the quarterback does not know where to go with their first read," Gray said.

Across the field stands Albany State's own chess piece: Isaiah Knowles, who has thrown for 2,151 yards and 18 touchdowns despite missing three games. He's steadier than flashy, tougher than he looks, and has been at



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Albany State wide receiver Jamill Williams tries to pull away from a tackle during Saturday's win over Benedict College at the Albany State Coliseum.

his best since returning from injury. His connection with receiver Jamill Williams has become a problem for every defense unlucky enough to diagnose it too late.

Saturday could be a game where the quarterbacks take turns answering each other. Or it could be a game where the

defenses decide who blinks.

Playing for More Than Themselves

Albany State's run has carried a pride that stretches far beyond campus. The Rams aren't just playing for themselves — they're carrying the entire HBCU football com-

munity into December. "We take a lot of pride in being the only HBCU remaining," Gray said. "We understand that we are representing a huge number of people. We do not take that lightly." If the magnitude of that

See **HISTORY**, 10A

Worth County chases first finals berth since '91

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

SYLVESTER — The wait has been long for both programs, and the reward Friday night could not be bigger. When No. 1-ranked Worth County (13-0) hosts Pepperell (9-4) in the Class A Division I semifinals at Milt Miller Field, the winner will earn a trip to Atlanta and a berth in the state championship game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

A week after fans bundled up in mid-40s temperatures for the Rams' 17-7 quarterfinal win over Gordon Lee, another tough forecast awaits — this time with wet weather expected in Sylvester. But nothing about this season has suggested that conditions will rattle Worth County, now one win from its first title-game appearance since 1991.

That was the final semifinal run under legendary head coach Milt Miller, who led the Rams to six semifinal appearances in eight seasons from 1984 to 1991 and delivered the school's only football state championship in 1987. The field they play on bears his name.

A Revival in Lindale

Pepperell, meanwhile, is experiencing its own renaissance. Located in the Lindale community of Floyd County near Rome, the Dragons last reached the semifinals in 1998. Their only state title

came in 1990.

This year's return to prominence has been unexpected in timing but undeniable in its momentum. After starting 1-3, Pepperell has surged to win eight of its last nine games, including last week's stunning 34-0 shutout of Rabun County. The Dragons finished second in Region 7-A Division I behind Heard County, another of the semifinalists.

The turnaround is tied directly to second-year head coach Brandon Haywood, who inherited a 2-8 team last season and changed everything from the team's culture to its conditioning. His emphasis on accountability, trust, physicality, and what he calls a "refuse-to-lose" mentality has reshaped the program.

"We were 2-8 last year," Haywood said this week in the Georgia High School Football Daily. "To be in this position is a testament to the staff and the kids doing what was demanded. It's a surreal feeling to give this community what they deserve and have been longing for."

The Dragons' postseason run has been powered by a sturdy defense that forced three interceptions against Rabun County and a balanced offense led by quarterback Moss Tant, who recently threw for a career-high 202 yards and two touchdowns. Standouts Stephen Sapp, Hayden Wheat, Jace



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield

Worth County kicker Brodey Hancock kicked a field goal and two extra points Friday night in the Rams' 17-7 win over Gordon Lee. He could be a key piece as Worth County looks to make it to the state championship game.

Poe and Madoc Garcia have strengthened a roster now playing its best football at the right time.

Pepperell's confidence took shape in defeat — a Week 4 loss to Cedartown in which Haywood opted to go for a two-point conversion and the win in the game's final seconds. The play failed, but the mentality stuck. From that point forward, the Dragons have looked nothing like a team breaking in a second-year coach; they've looked like a team unwilling to do anything but attack.

Rams Focused on Cleaning Up Mistakes

Worth County has seen its share of adversity as well, most of it self-inflicted. Penalties and two turnovers stalled multiple drives last Friday before the Rams muscled past Gordon Lee in a physi-

cal, low-scoring game.

Head coach Jeff Hammond knows Pepperell arrives with belief and momentum — both valuable this time of year.

"They are a solid football team playing with a lot of confidence," Hammond said. "We will need to play great on both sides of the ball. We have to eliminate turnovers and limit penalties."

The Rams' defense, led by Chance Sims, Brady Weaver and Josh McGee, has been the backbone of their undefeated season, but their offense — paced by quarterback Lyndon Worthy and running backs Kaden Chester and Treshaun Jones — has supplied steady firepower. In a semifinal where the weather may dictate tempo, protecting the ball could be the determining factor.

See **WORTH**, 10A

Dawgs and Tide set for another Atlanta showdown

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

ATLANTA — Georgia knows the route to Mercedes-Benz Stadium almost by muscle memory now, and on Saturday the Bulldogs will make it again for their fifth straight SEC Championship appearance — a feat unmatched by any program since Florida's run in the 1990s. This time, as often seems to be the case, Alabama will be waiting.

The third-ranked Bulldogs (11-1) and No. 10 Crimson Tide (10-2) will kick off at 4 p.m. with a top-four playoff spot and a first-round bye on the line. The winner is effectively guaranteed both. The loser's fate depends on the logo. Georgia, with one loss and a full season inside the top four, is positioned to host a first-round game regardless. Alabama, with two losses already, can scarcely afford another.

This is a rematch of the teams' September meeting at Sanford Stadium, where Alabama handed Georgia its only loss of the season and ended the Bulldogs' 33-game home winning streak. It also fits a familiar historical pattern: Alabama is 4-0 against Georgia in SEC Championship matchups and still leads the all-time series 44-26-4.

Georgia earned its way here after Texas A&M's loss to Texas. Alabama reached the title game by surviving the Iron Bowl and edging out Ole Miss in the standings. The route has been different for both teams, but



Special Photo: Kameron Taylor

Georgia wide receiver Dillon Bell pauses for a prayer before Georgia's game against Georgia Tech Saturday. Georgia fans will be praying for a win over Alabama Saturday in the SEC Championship game.

the grind has been the same. Kirby Smart made sure his players understood that.

"You earned the opportunity to play in this game," Smart said this week. "This was not given, this was earned. This was not picked by a committee, it was on the field."

Smart also made clear that very little will change between now and kickoff. The teams are largely the same as they were in September, aside from the bumps and bruises that accumulate across three months in the SEC.

"What wins football games doesn't change," Smart said. "Good players win football games. Not turning the ball over wins football games. Being explosive wins football games."

Turnovers and explosive plays were exactly what doomed

See **SHOWDOWN**, 10A

From 9A

WORTH

A Long Road to a Shorter One

Pepperell faces a 250-mile trek from Lindale to Sylvester, but they also arrive with a community at their back. According to Haywood, supporters have delivered team meals daily, including on Thanksgiving, and donations have nearly covered a charter bus

From 9A

MONROE

the bulk of the praise.

"I've learned a lot since we started this, but I have to give all the credit to Coach Jones," Drayton said. "He is relentless. He is always working to help these girls get better. He is watching film, pulling stats, doing something to help these girls. He is the GOAT for a reason."

Jones has been part of Monroe athletics for 25 years, and Drayton says his drive has powered the team's rapid improvement.

"He is dedicated to whatever he puts his mind to," she said. "We are so blessed to have him at Monroe."

From Basics to Playoff Ready Monroe's rise didn't begin with advanced schemes or trick plays. It began with teaching — lots of it.

"We had to start with the basics," Drayton said. "Most of these girls have never played any type of football, so we had to teach them the game, how to play and even the very basics of how to catch the ball."

Slowly, the pieces came together. The players learned how to cover receivers in a non-contact format, how to

From 9A

HISTORY

moment seems large, Gray isn't letting his players feel it. That's for history books and reunions, he said.

"They will get it when they come back for games five or ten years from now, when they are being celebrated for this season," Gray said. "For our guys — they are so locked in and just looking forward to continuing to play for each other."

A City Ready. Again.

Albany State expects a packed house Saturday, even if the weather doesn't cooperate. Last week's crowd filled the home side despite the Thanksgiving weekend thinning the student section.

"This university belongs to this community," Gray said. "I don't think we would be able to host three playoff

to Friday's game.

Worth County's support will be loud enough to counter any travel fatigue. A packed house is expected, and the magnitude of the moment — 33 years since the program's last semifinal appearance — will not be lost on anyone in black and gold.

Two proud programs. One long-overdue opportunity. Forty-eight minutes to earn a ticket to Atlanta.

Friday night, the stakes speak for themselves.

run routes with precision, how to pull flags cleanly, how to communicate, how to read defensive alignments and execute offensive concepts.

"Once they figured it out, the girls locked in," Drayton said. "They have been watching film of other games, they come out here for practice on Saturdays and Sundays, and here they are the day before Thanksgiving out here working."

Today, Monroe's offense operates with rhythm behind freshman quarterback Harmony Moore, who has taken command of the huddle in her first season playing the sport. The roster features 17 players, several of whom have emerged as standouts, including Laila Seay, Jada McDuffie and Ny'keinbrell Lassiter.

Kickoff at 5:30 p.m. Thursday

Thursday's playoff action begins at 5:30 p.m. at Monroe High School, where the Lady Tornados will take their next step in an already unforgettable inaugural season — one that has moved faster, flown higher and surprised more people than anyone expected.

But inside the Monroe program, nobody is surprised anymore. Not with this group.

They didn't wait for success. They went out and earned it.

games without the support of the people in this city. The support and the love that we have gotten have just been amazing."

With students back and a semifinal berth on the line, Gray expects an even louder backdrop.

"We are looking for even greater numbers this Saturday," he said. "We were missing some of our cheering section last week with the students away."

A Quarterfinal With Weight

Albany State has never reached the semifinals. Newberry hasn't either. One team will walk off the field Saturday with its season over. The other will step closer to a destination both dreamed of in August.

The Golden Rams have already written new chapters.

Now they get a chance to write the biggest one yet.

From 9A

SHOWDOWN

Georgia in that first meeting. Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson threw for 280 yards and dictated the Bulldogs' coverages with his mobility. Smart said Simpson has only gotten better.

"He's extremely athletic. He can extend plays. He knows where to go with the ball," Smart said. "They're really good at what they do."

Georgia's counterpunch has been its improving offense, led by quarterback Gunner Stockton. The junior has grown steadily into the role, making quicker decisions and operating with more freedom at the line of scrimmage. He's completed over 70 percent of his passes and sparked three fourth-quarter comeback wins this season.

"He's gained experience," Smart said. "There are very few plays that are simple. We put a lot on the quarterback, and he's handled it well."

The Bulldogs still lean on their defense, which has allowed just 16.7 points per game and remains stingy against the run. Linebacker CJ Allen has emerged as one of the SEC's best defenders, and Georgia has held opponents scoreless after halftime five times.

Their identity hasn't changed much from the teams that won back-to-back national titles: physical at the line of scrimmage,

committed to balance, willing to win methodically.

"The things important to our identity — physical toughness, discipline — have not changed," Smart said.

Alabama, under second-year coach Kalen DeBoer, looks less like the bruising Tide of old and more like the fast-moving, space-creating offense DeBoer built at Washington. The Crimson Tide use shifts, motions, tempo and vertical shots to keep defenses guessing. They're 8-0 this season in one-score games, a testament to their own growth and late-game composure.

Both teams are, by Smart's admission, beat up. Both have evolved since September. But neither is likely to reinvent itself on Saturday.

"Good teams do what they do," Smart said. Georgia has been doing it here for a while now. The Bulldogs won twice in Mercedes-Benz Stadium last year, including the SEC Championship, and beat Georgia Tech here last week after the Jackets elected to host the rivalry game downtown. The building has become a familiar extension of Georgia's calendar.

It is familiar to Alabama, too — and that's what gives this matchup its edge. Both teams understand the stakes, the lights, and the pressure of championship Saturday. Both have lived through versions of this exact game.

Now they get to do it again, with the playoff bracket waiting to be shaped around them.

Albany Middle, Lee East split Monday doubleheader

By Joe Whitfield
Sports Editor

LEESBURG — Lee East Middle School and Albany Middle School split a pair of competitive games Monday afternoon, with each program leaving with a win after two tightly contested matchups on the hardwood.

Albany Middle claimed the boys game 30-32 thanks to late-game heroics from Jojo West, while the Lee East Lady Trojans earned a 37-28 victory in the girls contest behind a balanced scoring effort and strong defensive play.

In the boys' game, Lee East jumped out to a 6-2 lead before the Indians turned the momentum with a smothering full-court press. The pressure forced a flurry of turnovers and sparked a 17-0 run, propelling Albany Middle to a 19-6 advantage. The Trojans regrouped after a timeout, shifting into a half-court defensive look that slowed the pace and allowed them to chip away. By halftime, Lee East had closed the gap to 21-18.

The Trojans carried that surge into the third quarter. Juan Carr scored on a drive to give Lee East the lead, and just before the buzzer, Aiden Metz banked in a long three-pointer to push the margin to 29-23 heading into the fourth. But the Indians battled back. Laminsky Clinton came up with a key

steal and layup to tie the score at 29-29 midway through the final quarter.

Down 32-29 with just over a minute left, West took over. He drove into the lane for a basket to pull the Indians within one, then buried a deep three-pointer with 23 seconds remaining to secure the win for Albany Middle. West and Jamikel Tiller led the Indians with eight points each, and nine different players scored for Albany Middle. Carr paced Lee East with 10 points, while John Cody and Ethan Slaughter added six apiece.

The girls' game was tight early, with the teams tied 5-5 after one quarter, but Lee East began to separate in the second period. The Lady Trojans' defense sparked an 18-8 advantage before Albany Middle's Zy'deriaka Harris scored twice to trim the margin to 18-12 at halftime. The Lady Indians pulled within three early in the third, yet Lee East responded immediately, turning up the defensive pressure again and rebuilding the lead to 26-16. Moments later, Aubree Spencer swished a three-pointer to give the Lady Trojans a 33-20 cushion heading into the fourth quarter.

Albany Middle outscored Lee East 8-4 in the final period but couldn't get closer. Laila Patrick led the Lady Trojans with 13 points, Spencer scored nine, and Addison Savage added eight.



Albany Middle's Laminsky Clinton lays up two points during Monday's game at Lee East. Clinton and the Indians won 34-32.

Harris finished with 13 points to lead the Lady Indians, while Amiyah Perkins and Rishonda Butler scored six apiece.

Lee East and Albany Middle continue conference play later this week as both teams move deeper into the regular season.

Falcons' Morris calls special teams play 'awful'

Field Level Media

Of the Atlanta Falcons' many problems this season, special teams play has been chief among the main issues. Still, head coach Raheem Morris maintains there will be no changing of the guard with the unit.

Atlanta (4-8) is on its third kicker after releasing Younghoe Koo and John Parker Romo, while the team ranks last in average kickoff return yards (22.2) and third-worst in yards per punt return (5.9).

The lack of production was on display in the Falcons' 27-24 loss to the lowly New York Jets on Sunday. Former Pro Bowler Jamal Agnew muffed a punt and the Jets recovered at Atlanta's 2 in the second quarter, directly leading to their first touchdown. Zane Gonzalez missed a 50-yard field goal in the third quarter, before the Falcons' kickoff unit

allowed Isaiah Williams' 83-yard return, leading to New York's game-tying field goal in the fourth.

Despite the hapless play, Morris is sticking with special teams coordinator Marquice Williams, who's been in the position since 2021.

"No. Not at this time," Morris told reporters on Monday when asked if he'd make a change. "I've got a lot of confidence in what Marquice does. I've got a lot of confidence in our coaching techniques. I've got a lot of confidence in our guys to go and execute. We just have not done it."

"... We played awful (Sunday) on special teams. I don't know how to say it any other way. You can't give up the kickoff return, and you certainly can't muff it on the 2-yard line. We gave up 10 points on special teams."

Offensively, veteran Kirk Cousins has assumed the start-

ing quarterback role after Michael Penix Jr. suffered a season-ending partially torn ACL. Cousins passed for 234 yards and a touchdown on Sunday, despite throwing to a much different receiving core than Atlanta envisioned having entering the year.

Leading receiver Drake London has missed two straight weeks with a knee strain. Ray-Ray McCloud, who had a career year with the Falcons last season, was released in October after missing several games and then being sent home as a "healthy scratch."

The inexperience at the position was highlighted on Sunday, with Dylan Drummond, Devon Thompkins and David Sills V combining for 88 offensive snaps in the loss. The three have just 11 total career starts to their names. Thompkins was elevated in place of Casey Washington on Sunday, as the receiving

carousel continues.

"You've got to go out there and find out who's going to give you the best chance to win," Morris said of the receiving room. "We went with (Thompkins). He kind of outplayed (Washington) in practice so we put D.T. out there. Drummond has been able to play a little for us the last two weeks. It's always going to be performance-based and trying to see who can give you the best chance to win."

Ahead of Atlanta's home meeting with the Seattle Seahawks, Cousins may be getting a massive piece back in London.

"Drake is certainly getting better," Morris said. "He certainly has a chance to play. We'll have to see him move around a bit this week and we'll get more of a feel for that by Wednesday and Thursday."

Georgia Bulldogs: SEC Championship 2025

By Michael Lawson
Lawson.wm@gmail.com

When you walk that aisle, remember this! Woo! To be THE man, you gotta beat THE man. And one more thing; Diamonds are forever, and so is Ric Flair.

--- Ric Flair "The Nature Boy" circa 1985

Professional Wrestling in the 1980s is a special thing unto itself. A college friend wrote his Master's thesis at the University of

Chicago on the influences of Shakespeare in the language of pro wrestling, or some such. He wasn't wrong. Every week on TBS, at 6:05 pm on Saturday, or in the Omni in Atlanta on Sunday night, you'd have a real-life costume drama telling the tale of good vs evil that would unfold in real time for everyone to see. If you knew about The Four Horsemen or The Midnight Express or The Great Kabuki, you knew evil existed in the world and it would cheat every chance it got. Every now and then it would also be for all the gold. In those instances, when the World's Heavyweight Champion put the belt on the line, the fifteen pounds of 24 carat gold, it seemed like a matter of life and death. When the Georgia Bulldogs meet Alabama Saturday night in Atlanta, it will have that feel.

In the National Wrestling Alliance, or more specifically, Jim Crockett Promotions, Georgia Championship Wrestling, later known as WCW, became the most-watched syndicated television program in the nation. There were many rivalries and feuds that fueled that audience growth, but none were more tangible and felt than that of "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes and "The Nature Boy" Ric Flair. There was a class divide, as Rhodes was the "son of a plumber" and Flair had \$10,000 alligator shoes. There was the good and evil theme, as one stood up for the "every day American" and the other cheated relentlessly and unapologetically and would do anything to win. But the thing that most enflamed that most heated of enmities was that one guy always won and the other

guy always fell short.

Aside from the occasional few-day championship stints of the likes of Harley Race, Tommy "Wildfire" Rich, and Kerry Von Erich, Flair held the NWA World Heavyweight Championship belt from 1981 to 1986. Dude couldn't lose. If and when he did lose the strap, he got it back shortly thereafter. It was infuriating. It was depressing. It was maddening. Does that remind you of a certain football team?

When Georgia and Bama meet this Saturday, it will be the fourth SEC Championship war since 2018. Going back to the national championship overtime win in 2018, Bama is (7-1) against Kirby Smart and his Dawgs with the most recent win in Athens back in September.

As for this last game in September, it was a close game, with Bama winning (24-21). Bama threw the ball well and Georgia ran the ball well. But there are some striking numbers when we look back.

A couple of other things that stand out were turnovers and time of possession. The Dawgs lost the turnover battle (0-1) and time of possession (35 minutes to 24 minutes). If you want indicators as to the outcome, we can look to those metrics, as well. A reversal of one or both would serve UGA well.

Finally, quarterback Gunner Stockton had a terrible day in the pocket going (13 of 20) for 130 yards passing back in September. He's played better in the 2nd half of the season and Georgia will need him to play better than that Saturday.

Having written all those terrible numbers and stats from the game in September one

would surmise a blowout. But it wasn't. It was a three-point game that, if Coach Smart had elected to kick a field goal with a minute to go in the game, likely would have gone to another overtime.

But, he didn't. The game didn't. And Georgia lost another one to Alabama.

That's why this game Saturday feels this way. That's why this game Saturday in The Benz feels like Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair in the Omni.

Leading up to "The Great American Bash" in 1986, Ric Flair had held the World Championship belt for the better part of five straight years. And then the unthinkable happened. On July 26, 1986, in Greensboro, North Carolina, "The American Dream", the "son of a plumber" did what no one thought could be done. He beat Ric Flair in the middle of the squared circle, fair and square, 1-2-3, and won the most prestigious belt in all of professional sports. He did it for the people. And we rejoiced.

Saturday night in Atlanta, The Georgia Bulldogs have a chance to do something that we have rarely seen. The Georgia Bulldogs have a chance to take destiny by the hand, to ride the end of a lightning bolt, and reach for the stratosphere that is reserved for them.

One game. One night. One chance to turn it all around and burnish a new legacy. Saturday night in Atlanta, the Georgia Bulldogs can take the championship for the people. And Dawg Nation will rejoice as back-to-back SEC Champions.

But to be the man, you gotta beat the man. It's just that simple. They walk that aisle Saturday night in Atlanta.



Staff Photo: Lucille Lannigan

Albany and Dougherty County leaders gathered at LMC Ag Monday to celebrate the company's 25 years in business.

Albany, Dougherty leaders celebrate LMC Ag's 25 years in business

By Lucille Lannigan
lucille.lannigan@albanyherald.com

ALBANY – Albany-Dougherty County leaders gathered Monday to celebrate a manufacturing mainstay that has helped shape the region's agricultural economy for a quarter-century.

The Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission, in partnership with the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce and the Albany City Commission, held a special proclamation ceremony honoring LMC Ag for its 25th anniversary in business in Albany. Leaders congregated at the company's facility at 1715 S. Slappey Blvd., with Albany Mayor Bo Dorough presenting the formal proclamation.

LMC Ag operates a modern 46,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, employing a team of about 35 skilled technicians, welders, fabricators and engineers. It sells a wide range of farming equipment, including a newer tillage line added in 2025. Leandro Santos, the company's vice president, said it serves about 200 customers in the southeastern U.S. and will even be stretching its services up north.

The mayor's proclamation recognized LMC Ag's founding in 2000 and highlights its rise as a respected producer of sprayers, spreaders, planters, and applicators for farmers across the country. The proclamation noted that it's been "a quarter-century of innovation, craftsmanship and economic impact," and praised the company's evolution into a manufacturer whose products continue to support "the No. 1 industry in the state of Georgia."

Jana Dyke, president and CEO of the Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission, said LMC Ag's longevity and commitment to investing locally make this milestone especially meaningful.

"LMC Ag is a supporter of our community and agricultural community," she said. "The products they make here have such a significant impact on our region, and the 25-year mark is just an opportunity for us to celebrate the impact that they've had and

continue to have and the investments that they've made in the community."

Dyke also said the company's family ownership and steady innovation have helped it grow and maintain strong visibility in agricultural networks across Georgia.

Santos highlighted the company's expanding footprint. "We are proud for the 25 years in this community supporting farmers," he said.

CFO Tracy Davis said the anniversary underscores the durability of LMC Ag's products and its responsiveness to farmers' needs. The company has not only expanded its physical location in Albany, but it's also gone from selling only sprayers to introducing complete outdoor lines along with its new tillage equipment introduced in 2025.

"It really says a lot for the quality of our equipment," she said. "We purchased the property next door at 1711, and we just slowly increased our product offerings based on feedback that we've gotten from our customers and the farmers."

Dorough praised LMC Ag for reinvesting in its property and contributing to broader revitalization along South Slappey Boulevard. The business updated its front-facing facade in the last year, giving it a sleek and modern look.

"The city's delighted not only to celebrate LMC's success, but also we are thankful that LMC made this investment in improving the exterior of the building here on South Slappey," he said.

Dorough said this type of reinvestment into making a building look nice, helps encourage other nearby businesses to do the same.

"We are making slow progress here, and we are still celebrating Outdoor Network moving into the old McGregor building and the restoration of a full-service grocery store at the corner of Slappey," he said.

Dorough also emphasized the importance of agricultural technology, noting that "technology is moving so fast that farmers have to adapt to survive and succeed," and that companies like LMC Ag are "providing the equipment to help farmers in that pursuit."

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7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 coif (9)	_____
2 holder of elected office (10)	_____
3 not perfect (7)	_____
4 in an ungainly manner (9)	_____
5 high-strung (7)	_____
6 glib (8)	_____
7 English movie star Michael (5)	_____

DLY	UNI	YLE	HAI	ITI
RST	AWK	ANT	DE	NER
CIAN	VO	WAR	POL	FL
US	NE	IPP	CAI	AL

Tuesday's Answers: 1. PUZZLINGLY 2. BURGUNDY 3. CLOVERLEAF 4. QUARTERBACK 5. CANOEING 6. SWIFT 7. TROPHIES 12/3

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 ruling the roost (11)	_____
2 sirloin and strip (6)	_____
3 pull apart the threads (8)	_____
4 evidence of whittling (8)	_____
5 actress and singer Latifah (5)	_____
6 tendency to do nothing (7)	_____
7 Cagliari's island (8)	_____

RDI	CON	LL	QU	ANG
SHA	INE	UNT	SA	ING
IA	STE	EEN	TRO	GS
AKS	NIA	VIN	LE	RT

Wednesday's Answers: 1. HAIRSTYLE 2. POLITICIAN 3. UNIDEAL 4. AWKWARDLY 5. NERVOUS 6. FLIPPANT 7. CAINE 12/4

CROSSWORD

- | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACROSS | 3 Feature of many a slinky gown | 31 Dot on a map | 52 Blessing ender |
| 1 All-Star side | 4 "I lost interest" letters | 32 Call for | 53 Lip |
| 5 Maori dance | 5 Relish-topped ballpark bites | 33 Prefix with sexual | 55 Not pro |
| 9 Building blocks | 6 Theater chain with MacGuffins Bar and Lounge | 38 "Good one" | 57 Vegetable side |
| 13 Pepper | 7 Some Korean cars | 41 Vinyasa sequence | 58 Result of a good pitch |
| 14 Drop | 8 ___ the Hun | 42 Freshen | 59 Some football linemen |
| 15 Biggest city in the Cornhusker State | 9 Check no. | 44 Bureaucratic hassle | 60 Sketch |
| 16 Sad cry from a hot potato player? | 10 Thai currency | 47 Like kanelisnegle | 62 Like sashimi |
| 19 Custom car made from cast-off parts | 11 Hebrew symbol that translates to "living" | 48 ___ tube | 63 HS equivalency test |
| 20 Knightly honorifics | 12 Fill fully | 51 Floppy or hard medium | |
| 21 Formal accessory | 15 "You are just too much!" | | |
| 22 Actor Corddry | 17 Edible seaweed | | |
| 24 Rented | 18 Hands that handle the deck | | |
| 25 Sad cry from a Bananagrams player? | 23 Radiate pride | | |
| 33 Palm fruit | 25 Tricky pool shot | | |
| 34 Tool that can be made to sound like a theremin | 26 Maker of the 2600 and 5200 game consoles | | |
| 35 Thin | 27 Tiny homes tucked in branches | | |
| 36 Ballpark figs. | 28 Chirp | | |
| 37 Verbal shrug | 29 ___ wave | | |
| 39 Valley | 30 Broadway genre | | |
| 40 Grinding vessel | | | |
| 43 Orecchiette shape | | | |
| 45 Cyberchatted, for short | | | |
| 46 Sad cry from a Battleship player? | | | |
| 49 "SNL" alum Gasteyer | | | |
| 50 Bother | | | |
| 51 "KPop Demon Hunters" voice actor Daniel ___ Kim | | | |
| 54 "99 Luftballons" band | | | |
| 56 Trashes | | | |
| 61 Happy cry from a Scrabble player? | | | |
| 64 Game consoles produced between 1983 and 2001 | | | |
| 65 Escalator part | | | |
| 66 No-frills grocery chain | | | |
| 67 Had in mind? | | | |
| 68 Obscure | | | |
| 69 All-Star side | | | |

ANSWER TO TODAY'S PUZZLE:

L	S	E	M	E	D	I	H	M	E	N	K
I	D	T	V	P	E	L	S	S	V	G	E
K	N	V	T	B	V	N	I	M	V	D	W
S	E	S	O	L	V	N	E	N	E	V	D
				O	D	V	V	N	V		
L	V	O	B	E	H	L	D	E	S	S	I
D	E	M	I	R	V	E	R	V	T	R	O
E	T	V	D	S	H	E	M	S	V	R	E
N	I	D	R	O	M	V	T	E	G	I	N
				L	E	T	B	O	R		
E	I	L	S	H	I	S	D	O	R	L	V
L	V	H	L	H	C	L	V	C	L	N	D
V	H	V	W	O	L	I	W	O	L	T	I
S	C	B	A	V	K	A	V	H	T	S	V

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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CELEBRITY CIPHER
by Luis Campos
Celebrity Cipher cryptograms are created from quotations by famous people, past and present. Each letter in the cipher stands for another.

"FO ZPVR RFTP, XMPZP VZP OVYPN
XMVX NIZHZFNP IN SPGVINP XMPA
EWO'X NPPY XW NIFX XMP HPZNWO VX
VRR." — LZJANJXWT LFPNRWUNLF

Previous Solution: "I like this life. I like it when it's hard ... you don't get the sweet part without the bitter." — Holly Near

TODAY'S CLUE: *g s i n b e s*

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CELEBRITY CIPHER
by Luis Campos
Celebrity Cipher cryptograms are created from quotations by famous people, past and present. Each letter in the cipher stands for another.

"B W Y G M S R ' I Y G S K U A S G T Z G T K W F G ,
M S R H S L Y R O B F K W Z O Y I D S G Z A F K M
I Y Z A V R F H X . " — Z H K I Y D D / H S L Y T F Z G
X Z K W M G Z P F L M

Previous Solution: "In real life, there are names that surprise us because they don't seem to suit the person at all." — Krzysztof Kieslowski

TODAY'S CLUE: *r s i n b e d*

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Georgia Southwestern announces 2026 Outstanding Alumni Award recipients

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

AMERICUS — Georgia Southwestern State University has announced its outstanding alumni for 2026, recognized for their professional and personal achievements as well as their contributions to the university.

All recipients will be honored during the fourth annual Gold Force Gala on Jan. 31 at the new Griffin Bell Conference Center.

The 2026 alumni honorees include:

Aeolian Award recipient: Chris Hosey, '87

Canes Community Champions: Gay, '96, and Bill Sheppard

Leewynn Finklea Award recipient: Royce Hackett, '01, '04

Visionary Award recipient: Harry Kitchen, '75

Young Alumni of the Year: Jonathan Hobbs, '17

Family Legacy Award recipients: The Tondee Family

Hall of Fame inductee: Hayley (Tierce) Stripling, '19

"We are truly honored to celebrate these exceptional alumni," GSW Alumni Engagement Specialist Angela Smith said. "Their professional achievements and commitment to service continue to inspire. Each one is a shining example of the GSW spirit, and we look forward to honoring them at our upcoming gala with the

GSW family, friends and supporters."

Chris Hosey has dedicated 38 years to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, exemplifying unwavering work ethic and integrity. Appointed by Gov. Brian Kemp, he has served as GBI director for the past two years, leading Georgia's premier law enforcement investigative agency. Starting in 1987 as a narcotics agent, Hosey rose through every sworn supervisory rank in the Investigative Division. Today, he oversees more than 975 employees and manages a \$162.5 million budget.

The Aeolian Award is given to an alumnus/alumna who has distinguished him/herself in their profession as well as in their community. This award is chosen based on outstanding lifetime achievement as a distinguished alumni and community leader.

Gay and Bill Sheppard are proponents of activity and service in the Americus community, whether at their church, Boy Scout Troop 21, the Americus Kiwanis Club or attending a GSW sporting event. Bill is a retired partner from Chambliss, Sheppard, Roland and Associates LLP, and Gay is retired from the University of Georgia Extension Service.

Both natives of Southwest Georgia, the Sheppards are

graduates of Georgia Southern University, and Gay earned a Master of Science in Administration from GSW.

The Canes Community Champion Award recognizes dedicated servants of the community who show a fervent record of collaboration with and advocacy for GSW.

Royce Hackett has been a cornerstone of integrating the technological landscape at Georgia Southwestern since joining the Information and Instructional Technology team in 1997. He has played a pivotal role in advancing the university's digital infrastructure and was appointed chief information officer in April 2007, overseeing the integration of technology across both academic and administrative domains. Hackett is a Double Cane, holding bachelor and master of science degrees in Computer Science.

The Leewynn J. Finklea Award, named in honor of the University's first alumni director, recognizes individuals who have demonstrated exceptional service to campus life, the Alumni Association or the University.

Since founding The Foxfield Company in 1989 with his wife Charlotte, Harry Kitchen has demonstrated foresight in commercial real estate. Over 36 years, the Kitchenses have led developments totaling nearly \$460 million. His success is

rooted in his ability to collaborate with counties, municipalities and state and federal agencies. His daily engagement with government entities has earned him strong relationships with key leaders across Georgia and the real estate industry.

The Visionary Award is given to an alumnus/alumna who is an entrepreneur or innovator with the commitment to turn a vision into reality, the courage to assume risk, and the ability to make changes and take advantage of new opportunities.

Jonathan Hobbs has served Georgia Southwestern for more than 13 years, evolving from a student worker in IIT to assistant professor of Information Technology. As a faculty member recognized for his research work on cybersecurity awareness in higher education, he played a pivotal role in updating curriculum to meet ABET accreditation standards, which the Computer Science program achieved in 2024. Now serving as program director for the MSCS program, he has helped nearly triple its enrollment.

Young Alumni of the Year is given to an emerging leader making waves in his/her field as a positive role model and positive reflection on the university. The recipient must have attended GSW within the



Special Photo: GSW

Honored GSW alumni include, top row, from left, Chris Hosey, the Tondee family, Jonathan Hobbs; and, bottom row, from left, Harry Kitchen, Hayley Stripling, Gaye and Bill Sheppard, and Royce Hackett.

past 15 years.

Georgia Southwestern proudly celebrates the enduring legacy of The Tondee Family, whose deep roots in education and support for GSW have made a lasting impact across generations.

With numerous GSW graduates in the immediate and extended family, many of whom met their spouses while attending the university, the Tondees exemplify the spirit of Hurricane pride. Rusty Tondee, '84, and Traci (Lawhorn) Tondee, '95, both education majors, dedicated decades to their fields and made a positive impact on thousands of lives they touched. Their influence extends far beyond the classroom, having shaped the lives of countless students.

Family members who are GSW alumni include:

Rusty Tondee, '84 (education)
Traci (Lawhorn) Tondee, '95 (education)

Joshua E. Tondee, '11 (management)

Katie (Hendrickson) Tondee, '12 (marketing)

Tyler Tondee '14, (marketing)

Numerous members of the Tondees' extended family also attended GSW including Rusty's nephew Christopher Tondee, '14, and his wife Katherine (Dieckmann) Tondee, '14, and Rusty's niece Shelley (Tondee) Roderick, '10 and her husband Ric Roderick, '10.

The Family Legacy Award

recognizes one family with a tradition of attending GSW through multiple generations with continued interest in and support of the university.

Hayley Stripling left an indelible mark on GSW softball during her career from 2016–2019, establishing herself as one of the most decorated student-athletes in program history. A native of Warner Robins and a standout at Houston County High School, Stripling arrived at GSW as a third baseman before transitioning to shortstop, where she became the cornerstone of the Hurricanes' defense and a force at the plate. In addition to her numerous Peach Belt Conference accolades, she rewrote the GSW record books holding the program record for the longest NCAA-era hitting streak (19 games), is tied for the most single-game runs (4) and set single-game records for doubles (3), walks (4), and intentional walks (3). She also had five multi-homer games and holds the all-time NCAA-era records for RBIs (180), doubles (44), total bases (410), and career starts (213), while being tied for the most career home runs (54).

The Gold Force Gala will be held on Jan. 31 with a cocktail social and silent auction beginning at 6 p.m. and a plated dinner at 7 p.m. with awards and live music to follow. Purchase tickets online at gsw.edu/GoldForceGala.

Electric car drivers to get more charging stations in Georgia

Staff Reports

news@albanyherald.com

ATLANTA — Electric vehicle owners will eventually have another 26 places to recharge when motoring through Georgia after the state awarded \$24.4 million in federal funding to build chargers along highways and interstates.

"This investment will help further secure our status as a national leader in innovation and infrastructure for years to come," Gov. Brian Kemp said of the money from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

The act, which took effect in 2021 during the administration of President Biden, allocated \$5 billion nationwide over five years to foster a network of electric vehicle charging stations.

Georgia's share was \$135 million. The money is awarded in public-private partnerships and covers up to 80% of project costs.

Six winning bidders were announced last week by the Georgia Department of Transportation. This was the second round of contracts, with the first issued last year.

The chargers — four at each site — must be installed and maintained for around-the-clock operation for at least five years. They must be equipped with direct current fast-charging ports, which can fully recharge a vehicle battery in as few as 20 minutes.

See a map with locations at <https://arcg.is/zCya9>.



File Photo

Electric vehicle owners will eventually have another 26 places to recharge when motoring through Georgia after the state awarded \$24.4 million in federal funding to build chargers along highways and interstates.

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