

**Perspectives**
Wayne Fowler
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# The Albany HERALD

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**Ice hockey gold**
USA tops Canada
• Page 10A


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# Fate of downtown Albany brewery facility under discussion

**By Alan Mauldin**
*alan.mauldin@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY** – The question of what to do with Albany's downtown brewery is set for discussion next month for the Albany City Commission as the body seeks to find a tenant for the facility that closed more than a year ago.

The commission met with a potential occupant of the 120-122 Pine Ave. facility in the summer of 2025, but that was before the city gained control of the facility by purchasing the first option on the foreclosed property.

Now, with that control, the ball is in the commission's court for pumping new life into a location that had drawn night life to the area.

"We will hopefully be bringing the brewery back in the March (meeting) cycle," City Manager Terrell Jacobs told commissioners during a Feb. 17 meeting.

The city manager said that he had met with the former operator of the facility, Dr. Joe Harris "Tripp" Morgan III, at the behest of Mayor Bo Dorough.

Dorough sent commissioners a proposal from Morgan in which the former operator asked to rent the property for $1,000 per month with an option to purchase the property and brewing equipment at a cost of $1.2 million.

Jacobs has previously said that Morgan owes the city about $1 million in loan repayments and back taxes.

"I had a great conversation with him," the city manager said. "I may agree he (Morgan) may have been villainized over time. I think COVID was his Achilles heel.

"At the end of the day we've

See **BREWERY**, 2A




**File Photo**
The Pretoria Fields Brewery located on Pine Avenue closed in November 2024. Now that the city of Albany has taken control of the facility, the city is looking to secure a tenant to operate the facility.

# The Arc's 'beep ball' tournament opens eyes to a new way of playing baseball



**Staff Photo: Carlton Fletcher**
Tim Chappell and The Arc of Southwest Georgia Marketing and Fundraising Specialist Sherry Clark show off some of the equipment used in beep ball.

**By Carlton Fletcher**
*carlton.fletcher@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY** – If you're a baseball player and you decide you want to have a go at "beep ball," forget all those things that your coaches taught you.

"Keep your eye on the ball?"

In beep ball that's so wrong it's almost funny. No, in this game, it's more like "keep your ear open for the buzzing of the ball."

Beep ball is baseball for the blind, and right now seven teams – most of whom, by the way, are not blind – are getting ready for a beep ball tournament to raise funds for the Arc of Southwest Georgia, an Albany-based nonprofit dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live the life

See **BEEP BALL**, 2A

# Allen Vital selected for cabinet-level position at ASU

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*



**ALLEN P. VITAL**

**ALBANY** – Albany State University has appointed Allen P. Vital as vice president for Strategy and University Affairs, effective March 2.

Vital will serve as the university's chief integrator of strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, and executive operations, working in close partnership with President Robert Scott to advance ASU's long-term priorities through disciplined execution and coordinated leadership.

In this cabinet-level role, Vital will translate institutional strategy into data-driven action, ensuring alignment between the president's vision and day-to-day operations. His leadership will strengthen cross-functional collaboration across senior leadership while enhancing the university's agility, accountability, and performance in an increasingly complex higher education environment, university officials said.

Vital will provide executive oversight for presidential operations, university events, the

See **VITAL**, 2A

# Phoebe cardiothoracic surgery again earns national recognition

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY** -- Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital has again earned the highest rating from the Society of Thoracic Surgeons for its patient care and outcomes in isolated coronary artery bypass grafting procedures. The three-star rating denotes the highest category of quality and places Phoebe among the elite for heart bypass surgery in the US and Canada.

"There are about 1,000 programs across the country that participate in the STS databank," Phoebe Cardiothoracic Surgeon Dr. Anthony Hoots said. "They're able to compare one program to another program to another program. Three stars means, the procedures that we do, we do really well."

The rating covers a rolling three-year period, and Phoebe has maintained its top rating for five consecutive rating periods over the last three years.

"The Society of Thoracic Surgeons leads the effort in quality improvement by maintaining one of the most penetrant clinical databases in cardiothoracic surgery that employs high-fidelity risk models to provide risk-adjusted outcomes to individual participants," Dr. Ram Kumar Subramanyan, chair of the STS Council on Quality and Research, said. "STS thanks participants for voluntarily submitting data to the databases, demonstrating their commitment to improving health care delivery.

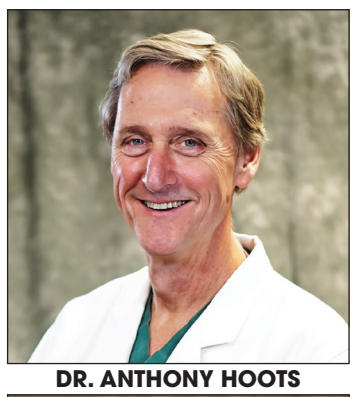
"Voluntary public reporting of outcomes by individual participants provides patients and their families with meaningful information to help them make informed decisions about health care."

The STS star rating system is one of the most sophisticated and highly regarded overall measures of quality in health care, rating the benchmarked outcomes of cardiothoracic surgery programs across the U.S. and Canada. The star rating is calculated using a combination of quality measures for specific procedures performed by an STS Adult Cardiac Surgery Database participant.

In addition to performing open-heart surgeries, Hoots and Dr. Scott Johnson also assist Phoebe Structural Heart Cardiologist Dr. Mark Cohen with transaortic valve replacements. Phoebe's Heart & Vascular team has now performed 250 of these minimally invasive procedures. Hoots said he was shocked when he first heard about the procedure that replaces the heart's main valve without open-heart surgery, but now it has become a routine procedure at advanced cardiac centers.

"If I do surgical aortic valve replacement, it's old-fashioned open-heart surgery, and you're in the hospital for

See **PHOEBE**, 2A



**DR. ANTHONY HOOTS**



**DR. SCOTT JOHNSON**


Periodical — Mail Label


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Phoebe

# Judge rules against Burt Jones' unlimited fundraising

**By Mark Niesse**
*Capitol Beat News Service*

**ATLANTA** — Lt. Gov. Burt Jones can no longer raise millions of dollars for his gubernatorial campaign through a special fundraising committee, a setback in his race for the Republican nomination.

A federal judge ruled in favor of a Republican rival Rick Jackson, whose lawsuit alleged that Jones gained an unfair advantage through WBJ Leadership Committee, which state law exempts from the same campaign contribution rules that apply to other candidates.

The decision is a blow against Jones' use of a Georgia fundraising tool called leadership committees that allow a handful of powerful politicians, including the lieutenant governor, to avoid campaign finance limits under a state law passed in 2021.

Unlike Jones' leadership committee, which can raise unlimited funds, all other candidates for statewide offices this year are permitted to raise only $8,400 per donor for primary and general elections and $4,800 per donor for runoffs.

Jackson, a billionaire health care executive whose surprise candidacy shook up the race this month, praised U.S. District Judge Thomas Thrash's order granting a temporary restraining order.

"A federal court today made clear that Burt Jones doesn't get his own rulebook," Dave Abrams, a spokesman for Jackson's campaign, said.

The court ruling granted Jackson's request to stop WBJ Leadership Committee from raising or spending money for Jones' campaign and to cancel campaign ads purchased since Feb. 10.

WBJ Leadership Committee, which is led by Jones, had a $15.9 million balance as of Jan. 31, according to a campaign finance filing. Jones' regular campaign committee had $3.3 million on hand.

Leadership committees have been stopped by courts in the past. Democrat Stacey Abrams and Republican David Perdue won similar lawsuits against Gov. Brian Kemp in 2022.

"We're not surprised Rick Jackson is taking a page from Stacey Abrams' playbook, using lawfare to target President Trump's endorsed candidate for governor," Kayla Lott, a spokeswoman for Jones' campaign, said. "Georgia Republicans have already rejected that strategy — and they'll reject it again."

Attorney General Chris Carr, another Republican contender for governor, had previously lost a court challenge to Georgia's leadership committees based on different legal arguments.

Jackson, Carr and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger aren't allowed to have leadership committees in their campaigns for governor. Under Georgia's leadership committee law, they're only permitted for the governor, lieutenant governor, Democratic and Republican nominees for those offices, and legislative leaders of each party.

From 1A

## VITAL

project management office, institutional research and effectiveness, Title III and federal program administration, and accreditation and continuous improvement initiatives. By aligning these mission-critical areas, he will foster a culture of evidence-based decision-making, institutional accountability, and continuous improvement.

Now in his third decade of higher education leadership, Vital has served in six presidential cabinets across historically black colleges and universities. Most recently, he served as senior advisor to the president and prior, he served as chief of staff for the Southern University System in Baton Rouge, La. His prior leadership roles include vice president for marketing communications and advancement, and executive director of the foundation at Alabama A&M University; associate vice president for external resources at Xavier University of Louisiana; foundation manager at Alcorn State University; and assistant to the vice president for administration at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Throughout his career, Vital has provided strategic guidance to university presidents across areas including institutional advancement, crisis management and preparedness, strategic planning, program evaluation, personnel assessment, and Title III management. His leadership philosophy centers on student success, stewardship of place, and developing alternative revenue sources to strengthen institutional sustainability.

A product of HBCUs, Vital earned his bachelor of arts degree in History from Southern University and A&M College, a master of education degree in Community Counseling from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and a doctor of philosophy degree in Urban Higher Education from Jackson State University. He has also completed executive leadership programs at Hampton University and Harvard University and is a former U.S. Department of State Muskie Mentor Fellow and American Council on Education Fellow.

With this appointment, Albany State reinforces its commitment to strategic discipline, institutional effectiveness, and mission-driven leadership, ASU officials said.

From 1A

## PHOEBE

four or five days, and it takes you six weeks to recover," he said. "With TAVR, patients usually go home the next day and are back to normal activity within a week."

Phoebe's cardiothoracic surgery program has also expanded its capabilities in thoracic surgery which includes procedures involving the chest organs – excluding the heart – such as lungs, esophagus, trachea and chest wall. For the last several years, the majority of lung resections – a surgical procedure to remove part or all of a diseased lung, primarily used to treat cancer, infections or severe damage – have been completed using minimally invasive video-assisted surgery. More recently, Phoebe has begun using robot-assisted surgery for these procedures, further enhancing precision.

Hoots said Phoebe also continues to strengthen its vascular surgery program.

"Dr. (Dan) Martin has built an outstanding vascular program, and he's been nationally recognized for that," Hoots said. "He and Dr. (Dominic) Suma offer very high-quality vascular services.

"Dr. Johnson and I take care of cardiac issues, so our patients and their families can have a high level of confidence that they will be well taken care of at Phoebe."

The STS is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,800 cardiothoracic surgeons, researchers and allied health professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lung and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The Society's mission is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research and advocacy.


**NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR PACKAGE OF BEER, AND WINE LICENSE**

Notice is hereby given that **AUSA LLC**, doing business as **AUSA**, located at **1003 N, Slappey Blvd, Ste. A Albany, Georgia 31701**, has made application for an **Alcoholic Beverage License for the off-premises package sell of beer, and wine**, for consideration and approval by the appropriate governing authority. This notice shall be published in the *Albany Herald* on **February 24, 26 and 28.**


From 1A

## BREWERY

got to figure out how we (utilize) that space."

One issue to be addressed is the condition of the equipment, which can degrade over time due to lack of use, he said.

"We want to at least get the equipment up to functional," Jacobs said. "If you don't run that stuff, over time it's going to be problematic."

Morgan's proposal also calls for the city to make any repairs to the equipment in the brewery exceeding $5,000 that might be necessary due to the year-plus non-use of the more than $1 million in brewing equipment, and for the city to be responsible for repairs and maintenance of mechanical systems in the brewery.

Socius Beer Collective, which has breweries in Lawrenceville, Stone Mountain and Winder in Georgia, and in Hendersonville, N.C., made a proposal in 2025.

The company asked the city to invest additional funding into the facility, including a line of credit of $250,000 to cover operating expenses during the first years of operation if income does not cover expenses.

Socius' proposal to the city also includes a food stall area, potential apartments or hotel rooms upstairs, a larger tasting/dining room and an enhanced beer garden.

City officials have described the brewery as an "anchor location" that brings people to the inner-city area, a key element to efforts to revitalize downtown.

Glenn Singfield, whose family owns and operates The Flint restaurant, also has been included in discussions with the city and said that he sympathizes with Morgan, although he said he is not working as Morgan's "savior" in the matter.

"He changed the perception that Albany is not safe, fun, a place to come, to raise your family," Singfield said. Operating a downtown business "is not easy. It requires a lot of personal sacrifice for me and my family to stay downtown."

The city can boost downtown's viability by making the area more attractive, keeping it clean and ensuring that it is a safe place, the restaurateur said. Having the brewery will bring more people, and potential customers for The Flint.

"We've got to put something down there that's going to draw people downtown," Singfield said. "Community-based, community-owned, that's what I'd like to see."

Now that the city has control of the property, it is in a stronger position in the process, Dorough said.

Advertising for proposals while the city had no control over the future of the facility may have been a mistake, he said, as other interested companies may have been unwilling to make a pitch for a building whose fate was up in the air.

"If somebody looked into it and saw the property was in foreclosure ... why would they lease the facility from the city?" Dorough said. "It was premature to solicit bids."

The City Commission could choose from the two proposals on the table or request new proposals before making a decision.

"Either way, I'm going to go in and strongly encourage that we need the brewery downtown," Dorough said. "The public wants something like this downtown. He (Morgan) put his money in downtown."



**Special Photo: Sherry Clark**
Tim Chappell is a Beep Baseball professional, a four-time all-star, a two-time MVP both in Georgia and the National Beep Bball Association World Series, and a two-time gold medal winner.

From 1A

## BEEP BALL

they choose.

The tournament, which as of Sunday included teams from The Arc – which has a ringer, by the way – Monroe High School, Lee County High School, Lee County SWAT, Ameris Bank, Deerfield-Windsor School and Worth County High School, will be played March 14 at Sherwood Christian School's Legacy Park.

The Arc's "ringer" is Tim Chappell, who helped form the organization's first beep ball team back in 2010. He's since gone on to play on teams in Columbus and in St. Louis. That latter team, the Gateway Archers, has afforded Chappell the opportunity to travel extensively, with trips this year planned in Las Vegas, Puerto Rico, Cincinnati, Indiana and Oklahoma.

Oh, and it probably should be mentioned that Chappell's been diagnosed as legally blind since birth. (And, I'll confess here that we were about a half-hour into our conversation with Arc Marketing and Fundraising Specialist Sherry Clark before I realized that Tim actually is blind.)

"I was born with 'stargardt's' (disease), a rare disorder," Chappell said. "It just happened that my mom and dad both carried the gene for the disorder. I'm the only one who got it; none of my other siblings did."

But Chappell had a couple of things going for him as he began to navigate a virtually sightless world.

"My mom and grandmother would not allow me to wallow in self-pity," he said. "I walk through life now with no problems at all."

Chappell ran into a kindred spirit of sorts in Clark, who has been in her position at The Arc for the past seven months.

"I've worked in nonprofits and banking in my career, and I really wasn't planning on getting back into nonprofits," she said. "But this opportunity came up, I prayed about it, and less than 24 hours later I had the job.

"There just isn't a bad day here. There's such joy being with our people."

Clark was the perfect person to work with Chappell on bringing beep ball back to southwest Georgia.

"I loved softball growing up," she said. "When my dad got in from work, if there was any light outside, we went out and played.

"It was a strange sensation at first learning about beep ball, and in fact, the first time I was out in the field, Tim hit a ball that hit me in the chest. I wasn't ready for that ... but I did actually catch the ball."

Perhaps a primer in beep ball is in order. Created in 1973 by Ralph Rock, the game is played with a special ball – slightly larger and a bit softer than a regulation softball – that, when activated, emits a beeping sound, and the pitcher alerts the batter when a pitch is thrown.

"You alert the batter when the pitch is coming by calling out 'Set, ready, ball' before the pitch," said Chappell, who is a Beep Baseball professional, four-time all-star, two-time MVP both in Georgia and the National Beep Ball Association World Series, and a two-time gold medal winner.

"For someone who's blind – or someone wearing the sport's official blindfold (which allows not a hint of anything other than darkness) – that's tricky at first. But it's really all about timing. When a batter hits the ball, an official activates one of two buzzing bases, and if the batter reaches the base, it's a point for his team. If a fielder – all of whom also are 'blind' -- gets the ball before the runner reaches base, it's an out."

Chappell and The Arc host clinics to explain the intricacies of the game. They plan to host one more clinic, on Feb. 28, so any group that would like to enter a team in the March 14 tournament must plan to attend the clinic.

The seven (or possibly more) teams that enter the single-elimination tournament will be part of a full day at Legacy Park.

"We'll have vendors, merchandise, food and the beep ball games, which are so much fun to watch," Clark said. "All the money we raise will go toward programs for The Arc. We'd like to invite the community – not just the teams – to come out and watch the tournament. It's really a lot of fun; it's actually been life-altering for me, if I can use that overused term.

"Every dollar raised through this tournament will go directly toward creating more group homes for individuals with disabilities in our community and helping meet the growing needs of those we serve."








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# Daily Horoscopes

**ARIES (March 21-April 19):** Today isn't much above zero in the Universal sky but tomorrow is underwater. Do it today or wait until Thursday or after. Someone could spit out something awkward without much warning.

**TAURUS (April 20-May 20):** Power dynamics could impact a money situation off and on, today might seem like the day for a sudden move but wisdom isn't lining up with the urgency. Take time to formulate a more considered approach.

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20):** Impulsivity could be your vibe again today, flow as freely as you can but sidestep any choice that could interfere with long-term objectives. Something could begin to form up in terms of a career plan.

**CANCER (June 21-July 22):** While you might feel that you have enough context for a snap decision, that might not be so. Stars are sinking Universally too, better to wait until Thursday or after for any proposed actions.

**LEO (July 23-Aug. 22):** The wrong energies could drive decisions now, don't make the move until both strategies and motives clarify and align. A friend could dish out something completely unexpected. Keep faith in yourself.

**VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22):** A new rule or expectation in the workplace could seem to come out of the blue — notice if this is emerging after or due to some kind of struggle for power. It's important to remember people will continue to be themselves.

**LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22):** Today is a better day than tomorrow to do anything that won't wait, but Thursday is an even stronger day and Friday is better yet. Strategize your timing to sweeten your odds in everything you do.

**SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21):** Your confidence in your ability to make things happen should be returning as more could begin to form up — a truly artistic solution could appear soon. Don't let a super-temporary money panic lead to a poor long-term choice.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21):** Stick with your plan even if others aren't impressed, they may not have either the context or the big picture. A partner or someone close could come across as heavy-handed for a few hours.

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19):** You could be close to finding an answer you've been looking for, keep your eyes open. Even in a setting of helping others, ego can arise — a delayed response could serve better than a snap reaction.

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18):** A creative clap back could seem great until you stop to realize it creates literally no good, no growth, no connection. You deserve to feel good about yourself, upholding your personal standards supports inner esteem.

**PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20):** Someone near could seem controlling, later becoming more impulsive, possibly out of anxiety in both cases. Don't hesitate to show up as yourself, your full authenticity there to be seen.

**IF TODAY IS YOUR BIRTHDAY:** You'll likely prefer logic to emotion during the remainder of the month. Your communication skills should be heightened, along with your artistic taste. Later March brings challenges to endure or overcome but they won't last long. Keep the faith in yourself and your goals even if you can't see the resolution up ahead. Don't give up or make crisis-based decisions during this brief period. April should throw windows open to renewed sunshine. Helpful opportunities for businesses or side gigs, good times for family, sweet new beginnings, and ample cash flow. Something could briefly jam up the works near April's end, but the obstacle should clear very quickly. If you've wanted fame, a viral moment, a serious career, clarity, or protection, they're all lining up waiting to land.

## TODAY IN HISTORY

**1868:** Andrew Johnson becomes the first U.S. President to be impeached by the House of Representatives, following his attempt to fire Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.

**1920:** The Nazi Party is founded in Germany, with Adolf Hitler outlining its basic points in Munich.

**1942:** The "Battle of Los Angeles" occurs, where anti-aircraft guns and spotlights comb the sky in response to a rumored (but false) Japanese attack.

**1946:** Juan Perón is elected president of Argentina.

**1989:** United Airlines Flight 811 experiences an explosive decompression over the Pacific Ocean, killing nine passengers.

**2010:** Sachin Tendulkar becomes the first cricket player to score a double-century in a One Day International match.

**2022:** Russia launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, marking the start of a prolonged conflict.

## CALENDAR OF OBSERVANCES

- **National Tortilla Chip Day**
- **National Trading Card Day**
- **World Spay Day**
- **World Bartender Day**
- **Flag Day (Mexico)**

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## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*"I've always found paranoia to be a perfectly defensible position.*

**Pat Conroy,**
*writer (1945-2016)*

## 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.

## Weather Forecast

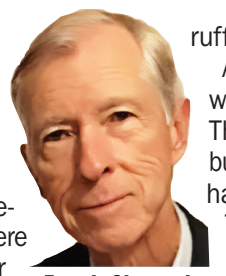
| Today | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday | Monday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 54° | 66° | 70° | 68° | 65° | 72° | 75° |
| 29° | 39° | 59° | 56° | 50° | 50° | 50° |

***Daily Bridge Club***

# Cut-rate play

**By Frank Stewart**
*Tribune Content Agency*

Heard about the store manager who used a product-label gun to fight off an attempted robbery? The robber got away, but he has a price on his head.


Frank Stewart

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | NORTH<br>♠ 9 5 4<br>♡ J 9 3<br>◇ Q 6 5 4 2<br>♣ 8 7 | |
| WEST<br>♠ 8 7 3 2<br>♡ 8 7 5<br>◇ A 3<br>♣ K J 9 6 | | EAST<br>♠ K Q J 10 6<br>♡ 4<br>◇ K J 9 8<br>♣ 10 4 2 |
| | SOUTH<br>♠ A<br>♡ A K Q 10 6 2<br>◇ 10 7<br>♣ A Q 5 3 | |

| West | North | East | South |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pass | Pass | 1 ♠ | Dbl |
| 2 ♠ | Pass | Pass | 4 ♡ |
| All Pass | | | |

**Opening lead – ◇ A**

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Both the play and defense in today's deal were criminal. Against four hearts, West led the ace and a low diamond. East won with the jack and returned the eight. Declarer ruffed with the ace of trumps, and West threw a spade.

South next led a trump to dummy's nine and tried a club to his queen, but West produced the king and led a trump. Then South could ruff only one club in dummy and lost a second club. Down one.

**CLUB RUFFS**

I would label the play and defense as cut-rate. After ruffing the third diamond, South must lead the ace and a low club. He can win a trump return, ruff a club, come to his ace of spades and ruff his last club.

A trump opening lead would beat the contract. That lead wasn't obvious, but either West or East could have found a trump shift. Then when West gets in, he leads a second trump, and South fails.

**DAILY QUESTION**

**You hold:** S K Q J 10 6 H 4 D K J 9 8 C 10 4 2. Your partner deals and passes, and the next player passes. East in today's deal opened one spade with this hand. Do you agree with that call?

**ANSWER:** It is common to open light hands in third seat to direct a lead, but such openings should still deliver some defensive tricks. Many players would open two spades, weak, despite having only five spades. Partner is a passed hand, so no harm is likely.

West dealer
Neither side vulnerable

***Advice Columnist***

# Aunt is disinvited from wedding ceremony, but still expected at reception

**By Eric Thomas**
*Tribune Content Agency*


Eric Thomas

**Dear Eric:** My sister's daughter is getting married in the fall. My 20-year-old daughter has not been invited because it is "adults only." This upsets both of us because she is close to her cousin.

When I asked if she could attend the wedding ceremony, I was told that I wasn't even invited to the wedding ceremony because it was immediate family only, although the seven bridesmaids will outnumber the wedding guests.

Now I will be driving several hours to attend the reception. It feels like a long trip just for dinner. Just sending a gift will upset my sister. I am not sure how to handle this situation.

*– Reception Only*

**Dear Reception:** I do empathize with your disappointment about not being invited to the ceremony, but on a technical level the difference between a reception-only experience and one that includes the ceremony is probably only an hour, maybe an hour and a half. Yes, that's a crucial hour, emotionally, legally, religiously, if they're so inclined. But it might help you to think of the reception not as lesser, but just different.

Now, this doesn't mean you're required to go. If you find that thinking of the reception in a different way doesn't assuage your hurt feelings, that's fine. You can decide to send a gift and spare yourself the drive. But there probably isn't a way to skip the event and not offend your sister.

I often get questions about weddings; people have different requests and requirements of their guests. It's good for marrying couples to assume everyone's best intentions and best efforts and be understanding of their guests. It's also great for guests to say to themselves, this is their special day, and I want to be there to help make it special.

Tell your sister you want to make it special, but you're feeling like an afterthought. Maybe she has some insight.

**Dear Eric:** I am recently widowed and have never seen my problem addressed. My spouse was a wonderful person. I now have the remnants and reminders of our 38 years together literally everywhere. Hobbies, clothes, boat motors, guitars, golf clubs, yard tools, woodworking supplies. My children would love for me to continue living with it all. How do I separate from it?

*– Mementos*

**Dear Mementos:** I'm sorry for your loss; mementos can be a comfort or a hard reminder. And sometimes they're both. The complicated feelings you're likely feeling aren't unusual. There are options. Reach out to a senior downsizer or a professional organizer and enlist their help. They won't start giving things away right off the bat. Rather, they'll help you think through what you want your space to look like and they can help navigate conversations with your kids about handing things off.

It sounds like your children are experiencing part of their grief as sentimentality. That's completely understandable. But the solution isn't for your house to remain a museum. They can take mementos that mean something to them. Then you all, as a family, can thank the other mementos for what they gave to you and what they represent, then release them to another life.

Take your time with this. I imagine it's overwhelming being surrounded by reminders of your fresh loss every day. Start small, perhaps by creating a space – a room, a corner – that is just yours to fill up or leave empty as you get to know this new version of yourself and process your feelings.

**Dear Eric:** This is in response to "Rambling Relative", whose 84-year-old mother had no cognitive issues but had begun rambling and repeating herself on their phone calls.

The letter writer may want to try this:

When she starts talking about people or events you don't know anything about, get a pad and pencil and write down notes. Make sure you tell her you are doing this so maybe she will get to the point. (You can repeat each one back to her as if you are trying to get it right.) If you are a praying person, you can tell her you will take time to pray for them during the week.

The next time you talk to her, go down the list and ask how each one is doing. If she starts to ramble on about one of them, summarize by saying, "So no improvement there," or "I'm glad so and so is doing better." Then move on to the next one. After you finish the list, tell her something about your life, or ask her how she likes the weather, etc.

I hope this helps!

*– My Mother's Caregiver*

**Dear Caregiver:** I think this is such a beautiful suggestion. This kind of active listening and engaging could change the experience for both letter writer and mother.

***Send questions to R. Eric Thomas at eric@askingeric.com or P.O. Box 22474, Philadelphia, PA 19110. Follow him on Instagram and sign up for his weekly newsletter at rericthomas.com.***

## SQUAWKBOX

**squawkbox@albanyherald.com**

Let's see more columns by Thomas Knapp. He and H.L. Mencken nailed it.

I believe it was comedian Richard Prior who said, "Are you going to believe me or your lying eyes?" That's the hold Trump has over his minions who refuse to see the truth when it's staring them in the face. They believe him when he says the economy is "fixed," even though they're paying higher prices everywhere. None so blind ...

Our commissioners want $70 million of our tax dollars for a convention center? Must be a joke? The city already neglects dozens of crumbling facilities. Our roads have potholes, and we have no police. Not to mention, Las Vegas now struggles to attract meetings in its convention center post-COVID. Why do Commissioners always want to buy a silly new toy with other people's money? Take better care of those of us here that pay taxes, and clean up our city to attract private investment.

I absolutely loved the story about the Stifftones in Saturday's Herald. Because of the fun story, I went to see them. Thanks for giving us the info.

You people quit complaining about the president's policies. Things aren't great right now because of the mess left by Joe Biden. But, mark my words, Republicans will win big in the midterms, and the greatest president in our country's history will lead an amazing comeback.

Pam Bondi has made it clear that she is not the attorney general. She's Donald Trump's personal attorney, and she's being paid with your tax dollars. Even MAGA should have a problem with that, but they don't. Trump is lining his pockets, but MAGA doesn't care. That Man Without a Family

I don't know if it's a regular feature now, but I have really enjoyed the stories in the Entertainment page in the last three weekend editions of the paper. Keep it up, please. This is what Fletcher does best.

I've been waiting anxiously for that $195,000 "virtual civil rights tour" that my tax money helped pay for. Is this just another instance of our supposed leaders giving money to their friends at the expense of people who actually work for a living?

If Phoebe can afford to give a family $200,000 for their new home, a fatherless home it seems, they can afford not to send bills to seniors for charges that Medicare does not cover. Those seniors worked and paid for their homes.

I was hoping for another column by Chad Warbington in Saturday's Herald. I guess "regular" publication means whenever he has an issue to complain about.

The Dems could lose one of their biggest voting blocks. How can they get a picture ID for a dead person?

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THE ALBANY HERALD

# Perspectives

The Albany HERALD
ALBANYHERALD.COM

Carlton Fletcher
EDITOR

Georgia Trust for LOCAL NEWS

**TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE**

*"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*
**Psalms 23:3**

**COLUMNIST** ■ WAYNE FOWLER

## Windows in Heaven, open just for you

God in His sovereignty is involved in human affairs in ways not always obvious. That would explain not only things that happen but confirm what the Bible says about your value to God.


FOWLER

So you might want to pay closer attention to things that happen.

The Hebrew Scriptures tell a story about God tweaking events so slightly as to almost be unnoticed. An enemy of the people laid siege to their city. The famine was so severe, people were starving. During this suffering, the prophet Elisha told the king an abundance of food would appear the next day. In sarcastic disbelief a royal official said, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?"

That evening, lepers living outside the gate made a desperate decision to seek food from the enemy. They found the camp full of supplies and equipment but empty of soldiers. By the next day, news reached the city. The people rushed out to plunder the enemy camp and find food.

So how did God tweak the outcome? He caused the enemy soldiers to hear a sound. A rumor swept the camp that a mighty army approached. They fled into the darkness empty-handed, not because of an actual army, angelic beings, or a mighty miracle, but because of a sound.

No "windows in heaven" poured out miracle flour and barley for the people, but God turned events in a more subtle way.

If you only look for mighty miracles, you can miss God's intervention in simpler, almost unnoticed ways. So pay attention when you encounter these uncanny coincidences, changed plans, changed minds, unexpected outcomes, inadvertent omissions, chance encounters, missed turns, surprising discovexplained sound.

It is in these that you may well experience the care and providence of God, orchestrating the circeries, unforeseen delays, and (per the story) an unumstances of your life.

"You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down and are intimately acquainted with all my ways." (Psalms 139:2-3)

The Creator who scrutinizes your path values your life. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31)

Carry with you an awareness of the presence of God, who loves you. Let that fill you with a patient hope, a resilient trust, and a thankful joie de vivre. If you are to live without fear, apply wisdom to your circumstances, and maintain strength to carry on, it is because the Lord is near.

It's as though there are windows in heaven, open just for you.

*Wayne Fowler has been a pastor and columnist in Georgia since 1996. His articles appear on Substack @ wayne505598.*

**COLUMNIST** ■ B.J. FLETCHER

## Fight back against 'lie merchants' with the truth

Have you ever heard of that trade ... lie merchants? Sure you have. We all visit their websites, their businesses, their churches or their homes every day. And we all stay to entertain their lies; plus we all support their lies and keep their businesses going.


FLETCHER

Yes, their businesses. From politicians' points of view to pastors' propaganda and all in between, it seems that pedaling lies is the No. 1 business in this world that makes profits from people of all backgrounds and ages.

We simply can't get enough of the lies that we hear every day to be satisfied.

People are talking now about the 84-year-old woman, Nancy Guthrie missing in Arizona. Did you know we have a woman in Lee County missing?

Athletes are talking about being ashamed of America. Yet they take their butts to the Olympics on the American dime. Our dime.

And we continue to support the companies that sponsor these jerks. Didn't Budweiser learn their lesson? Many say "demolish ICE" or all law enforcement agencies, but who do they call when in need?

We turn our eyes away from human trafficking of kids because it's "uncomfortable" for us to deal with the truth. Yet we say nothing about the doctors who perform transgender surgeries on kids 10 years old or younger.

It most likely sounds like I am just babbling on. Maybe so. I was thinking if I babble on like our lie merchants do, then many of you just might start to realize that our priorities are wrong. Instead of going along with the media and hate-mongering that's taking over our country.and.our world,.why don't we simply close down the lie merchants and hit them with what they hate.

The truth.

On everything. Pay their lies back with the truth. And you will see just how quick they close up shop. Umm ... the truth. Do we remember how to tell that?

*B.J. Fletcher is an Albany businesswoman and former Albany City Commissioner.*

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

## Threat of another COVID-like pandemic remains

To the editor,

While the topic has faded from public discussion, the threat remains of another pandemic, à la COVID-19, spreading around the globe and leaving devastation in its wake. To help prevent this possibility, our political leaders should support state and federal funding of cultivated-meat research. The new protein is grown from livestock cells, without slaughter. Animal agriculture is a frequent cause of zoonotic diseases making the jump to humans.

While growing cultivated meat is now technologically feasible, it's too expensive to mass produce. Further study will fix this. Let's build facilities like the Tufts University Center for Cellular Agriculture at schools across the country. I have no doubt that, working together, researchers can overcome the remaining scientific barriers to making cheap, slaughter-free meat. Among other things, this will be a significant boon for public health.

Jon Hochschartner
Granby, CT 06035

**COLUMNIST** ■ THOMAS L. KNAPP

## 'Peace President's' latest date that will live in infamy

I wrote this column with the news trickling in about our president's order to attack Venezuelan ships. "The facts" are still thin, and some of them will likely turn out to be either incomplete or not "facts" at all. But a few real facts are foundational and not subject to change. Let's go through them:


KNAPP

First, Trump's attack on Venezuela is illegal under U.S. law and should result in his impeachment, conviction, removal from office, and eventually imprisonment. Congress has not declared war on Venezuela; therefore, Trump has zero authority to wage said war. But he's been doing so at low intensity for months and just kicked it into high gear with multiple strikes on the country's ships and the abduction of the titular "leader" of Venezuela.

Second, Trump's attack on Venezuela is an illegal war of aggression under international law -- and since the Venezuelan regime is a member state of the International Criminal Court, Trump and everyone below him in the chain of command who participates in it are now subject to indictment, arrest and prosecution for all of the crimes the attack entails.

Third, Trump's attack on Venezuela was entirely optional. There was no plausible, let alone imminent, threat against the United States by the Venezuelan regime that could have served as an excuse for "retaliation" or any plea of "necessity." Whatever Trump's reason for ordering the attack (personally, I suspect it's just another attempt to distract from his long, close, personal relationship with Jeffrey Epstein), those reasons are his own, not "America's."

Fourth, the whole thing is indescribably stupid and evil. U.S. troops' lives are being put at risk. U.S. taxpayers' money is being wasted. And the operation has the makings of extending that risk and increasing that waste by way of reproducing past "regime change"/"nation-building" fiascos such as South Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The very best possible outcome of the attack is that the Venezuelan people rise up, overthrow the current regime, and replace it with something more to their liking -- but probably not to the Washington, D.C., regime's liking. Which they could have done at any time, without Trump's help, had they chosen to.

The more likely outcome is that U.S. forces will install a puppet/quisling regime to rule Venezuela to Trump's (and Big Oil's) liking, then spend years bleeding American blood and treasure into the place before an ignominious departure (with or without formal surrender).

What's not likely is that Trump and his accomplices will be removed from office/power, charged under U.S. law, or extradited for trial under international law. That's a shame. Letting violent criminals get away with violent crimes is an invitation to continue committing those crimes.

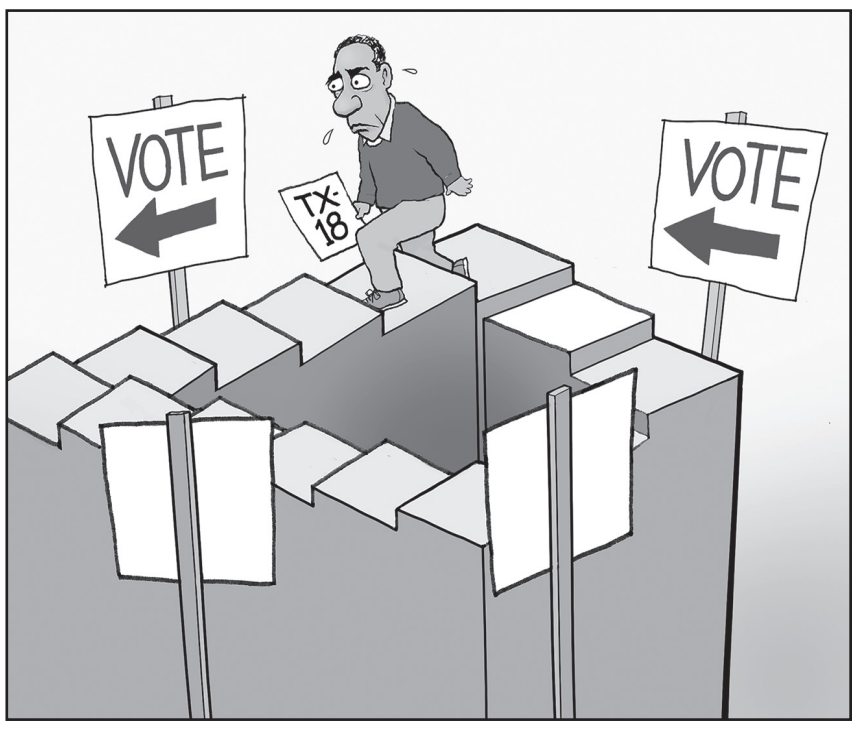
So much for a peaceful 2026.

*Thomas L. Knapp is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism (thegarrisoncenter.org). He lives and works in north-central Florida.*

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS:

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The Albany Herald encourages letters to the editor on topics of general interest, but reserves the right to edit them for content and length. Letters should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number for verfication purposes.



# What to watch

## TUESDAY

February 24, 2026

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

### Will Trent
**ABC, 8 p.m.**

A woman found drained of her blood pulls Will and Caleb (Ramón Rodríguez and Yul Vazquez) into a chilling case in the new episode "We're Looking for a Vampire."

### Best Medicine
**FOX, 8 p.m.**

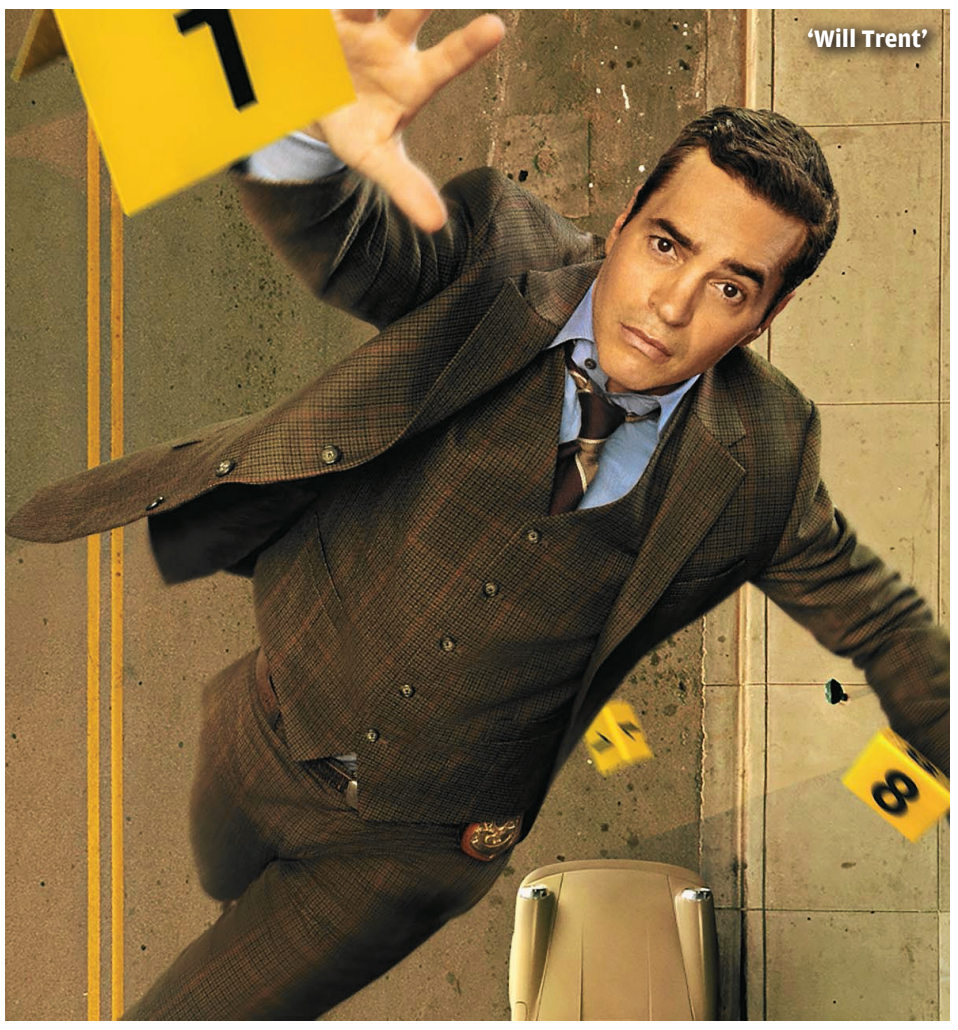
Port Wenn goes into high alert when a corpse is found in the town's bog in the new episode "The Bogfather."

### Finding Your Roots
**PBS, 8 p.m.**

Host Henry Louis Gates Jr. explores the family trees of Oscar-winning director/writer/producer Spike Lee and Tony-winning actor/singer Kristin Chenoweth in the new episode "Artistic Roots."

### Good Sports
**Prime Video, 8 p.m.** ■ Season Finale

Kevin Hart and Kenan Thompson break down their favorite moments from the wide, weird world of sports in the Season 1 finale.


'Will Trent'

DISNEY

### 2026 State of the Union Address
**Various networks, 9 p.m. Live**

President Donald Trump will deliver the first State of the Union address of his second term before a joint session of Congress, and the nation, this evening. Most of the usual outlets will cover the address live, including the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC and PBS), and cable channels like CNN, Fox News Channel and MS NOW.

## CATCH A CLASSIC

### Oscar Goes Back for More (Remakes)
**TCM, beginning at 8 p.m.**

The term "gaslighting" was popularized through Charles Boyer's character in tonight's first film, **Gaslight (pictured),** a 1944 psychological thriller in which a husband drives his wife to question her sanity. Though the original film had been made just four years earlier, a few key changes and a haunting performance from Ingrid Bergman propelled the remake into awards contention, earning seven Oscar nominations and two wins. Consider too the lasting legacy of **The Magnificent Seven** (1960), also airing tonight. This reimagining of Akira Kurosawa's **Seven Samurai** (1954) in turn inspired a few retellings, including a blockbuster casting Denzel Washington in Yul Brynner's iconic role. Then stay tuned for the ultimate trump card in any conversation of reboots and remakes: **A Star Is Born** (1976), starring Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson in the lead roles. They were the third duo to tackle the tragedy, before the latest with Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper.



MGM

## MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE


'The Woman King'

TRISTAR

**Goodfellas** (1990, Crime drama) Robert De Niro, Ray Liotta **Paramount, 6 p.m.**

**Wildcat** (2025, Suspense) Kate Beckinsale, Lewis Tan **MGM, 6:15 p.m.**

**Judge Dredd** (1995, Action) Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante **BBC America, 6:30 p.m.**

**Boomerang** (1992, Romance-comedy) Eddie Murphy, Halle Berry **Starz, 7:05 p.m.**

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2** (2011, Fantasy) Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint **SYFY, 7:05 p.m.**

**Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning** (2023, Action) Tom Cruise, Hayley Atwell **MGM, 8 p.m.**

**Soul Men** (2008, Comedy) Samuel L. Jackson, Bernie Mac **VH1, 8 p.m.**

**Twister** (1996, Action) Helen Hunt, Bill Paxton **AMC, 8 p.m.**

**Bridesmaids** (2011, Comedy) Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph **Starz, 9:05 p.m.**

**The Godfather, Part II** (1974, Crime drama) Al Pacino, Robert Duvall **Paramount, 9:30 p.m.**

**Cocaine Bear** (2023, Horror) Keri Russell, Margo Martindale **SYFY, 10 p.m.**

**Give Me Back My Daughter** (2025, Drama) Gabourey Sidibe, Cadence Reese **LMN, 10 p.m.**

**The Woman King** (2022, Action) Viola Davis, Thuso Mbedu **FXM, 11:15 p.m.**

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# What to watch

## WEDNESDAY

February 25, 2026

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

### Beast Games
**Prime Video** ■ Season Finale

Will it be superhuman strength or superhuman smarts that takes home the $5 million grand prize in the Season 2 finale of the competition show?

### Scrubs
**ABC, 8 p.m.** ■ New Series

The two-episode, back-to-back premiere sees the return of J.D. (Zach Braff) and Turk (Donald Faison) scrubbing in together for the first time in a long time. While medicine and interns have changed, their bromance has stood the test of time. Characters new and old (actors John C. McGinley, Sarah Chalke and Judy Reyes are also back, among others) will navigate the waters of Sacred Heart with laughter, heart and some surprises along the way.

### Survivor
**CBS, 8 p.m.** ■ Season Premiere

The milestone 50th season of the reality competition features 24 of the series' all-time great castaways playing for the $1 million prize. This edition is "In the Hands of the Fans," with fans voting on key elements of the game. Host Jeff Probst says, "They're deciding how powerful the advantages will be. They're deciding on twists. They're deciding if there's going to be a [tribe] switch, if there are [immunity] idols or no idols at all." The players won't know what the fans voted for until they are competing on the island.

### The Masked Singer
**FOX, 8 p.m.**

It's what you want. What you really, really want. The new episode "Spice Girls Night" features fan-favorite songs from the iconic girl group. Taraji P. Henson is a special guest panelist.


'Scrubs'

BRIAN BOWEN SMITH, DISNEY

### Nature
**PBS, 8 p.m.**

The *Nature* "Parenthood" series continues with the new episode "Jungles," which looks at how jungle animals raise their young by mastering their environment. An orangutan spends eight years teaching her baby the ways of jungle living, and a crab becomes the ultimate chemist to create the perfect home for her crablets. Sir David Attenborough narrates.

### Fear Factor: House of Fear
**FOX, 9 p.m.**

In the new episode "Pain Auction," contestants bid on how much punishment they can take, and no one is safe from elimination in a truly sick pie-eating contest. Johnny Knoxville hosts.

### The Greatest Average American
**ABC, 9 p.m.** ■ New Series

Nate Bargatze hosts this hilarious new game show that celebrates the power of being perfectly average. Contestants play through rounds of challenges and trivia to try to guess how everyday Americans think and live. In the end, one lucky player will be crowned the Greatest Average American and get the chance to win the ultimate grand prize: the average American salary of $67,920.

### NOVA
**PBS, 9 p.m.**

In the new episode "Stone Age Temple Mystery," follow experts as they use new digs and shattered skulls to piece together a captivating story that could forever change our understanding of the roots of civilization.

## CATCH A CLASSIC

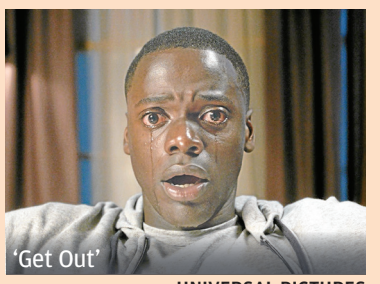
### Oscar Goes Back for Even More
**TCM, beginning at 7 a.m.**

TCM makes another strong case for the value of remakes with its second curated selection of studios taking proven stories and elevating them. Exhibit A: **The Merry Widow** (1952), which takes advantage of recent developments in film technology to transform a previously drab 1934 black-and-white operetta into an exhibition. The result? Two Oscar nominations for Art Direction and Costume Design. If you're looking for more examples, look no further than the endlessly adaptable **Little Women (1949, pictured),** which featured an early career turn from Elizabeth Taylor as the youngest March sister, Amy, and the foil to June Allyson's Jo. Taylor took up the mantle from Joan Bennett's 1933 portrayal, setting a high bar for later actresses such as Kirsten Dunst and Florence Pugh. The day's lineup rounds out with another interpretation of the timeless **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** (1941), starring Ingrid Bergman as she approaches the peak of her stardom.



EVERETT COLLECTION

## MOVIES YOU'LL LOVE


'Get Out'

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

**Gone Girl** (2014, Mystery) Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike **SYFY, 6 p.m.**

**Bridget Jones's Diary** (2001, Romance-comedy) Renée Zellweger, Colin Firth **SHO, 6:15 p.m.**

**The Lost World: Jurassic Park** (1997, Adventure) Jeff Goldblum, Julianne Moore **AMC, 7 p.m.**

**Mrs. Doubtfire** (1993, Children) Robin Williams, Sally Field **Freeform, 8 p.m.**

**South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut** (1999, Comedy) Trey Parker, Matt Stone **MGM, 8 p.m.**

**The Stars Between Us** (2026, Romance) Sarah Drew, Matt Long **Hallmark, 8 p.m.**

**O Brother, Where Art Thou?** (2000, Comedy-drama) George Clooney, John Turturro **BBC America, 8:30 p.m.**

**Dead of Winter** (2025, Suspense) Emma Thompson, Judy Greer **HBO, 8:40 p.m.**

**Pride and Prejudice and Zombies** (2016, Horror) Lily James, Sam Riley **SYFY, 9:30 p.m.**

**Relative Danger** (2025, Suspense) Kirsten Comerford, Debra Hale **LMN, 10 p.m.**

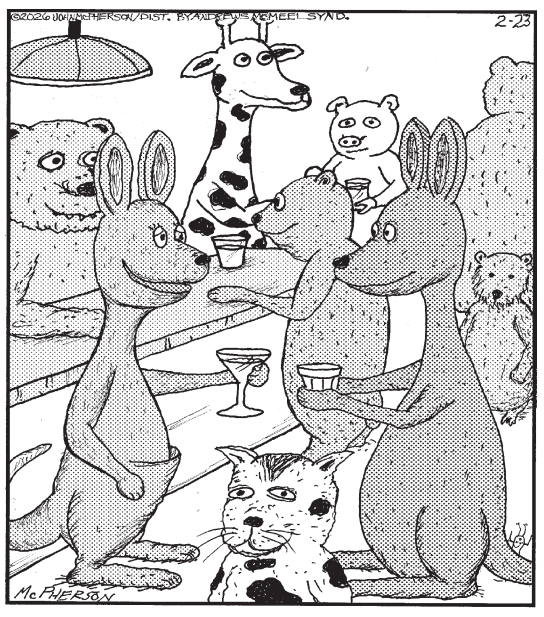
**The Martian** (2015, Science fiction) Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain **AMC, 10 p.m.**

**Get Out** (2017, Horror) Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams **HBO, 10:20 p.m.**

*From the editors of TV Weekly and tvinsider.com*

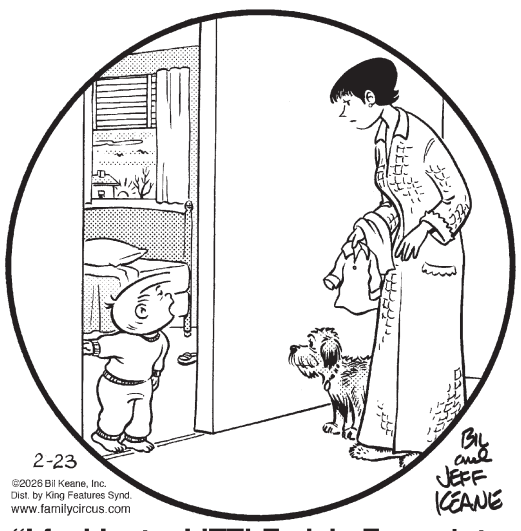
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## CLOSE TO HOME John McPherson



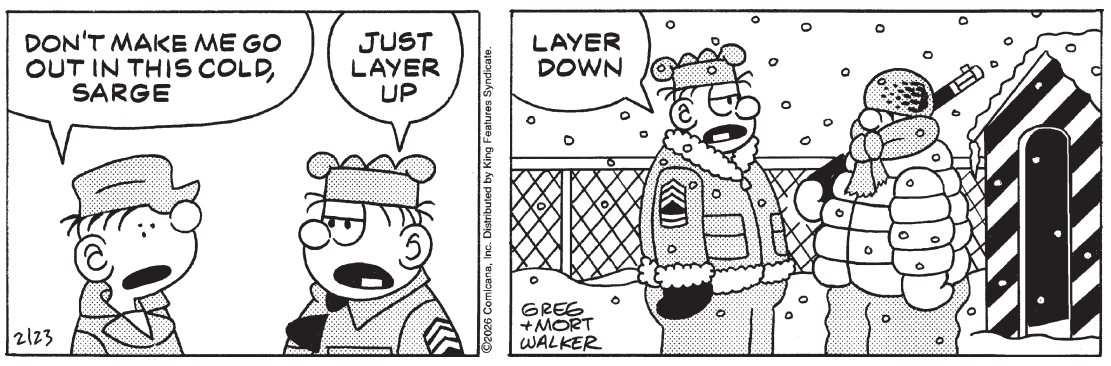

"This party is pretty dull. You ready to bounce?"

## THE FAMILY CIRCUS Bil Keane

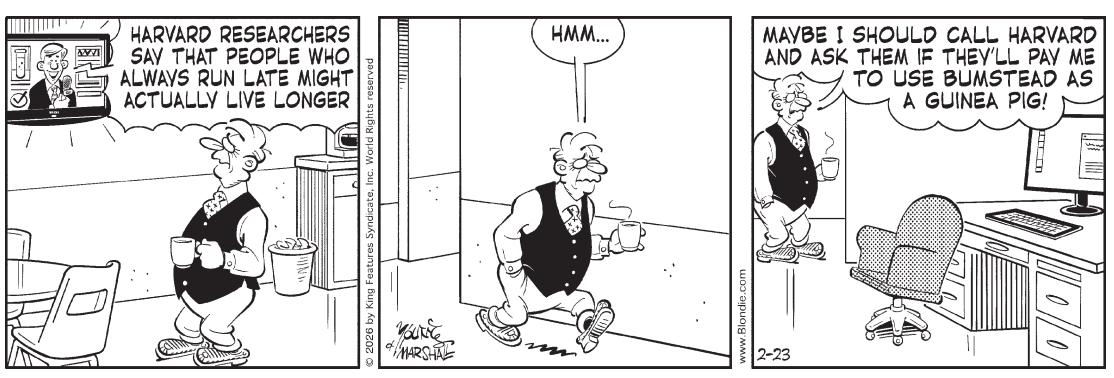



"I feel just a LITTLE sick. Enough to stay home from school, but not enough to stay in bed."

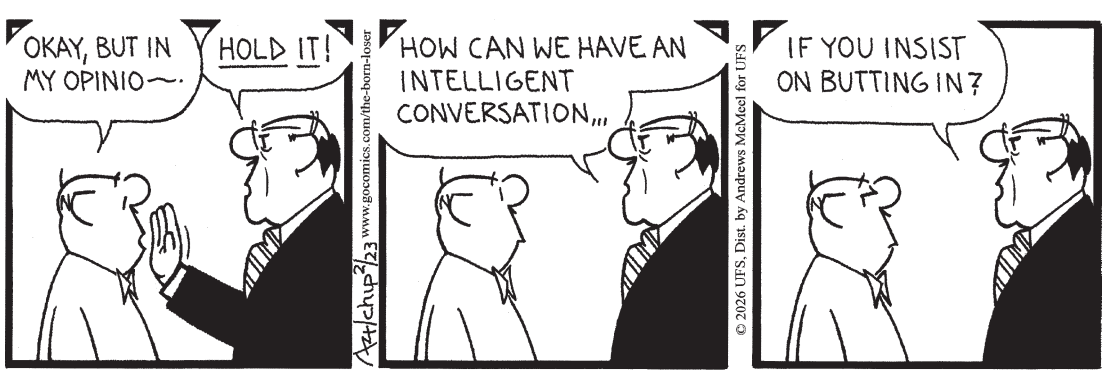
## BEETLE BAILEY Mort & Greg Walker



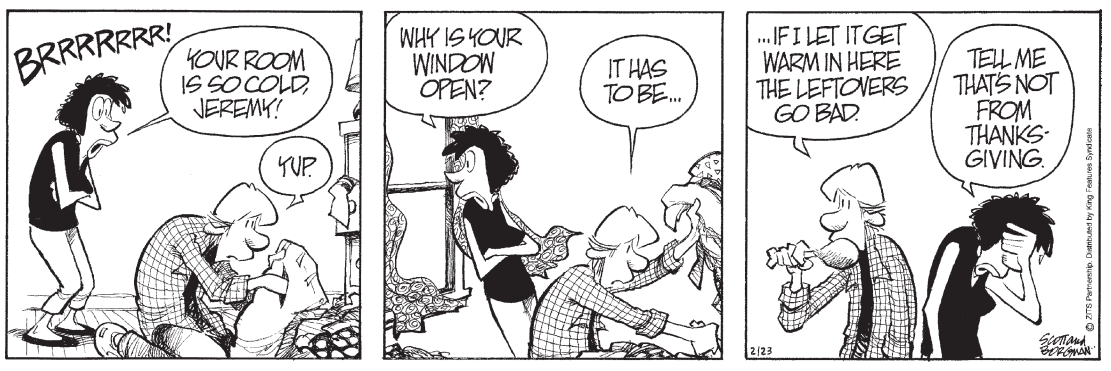

## BLONDIE Dean Young & John Marshall




## THE BORN LOSER Art & Chip Sansom



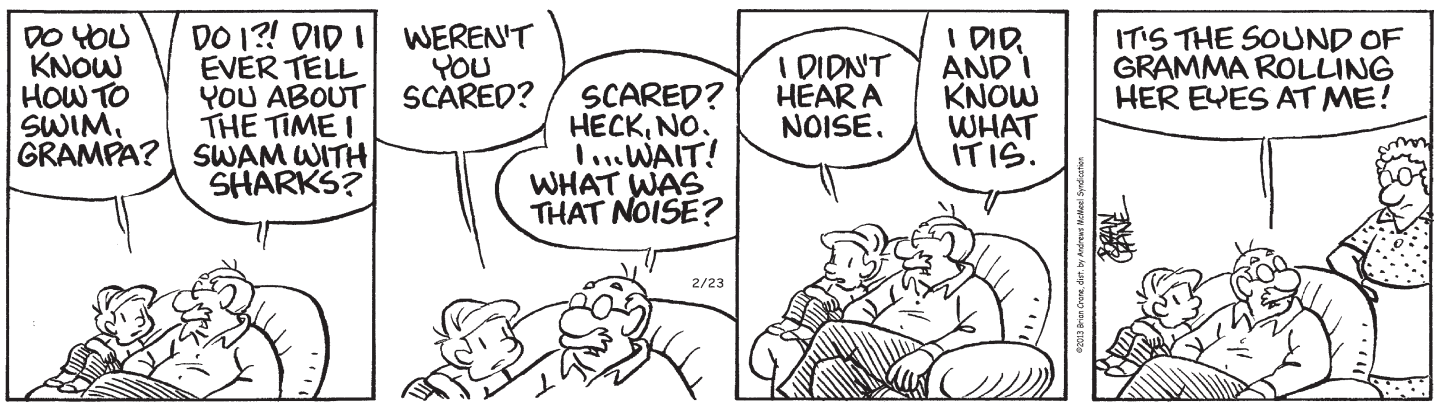

## ZITS Jim Borgman & Jerry Scott




## GARFIELD Jim Davis




## PICKLES Brian Crane




## SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

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**SUDOKU INSTRUCTIONS:** Each row, column and set of 3-by-3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 through 9 without repitition.

**TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION:**

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

## WHATZIT?™

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




**TODAY'S WHATZIT SOLUTION:** Stranger Things

## Los Angeles Times Daily Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Patti Varol

**ACROSS**

1 Rains cats and dogs
6 Inflatable float
10 Film school deg.
13 Greenish pond growth
14 After-sun gel ingredient
15 Small appliance that removes wrinkles
16 *Woolen garments for ballet dancers
18 Floating ice chunk
19 Dull and dreary
20 Halloween goodies
22 Hotel room price
25 Right this moment
27 Constricting undergarment
28 Shocked
30 Pretty soon
32 Magician's revealing cry
33 Grandson of Adam
34 "Planet of the ___"
37 Indoor rower, for short
38 Used some Listerine, say
41 Sass
42 Arlene of classic cinema
44 Fairy tale bear
45 Water bill statistic
47 Actress Tomei
49 Really, really hate
50 Primary hub of Alaska Airlines, familiarly
52 Hoops org.
54 Collecting Soc. Sec., maybe
55 Lipton rival
56 With 48-Down, "Insecure" creator/star
58 "Laugh-In" comedian Johnson
59 Wishes of a lifetime, or what the starts of the answers to the starred clues form at a chicken restaurant?
65 Santa Monica landmark
66 The Daily Planet reporter Lois
67 Eaglet nest
68 Msg. from a pulpit
69 Strong urges
70 Make fun of

**DOWN**

1 Chum
2 Nashville's Grand ___ Opry
3 Fleecy boot brand
4 Shoddy treatment
5 Cook fast, as tuna
6 Stallone's "First Blood" role
7 The "A" of IPA
8 In favor of
9 Court decision that sets a precedent
10 *Defensive armor that covers the chest
11 Strong suit
12 Anxious feeling
15 Spain and Portugal's peninsula
17 Speak wildly
21 Actor Lowe
22 Spoke wildly
23 Ancient Greek marketplace
24 *Fitness gadget promoted by Suzanne Somers
26 *Supporting pilot in a "Top Gun" formation
29 Droop
31 Mardi Gras city, familiarly
33 Presidential spans
35 Elite ___: March Madness round
36 Put the pedal to the metal
39 In an agreeable manner
40 Dynamic ___
43 Former's counterpart
46 Big name in frozen desserts
48 See 56-Across
49 Cut with a beam
50 Breaks sharply
51 Otherworldly
53 Two-wheelers
57 "Pronto!"
60 Dubai's fed.
61 "The Situation Room" channel
62 Lyricist Gershwin
63 Female sib
64 Workout top

**TODAY'S SOLUTION:**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E | S | A | E | T | ■ | S | N | E | Y | ■ | ■ | R | E | S |
| E | I | R | E | A | ■ | E | N | A | L | ■ | R | E | I | P |
| T | S | I | L | T | E | K | C | U | B | ■ | E | T | R | A |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | A | S | S | I | ■ | ■ | A | E | T | S | E | N |
| D | T | E | R | ■ | A | B | N | ■ | C | A | T | A | E | S |
| E | H | T | A | O | L | ■ | S | A | I | R | A | M | ■ | ■ |
| E | G | A | S | U | ■ | A | M | A | M | ■ | L | H | A | D |
| ■ | I | P | L | D | E | L | A | R | G | ■ | G | R | E | E |
| S | E | P | A | ■ | S | O | N | E | ■ | A | L | I | O | V |
| ■ | ■ | T | I | B | A | N | I | ■ | T | S | A | H | G | A |
| T | E | S | R | O | C | ■ | O | W | N | ■ | E | T | A | R |
| S | T | A | E | R | T | ■ | ■ | B | A | R | D | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| G | R | E | B | ■ | S | E | R | M | A | R | W | G | E | L |
| N | O | R | I | ■ | E | O | L | A | ■ | E | A | G | L | A |
| P | O | U | R | S | ■ | A | F | T | R | A | ■ | F | B | A |

02/23/26

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ■ | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | ■ | ■ | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | | | | | ■ | 14 | | | | ■ | 15 | | | |
| 16 | | | | | 17 | | | | | ■ | 18 | | | |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | 19 | | | | ■ | ■ | 20 | 21 | | | | |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | | ■ | 25 | | 26 | ■ | 27 | | | | | |
| 28 | | | | 29 | | ■ | 30 | 31 | | | | | ■ | ■ |
| 32 | | | | | ■ | 33 | | | | ■ | 34 | | 35 | 36 |
| 37 | | | ■ | 38 | 39 | | | | | 40 | ■ | 41 | | |
| 42 | | | 43 | ■ | 44 | | | | ■ | 45 | 46 | | | |
| ■ | ■ | 47 | | 48 | | | | ■ | 49 | | | | | |
| 50 | 51 | | | | | ■ | 52 | 53 | | ■ | 54 | | | |
| 55 | | | | | | ■ | ■ | 56 | | 57 | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 58 | | | | ■ | 59 | 60 | 61 | | | | | 62 | 63 | 64 |
| 65 | | | | ■ | 66 | | | | ■ | 67 | | | | |
| 68 | | | ■ | ■ | 69 | | | | ■ | 70 | | | | |

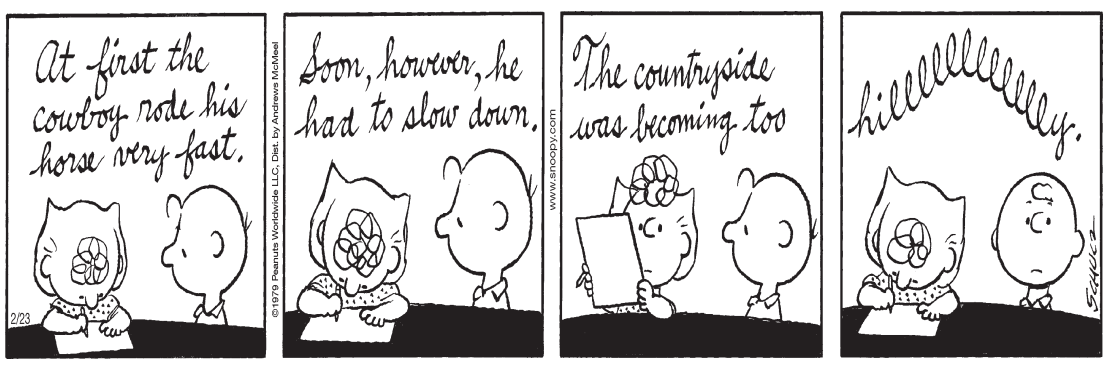
By Robert E.L. Morris
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02/23/26

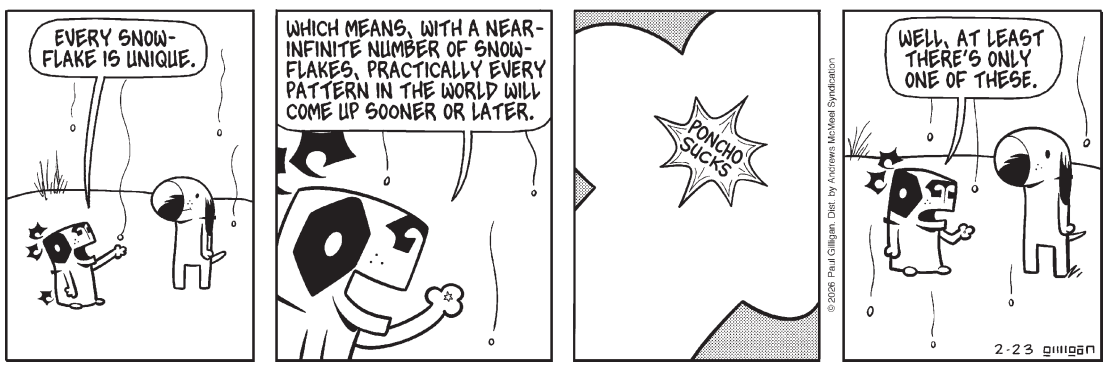
## HAGAR THE HORRIBLE Chris Browne




## 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.**

**BOZEMAN, MONTANA** **Solution: 6 letters**

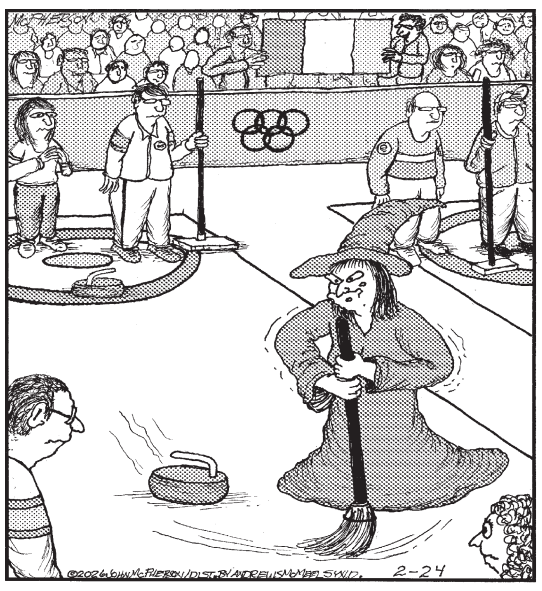
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | M | A | D | V | E | N | T | U | R | E | B | M | I | T |
| W | I | A | S | N | I | A | T | N | U | O | M | G | T | N |
| P | I | T | D | R | M | E | Y | E | R | S | I | O | S | O |
| A | D | L | A | I |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

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Adventure, Big Sky, Bike, Bison, Bowl, Bridger, Canyon, Climb, Cowboy, Distillery, Downtown, Forest, Gallatin, Golf, Hike, Hill, Horses, Hyalite, Lodge, Madison, Meyers, Mountains, Museum, Outdoor, Palisade, Paradise, Reservoir, Resort, River, Rocky, Safari, Scenic, Shore, Snowboard, Timber, Tour, Trail, Valley, Western, Wildlife, Wolf, Yellowstone

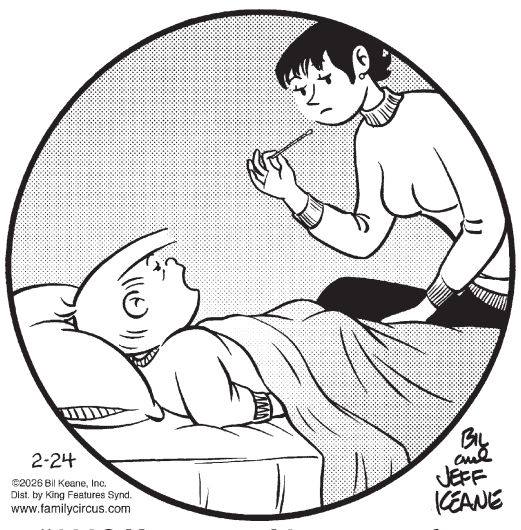
**TODAY'S ANSWER:** Alpine

## CLOSE TO HOME John McPherson



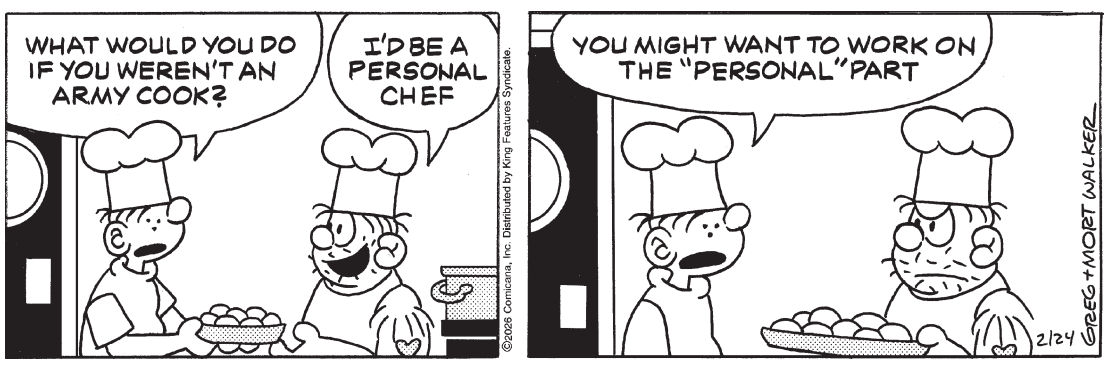

Despite her surly demeanor, the Wicked Witch of the West's skills with a broom made her a star on the Olympic Curling Team.

## THE FAMILY CIRCUS Bil Keane




"100? You mean I have a perfect temperature?"

## BEETLE BAILEY Mort & Greg Walker




## BLONDIE Dean Young & John Marshall




## THE BORN LOSER Art & Chip Sansom



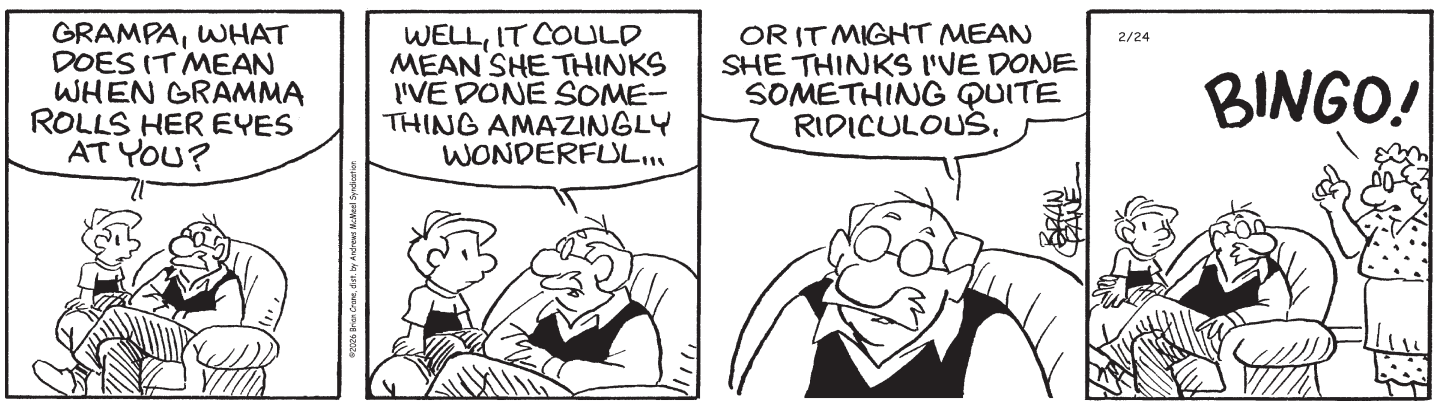

## ZITS Jim Borgman & Jerry Scott




## GARFIELD Jim Davis




## PICKLES Brian Crane




# SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

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

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**SUDOKU INSTRUCTIONS:**
Each row, column and set of 3-by-3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 through 9 without repitition.

# WHATZIT?™

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




Whatzit ©2026 Paul Sellers

**TODAY'S WHATZIT SOLUTION:**
Nose in the air

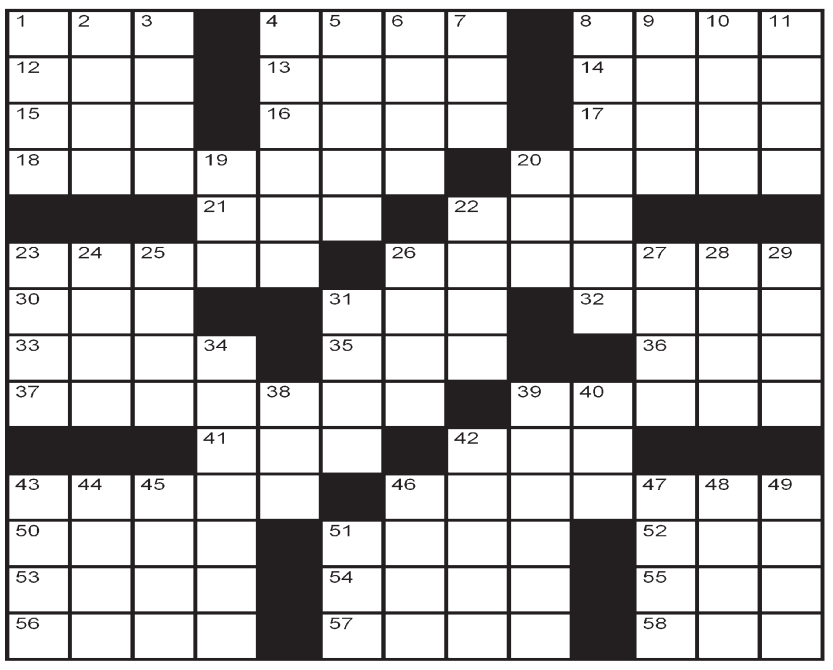
**TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION:**

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

# CROSSWORD

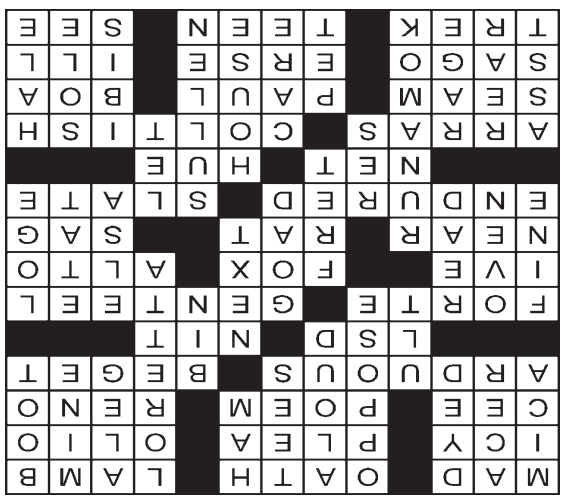
**ACROSS**
1 Like Lewis Carroll's hatter
4 Solemn promise
8 Ewe's offspring
12 Frosty
13 "Not guilty" is one
14 Hodgepodge
15 So-so grade
16 Work in verse
17 Nevada town
18 Difficult
20 Sire
21 Illegal drug letters
22 Insect egg
23 Strong point
26 Prim and proper
30 "— Got a Secret"
31 Vixen
32 Palo —, California
33 Approach
35 Lab animal
36 Hang down
37 Lasted
39 List of candidates
41 Mesh fabric
42 Color
43 Wall hanging
46 Like a young horse
50 Line of stitches
51 Actor — Rudd
52 Snake
53 Palm starch
54 Gaelic
55 Under the weather
56 "Star —"
57 Prom attendee
58 Perceive

**DOWN**
1 Isinglass
2 Maple genus
3 — -in-the-wool
4 Fight against
5 So as to be heard
6 Golf pegs
7 Showy performer
8 Singer — Lynn
9 "Shake — —!"
10 Source of ore
11 Kick
19 Final (Abbr.)
20 Trash receptacle
22 Succeeding
23 Penalty
24 Baking chamber
25 Interpret
26 Prod
27 "Born Free" lioness
28 Coup d'—
29 Theater section
31 Ridge on a fingerboard
34 Go on a rampage (2 wds.)
38 Domicile (Abbr.)
39 Gloomy
40 Allow
42 "Little — on the Prairie"
43 Aide (Abbr.)
44 Back
45 Fury
46 Maintenance
47 Leggy bird
48 Food fish
49 Robust
51 Animal friend

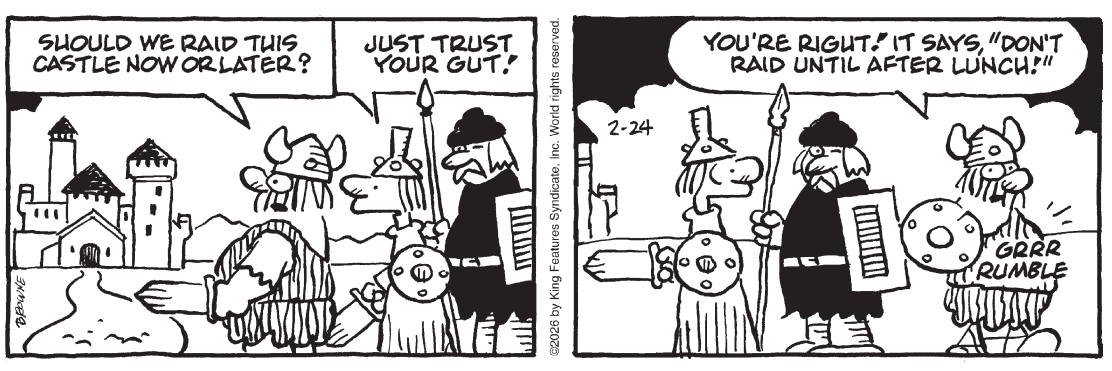


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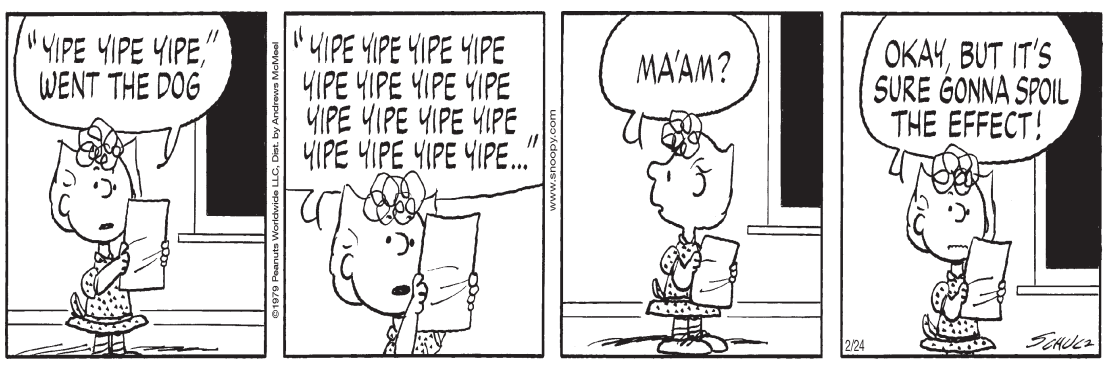
**TODAY'S SOLUTION:**



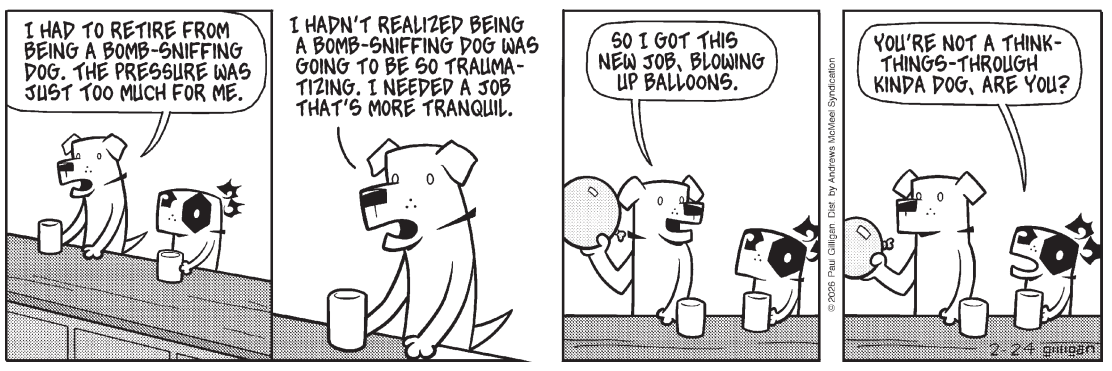
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## PEANUTS Charles M. Schulz




## 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.**

**EATING BEETS** **Solution: 6 letters**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | M | E | V | R | E | S | E | R | P | U | R | P | L | E |
| R | E | A | E | X | E | R | C | I | S | E | T | A | R | G |
| R | E | T | G | V | S | M | O | O | T | H | I | E | E | E |
| E | C | Z | A | N | A | S | R | C | R | O | V | A | L | F |
| C | O | E | I | L | E | G | N | Ⓝ | Ⓞ | Ⓡ | Ⓘ | N | B | I |
| I | L | P | O | T | A | S | S | I | U | M | D | T | A | B |
| P | O | H | C | N | E | I | I | Z | M | G | N | I | T | E |
| E | R | R | I | G | Y | P | N | U | H | A | I | O | E | R |
| H | F | C | R | O | E | N | P | S | M | R | T | X | G | T |
| E | U | I | G | Y | J | E | I | A | N | D | R | I | E | H |
| A | L | U | E | U | H | D | R | E | T | E | A | D | V | G |
| L | R | N | I | E | A | L | V | U | T | N | T | A | R | I |
| T | O | C | A | R | R | O | T | S | P | U | E | N | O | R |
| H | E | R | H | R | E | G | N | I | G | Y | A | T | O | B |
| S | T | A | M | I | N | A | L | E | E | P | A | S | T | A |

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Antioxidant, Appetizer, Betalains, Bright, Carrots, Chop, Colorful, Diet, Exercise, Fiber, Flavor, Garden, Ginger, Golden, Grate, Grill, Health, Heart, Honey, Iron, Juice, Leaves, Magnesium, Nitrate, Organic, Oven, Pasta, Peel, Potassium, Preserve, Puree, Purple, Radish, Recipe, Root, Sauté, Smoothie, Stamina, Vegetable, Vitamins, Yogurt, Zinc

**TODAY'S ANSWER:** Earthy

# Deerfield student Catharine Darden named National Merit finalist

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY –** Deerfield-Windsor School has announced that senior Catharine "Cat" Darden has been named a 2026 Finalist in the prestigious National Merit Scholarship Program.

The National Merit Scholarship Program, conducted by the National Merit Scholarship

Corporation, recognizes the top high school students in the nation based on their academic achievement, standardized test performance, leadership and extracurricular involvement.

Of the more than 1.3 million students who entered the 2026 competition by taking the

PSAT/NMSQT, fewer than 1% advanced to finalist standing. To become a finalist, students must demonstrate an outstanding academic record throughout high school, earn high SAT or ACT scores that confirm their PSAT performance, receive a recommendation from their school principal, and submit a detailed scholarship application highlighting achievements, leadership, and community involvement.

"We are so proud of Cat," Deerfield-Windsor's Upper School Director Lindsey Kotter, said.

"This is not an honor that comes without the preparation and work that others do not see outside of the normal school day. Cat has worked hard for this achievement, and is so deserving of this recognition. I can't wait to see what she does with her talent."

National Merit Finalists are now eligible to compete

Special Logo

for National Merit Scholarships, which will be awarded later this spring.

# Albany State Chamber Ensemble to perform at Northwest Library branch

**ALBANY –** In celebration of Black History Month, the Albany State University Department of Fine Arts will present a special evening of music featuring the university's Chamber Ensembles.

The performance will take place on Tuesday, at 7 p.m. at the Dougherty County Public Library – Northwest Branch at 2507 Dawson Road.

This community concert offers a curated selection of musical works that honor the rich heritage and contributions of black composers and musicians. The program is designed to inspire and engage listeners of all backgrounds, showcasing the technical skill and soul of ASU's student performers.

The event is free and open to the public. Families and music lovers of all ages are encouraged to attend this celebration of culture and excellence.:

Event Details:

-- Who: The Albany State University Chamber Ensemble

-- What: A free Black History Month concert in partnership with Dougherty Public Library System

-- When: Tuesday at 7 p.m.

• Where: Northwest Library, 2507 Dawson Road

The Dougherty County Public Library System strengthens the community by inspiring, encouraging, and supporting life-long learning for all through five locations throughout Albany and Dougherty County, including the Main/Central Library in downtown Albany, Northwest, Southside, Westtown and the Tallulah Massey branches.

For more information go to www.docolib.org for more information.




Special Graphic




Special Photo: SRTC

Southern Regional Technical College has achieved an increase in enrollment for the 11th consecutive semester.

# Southern Regional Tech sees record enrollment growth

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**THOMASVILLE --** Southern Regional Technical College has achieved an increase in enrollment for the 11th consecutive semester since the fall of 2022. The college's total enrollment for the spring 2026 semester is 5,640, up from the 2025 spring enrollment of 5,091.

The 10.8% growth is well over the Technical College System of Georgia's average of 8.7% growth. SRTC also saw a 12% increase in full-time equivalent enrollment from spring 2025 to spring 2026, well above the system average of 9.6%. It also marks another milestone for the college's largest spring semester enrollment to date.

SRTC President Jim Glass credits the college's strong growth to the combined efforts of faculty and staff.

"Our faculty members are committed to providing the kind of high-quality education that is required in our service delivery area," Glass said. "Before an individual can become a successful graduate, they must first become a successful student.

"Our staff frequently go far above and beyond for our students, assisting and supporting them every step of the way. From application to graduation, our students are never alone. I am proud to say that our team continually puts forth the kind of effort that our students deserve."

Several programs have experienced significant enrollment growth, reflecting both strategic partnerships and dedicated faculty engagement. The college's new Echocardiography program saw an exceptional 64.5% growth, driven by a vital partnership with Archbold Memorial Hospital. The Land, Forest, and Wildlife Management program achieved 45.7% growth, a testament to faculty members who have worked diligently to build strong relationships with local conservation groups, organizations, and high schools throughout the region.

Three other programs that saw significant growth were Air Conditioning Technology, 52.5% growth; Criminal Justice, 40.5%; and Electrical Systems, 32.6%. With a 99% job placement rate, SRTC continues to demonstrate its commitment to providing quality education that prepares students for success in the workforce.

The Manufacturing Engineering and Precision Machining programs, launched through Southern Regional Tech's partnership with the Georgia Institute of Technology and through the Georgia AIM grant, have seen extraordinary 271.4% growth as students recognize the importance of advanced manufacturing skills in today's economy.

The college saw a 13.6% increase in dual enrollment from spring 2025 to spring 2026, serving students across more than 20 high schools in the region. Dual enrollment students are enrolled in both core and occupational courses, giving them a head start on their college education while still in high school. SRTC offers 38 general education courses that transfer seamlessly to the University System of Georgia, as well as to 19 private colleges and universities throughout Georgia, providing students with flexible pathways to continue their education beyond technical college.

For the most up-to-date information on registration, class dates, and program offerings, interested individuals can log on to www.southernregional.edu or call (888) 205-3449. Summer semester begins May 19.

# Southwell board member Wasdon Graydon passes

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**TIFTON –**Southwell learned over the weekend of the recent passing of long-serving board of directors member Wasdon Graydon Jr. Southwell's board, executive staff, medical staff, and employees offered their condolences to his family and friends.

Graydon had served in a board capacity with Southwell and Tift Regional Medical Center for more than 15 years. His most recent positions included board secretary for the Southwell Inc. Board of Directors and vice chair for the Tift County Hospital Authority.

"I don't think anybody loved our community more than Wasdon," Southwell President/CEO Christopher Dorman said in a news release. "He wanted to ensure that Tift and surrounding counties had access to quality primary and specialty care services. Enhancing the health and wellness of our service area was important to him. He provided keen insights that directly impacted our organization's long-term success."

A graduate of Tift County High School, Graydon was one of the first black students to attend ABAC in 1968. He later retired from ABAC after working for 37 years as director of student support services and the Minority Advising Program.

In addition to his diploma from ABAC, Graydon earned a bachelor's degree in history and education from Georgia Southern University and a master's degree in education from Valdosta State University.

During his time working at ABAC, Graydon was recognized with the E. Lanier Carson Leadership Award for College Administrators and the President's Award for Achievement, Leadership and Service. In 2008, ABAC President David Bridges asked Graydon to be the fall commencement speaker in the closing moment of ABAC's 100th birthday celebration.



Wasdon Graydon

After his ABAC retirement, Graydon worked part-time for Diversified Enterprises and remained a managing member of Graydon Enterprises LLC.

"As a Southwell board member, Wasdon provided direction, ensured accountability, and always made certain that our health care institution remained true to its mission," Dorman said. "He will truly be missed. Our thoughts and prayers go to his wife Veronica and the entire family."

# Bainbridge-Decatur County Chamber announces River Town Days Festival

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**BAINBRIDGE –** With just weeks to go, the River Town Days festival is set to return to Bainbridge for another day of family-friendly fun. Hosted by the Bainbridge–Decatur County Chamber of Commerce, River Town Days will take place March 14 at Earle May Boat Basin Park, along the scenic Flint River.

River Town Days will offer a variety of activities and entertainment for all ages, including children's activities, a vendor marketplace featuring local food and crafts, a river rummage sale, free live music, and a highly anticipated BBQ cooking competition, a long-time crowd favorite.

Conveniently located just an hour from Albany; Thomasville; Tallahassee, Fla.; and Dothan, Ala.,the festival is the perfect destination for a family day trip.

The music lineup: Free live music will once again be a highlight of River Town Days, featuring country music star Larry Fleet as the headlining act. Additional performances include Derrick Dove and the Peacekeepers and Seventh Addiction, ensuring a full day of entertainment for all music lovers.

Event highlights:

-- Date: March 14, 2026

-- Time: 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

-- Location: Earle May Boat Basin Park, Bainbridge

-- Admission & Parking: free

-- Children's Armbands: $10 for unlimited access to inflatables, slides, & train ride

-- Free Children's Activities Include: Decatur County 4H petting zoo, The Home Depot kids workshop, pony rides, Chehaw Park exhibit, Gulf specimen marine lab, Touch-A-Truck with Decatur County Fire & Rescue

-- Entertainment Schedule: 4 p.m. – Seventh Addiction; 5:45 p.m. – Derrick Dove & The

Special Logo

Peacekeepers; 7:45 p.m. -- Larry Fleet

For the full festival schedule and additional information, visit www.rivertowndays.com

# Annual 'Cabaret at ABAC' scheduled

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**TIFTON —** Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's annual "Cabaret at ABAC" is scheduled for March 13.

The intimate evening of romantic popular music will be held at ABAC's Edwards Hall beginning at 7 p.m. and will benefit the Fine Arts Program.

"Guests can enjoy dinner while being serenaded by talented students, faculty and community musicians," Jennifer Huang, head of ABAC's Department of Fine Arts, said. "The vocalists will captivate you, and the instrumentalists will create a soothing atmosphere as you savor the ambiance of ABAC's beautiful Fine Arts facility."

Tickets to the event are $75 and may be purchased online at link.abac.edu/cabaret. Dinner, along with beer or wine, is included in the admission fee.

Founded in 1908, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College provides a personalized, hands-on learning experience for students across Georgia and beyond. With a strong focus on academic excellence, affordability, and student success, ABAC offers more than a dozen bachelor's degrees and is recognized for its leadership in agriculture, business, humanities, nursing, sciences and education.

ABAC serves as a vital resource for the region, preparing graduates who are ready to lead their communities and careers, school officials said.




Special Photo: ABAC

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's annual Cabaret is scheduled for March 13.

# Boy's Playoffs: Monroe, Dougherty eye Sweet Sixteen showdown

**By Joe Whitfield**
*Sports Editor*

**ALBANY -** When the bracket came out, Albany didn't just see matchups.

It saw possibility.

All three Albany high schools earned home games for the opening round of the Class AAA boys state playoffs. And if the bracket holds to chalk — or at least to local ambition — Monroe and Dougherty could meet again Friday night with an Elite Eight berth at stake.

The Monroe Golden Tornadoes (21-6) drew the No. 4 seed and will host familiar region foe Bainbridge Bearcats (10-17) at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

Familiar, perhaps, to a fault.

Monroe has beaten Bainbridge three times this season. The most recent meeting, however, required a deep breath. The Tornadoes escaped with a 42-41 win in the region semifinals — a game that reminded everyone that familiarity doesn't guarantee comfort.

Dougherty's path is less familiar, but no less intriguing.

The Dougherty Trojans (13-13) earned the No. 13 seed after finishing second in the region and will host Liberty County Panthers (15-8) at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

If both Monroe and Dougherty advance, Monroe would host Dougherty on Friday in the Sweet Sixteen — one local power eliminating another, with a trip to the Elite Eight waiting.

It is the type of bracket twist that energizes a city and frustrates a coach.

"The whole point of making the state playoffs is to face other non-region opponents and see how your region fares against the rest of the state," Monroe head coach Michael Hoffpauir said. "There are several instances where this is happening in the state brackets. The GHSA will continue to review and try to get it right. Nevertheless, it is what we are facing and the objective is to win and advance and that's what we are intending to do."

Translation: It is what it is.

Win and move on.

Across town, the Westover Patriots (23-2) will try to do just that.

Westover rolled through its region undefeated during the regular season, only to stumble in a surprising semifinal loss to Dougherty. That defeat altered the bracket and set up a compelling first-round test: Lumpkin County (23-4) from Dahlonega visits Albany at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday.

If records are indicators, it is one of the more balanced matchups on the Class AAA slate.

Beyond Class AAA, the postseason map stretches far beyond Albany.

In Class 5A, the Lee County Trojans (17-10) face a long trip to Woodstock to meet the Woodstock Wolverines (24-3), who entered their region tournament as a No. 1 seed before falling to Lassiter in the championship.

Class A Division II features strong representation from Southwest Georgia.

Region champion Mitchell County (20-7) will host Greene County (8-20) in Camilla at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

In Donalsonville, the Seminole County Indians (25-2) host Warren County (16-9). Early County (20-7) travels to the northeast Georgia mountains to face Towns County (14-12), while Randolph-Clay (11-15) heads to Washington-Wilkes (15-8).

This is what late February looks like in Georgia.

Home gyms buzzing on weeknights. Long bus rides north. Familiar rivals crossing paths too soon. Records that no longer matter as much as the next 32 minutes.

For Monroe and Dougherty, Wednesday offers opportunity.

For Albany, it offers something else.

A chance — if things break right — to pack a gym Friday night knowing only one of its own will survive.



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield
Monroe's Tristen Terry shoots for two over Dougherty's Naqwan Kegler during the region championship game last week at Westover. If both teams win Wednesday night, Monroe and Dougherty would play each other in the Sweet Sixteen.

# Girls' Playoffs: Monroe earns top seed

**By Joe Whitfield**
*Sports Editor*

**ALBANY -** When the bracket came out, Monroe already knew one thing.

The Lady Nadas were the top seed in Class AAA.

What they wanted to know was something else — where the other contenders would land.

The Monroe Lady Nadas (24-3) earned that No. 1 long before the pairings were released. They handled November. They survived January. They closed February with authority. As long as they keep winning, they won't have to leave Albany until the Final Four.

But seeding only tells part of the story.

The rest of it sits in the same bracket.

Defending state champion Cherokee Bluff — the team that ended Monroe's season in last year's Elite Eight — occupies the other side. If both teams take care of business, they will meet again in the Elite Eight.

This time, the game would be in Albany.

Monroe opens the tournament Tuesday at 6 p.m. at Monroe High School against the East Hall Lady Vikings (6-20), a team from Gainesville in northeast Georgia — roughly a four-and-a-half-hour bus ride from Albany.

"Thank God we are at home and don't have to travel to East Hall," Monroe head coach Jennifer Acree said. "They get to have that trip."

Acree knew her team would be the top seed. The suspense was never about Monroe.

"We knew we were going to be the top seed," Acree said. "We were waiting to see how the rest of the top eight played out."

It played out with symmetry.

"If we can take care of business and get there, we will play them again in the Elite Eight," Acree said of Cherokee Bluff. "But this time we will play them at home. But right now we are focused on East Hall."

That's coach-speak, yes. But it's also discipline.

East Hall's 6-20 record doesn't shimmer. Context matters. The Lady Vikings survived a rugged region simply to reach this bracket. And as Acree sees it, qualifiers deserve respect.

"The way I look at things is this, if you made this tournament, you are a pretty good team," she said. "So we are looking at them as a formidable opponent and we are not overlooking them."

Monroe has earned the luxury of thinking big. But its strength this season has been restraint — a refusal to skip steps, even when the bracket tempts you to look ahead.

Monroe has the discipline.

It also has the firepower.

Georgia's leading scorer, Kie'Aundria Acree, is averaging 30 points per game. She can score from anywhere — off the bounce, from deep, in traffic — and she rarely forces it. Everything runs through her, and she rarely lets it stall.

Taylor McKinzy changes geometry. Leave her for a second and the three is already in the air.

Glendalys Harvey, back from injury, reminded everyone in the region tournament what Monroe looks like when it's whole — longer, quicker, deeper.

Two freshmen start.

Maleyah Hines has been relentless in the paint, playing beyond her years. Naraji McDowell took over at point guard late in the season and hasn't blinked, steadying the offense with calm that doesn't look like freshman basketball.

And then there's the bench.

Mariah Toye. Karma Pope. Antasia Vickers. Jibria Butler. Kaydin Hammond. Miesha Ellis.

No seniors anywhere in sight.

The present is dangerous.

The future is louder.

Around them, Southwest Georgia has turned into something of a postseason hub.

The Westover Lady Patriots (11-13) claimed the No. 15 seed in Class AAA and will host NW Whitfield (16-11) of Dalton on Tuesday at 5 p.m. It's not often a No. 15 seed hosts, but that's the geography of a statewide bracket. Westover gets its chance in its own gym.

The Dougherty Lady Trojans (7-19) drew the No. 31 seed and the long road that comes with it. They will travel to face No. 2-seeded Heritage-Catoosa (23-4), the champion of a region in Georgia's far northwest corner. It's a tall order. It's also late February.

In Class 5A, the Lee County Lady Trojans (18-9) will host the Creekview Lady Grizzlies (22-5) of Canton.



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield
Monroe's Kie'Aundria Acree finishes at the rim during the region tournament at Westover. The state's leading scorer now sets her sights on bringing a championship home — for Monroe and head coach Jennifer Acree.

Class A Division II features a strong regional presence as well, with the Terrell County Lady Greenwave (22-4) hosting Towns County (8-18), while Mitchell County, Pelham and Randolph-Clay also represent the area.

It is bracket season. It is bus-ride season. It is the time of year when geography and seeding collide and small-town gyms feel larger than usual.

For Monroe, the path is clear — at least for now.

Four wins stand between the Lady Nadas and the Final Four. One game stands between Monroe and the right to think about the next one.

The bracket says Monroe is No. 1.

March will decide what that means.

And somewhere in that draw, a familiar name waits.



Special Photo: Submitted

# Sherwood girls fall in Elite Eight

The Sherwood Christian Academy Lady Eagles share a moment before their GIAA Elite Eight game against top-seeded Brentwood. Sophomore Ellie Beck scored 31 points, Julia Kendrick and Aziah Harrison each scored 10 Friday in Macon but Brentwood took the win, 66-55. After struggling early in the season, Sherwood won 10 of its last 13 games and finished with a 13-9 season record under head coach Kenny Roberts.

# Three Braves prospects that could create spring buzz

**By Mark Bowman**
*Braves.com*

**NORTH PORT, Fla.** — The Braves have never been shy about pushing young arms.

Spencer Strider began the 2021 season at Single-A and finished it in the Major Leagues. AJ Smith-Shawver made a similar leap in 2023. Spencer Schwellenbach opened last year at High-A and ended up making 21 starts in Atlanta.

So as Spring Training opens, the natural question isn't whether another young arm will rise quickly.

It's which one.

Here are a few prospects who could make noise this spring — and possibly later this season.

**JR Ritchie (Braves' No. 2 prospect)**

The 22-year-old right-hander made an impressive jump from High-A to Triple-A last season, posting a 3.02 ERA in 11 starts for Gwinnett after returning from Tommy John surgery.

Veteran catcher Sandy León was struck by something beyond the numbers — Ritchie's preparation.

"He does it the right way," León said. "He has his routine in the weight room and in the bullpen. When you have that at that age, it's really good."

León has caught Cy Young winners like Chris Sale and David Price. He sees similar professionalism in Ritchie's daily work.

Ritchie has logged just over 217 innings as a pro, but a strong stretch in Triple-A could put him on Atlanta's radar sooner rather than later.

"I try not to let where I am affect what I do day-to-day," Ritchie said. "It's still the same game."

**Didier Fuentes (No. 7 prospect)**

Fuentes was rushed last June out of necessity. Injuries forced the Braves to call up the 20-year-old Colombian with just six starts above High-A. He struggled, posting a 13.85 ERA in four starts.

He wasn't ready then. That doesn't mean he won't be.

Fuentes has a live arm and a high ceiling. With more seasoning, he could reenter the conversation this season.

**John Gil (No. 13 prospect)**

If there's a position player drawing attention early in camp, it's Gil.

Still just 19 — he turns 20 in May — Gil has begun to physically mature and flash offensive upside. Evaluators see athleticism reminiscent of Wilson Betemit's frame paired with the energy and quickness of Rafael Furcal.

He likely needs a full season of at-bats before being considered Major League-ready.

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# Terrell Academy run-rules Sherwood in season-opener

**By Joe Whitfield**
*Sports Editor*

**ALBANY** — For one inning Thursday night at Legacy Park, the Eagles took flight.

The Terrell Academy Eagles sent 14 batters to the plate in the top of the first, scored nine runs and rode that avalanche to an 11-1, run-rule victory over the Sherwood Christian Academy Eagles in the season opener for both teams.

Yes, it was Eagles versus Eagles. But only one flock found early lift.

Hunter Green reached on an error to open the game, and Terrell immediately went to work. Flint McCullogh followed with a single. Brody Cowart delivered another, driving in Green for the first run of the season. Then came the swing that broke it open.

Jack Hampson turned on a pitch and sent it over the center-field fence for a three-run homer, staking Terrell to a 4-0 lead before Sherwood could settle in. Later in the inning, Green ripped a bases-loaded double to left, stole third and eventually scored on a passed ball, the ninth run of an inning that felt like it would not end.

"I liked how it went as well," Terrell head coach Ashley Walker said. "We are so very young with no seniors and five juniors. We have to rely on some really young guys in key spots."

That youth was evident — both in the explosive start and in the innings that followed.

Sherwood, less than 24 hours removed from a GIAA basketball tournament loss Wednesday night, managed to steady things after the first. In the bottom half of the opening frame, Gregg walked, stole second and scored on a single to left by John Butler to account for Sherwood's only run.

From there, Terrell's bats cooled.

"Sherwood did a really good job of adjusting their game plan in attacking our hitters after the first inning, and we didn't adjust with them," Walker said. "They pitched us really tough after the first and we had some 'let down' at-bats in the innings that followed. But that's credit to Sherwood and their staff for making that happen."

Cowart made sure the early cushion held.

The right-hander worked four innings, allowing just two hits and one earned run. He struck out seven and walked two, though Walker noted there was still room for growth.

"Brody pitched well... pitched a little behind in the count more than we needed him to with a lead," Walker said. "Flint did a good job of coming in and attacking the zone to finish the game."

Indeed, McCullogh closed the door by pounding the strike zone, preserving a clean defensive effort behind him.

"Overall, we played clean defensively," Walker said. "We have to find our identity as a team and we have to understand that this season is going to be a process. We can't allow ourselves to get caught up in individual results, and we have to grow together.

"We showed a few flashes tonight of our potential as well as we let our inexperience and youthfulness show after our explosive first inning."

That, Walker believes, is the larger point.

"All in all, it's a really good first win of a really impactful year moving forward as we grow."

Terrell travels to Grace Christian on Tuesday afternoon.



Staff Photo: Joe Whitfield
Sherwood junior Hunter Gregg dives back to first as Terrell Academy's Tillman Faust waits for a throw during Thursday's game at Sherwood.

# Team USA defeats Canada, wins first hockey gold since 1980

**Field Level Media**

Jack Hughes scored at 1:41 of overtime to lift the United States to a 2-1 victory against Canada in the gold medal game on Sunday at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics.

Hughes scored with a one-timer from the inside edge of the left circle off a feed from defenseman Zach Werenski. The goal gave the Americans their first Olympic gold medal since the Miracle on Ice in 1980.

Matt Boldy scored on the first shot of the game for the U.S. and Connor Hellebuyck made 41 saves.

Defenseman Cale Makar scored and Jordan Binnington made 26 saves for the Canadians, who were trying for their 10th Olympic gold medal.

Canada was outshooting the U.S. 4-0 when Boldy split between Makar and Colorado Avalanche teammate Devon Toews at the Canadian blue line.

Toews had the best chance at snuffing out the play, but he whiffed on his clearing attempt. Boldy continued skating in on Binnington before sliding a backhand between his pads for a 1-0 lead at the six-minute mark of the first period.

Hellebuyck stopped Connor McDavid on a breakaway just before the midway point of the second period, and the Canadians failed to capitalize on a 5-on-3 power play for 93 seconds.

The penalty kill for the U.S. went 18-for-18 in the tournament.



Special Photo: David W Cerny/Reuters
Jack Hughes scored in overtime Sunday to give Team USA a 2-1 win over Canada in the Olympic gold medal game in Italy, giving the United States their first gold medal in hockey since 1980.

The Canadians avoided trailing at the start of the third period for the third straight game when Makar received a pass from Toews above the right circle and fired a wrist shot into the net to tie it 1-1 at 18:16.

Canada outshot the U.S. 19-8 in the second period to take a 27-16 advantage into the third.

Hellebuyck continued to make Grade-A saves early in the third, reaching back with his stick to tip a shot by Toews and then stopping Macklin Celebrini twice on the same breakaway.

Canada was levelled by a four-minute double-minor high-sticking on Sam Bennett at 13:26 of the third, but the U.S. couldn't capitalize for the first three minutes. The rest of the power play was negated by a high-sticking penalty on Hughes.

Canada played its second straight game without star captain Sidney Crosby, who was injured in the 4-3 overtime win against Czechia in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Crosby scored the overtime winner for Canada in a 3-2 win against the U.S. in the gold medal game at the Vancouver Olympics in 2010.



Special Photo: Imagn Images
Clemson alumnus Jacob Bridgeman won his first PGA championship Sunday in California, shooting 18-under 266.

# Clemson alum Jacob Bridgeman earns first win at Genesis Invitational

**Field Level Media**

**PACIFIC PALISADES, Calif.** — After hanging around on the porch for much of the past year, Jacob Bridgeman stormed through the front door Sunday, earning his first career PGA Tour victory by holding on for a one-shot win in the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club.

Bridgeman played it safe, shooting 1-over-par 72 in the final round to finish 18-under 266 at the finale of the season-opening West Coast Swing. After holding a seven-shot lead at one point early in his final round he needed a 5-foot putt at 18 to make the win official.

Rory McIlroy (67) closed with birdies on the final two holes to finish tied for second with Kurt Kitayama (64) at 17 under, while Australia's Adam Scott (63) finished fourth at 16 under. Scott, the tournament winner in 2005 and 2020 who entered on a sponsor's exemption, had two rounds of 8-under 63.

South Africa's Aldrich Potgieter (68) was alone in fifth at 15 under and Jake Knapp (66) was sixth at 13 under.

During an emotional week, as the tournament returned to the Los Angeles-area neighborhood that was devastated by a wildfire last January, Bridgeman fought back tears on the 18th green when his breakthrough was complete.

Content to play it safe after starting the day with a six-shot lead, Bridgeman was even par through 15 holes after two birdies and two bogeys. His bogey at No. 16, dropped him to 18 under and allowed Kitayama to pull within a stroke.

Nine strokes back at the start of the day, Kitayama's charge included four birdies over his first five holes of the final round. He had four more birdies on the back nine to deliver his first top-five finish since winning the 3M Open in July.

It was almost one year to the date when Bridgeman started to show that his first trophy was near. He was runner-up at Cognizant Classic last February and delivered four top-five finishes in just over four months.

The run continued this season with a fourth-place finish at the Sony Open at Hawaii and a tie for eighth at Pebble Beach last week. After never holding an overnight lead since joining the PGA Tour, he was in the top spot all four days this weekend, including a tie for first after each of the first two rounds.

Bridgeman, a South Carolina native and Clemson alum, who reached 21-under par early in his round, finished off the victory with a pars at 17 and 18.

An infrequent visitor to the West Coast until joining the PGA Tour, Bridgeman not only earned a hefty payday, he did it while playing on the legendary Riviera layout for the first time.

For the third consecutive week, world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler (65) turned a poor start into a solid finish. He finished 11 under for the weekend and in a tie for 12th after scrambling to make the cut on the number.

"I think after Thursday I did some pretty good stuff," Scheffler said. "... I think I was in dead last after Thursday, battled just to make the cut and think I had two solid (rounds) over the weekend."

Collin Morikawa (65), who ended a victory drought of over two years last week at Pebble Beach, was in a group of five, along with Tommy Fleetwood and Xander Schauffele, that finished tied for seventh place at 12 under.

In the middle of a rough round, Max Greyserman had a hole-in-one at No. 12 after he was 4 over on the day to that point. He finished in a tie for 24th place at 7 under.

# Moving the chains: Love it or LIV it

**By Scott Ludwig**
*MagicLudwig1@gmail.com*

The PGA Tour allowed Brooks Koepka to return this year.

Yes, that would be the same Brooks Koepka who joined LIV golf in the summer of 2022. Why would he do such a thing? For a sign-on fee in excess of $100 million, that's why. Also, in lieu of playing 72-hole tournaments on the PGA Tour, he only had to play *54, which translates to 3 days of golf instead of 4.

*In 2026 LIV adopted the 72-hole format. Incidentally, LIV is the Roman numeral for 54, so don't be at all surprised if LIV becomes LXXII.

For those unfamiliar with LIV golf, it's a rogue (yes, rogue) professional golf tour funded by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund – whose assets are close to $940 billion – that is hell bent on competing with the PGA Tour.

Offering lucrative sign-on fees such as the one given to Koepka, about four dozen PGA players followed suit – the list of traitors (yes, 'traitors) includes Phil Mickelson, Jon Rahm, and Bryson DeChambeau – and left for greener pastures.

The PGA Tour should have said 'good riddance' and left it at that. Only that's not the case, because despite Koepka turning his back on them, they made the unwise decision to give him another shot.

Koepka's return to the PGA Tour is part of the new Returning Member Program, established for major winners (Koepka has 5) who also meet certain other criteria, including a mutual and amicable departure from LIV Golf, a player's familial concerns, and their 'competitive desire' – whatever that means.

Assuming Koepka checked every box, which he apparently did, everything is hunky-dory, right?

Not exactly. At least not according to fellow PGA Tour player Wyndham Clark, who says he is 'torn' about Koepka's return and that it feels like Koepka was able to (sic) 'get the cake and also eat it.' Specifically, he doesn't feel Koepka should have been allowed take a 'boatload of money' from LIV and still be able to return to the PGA Tour whenever he felt like it – a move Clark believes other players would have made had they known it was even a remote possibility.

Clark has a valid point. Who wouldn't want a guaranteed payday to jump ship if there was the chance of climbing back on board later?

There's more to be heard on this from both sides, of course, but this is more than enough for the point I want to make, which is:

I'm done with professional sports.

Every last one of them. Because the lone professional sport I still followed is now dead to me as well.

And in a way it breaks my heart, because I've been a devoted fan of professional golf ever since I saw a former U.S. Army sergeant (Orville Moody) win the U.S. Open and a disappointed Argentinian (Robert de Vicenzo) sign an incorrect scoreboard that kept him from possibly winning the Masters in sudden death.

Over the years, I've followed the PGA's biggest stars, going all the way back to Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Tom Watson - as well as all the various members of the supporting cast, such as Kermit Zarley, Rod Funseth, and Homero Blancas.

But enough is enough. That all ends now, and the Brooks Koepka situation is the only reason I need. It's a shame, because I always thought athletes should be paid for their individual performance, and no one does it better than golf.

I have to go all the way back to the 1994 strike in Major League Baseball to explain what ended my lifelong love affair with the other professional sports. An athletes' greed for more money was all it took for me to say enough is enough back then, and now I'm saying it again for the last time.

In a way that makes me sad, because my fandom dates back more than 6 decades. I watched professional baseball when just the two teams with the best records in each league played in the World Series, professional football teams played an even number of regular season games – 14 – and always on Sunday, and the only possible 3-point play in professional basketball was a 2-and-1.

I knew the rosters of every team in baseball, football, and basketball, as well as where each team stood in the standings (to include when teams were mathematically eliminated from contention). I could recite the statistics of every player in all three sports - within a margin of error of +/- 3%.

Today they have been virtually forgotten. Because that was then.

And this is now. I'm giving up my last remaining professional sport as a fan: golf.

Slowly but surely those players, statistics, and memories will escape me as well, no doubt leaving space in my brain to remember other things that I haven't thought about in years.

Like the lyrics to old, long-forgotten songs. Ito Eats from Elvis Presley's Blue Hawaii, for example:

Ito is an eating boy
He never get enough from fish and poi
He eat everything, he don't care what
He even eat the shell from the coconut
What was I talking about again?

# High housing costs, shortage propel reform movement in Congress

**By David Lightman**
*Georgia Recorder*



Special Photo: Dan Reynolds/Getty Images via Georgia Recorder

Two bills pending in Congress potentially could bring about reform and make home-buying less expensive and easier to achieve.

**WASHINGTON** — Republicans, Democrats and the White House are methodically, calmly inching toward a common goal: agreeing on a thick package of laws that would do something quickly about slowing housing costs and boosting supply.

There's no talk of gridlock here. No partisan sniping. Just an under-the-radar effort to show constituents in an election year that their lawmakers realize there's a big problem when it comes to buying homes.

That's why the House earlier this month passed its version of housing reform with only nine dissenting votes. The Senate committee writing similar legislation approved it unanimously last year.

While there are still some obstacles ahead before anything reaches President Trump's desk, what's happening is almost a throwback to the days when getting 80% of one's plan was a big victory, a policy prize to tout back home as midterm elections near.

"There is no silver bullet for fixing this problem," Rep. Mike Flood, R-Neb., chairman of the Housing and Insurance Subcommittee, said.

But, he added, "I think that this bill, this legislation, includes a range of meaningful housing reforms that will add to housing supply and ultimately decrease housing costs."

The House and Senate bills have a common purpose, said Emma Waters, senior policy analyst at Washington's Bipartisan Policy Center. "Both bills really are pushing to make it easier to build more affordable homes," she said.

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, D-Mo., a member of the House Financial Services Committee, explained the House bill this way: "It ensures that every dollar we do spend goes further."

An analysis by the Zillow Group, a real estate company that researches home prices and trends, last summer found that in 2023, about 1.4 million new homes were added to the housing stock, but there were 1.8 million newly formed families.

As a result, the housing shortage was up to 4.7 million units. Other estimates put it as high as 7 million.

The typical home price in January in the United States was $359,078, up 0.2% from a year earlier, Zillow found. Prices depend on a wide variety of factors, including labor costs, cost of materials, interest rates, supply and demand, and more.

The House and Senate bills share several similar provisions. The Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based research organization, estimated that the House bill includes pieces of at least 43 different House or Senate bills, 27 of which have had bipartisan support.

Under the House plan, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development would update the department's construction standards for manufactured housing. The Senate bill has similar provisions.

The House bill would provide money for "pattern books" for such housing that would feature pre-approved plans that could speed up the approval process.

The bills would allow money from Community Development Block Grants, which help fund neighborhood projects, to better support housing production.

The Senate bill would reward CDBG recipients that have, unrelated to their other CDBG projects, increased their housing production in the previous year.

As a reward for building more housing in the previous year, those jurisdictions would receive additional CDBG funding, but there are still restrictions on how those funds can be used.

The House bill, though, would change the restriction so that CDBG money could be used for housing construction.

Housing experts believe a reason landlords balk is they're reluctant to endure the government's inspection process; the bills would streamline that process. Landlords would get incentives to accept tenants with rent vouchers.

Also likely to help consumers: making it easier for banks, usually community institutions that focus on local needs, to invest in more affordable housing. The House bill would raise the public investment welfare cap, allowing more such investments.

The banking provision is one of the few major areas where the Senate and House disagree. There's concern among some Democrats that the House bill lifts too many bank regulatory barriers.

"We have a bipartisan bill with unanimous support in the Senate that will help build more housing and lower costs for the American people. I'm glad to see the House move forward on housing proposals," Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee, said, but she added, "House Republicans should not hold housing relief hostage to push forward several bank deregulatory bills that will make our community banks more fragile while harming consumers, small businesses, and economic growth."

Also having potential to stymie negotiations is the White House's eagerness to ban institutional investors from buying single-family homes. There's not much congressional support for that idea.

There's still a sense in the Capitol that Republicans and Democrats will come together on a major housing bill, particularly since Congress and the White House agree on most key provisions and leading interest groups are helping push legislation forward.

The National Association of Realtors has been enthusiastic about the House and Senate bills.

"By addressing barriers at every level of government, the legislation will make it faster and cheaper to build new homes," the organization said after the House passed the housing reform bill.

The Affordable Housing Tax Credit Coalition also liked the House bill, as CEO Emily Cadik called it "a set of commonsense, bipartisan housing proposals that would increase the supply of affordable housing."

Most in Washington who follow housing policy closely are upbeat about the legislation's prospects.

## OBITUARY



**Mr. John "Jack" Bernard Cronin Jr.**

John B. Cronin Jr., 72, of Huntsville, Alabama, passed away peacefully on February 6, 2026. Born on May 27, 1953, in Spokane, Washington, he lived a life marked by devotion to his country and, most of all, to his family.

A proud United States Army veteran, Jack served with honor and carried that strength and loyalty with him throughout his life. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Nancy Cronin.

Jack is survived by his daughters, Sarah Cronin and Christie Thomason (Jeff Thomason); his grandchildren, Ashley White, (Ryan White) Ryan Thomason, and (Elsa Thomason); and his treasured great-grandchildren, Isaiah White, Elijah White, Olivia White, Knox Thomason, Kase Thomason, Wilder White, and Abel White.

Family was everything to Jack. He was known for his quick wit, unforgettable jokes, and the special nicknames he gave to those he loved. He cared deeply, loved fiercely, and made everyone around him feel valued. He will be missed beyond measure and remembered always for the laughter and love he brought into our lives.

A service with military honors will be held at Andersonville National Cemetery in Andersonville, Georgia, on Thursday, February 26 at 12:00 PM.

### 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.

"AJ HZ, GSXM CV DRJSA RZCXI DX CXNCYCNSDW ... VADXNCXI SG DXN VDBCXI, 'AFCV CV UFJ C DH.'"

— PJZB ODHJXZ

Previous Solution: "There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well prepared to meet the enemy." — George Washington

*TODAY'S CLUE: V equals Y*

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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.

"WN MTK UXL TERXG, LFX AVJDVPUN UXL NEVOOXG, HKL LFX AXTAEX RTP'L." — JWGGVX IVNFXG

Previous Solution: "To me, punk is about being an individual ... standing up and saying, 'This is who I am.'" — Joey Ramone

*TODAY'S CLUE: D equals K*

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## Albany Classifieds

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Notices

**Dougherty County Democratic Candidates Qualifying for 2026 Primary**

The Dougherty County Democratic Committee will qualify Democratic Candidates for the upcoming Primary of the 2026 Election Cycle. Qualifying starts on March 2, 2026 and ends on March 6, 2026 at 12 Noon.

Qualifying will be held at 1347 Silas Lane, Albany, GA
Qualifying date and times: **By Appointment only.** Contact Benny Hand at 229- 291-2888.

Qualifying fees should be paid with a postal money order, a bank issued cashier's check,or personal check.

In notification,
Chair Barlow
Joyce Barlow

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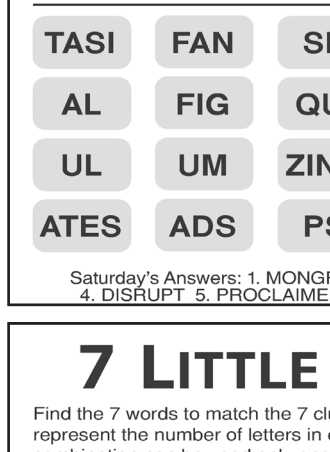
## JOBS

### Full-Time

**Judicial Notice**

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. §15-11-50(f) the Superior Court is seeking qualified candidates for the position of Juvenile Court Judge in the Dougherty Judicial Circuit. This will be an appointment or reappointment by court order for a term beginning April 1, 2026 and ending December 31, 2029. All applicants interested in appointment or reappointment as the Judge for Juvenile Court shall submit a letter of application to the Honorable Denise Marshall, Chief Judge of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit, P. O. Box 1827, Albany, GA 31702. All applications shall be received by Chief Judge Denise Marshall office by February 28, 2026.
Qualified applicants must be at least 30 years of age, a citizen of Georgia for 3 years, having practiced law for five years (seven is preferred) and be a member of the State Bar of Georgia in good standing.

## Full-Time




## Albany Legals

## DUI Notices



2/10/2026
Defendant's name: Jalen Jawuan Dawson
Defendant's address: 333 S. Mock Rd, Apt 111, Albany, GA 31705
ARREST
DATE: 7/26/2025, TIME: 4:45 A.M.
PLACE: Albany, Georgia
CHARGE(S): DUI Alcohol Less Safe (2nd), Failure to Maintain Lane with Accident
ARRESTING AGENCY: Albany Police Department
DISPOSITION DATE: 2/6/2026
SENTENCE: Guilty Plea to DUI Alcohol Less Safe (2nd) $1200 fine, Nolo Contendere Plea to Open Container $150 fine, 24 months' probation, 30 days community service, DUI Risk Reduction Class within 120 days, clinical evaluation and follow all recommendation, $25 publication fee, no alcohol, 60 days jail credit for time served, 30 days balance suspended upon compliance with probation.
COURT: Albany Municipal Ct, Albany, GA

Keep Journalists On Their Beat

## 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 imagining the possibilities (11) | |
| 2 airtight, perhaps (6) | |
| 3 bruising brawl (9) | |
| 4 dill spears (7) | |
| 5 prepares needle for sewing (7) | |
| 6 witty cracks (5) | |
| 7 piles up (11) | |

TASI FAN SE ST ED
AL FIG QUI ACC LES
UL UM ZING HT THRE
ATES ADS PS PICK FI

Saturday's Answers: 1. MONGREL 2. CAVORTS 3. ROAST 4. DISRUPT 5. PROCLAIMERS 6. ENOKI 7. GUJARATI 2/23

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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 calendar cycles (5) | |
| 2 famous fawn (5) | |
| 3 pocket change (5) | |
| 4 apparently (9) | |
| 5 dressed (7) | |
| 6 highchair users (8) | |
| 7 spoke like the Sphinx (7) | |

LE CO YEA EM BAM
BI TO INS LY ED
SE RS CL RS DDL
RI ED DD OTH ING

Monday's Answers: 1. FANTASIZING 2. SEALED 3. FISTFIGHT 4. PICKLES 5. THREADS 6. QUIPS 7. ACCUMULATES 2/24

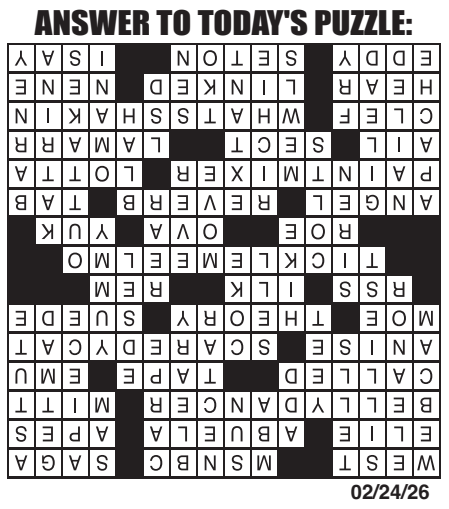
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## CROSSWORD

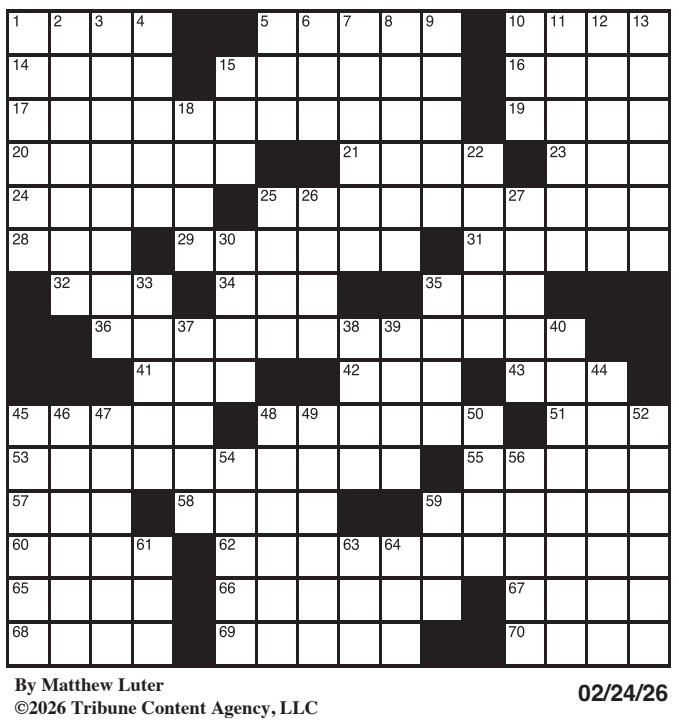
**ACROSS**
1 Direction in the name of only one U.S. state
5 News network that changed its name in 2025
10 Story that spans generations
14 Writer Wiesel
15 Spanish nana
16 Large primates
17 Performer who might play finger cymbals
19 Baseball glove
20 "But that's not why I __ ... "
21 Cassette
23 Australian bird with secondary eyelids
24 Fennel flavor
25 Easily frightened sort
28 "The Simpsons" tavern owner
29 Plausible explanation
31 Leather with a fuzzy finish
32 Blog feed initials
34 Sort
35 "Shiny Happy People" band
36 Furry red "Sesame Street" toy
41 Small eggs
42 Very small eggs
43 Guffaw
45 __ hair pasta
48 Echoing guitar effect
51 Bar bill
53 Hardware store device that makes custom colors
55 Led Zeppelin's "Whole __ Love"
57 Feel poorly
58 Breakaway group
59 Actress/inventor Hedy
60 Sheet music symbol
62 "How goes it?," or a question that could be answered by 17-, 25-, 36-, and 53-Across
65 Listen to
66 Connected
67 Hawaii's state bird
68 Small whirlpool
69 __ Hall: New Jersey university
70 "My stars!"

**DOWN**
1 Online video tool
2 Roosevelt who was first lady for 12 years
3 Most inane
4 Rats (on)
5 Exec's degree, often
6 __-dried tomatoes
7 Hummingbird food
8 Like sleep-deprived eyes
9 "__ diem!"
10 Actor Waterston
11 Each
12 Grow angry
13 Insightful
15 Sum up
18 Toss aside forcefully, in slang
22 Ford that flopped
25 Peddle
26 Cola choice
27 Delish
30 Go backpacking
33 Warning wail
35 Raise, as kids
37 Young male horses
38 Checkers turn
39 "Best. Day. __!"
40 Blooper reel bits
44 Hurricane in Jesmyn Ward's novel "Salvage the Bones"
45 Navajo neighbors
46 Did exactly right
47 "The Handmaid's Tale" setting
48 Lionel of the Commodores
49 Still around
50 Meh
52 Fred's friend in Bedrock
54 Whimpers
56 Muscat citizen
59 Acid rock's acid
61 Word after waffle or curly
63 Boxing ring ruling, for short
64 One of a D.C. 100

**ANSWER TO TODAY'S PUZZLE:**



02/24/26



By Matthew Luter
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02/24/26

# Dougherty commissioners eligible for retirement plan starting in 2027

**By Alan Mauldin**
*alan.mauldin@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY** – Starting in January 2027 Dougherty County Commission members will be eligible to participate in the county's defined-benefit plan.

Under the proposal, approved with a 6-1 vote, each commissioner who opts into the program will be eligible for contribution from county coffers of 12% of their base salary, which currently is about $22,000 per year.

Commissioners told The Albany Herald that the provision could lead to more individuals being interested in serving in public office, while Commissioner Russell Gray, who was the sole vote against the motion, said that it is an unbudgeted expense to taxpayers.

"It's a great idea," Commissioner Victor Edwards said. "Commissioners make a great sacrifice being in public office. The (Albany) City Commission already has it. We just always kind of danced around it."

The move adds county commissioners to eligible employees under the county's 401(a) program effective Jan. 1, 2027.

"You make sure all your employees are taken care of, so why wouldn't you take care of elected officials and make sure they have a better life after doing what we've done?" Edwards said.



Staff Photo: Alan Maiuldin

Dougherty County Commissioners Russell Gray, left, and Gloria Gaines look over their notes prior to a Feb. 16 commission meeting.

Holding elected office can be tough for individuals who are not self-employed due to their not being able to take time off from work to perform the duties expected of them such as attending meetings and meeting with constituents, he said.

"You've got to remember, politics was never designed for middle-class, lower-class, anyway," Edwards said. "How can you go to the (Georgia) Capitol (for Albany-Dougherty Capitol Day) like we did last week? What employer is going to let you take the day off and go to the Capitol?

"I appreciate the Chairman (Lorenzo Heard) for having the audacity and strength to bring this up. I appreciate Commissioner Gaines and Commissioner Jones."

The job of commissioner is a part-time duty, not one that one should expect as a way of receiving compensation, Gray said.

"It is a personal sacrifice," he said. "It's not a full-time job. To me, board members are not employees of the county and shouldn't have the same benefits and perks that employees busting their cans for 40 or 50 hours a week should have."

Adding commissioners to the defined-benefit plan would add an expense of about $2,640 for each member who opts in, Gray said, plus the administrative costs, all of which will be borne by taxpayers.

"First and foremost, I voted against it because it's a new expense to the county that we can't afford right now," he said. "It's taxpayer money, and the less you can use, the better."

The amount that the county will pay into the plan on behalf of commissioners could be the difference in an individual deciding to seek election, Gaines said.

"If we can get a young and vigorous person on the board who represents their constituents ... and this makes the job a little more attractive, I'm all for it," she said. "It may result in getting more competent people."

Although the position is considered part-time, commissioners do put in hours to do their jobs effectively, Gaines said.

"It takes quite a bit of time on the part of a few of our commissioners," she said. "We are being called on in a variety of ways in representing the various interests of our district."

# Georgia Southwestern freshman wins gold at Special Olympics World Winter Games

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**AMERICUS** –As athletes from around the world compete on the global stage at this year's Winter Games, one member of Georgia Southwestern State University's freshman class already knows what it feels like to stand atop the podium.

Jayda Hughes of Moultrie won a gold medal in Alpine Skiing at the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy. In addition to gold, she earned two bronze medals in other skiing events, bringing home three medals in her first World Games appearance.




Special Photo: GSW

Jayda Hughes of Moultrie won a gold medal in Alpine Skiing at the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy.

Hughes was one of only three athletes from Georgia selected to compete at the 2025 Games, where she faced more than 1,500 athletes from 103 countries. Now a fine arts major at GSW, Hughes concentrates in ceramics. Her pottery and artwork have been exhibited at the Georgia National Fair in Perry. She says the encouragement she received from the GSW community meant everything as she prepared for international competition.

"Everyone at GSW was very supportive, gave me prayers and blessings and told me very encouraging words," Hughes said.

Although she has only been skiing for about five years, her coach, Mitchell McKinney, describes her as a natural skier with "raw talent." Hughes first tried skiing at age 14 on a trip with Special Olympics to Boone, N.C. Because Georgia rarely sees snow, she is typically able to practice just once a year. Even so, McKinney says she has impressed coaches from around the world with her determination and skill.

Hughes, who has autism and a physical disability due to a birth defect affecting her leg, says Special Olympics gave her the opportunity to prove something to herself and others.

"Special Olympics has allowed me the opportunity to show people that I can do something, that I am good at something," she said.

As winter athletes compete on the world stage this season, Hughes' story stands as a reminder that excellence and perseverance are already shining bright at GSW.



Danielle Olivia Weaver

# Lee County teacher charged with child molestation, improper sexual contact with student

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**LEESBURG** – A Lee County High School teacher faces charges related to allegations of inappropriate sexual contact with a student.

Danielle Olivia Weaver was charged with child molestation and improper sexual contact by an employee, agent or foster parent, according to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Weaver was arrested on Wednesday at the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

The school system notified the Lee County Police Department of the accusations on Feb. 3. Over the course of the investigation, Weaver was identified as the subject and the victim was identified as a juvenile student at the high school, the GBI said.

Following further investigation by police and the GBI, law enforcement took out arrest warrants for Weaver.

The investigation is ongoing, the agency said.

# Albany Technical College students win five gold, five silver medals at SkillsUSA challenge

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**ATLANTA --** Albany Technical College students earned five gold medals and five silver medals at the 2026 SkillsUSA Georgia State Leadership and Skills Conference held recently at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Atlanta.

Nearly 40 Albany Tech students competed this year, representing more than 15 academic programs offered at the college. Students demonstrated their technical expertise, leadership skills, and professionalism while competing against the top postsecondary talent across the state.

Gold medalists advancing to the 2026 National Leadership and Skills Conference June 1-5 in Atlanta include:

Eleanor Handwerk - Welding Sculpture

Chavares Porter - Extemporaneous Speaking

Nadia Qualls – Esthetics

Tommy Stewart – Masonry

Carnal August - Firefighting

Silver medalists include:

Christopher Whitaker - Prepared Speech

James Green - Commercial Roofing

Vanessa Warren – Cosmetology

Teairra Clyde - Early Childhood Education

Erica Vance - Practical Nursing

This year's SkillsUSA theme, "Champion Your Future," was embraced by Albany Tech students with their own unified declaration: "We Are Champions of Our Future."

Kenneth Williams, Director of Athletics and Student Life, commended the students and faculty for their commitment to excellence.

"Our students represented Albany Technical College with skill, confidence, and professionalism," Williams said. "Competing at this level requires dedication and preparation, and our instructors invested significant time ensuring our students were ready for this opportunity."

"These accomplishments reflect the strength of our programs and the talent of our students," Albany Tech President Emmett Griswold said. "Their performance at the state level highlights the quality of technical education and work force training delivered at Albany Tech."

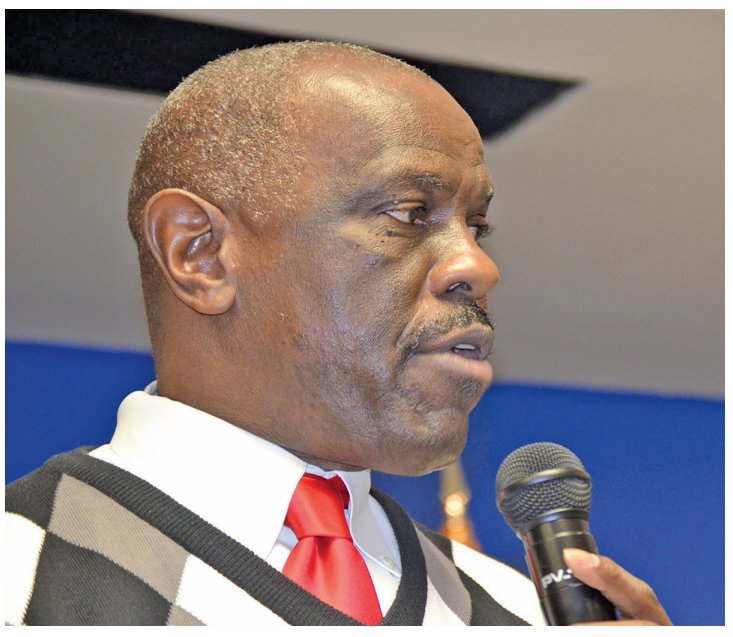
SkillsUSA is a national career and technical student organization that provides education, leadership development, and competitive opportunities for students preparing for careers in skilled trades and service occupations. Founded in 1965 as the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), the organization was renamed SkillsUSA in 2009. Members compete at local, state and national levels in career-related technical events designed to measure real-world workforce readiness.




Special Graphic

Albany Technical College students earned five gold medals and five silver medals at the 2026 SkillsUSA Georgia State Leadership and Skills Conference held in Atlanta.

Albany Tech's Gold Medalists will advance to compete at the National Leadership and Skills Conference in Atlanta June 1-5, where they will represent both the college and the state of Georgia on the national stage.



Jon Howard

# Saturday town hall to provide information on 2026 election

**Staff Reports**
*news@albanyherald.com*

**ALBANY** – Albany City Commissioner Jon Howard will hold a Saturday town hall meeting to inform voters about the 2026 elections.

Dougherty County Elections Supervisor Ginger Nickerson will give the update on the election, Howard said in a news release.

Other topics will include provisional ballots, voter apathy and precinct changes.

The town hall will be held at 10 a.m. at the Club at Thornton, located at 210 Thornton Drive.