

# The Courier Herald

\$1 TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026 COURIERHERALDTODAY.COM

## County Commission OKs bid for new EMS station

By **RODNEY MANLEY**  
Staff Reporter

The Laurens County Commission approved a \$575,900 bid last week to build a new Emergency Medical Service substation.

Riley Construction submitted the lowest of five bids to build the new substation near the main EMS office off County Farm Road. The commission approved a contract in June with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency for the new building after

state Rep. Matt Hatchett secured \$500,000 in state funding for the project.

"We had budgeted for \$500,000. We had hoped to build it for that," said County Administrator Bryan Rogers.

The commission approved a request from the Dublin Circuit District Attorney's Office to amend the budget to include funding to retain through June 30 two assistant DA positions that had been funded through grants. Laurens County's share will be \$49,500, with the judicial circuit's remaining three counties footing the rest of the

\$75,000 total.

"The district attorney has been working hard. They've really been prosecuting a lot of cases, getting people out of jail in an expeditious manner, which has saved us a lot on medical costs," Rogers told the commissioners.

Commission Chairman Jimmy Rogers opened the meeting asking for prayer for County Attorney Billy Kight, who at the time was in critical condition in a Savannah hospital, and for the family of county employee Randall Warnock.

Kight had brain surgery last Monday but passed away over the weekend.

"Billy has meant a lot to me and to a lot of people in this room," Bryan Rogers said.

Warnock, who was a road supervisor for the county, also recently passed away.

"We lost a good employee, but we also lost a good man who would do so much to help people that he didn't want any credit for," said Chairman Rogers.

**COUNTY COMMISSION**  
Continued on page 8



County school Superintendent O.J. Hall (right) leads his first meeting as superintendent Thursday in the Old West Laurens gym/PAYTON TOWNS III

## Board honors WL football for historic season

By **PAYTON TOWNS III**  
Senior Reporter

The West Laurens Raiders were honored for a successful season in which their football squad went further than any in school history.

New board chairman Tony Johnson, an alum of WLHS, thanked the football players for the 13-1 season in which they made it to the semifinals, during last Thursday's Laurens County Board of Education meeting held at the Old West Laurens School.

"Thank you for your outstanding play and your hard work," Johnson said. "You created memories for me and the community that will last forever. I appreciate what you did on and off the football field."

New Superintendent O.J. Hall, who also graduated from WLHS, agreed with Johnson.

"What you provided for us and this community this year was something special," Hall said. "I know it is something I will never forget. It was good to know that our high school football team was practicing on Thanksgiving Day and our high school football team was playing a day after Thanksgiving. It was good to know that they were



Superintendent O.J. Hall congratulates the West Laurens football team that finished 13-1, won a region title and reached the final four in Class AAA/PAYTON TOWNS III

playing the first week of December."

He pointed out all of the school officials and the parents for what they did behind the scenes.

"I know they came home tired and you made them stick with it," Hall said. "They were playing on

week 14 ... and it was good to see our crowd come alive this year like I have not seen it in years."

Raiders head coach Kip Burdette introduced the players and coaching staff,

playing the first week of December."

He pointed out all of the school officials and the parents for what they did behind the scenes.

"I know they came home tired and you made them stick with it," Hall said. "They were playing on

week 14 ... and it was good to see our crowd come alive this year like I have not seen it in years."

Raiders head coach Kip Burdette introduced the players and coaching staff,

**SCHOOL BOARD**  
Continued on page 8

## Chain announces bid for re-election

By **RODNEY MANLEY**  
Staff Reporter

Laurens County Commissioner Brenda Chain has announced that she plans to seek re-election in November.

"After careful thought and encouragement from my family and constituents, I have decided to run for a third term as county commissioner. Nothing has changed from the first time I ran for county commissioner. I ran on five principles. One, being your voice. Two, having vision. Three, being visible. Four, being vested. Five, adding value," Chain said in a statement.

"As a county representative, I have shown that I am not afraid to speak up on what is best for the community. I show that I have vision, if you look at the things we have accomplished these past two terms. I have been visible throughout the county. I

don't just sit idly by waiting for someone else to tell me what is going on. I have lived in Laurens County my whole life, raised my family here, opened businesses here. What better person to have to have to represent other than one who has been here since birth. It shows that I am very vested in my community."

Chain, a local businesswoman, publicly announced her intentions at last week's commission meeting, noting that fellow commissioners Jimmy Rogers and Kevin Tanner had already announced their re-election bids.

"We need to vote on that?" Rogers joked.

Commissioner Gerad Mathis gave Chain his informal endorsement during board comments, as he reflected on his first year in office.

"I've really enjoyed

**CHAIN**  
Continued on page 8



Commissioner Brenda Chain (center), while serving as chairwoman last year, takes a vote during a meeting at the county's new 911 center/PAYTON TOWNS III

## State senator to speak at annual MLK breakfast

**SPECIAL TO THE COURIER HERALD**

State Sen. Derek Mallow will be the guest speaker at the Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast at 9 a.m. on Jan. 19 at Dublin Middle School.

This year's theme for the breakfast, which is presented by the Dublin-Laurens Black Festival History Community Committee, is "A Century of Black History Commemorations."

Mallow, whose district includes most of the Savannah area, is a member of Senate committees on Children and Families, Economic Development and Tourism, State and Local Tourism, State and Local Governmental Operations, and Transportation. He is also the secretary for Com-

mittee on Ethics. He previously served as state representation for House District 163 before his election to the Senate in 2022.

A native of Savannah, Mallow is a graduate of Jenkins High School. He earned degrees in leadership and ministry from Asbury University and later obtained a Master of Public Administration from Savannah State University, along with a graduate certificate in nonprofit organizational leadership. He currently serves as executive director and CEO of East Savannah United, a nonprofit dedication to community revitalization.

Mallow is deeply involved in his community, including more than



**MALLOW**

15 years with the Boy Scouts of America, serving as a field director. He is a board member of the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus and the Greater Savannah Black Chamber of Commerce, and a member of Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity.

**MLK BREAKFAST**  
Continued on page 8

## Martin Luther King Jr. Parade looks for better weather in 2026

By **PAYTON TOWNS III**  
Senior Reporter

It may have poured down rain during the 2025 Martin Luther King Jr. Parade, but it did not stop the event. Parade organizers are hoping for better weather in 2026.

The 30th annual Dublin-Laurens Martin Luther King Jr. Parade will be held at 11 a.m. on Jan. 17 in downtown Dublin. The parade lineup will start at 9:30 a.m., said Royce Hall, secretary for the Dublin-Laurens Martin Luther King Jr. Parade Committee.

"I love the unity about the parade," Hall said. "I love to build the community up for unity and promoting love. I love to see people happy and smiling and commemorating what Dr. King stood for and keeping it based on doing good for all people. It's good to have everyone come out and enjoy. We are just praying for good weather."

The theme for the parade is Mission Possible II: Uniting a Nation. Building a Future. The Nonviolent Way." Judge Dexter Winbush will



Participants brave the rain aboard their float in last year's MLK Jr. Parade/HORACE AUSTIN, File

be the grand marshal for the parade.

Wimbish is an attorney, community activist, fundraiser, adjunct professor, father and minister who has worked in the area of civil

rights for two decades. He has nearly 30 years of diversified managerial, legal, diversity, and governmental

**SCHOOL BOARD**  
Continued on page 8



7 36211 57521 0

1 section, 8 pages • Vol. 112, No. 5, Pub. No. 161860

**OBITUARIES**



**Rita Hogan Mullis**

Rita Hogan Mullis, age 84 of Dublin, Georgia passed away peacefully on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026, surrounded by her loved ones. She is now walking with the Lord and is now reunited with her son, Mitch Rhodes, in Heaven.

She was born Dec. 9, 1941, in Dublin, Georgia. She was the daughter of Calhoun Hogan and Mary Belcher Hogan. She lived a life defined by kindness, strength, and devotion to her family. She was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt and friend whose presence brought comfort and joy to everyone who knew her. Her laughter, wisdom, and unwavering love will be deeply missed.

She loved gardening, watching birds, crocheting, working in the yard, enjoying fellowship with her church friends at Dexter Methodist Church, and any kind of travel or fun that she could get into with her husband, Wayne. Most of all, she loved spending time with her loved ones.

She was the heart of her family. A woman whose love knew no limits, loved fiercely, and carried and unmatched strength that inspired those around her. Her gentle presence, warm smile, and comforting words will be missed beyond measure. Her dedication to her family will be carried out for generations to come.

Mrs. Mullis is survived by her husband, Wayne Mullis of Dublin; two sons, Jeff Rhodes (Sheri) of Ocilla, Jimmy Mullis of Blue Ridge; four daughters, Michelle Mimbs (Gary) of Dexter, Dawn Rhodes of Dexter, Lisa Snell (Scott) of Canton, and Christy Clements (Alan) of Dexter, 11 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026, in the Chan Stanley Memorial Chapel of Stanley Funeral Home and Crematory, with interment to follow at Northview Cemetery. Rev. Gary Mimbs will officiate.

The family will receive friends from 12:30 p.m. until 1:45 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026, at the funeral home.

Pallbearers will be Tyler Mimbs, Ryne Mimbs, Tucker Rhodes, Austin Snell, Caden Snell, Blake Clements, Justin Clements, and Casey Crabb.

The family asks that in lieu of flowers donations be made in memory of Mrs. Mullis to Kids Cup at 2011 Claxton Dairy Road, Dublin, GA 31021.

Stanley Funeral Home and Crematory/Dublin Chapel has charge of funeral arrangements. To sign the Online Register Book please visit [www.stanleyfuneralhome.com](http://www.stanleyfuneralhome.com)



**Billy Roy Kight**

Billy Roy Kight, 74, of Dublin, Georgia, passed away on the evening of Jan. 9, 2026. Born in Dublin on July 12, 1951, he was the first son of Thelmon Kight Jr., and Mary Davis Evans.

In his younger years, he and his family moved to Winter Haven, Florida, and then Vidalia, Georgia. After returning to Laurens County, he graduated from East Laurens High School in 1969. He worked at the J.P. Stevens factory in Statesboro while attending Georgia Southern College, graduating in 1973 with a degree in history. He began his professional career as a probation officer with the State of Georgia. While working full-time, he continued his education by earning a master's degree in psychology from the University of Georgia and, after years of commuting at night to Atlanta, a juris doctor from Atlanta Law School in 1978.

In 1979, he joined his brother-in-law Gibbs Flanders to form the law firm Kight & Flanders. Over the decades of his legal career, he provided wise counsel and assistance to countless citizens throughout Laurens County. The difficult and impoverished circumstances of his own youth, which he rarely spoke of, led him to show non-judgmental kindness to people of all backgrounds.

In 1993, Billy was appointed county attorney for Laurens County, a position he held for over 30 years until his death. His insights were valued for their common sense and sound judgment, often delivered with a laugh and a smile. At home, these same qualities of mischievous humor, intelligence and gentleness were equally present, especially during those special moments in his home library surrounded by the thousands of books he cherished.

He is survived by his much-loved wife of 36 years, Karen Lee Kight; sons Joseph Brian Kight, of Savannah, and Joshua Eric Kight and his wife Victoria, of Dublin; siblings Sheila Morris (husband Bobby Morris, deceased), Bobby Kight and his wife Susan, Larry Kight and his wife Kathy, and Joan Thomas and her husband James; the mother of his children, Emily Flanders Kight; three grandchildren and numerous other relatives and friends.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his stepsons, Lindsay Michael Swida Jr., and Matthew Lane Swida, whom he helped raise and who loved him dearly.

The family received friends on Monday, Jan. 12, from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. at

Townsend Brothers Funeral Home.

A funeral service celebrating Billy's life will be held at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 13, in the Mary Whitaker Townsend Memorial Chapel of Townsend Brothers Funeral Home. Following the service, Billy will be laid to rest at Northview Cemetery in Dublin.

Please visit [www.townsendfuneralhome.com](http://www.townsendfuneralhome.com) to sign the online memorial registry.



**Sandra Kaye Smith**

Graveside funeral services for Sandra Kaye Smith, age 79 will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026, at Westview Cemetery. Rev. Michael Bailey and Rev. Barbara Nelson will officiate.

Mrs. Smith was born Dec. 1, 1946, in Dublin, Georgia. She was the daughter of the late Hazel Lewis Thigpen. She was also preceded in death by her sister, Swanna Barwick. She was a member of Thomas Chapel Methodist Church. She retired from Scott Health and Rehab. Mrs. Smith passed away Sunday, January 11, 2026, at her residence following an extended illness.

Mrs. Smith is survived by her husband, Ronnie Smith of East Dublin; a son, Andy Smith (Charlotte) of Rentz; a sister, Soffie Thigpen of East Dublin; two grandchildren, Kyle Smith (Makayla) of Dublin, and Dylan Smith (Kiley) of Rentz; three great-grandchildren, Crew Smith of Dublin, Hayes Smith of Dublin, and Beckett Smith of Rentz; a nephew, Dusty Barwick of East Dublin; great-niece, Gracie Barwick of East Dublin; and a special friend, Jonnie Sills.

The family will receive friends from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026, at the funeral home.

Stanley Funeral Home and Crematory/Wrightsville Chapel has charge of funeral arrangements. To sign the Online Register Book please visit [www.stanleyfuneralhome.com](http://www.stanleyfuneralhome.com)



**THE LAURENS COUNTY LIBRARY IS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR A FULL-TIME CIRCULATION CLERK POSITION.**

Some evening and Saturday shifts are required. A high school diploma or equivalent and basic computer skills are necessary. For salary details and the job description, visit our website at <https://ocrl.org/employment>. Benefits include health insurance, flexible benefits, annual leave, and enrollment in the Teachers' Retirement System of Georgia.

To apply, send a cover letter, resume, and two professional references via email to [employment@ocrl.org](mailto:employment@ocrl.org) or mail them to Beverly Brown, PO Box 100, Dublin, GA 31040.

**Some things new amid all that is old under the Gold Dome**

By TY TAGAMI  
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — When Georgia lawmakers return to Atlanta for the new legislative session, they will proceed to their weathered wooden desks, and if they are observant, they will notice something new.

The carpeted floor will offer a little more give, and the old stains will be gone.

When they reach their desks, some will bend to the floor to plug in their laptops, as they have long done. But someone will point out that they no longer need to: the old desks now have modern outlets — not just a standard power plug but also a USB-A connector, and even a future-proofed one for USB-C.

Then, other details will register, and it will become clear this is not exactly the same place they left in April.

The fireplaces (unused these days) now have hearths of marble, salvaged from the old state Supreme Court building after the new one was erected nearby.

Perhaps most obvious: the wooden chairs now carry their weight without creaking or worry.

And if lawmakers and visitors were to lift their eyes to the ceiling high above, they would see something that was never there before: gold, real gold.

When they were last here, the ceiling was decorated with gold-colored paint. Now it is adorned with gold leaf, applied by a restorationist hoisted high into the air on a platform supported by tons of steel scaffolding.

Like many of the more than 550 artisans and other workers who renovated the Capitol over the past eight months, the gold leaf was from Georgia, said Gerald Pilgrim, the state official who oversaw the face lift. "We actually have the receipts from Dahlonega."

The carpet is native, too, from the weave masters in Dalton.

Both were line items in a restoration budget that totaled about \$82.5 million,

with about \$10 million for furniture and similar things and the rest for construction, said Pilgrim, chief of staff at the Georgia Building Authority.

The work started in early May, a month after lawmakers finished their last legislative session. And the bulk of it was completed in time for their return this week, though there are a couple more phases to go.

Some of the most consequential work will be invisible to the lawmakers and to the observers who come to watch them, though repeat visitors might sense a difference. For one thing, the HVAC system is new. Pilgrim said it was the most challenging task, since it was the first significant update since the 1950s, around the time Americans started seeing color in their televisions.

The workers also laid 133,000 feet of wiring under the floors to connect all the new systems. In addition to those modern outlets at legislators' desks, there is a sound system in the visitors' gallery above them, for the hard of hearing. Workers also removed some of the fixed seats there to make room for wheelchairs.

From where visitors sit, they would be hard-pressed to notice one major upgrade that will quickly become apparent to the representatives and senators below.

The legislators used to play musical chairs, swapping out their own failing seats for functional furniture from a nearby and likely unobservant desk mate (no doubt one from the opposing party). They needed sturdy support for their 40 days and many nights of making laws.

"There was a lot of stealing chairs," Pilgrim said. Some were unsafe, "put together literally by toothpicks" and beyond repair, he said, adding that they should have been replaced half a century ago.

The new ones may not be authentic, but they can perform their duty safely, perhaps until the next renovation. The Building Authority kept the old ones in storage but got a 20-year warranty on their replacements.

**STRANGE BUT TRUE**

\* Giraffes have no vocal cords but can still communicate with low-frequency sounds.

\* In 1926, Clyde Barrow, of Bonnie and Clyde fame, was arrested with his older brother Buck for possession of a truckload of stolen turkeys.

\* The first recorded cookbook was written in cuneiform on tablets in ancient Babylon around 1700 B.C.

\* Gioachino Rossini's aria "Di tanti palpiti" was known throughout Europe as "the rice aria," since it was composed while he waited in a Venice restaurant for his risotto to cook.

\* Sunsets on Mars are blue.

\* Studies have suggested that the average human attention span is now about nine seconds -- shorter than that of a goldfish.

\* In 1820, Missouri imposed a \$1 bachelor tax on unmarried men ages 21-50. The short-lived law was designed to encourage marriage, population growth and family establishment in the new state.

\* A Russian safari park became famous after a tiger named Amur didn't eat a goat that had been placed in its enclosure as live food.

\* Detachable heads were used on Roman statues.

\* The first U.S. submarine was a hand-cranked, pedal-powered wooden craft from the Revolutionary War dubbed "the Turtle."

\* Astronauts sent to space can experience a kind of motion sickness known as space adaptation syndrome, or space sickness, with the most notable case inflicting former senator Jake Garn, whose bout was so disabling that his name became used as an informal measurement for the illness.

(c) 2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

**DIVORCED OR SEPARATED?**  
WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU FIND HOPE AND HEALING

**DIVORCE Care**

MEETS ON TUESDAYS FROM 6:45-8:15 PM  
1<sup>ST</sup> MEETING ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>

TO JOIN OUR 13-WEEK DIVORCE RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP, CALL THE CHURCH OFFICE AT 478-272-4031

---

**WANT TO FIND FREEDOM FROM LIFE'S HURTS, HANG-UPS, & HABITS?**

WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU FIND FREEDOM FROM THE ISSUES CONTROLLING YOUR LIFE

**Celebrate Recovery**  
A CHRIST-CENTERED Recovery Program SMALL GROUP

MEETS ON THURSDAYS AT 6:15 PM  
1<sup>ST</sup> MEETING ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 15<sup>TH</sup>

TO JOIN OUR SMALL GROUP RECOVERY COMMUNITY, CALL THE CHURCH OFFICE AT 478-272-4031

**BETHSAIDA BAPTIST CHURCH**  
www.bethsaidabaptistchurch.org

2519 Hwy 80 West  
Dublin, GA 31021



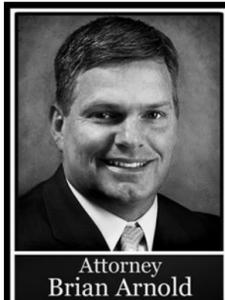
**JOHNSON**  
Tree & Stump Removal  
Tree Removal • Stump Grinding  
Bobcat Service • Lot Clearing  
- INSURED -  
478-275-8003 Home 478-279-1709 Truck

**JM Enterprises & More**

478-234-6632

Land / Lot Clearing	Building Demolition
Tree Removal / Clean Up	Driveway Installation
Privacy / Farm Fencing	Grading
Basement Excavation	Road Building
Pond Clearing and	House Pads
Restoration Under Brush	Food Plots Excavation /
Mowing Landscaping	Trenching

**Call For Free Estimate**  
478-234-6632  
Owner/Operator: James G. Moss - Sparta, GA.



**Social Security Disability Help**  
Experienced and Specialized Legal Representation

- Specializes in Social Security Disability Law
- Previously Worked for Social Security Disability
- No Fee unless you are granted Disability Benefits
- Successfully Represents Clients at Disability Hearings
- Files Disability Appeals at all Levels

1607A Rice Ave. 111 E. Cherry St. 544 Mulberry St., Ste. 619  
Dublin, GA 31021 Cochran, GA 31014 Macon, GA 31201  
478-272-2300 478-934-4561 478-745-9644

**ARNOLD & ARNOLD**  
www.GeorgiaDisabilityLaw.com

**Call 1-478-272-2300 for FREE CASE EVALUATION**

# Hawkinsville: 'How many will turnout?'

Dublin Courier Herald

"How many demonstrators you think going to come? If it's as many as they say, this town's going to be turned inside out," Roger Lewis at the Dairy Queen wondered.

That kind of wonderment and sentiment has embraced many of the residents of this middle Georgia town which is the site of the Cheryl S. Todd - Denise X Woods murder - robbery trial of Ronnie Horne, Laurens County native.

"Hawkinsville is just a little town with 3000 people. If a thousand people come into town, it's going to be mayhem.

"I just wish they'd go away and let us be a quiet little Old South town again."

All of the television cameras, reporters, extra security, and strangers have put many Hawkinsville residents at ill ease.

"If it goes like they say it's going to go, I know what we're going to do. We're going to shut down," Lewis remarked.

He looked down on Commerce Street, the old Slosheye Indian Trail that goes back to 1756 and shook his head.

"I just wish they had moved the trial sixty miles up the road to Macon."

The townsfolk are concerned over the developments surrounding the trial.

About 25 state troopers are on standby to keep order at the well-kept 75-year old courthouse.

Friday Sheriff Andrew Hill sent his deputies out with 70 questionnaires for prospective jurors seeking demographic information for the defense.

Members of the Atlanta Workers Defense Committee stood on street corners yesterday to hand out leaf-

lets proclaiming "Fight racism and injustice: Drop the Charges.

Free Cheryl and Dessie Demonstrate January 19 Courthouse."

A leader of the Atlanta group said buses of demonstrators would come from Louisville, Kentucky, Birmingham, Alabama, and Georgia cities, particularly Ft. Valley, home of the predominantly black Ft. Valley State College.

"Factory owners may get upset," but workers in Alamo and Glenwood will stay off their jobs Monday," She-drah Harris, a 21 year-old Atlantan said.

At least eight buses will come from Atlanta, including five from Atlanta University, Harris said, but he would not predict how many demonstrators there would be.

In court, Judge James B. O'Connor produced one of the leaflets being distributed by Harris' group in six middle Georgia counties.

It claimed that O'Connor "acts like a member of the KKK" and charged that he recently freed "two white cops" in Lumber City accused of "torturing a black man."

The Judge agreed that those who were passing out the leaflets had a First Amendment right to do so.

The trial of the two women accused of killing and robbing Ronnie L. Horne will begin Monday morning unless the judge rules favorably on a defense challenge to the change of venue.

Strict rules governing news coverage of the trial have been ordered by Judge O'Connor as well as tight security precautions.

### EAST DUBLIN RAPS COUNCIL

Approximately 200 East Dublin citizens met

Wednesday night in opposition to several actions taken by the City Council on Monday night.

According to information from Willie Clements, the group voted to present the Mayor and Council of East Dublin with a petition asking to -

1. Return the new pickup truck recently purchased by the city
2. Rescind the Garbage Fee
3. Return firemen's pay to \$140 a week
4. Reduce city spending

The petition cites that a special called meeting of the City Council was requested for Tuesday, February, 3rd at 7:30 p.m. so that the petition could be presented. Information given to the Courier-Herald was that the Mayor had agreed to call the meeting.

This morning East Dublin Mayor E.A. Page told the Courier-Herald that he had received a request for such a called meeting. Nothing is definite at this time, the Mayor said. It is in the planning stage.

In other developments on the troubled city front, Mayor Page said that the garbage fees became law without his signature. Under the city's Charter, the Mayor has three days in which to veto an ordinance; otherwise, it becomes law without his signature. The ordinance levying the garbage fees, effective March 1st, would provide for payment of \$3.00 a month by residences; \$7.00 a month by businesses, and \$7.00 a month for combined residences and businesses. The ordinance was passed by a three to two vote.

The pay increase for the three firemen was premised on their doing the janitor work at the City Hall. The janitor position with the city

was eliminated.

Mayor Page said this morning that the three firemen had refused the added pay and were not cleaning up the town's City Hall.

"I swept it out yesterday," Mayor Page said, "and Mrs. Martha Boatright (an employee in the City Clerk's office) is sweeping it out today.

### KILLEBREW NAMED MANAGER

As of last Friday, WMLT Radio has a new manager. He is Dick Killebrew who has been associated with the station as announcer-newsman since 1958. Mr. Killebrew replaces Ed Hilliard, who resigned the position in August of last year.

Killebrew, as most people know him, has been one of the more popular announcers in the Dublin area over the years. Coming to Dublin from a radio station in Columbus, Georgia, he is a native of Alabama.

It was Killebrew who first suggested the idea of Dublin and Laurens County should have a celebration around St. Patrick's Day. Today it is a St. Patrick's Festival Week.

Mr. Killebrew's appointment as manager of WMLT came last week by WMLT President W. Newton Morris.

### VA AWARDS SERVICE

Special awards and service pins were presented by Mr. Harold O. Duncan, Center Director, to these employees of the Dublin VA Center in a recent ceremony:

Sammie Robinson -Nursing Service - Suggestion Award - Dublin

Betty Ann Currie - Engineering Service - 20-Year Service Pin - Rentz

Paula D. Smith - Canteen Service - 10-year Pin - East

LOOKING BACK...  
50 YEARS AGO  
JANUARY 13, 1976



By HARRIETT CLAXTON

Dublin

Bobby J. Rutledge - Engineering Service - Quality Service Award - Dublin

Reba J Taylor - Dietetic Service - 15-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Benjamin T. Veal -Supply Service - 15-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Herbert E. Tomlinson - Supply Service - 30- Year Service Pin - Dublin

J.C. Ogburn -Engineering Service - Quality Increase Award - East Dublin

Hugh E. McLendon - Nursing Service - 20-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Ocie F. Joiner - Nursing Service - 20-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Dr. Franklin H. Goodwin - Medical Service - 20-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Joseph W. Folsome - Nursing Service - 15-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Ethel Mae Beard - Dietetic Service - 25-Year Service Pin - Dublin

Eugene C. Brown - Nursing Service - Suggestion Award - Dublin

### LAURENS SCHOOL ATTENDANCE UP

According to William P. Johnson, Laurens County School Superintendent, the average daily attendance (ADA) for the first four months of the 1975-76 school term has increased by 65 students over the same period last school term.

Since there was a slight

decrease in enrollment in grades 1-12 and yet an increase in ADA, he stated that he was very appreciative to the parents, students, and professional staff for efforts put forth to make this increase in attendance possible.

"Attendance in school has a vital bearing on the educational progress of students. Not only is the educational progress of students affected by attendance, the amount of financial assistance through the State Department of Education is directly correlated with ADA of the school system. The increase of 65 in ADA will bring an additional 15-18 thousand dollars to the system for school year 1975-76 which will be welcome information to the local tax payer," the superintendent reported.

The daily percentage attendance is 96.78 percent of grades 1-12 this year for the ten schools in the county system.

The Board of Education employs an attendance officer and three part time attendance workers.

Of course, school attendance should be encouraged, but not to the point of keeping children in school who are sick, he said, but it should be insisted upon to the point of maintaining interest and facilitating progress in school work.

FEBRUARY 7, 2026  
10AM-4PM



MIDDLE GEORGIA  
**Lit Fest**

MIDDLEGALITFEST.COM

NORTH HOUSTON SPORTS COMPLEX  
900 NORTH HOUSTON ROAD  
WARNER ROBINS, GA 31088

OUR TAKE...



This drone shot showed a busy scene as various fire departments came together to battle last week's blaze /SPECIAL PHOTO, courtesy of Dublin Fire Department

Latest fire shows importance of mutual aid from other agencies

When it comes to an emergency, all types of help should and needs to be considered. This has been the case in Laurens County, and was on full display last week when a big blaze was contained to its proximity. On Jan. 7, at 7:54 p.m., the Dublin Fire Department received a call about a structure fire at Dublin Glass. When firefighters arrived, they realized it did not start at Dublin Glass, but at a business next to it that was being rented by RR Towing. Because of the proximity of that business, the flames did move over to Dublin Glass about the time members of the Dublin Fire Department were arriving. Fire Chief Matthew Cutler said their goal was to attack the fire and contain it to that location. They did not want it to spread any further. Thankfully, the DFD received mutual aid from East Dublin Fire Department, Laurens County Fire Department and the Johnson State Fire Team. "That was great," Cutler said. "Mutual and automatic aid are live-savers. Having good relationships with your neighbors is a great thing." The investigation revealed that the fire was accidental and started in the area of a wrecker that was being repaired inside the building, Cutler said. In all, four vehicles and two ATVs were destroyed. In the past - and more than likely in the future - the DFD will repay this favor and help one of these agencies. But the real winners are us the citizens as the more help our first responders can get, the better the care we receive.

- Payton Towns III

YOUR TURN:

Share your opinion on current events, or topics covered in The Courier Herald by emailing us: tchnewsreporter@gmail.com

THOUGHT FOR TODAY...

"The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today." - Unknown

DAILY SCRIPTURE...

"Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." - John 15:4

EVERY DAY'S A HOLIDAY...

- Jan. 13, 2026 is...
- National Rubber Ducky Day
- Make Your Dream Come True Day
- National Poetry at Work Day
- National Peach Melba Day
- Public Radio Broadcasting Day
- National Sticker Day
- Stephen Foster Memorial Day
- Korean American Day
- National Shop For Travel Day

The Courier Herald

LOCAL MATTERS Judged a newspaper of General Excellence 2024

COURIERHERALDTODAY.COM Phone: (478) 272-5522 • Fax: (478) 272-2189 115 S. Jefferson St., Dublin, GA 31021-5146

Office hours are 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays

GET IN TOUCH

- News: tchnewsreporter@gmail.com
- Subscription: tchcirculation@gmail.com
- Advertising: advertisingtch@gmail.com
- Sports: tchsports77@gmail.com
- Obituaries: tchobits77@gmail.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES Print: \$12.50/month Digital: \$10.50/month

Periodicals Postage Paid at Dublin, Georgia (USPS 161-860) - Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday POSTMASTER: Send address change to:

The Courier Herald, 115 South Jefferson Street, Dublin, GA 31021

GEORGIA TRUST for Local News

DuBose Porter/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Pam Burney/GENERAL MANAGER Courtney Vessell/CIRCULATION MANAGER

This newspaper is committed to the idea that the press should tell the truth without prejudice and spread knowledge without malicious intent.

Time for us to be more like 'Monk'

The TV show "Monk" was ahead of its time.

For those who have not seen what I call a classic, "Monk" was a show about a former homicide detective who is a consultant for the San Francisco Police Department. Adrian Monk, played by Tony Shalhoub, has an obsessive-compulsive disorder along with multiple fears that really hit the fan when his wife Trudy was killed. After that tragedy, all of his disorders and fears kept him from performing his role as a detective without needing help.

One of the things Monk cannot do is shake hands without asking his assistant for a wipe. Most definitely, he kept his hands clean. What made the show funny was watching Monk go out of his way from touching and avoiding anything that may allow him to pick up germs.

If most of us would try our best to keep our hands clean, it would lower the chances of viruses such as the flu or other nasty stomach bugs from going around. At this time of year, especially with Georgia's latest flu ratings, we should all try to avoid other germs as much as possible.

It does not take an expert to know that as a state, Georgia is not doing too well when it comes to the rise of flu. In fact, we are leading the way when it comes to flu activity. On a scale of 1 to 13, we were at a 13 a few weeks ago. The good news is it can only decrease. When that will happen depends on each of us.

Yes, people can get the flu vaccine. No, that does not necessarily mean you will not get the flu. But the vaccine should help decrease the symptoms.

A few years ago, my wife and I both received the vaccine and at about the same time - three months lat-

MAN ABOUT TOWN...



By PAYTON TOWNS III

er - tested positive for the flu. We both went to the doctor at the same time - it was a two-for-one deal. The doctor said our symptoms would have been worse if we had not gotten the flu vaccine.

Do I know if this is true? I can only go by what the experts say. What I can say is that I missed one day of work and was back almost to 100 percent a few days later. For those who do not want to take the vaccine, hey, that's up to you.

Sometimes we are going to get sick and there is nothing we can do about it. But from observation, I cannot count the number of times I have been in a public re-

stroom and watched men walk out without washing their hands. They grab the door knobs and turn or pull, leaving their germs all over it.

According to Google, when it comes to washing hands, the proper way to do so is to use clean running water (hot or cold), soap to cover the entire hand and rub for 20 seconds if not more. Some experts encourage us to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Then rinse, dry your hands on a clean towel or use an air drier. Then, grab a paper towel to turn off the water. After all, you do not know who used that sink before you.

It may be an adventure

to wash hands in a public restroom where there are usually signs on the doors, or even mirrors, urging employees to clean them before returning to work. What is funny to me is when the conditions for doing so are laughable at best.

For example, you put your hands under the faucet and only receive a short burst of water, barely enough to get your hands wet. You are able to get soap on your hands but not enough water to do properly clean.

Then there are occasions when there is plenty of water but no soap. How are hands, especially those belonging to the employees, supposed to be clean if there is no soap?

And then when you leave the restroom, if you take your clean hand and open the door, you more than likely have new germs on your hand. I try to remember to keep that paper towel I used to dry my hands and use it to open the door to leave.

Sure I may look like Monk leaving the restroom, but at least I have a better chance of not bringing home a virus by simply taking care of my hands.



Boots on the ground in Venezuela

FIRMER GROUND: MIGHT DOESN'T MAKE RIGHT

By STEVE BULLINGTON Guest Columnist

I write here, not as any kind of expert on US foreign policy, but only as another concerned citizen. It seems to me that the capture of Nicolas Maduro and his wife, was terribly short-sighted. Whatever happens going forward in Venezuela as a result, this move, the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation and the deposing of its leader, however terrible he was, is likely to have grave consequences for us and for the rest of the world. But as laid out in the recent National Defense Strategy, the Trump administration has decided that the world is a place to be carved up between the great powers.

The President says that

he is reviving the Monroe Doctrine in which we think of the Western Hemisphere as our particular sphere of influence, that is, to make use of. And indeed, there is a long and sordid history of exploitation of the peoples and nations of Central and South America by greedy, more powerful nations near and far. And this in turn is what has bred gross inequity and resentment in many of these countries. Driven drug trafficking, rampant violence, and desperate migration patterns, and brought reactionary, brutal leaders like Maduro to power.

The resources we are spending on bullying and exploitation, which seems to be our official policy now vis-a-vis the rest of the planet, would be so much more

wisely spent in investing in democratic institutions and initiatives. ... Do democracy and the welfare of the Venezuelan people matter, or is this just about US control of their rich oil reserves, as the President has indicated?

As has been widely observed, this is all a radical departure from the democratic and international rules-based order that has been in place since the end of World War II. With this preemptory action in Venezuela, we would seem to have lost whatever shred of moral standing we still had in opposing the aggression of Russia and China in "their spheres of influence."

And beyond the many strategic questions this raises is the question as to what this means for the soul of

our country. What would it mean for us if national greed turned out to be the chief American value?

Meantime, 19 Buddhist monks continue their march for peace from Fort Worth to Washington, D.C. Reminding us that "peace is every step," and that simple, daily actions like compassion and open, honest speech on behalf of a longer, wider perspective are not nothing.

And as of January 6, the Magi have found their way once more to a manger in Bethlehem. And have cast down their crowns, bowing before the child whose birth signaled the ultimate end of the old order based on empire and domination, in favor of one based on truth and the power of love.

TO THE EDITOR ...

According to the chairperson of the Dublin-Laurens County MLK Committee, Dublin will celebrate its 50th MLK Breakfast Celebration on Jan. 19, 2026. Incorrect, 36. I have documentation and anecdotes to support my claim. My documentation is that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day became a legal federal holiday when Pres. Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law on Nov. 2, 1983. The holiday was officially observed on Jan. 20 1986. 2026 minus 1986 equals 40. MLK Committee, on the national level, the math is not "mathing."

The anecdotes that follow are real stories that also support my position. The first MLK Breakfast Celebration in Dublin was in 1990. The Dublin City Council MLK Committee named Rev. Dr. Neil Dixon the chairperson. Nearly a year before (1989), on New Year's Eve, the late Rev. Amos Holmes (in his living room), the late principal John Reed Deamer and I planned and implemented the first MLK Holiday Celebration in Dublin. Soon after, I left Dublin to do a residency from 1990 to 1995 in reading education at

the University of Georgia. In my first semester of 1990, the Dublin City Council MLK Committee gave me a plaque for my service. In that year (1990), the council implemented the first MLK Breakfast Celebration. 2026 minus 1990 equals 36. MLK Committee, the math is not "mathing."

Furthermore, from 1975 to 1990, I planned and coordinated 99.9 percent of the communitywide Black Heritage events. No one can deny that. Does anyone recall any MLK Birthday Breakfast Celebrations from 1975 to 1989? I do not see any hands. Through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), I chaired the committee that celebrated his death anniversary each year. More than that, no one can deny that I created and implemented the Dublin-Laurens County Black History Festival from 1975 to 1989. It is my intellectual property (creations of the mind, music, inventions, books and poems). I was knee-deep in the black experience and did not smell any bacon and eggs along the way.

The MLK Committee's reaction to my invitation to have a conversation

about their miscalculations was very disturbing. I did my due diligence, making contact with the chairperson and toastmistress. The chairperson did not respond to my text; I tried again and, sadly, she blocked me. Via messenger, I dialogued with the toastmistress. She stated, "I only go on what has been presented to me. The program has been planned and is going forward."

Good recordkeeping is essential. Time and dates of major events are used in databases to guide research, school calendars, congressional activities and cultural events. The committee's tendency to make up numbers is a testament to the quality of their work, and the respect they have for their constituency. The committee is not accountable to a governing body. Instead, it is judged by the people they serve. Dublin-Laurens community, as you attend the celebration on Jan. 19, 2026, understand that you are disrespected and the math is not "mathing."

Maudine Jefferson-Wood East Dublin, Ga.

**Dublin Police Department**

– Angela Denise King, 38, was charged with theft by shoplifting and giving a false name, address or birthdate to law enforcement at Belk on Veterans Boulevard around 4:51 p.m. on Dec. 18.

An officer talked with a loss prevention employee for Belk as they escorted King into the security office. The officer reviewed the security footage and saw King conceal one item by placing it in the buggy, putting a blanket over it and sitting her toddler age child on top of it. King then grabbed another item and sat it in plain view initially but later lifted the toddler from the buggy and the two items were placed under the blanket.

Later in the video, the officer saw King's 11-year-old daughter conceal a third item similar in shape and size as the first two items. They left the store with the buggy and the items inside of it, passing all points of sale within Belk. An employee stopped them inside the central area of the Dublin

Mall. King provided a different last name and date of birth than was listed on her driver's license. After two negative returns, King provided a cell phone image of her driver's license.

All three items were variety packs of fragrances that were recovered and returned to the store. King was arrested and transported to the sheriff's office. While being transported, King told the officer she was aware of her outstanding warrant, which is why she provided false information.

– Around 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 18, an officer was dispatched to Smith Street. The call concerned a man knocking on windows and possibly possessing a weapon.

The officer talked with two people who said a man, identified as Author Eugene Seals, 64, was knocking on windows and doors, thinking his wife was inside the house. Both people said that Seals' wife does not stay at that location and neither did he. Another officer recalled telling Seals a month previously that he was not to return



**POLICE BEAT...**

to that address.

Seals was arrested and charged with criminal trespass.

– Ramon Paul Albarran, 28, was charged with criminal trespass at Hop In on East Jackson Street around 1:50 p.m. on Dec. 19.

An officer met with the store clerk at the Hop In, who said Albarran had been outside panhandling money from customers. The clerk provided officers with a copy of the trespass notice for Albarran, along with camera footage of the incident.

The officer found Albarran walking south on South Washington Street and stopped to speak with him. Officers confirmed the identity of Albarran and arrested him. He was transported to the police department to be fingerprinted. Because the

machine was not functioning, he was unable to be fingerprinted. He was released on summons and advised to remain away from the Hop In.

– Willie Lee Flowers, 76, was charged with criminal trespass at Piggly Wiggly on Bellevue Avenue around 9:26 a.m. on Dec. 20.

Police saw Flowers leaving Piggly Wiggly, walking across Academy Avenue into a nearby business parking lot. The officers stopped Flowers in the parking lot where he stated he had just left Piggly Wiggly where he attempted to buy several items.

Officers confirmed with store employees that Flowers had been inside the store and had previously been notified that he was banned from that location. He was

transported to the county jail.

**Laurens County Sheriff's Office**

– A deputy met with people at the sheriff's office in regard to deposit account fraud that happened on Longcreek Way in Cadwell around 12:30 p.m. on Dec. 12.

– A deputy talked on a phone with a man about a civil matter that happened on Second Street in Dudley around 8:40 a.m. on Dec. 19.

– Nicholas James Cohen, 18, of Macon, was charged with driving under the influence of drugs at the intersection of 441 North and 441 bypass around 4:59 p.m. on Dec. 17.

– A burglary happened on Maddox Royster Road around 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 12.

– A deputy responded to shots fired on Oneal Drive on Dec. 14 around 8:44 p.m.

– Someone damaged property on Coleman Register Road between Nov. 28 and Dec. 12.

– On Dec. 11, around 12:22 p.m., a deputy conducted a stop on a Toyota Camry due to the owner being wanted out of Laurens County. Tanicka Lashae Coneway, 50, of Dudley, was charged with possession of methamphetamine and possession of drug related objects.

– A traffic stop resulted in the arrest of Marty Lewis, 28, of Dublin, who was a wanted individual.

*Editor's note: This information is public record and was taken from reports of local law enforcement agencies. These reports do not reflect guilt or innocence. An "arrest" does not always indicate incarceration. Readers are cautioned that people may have similar names. Police Beat does not identify minor children, victims of sexual assault, suicide attempts or medical conditions. Cases dismissed do not appear if the newspaper is notified before deadline.*



**TELL IT!**

CALL 272-0375, EMAIL CHTELLIT@GMAIL.COM, OR TELL IT! AT COURIERHERALDTODAY.COM

**Those anonymous donors** are not so smart, meaning there is no such thing as anonymity. They have forgotten that the people they arranged the donation with will talk and confide in "friends," who then talk and confide in other "friends." Such is now this case and such will be their shame for putting athletics above having a stable school system. I hope they are ready to explain themselves to the public.

**We say fire the coaches** along with the 51 other people who lost their jobs and cancel all remaining athletics for the rest of the school year. Over the summer, put

out a call for persons to be community coaches to take their place. We are sure there are people in the community that can do the job and save money for the system. If no one steps forward, padlock all the athletic facilities and shut down until either you have the real money or someone steps in. Dire times require dire measures.

**It's amazing how quiet** things have gotten, with no official notifications or activity reports about the school system debacle. Lately we only hear the soft rustle of a broom slowly sweeping it under the rug. Meanwhile the school systems continue receiving advances and

digging the hole deeper and the state keeps on sending them money that will never be repaid. Wake up folks... this is our money being squandered.

**What happens to a taxpayer** if they cannot pay their taxes this year due to that massive increase the school board slid past everyone? My neighbors are 92, social security income only, haven't had kids in school in 50 years and they do not have a snowball's chance of paying. The school board should be ashamed of what they have put on older people who do not have money to pay that big increase in taxes.

**Our school tax this year** is 80 percent of the total tax bill. I guess that explains why things are like they are. Money being given to the school system to waste and nothing much left to keep up the city. For example, take a look at some of the city and residential streets, and where is the street sweeper they bought? We are lucky if they pick up yard refuse once a month.

**The city has not done anything** about the four wheelers that are being driven on city streets, often by persons as young as 10-years-old. Then there are the adults who drive with an infant in their arms and none of the occupants are belted in. What's it going to take?

**Who do you talk to** about speed bumps being installed on Country Club Road? It is like a race track out here with so much traffic now. I never see any cops out checking traffic for speeders.

**To the church on Highway 257** that has the Christian flag above the American, there are 12 rules of American flag etiquette and the fifth code states the American flag should be at the center and highest point. The 12th code states that when the American flag is displayed with state flags, the American flag should be at the same height or higher. Please correct this.

**When it comes to the clock** on the wall in the Laurens County Courthouse, tear it down and paint over it.

**So the audit basically** says Dublin City schools was a free for all - twice the

employees needed, supplements were off the chart and credit card spending everywhere. That's the Dublin Way!

**How does no one in the finance department** have a brain to sound the alarm. The audit is so embarrassing. No one was checking anything.

**Dublin City putting on a show** with IGA, daycare and medical clinics while there was non-existent finance rules. Slash it all!

**Dublin City is officialy** a pile of \*^#! The audit basically said everything was a fraud. It will now implode and we can move on.

**A certain board member** still saying "see we didn't know." You're not a smart business man if you couldn't see there was no way to fund all the shiny

things Fred wanted. And you gave him his salary.

**So family members** were traveling at the school systems' expense. That should be criminal misuse of public funds.

**What do y'all think of Fred now?** Audit shows he was incompetent or just plain criminal. The super oversees the system and he played us all!

**I am beyond embarrassed** by Dublin City. The audit confirms it was not the great system they tried to pretend it was. They were faking it and over spending like crazy.

**The audit is so embarrassing!** All those educated people and no one was looking out for tax payers. Fred gave out money like it was candy. Will he ever answer for his mismanagement?

**Local 7-day Forecast:**

**The next 48 hours:**

	<b>TUESDAY:</b> 62° Mostly sunny. Sunrise: 7:33 a.m.
	<b>TUESDAY NIGHT:</b> 35° Partly cloudy. Sunset: 5:47 p.m.
	<b>WEDNESDAY:</b> 59° Partial sunshine. Sunrise: 7:33 a.m.
	<b>WEDNESDAY NIGHT:</b> 38° Mainly cloudy. Sunset: 5:47 p.m.

<b>Thursday 1/15</b>	<b>Friday 1/16</b>	<b>Saturday 1/17</b>	<b>Sunday 1/18</b>	<b>Monday 1/19</b>
HIGH/LOW <b>51/38</b>	HIGH/LOW <b>54/32</b>	HIGH/LOW <b>61/36</b>	HIGH/LOW <b>56/36</b>	HIGH/LOW <b>56/36</b>
Cooler with some sunshine.	Plenty of sunshine.	Plenty of sunshine.	Rain.	Cloudy yielding to sun.
Sunrise: 7:33 a.m. Sunset: 5:48 p.m.	Sunrise: 7:33 a.m. Sunset: 5:49 p.m.	Sunrise: 7:32 a.m. Sunset: 5:50 p.m.	Sunrise: 7:32 a.m. Sunset: 5:51 p.m.	Sunrise: 7:32 a.m. Sunset: 5:52 p.m.

**River levels...**  
Oconee (at Dublin) ..... 2.62'  
Ocmulgee (at Macon) ..... 6.4'

**Fairfield**  
BY MARRIOTT

620 Pinehill Rd., Dublin, Georgia 31021 • 478-277-0333  
www.marriott.com/DBNFI

**HOMER**  
SUITES BY HILTON

**www.hilton.com**  
105 Travel Center Blvd., Dublin, GA 31021  
478-205-5464

**CITY OF DUBLIN**

POSTING DATE JANUARY 13, 2026

**NOTICE OF CALLED PUBLIC MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT A CALLED PUBLIC MEETING WILL BE HELD JANUARY 29, 2026 AT 2:30 P. M. IN THE HENRY "BUD" HICKS JR MEMORIAL CHAMBERS, LOCATED IN CITY HALL AT 100 S. CHURCH STREET IN DUBLIN GEORGIA FOR AN AMENDMENT TO THE CITY OF DUBLIN FUTURE LAND USE PLAN FOR THE LAURENS COUNTY JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

Sharon Eveland, City Planner

If you should have any questions, please call (478) 277-5070.

# GHSA duals: WL wins 4-AAA crown

## Dublin just misses punching sectional ticket, EL finishes 5th at area

### From STAFF REPORTS

West Laurens handled some fairly straightforward business Saturday in Milledgeville as it took down a pair of challengers to capture a second-straight region duals wrestling title.

The dominant victories, over Howard and Baldwin, propel the Raiders into the next Saturday's GHSA sectionals at Troup High School in LaGrange, where they will open against Jenkins as one of 16 teams in the running for the state crown (in the team-based category that makes up the first phase

of the GHSA's postseason) over the two coming weeks.

Dublin and East Laurens teams finished just shy of sectional berths (awarded to only the top two) despite strong showings in Fitzgerald at the 1-A area championship meet, where Toombs County took the top spot.

The third-place Irish were edged only slightly by the host Purple Hurricane in their final match for second in the standings. The Falcons, who rebounded from an early defeat to advance in the loser's bracket, wrapped up the day in fifth place.

West Laurens, along with Harlem, enjoyed a first-round bye that made Saturday's path to first a simple one-two proposition. And the Raiders put up a similar number in both matches, though Howard provided the slightly stiffer opposition in the first with pins in the 120 and 128-pound weight classes to account for its 12 total points.

Seven pins, a technical fall, one sudden victory and three no-contests added up to 68 on the other side of the board.

Host Baldwin knocked off Harlem 40-36 to ad-

vance as their challenger in the finals, though the Braves provided opposition in only five of 14 weights, grabbing points by TF at 165 and 1-0 decision at 285 in the early stages of a chippy match.

West's Zorian Willis won by 9-7 decision at 175, and Jayden Watkins and Maxx Chafin recorded pins at 190 and 215 in the only other contested bouts before Baldwin forfeited the rest of the side. The final count was 69-8.

The Huskies gained a slight upper hand on Baldwin — down a man due to an ejection vs. West Laurens —

to win the runner-up match 36-30.

Dublin rode an early win streak to two sizable wins, 60-12 over Treutlen and 62-18 over Montgomery County, to reach the final three of the 1-A tournament, but fell to eventual champ Toombs 52-26 in the semifinal.

The Irish fell by only a two-point margin in their do-or-die match for "true second," as Fitzgerald took the 40-38 victory (hinging on a couple of forfeits and a handful of close matches the 'Canes ended by pin for max points) to advance.

### SCOREBOARD

#### GIRLS HOOPS

**Friday**  
Baldwin 69,  
West Laurens 55  
Jefferson Co. at Dublin  
(no score reported)  
Washington Co. 60, East  
Laurens 52

#### Saturday

EL 59, Bleckley Co. 57  
WL 47, Dublin 39

#### BOYS HOOPS

**Friday**  
Baldwin 73, WL 48  
EL 73, WACO 65  
Jefferson Co. 48, Dublin 45

#### Saturday

Dublin 70, WL 58  
EL 43, Bleckley Co. 39

### PREP SCHEDULE

#### BASKETBALL

**Monday**  
CCA at Trinity/6 p.m.

#### Tuesday

EL at Jefferson Co.  
Dublin at Toombs Co.  
Trinity at Gatewood  
WL at Westside Augusta  
/6 p.m.

#### Friday

Trinity at Brentwood  
Howard at WL  
Washington Co. at Dublin  
/6 p.m.  
Dodge Co. at EL/7 p.m.

#### Saturday

EL at Treutlen/5 p.m.  
Dublin at Johnson Co.  
/6 p.m.

#### CONTACT US:

Email sports information to  
tchsports77@gmail.com, or  
call (478) 272-5522, ext. 403

# For Mercer football, new head coach is an ace in the hole

### By MICAH JOHNSTON Georgia Trust for Local News

MACON — About 15 years ago, for only a few short months, Joel Taylor made his living at a table lined with felt instead of a field made of turf.

The former South Carolina State football player had just been laid off at his alma mater, where he worked as an assistant coach for part-time pay.

"I don't think it was like, 'I'm not doing a good job' or anything, it was just because of what was happening economically across the country," Taylor said of losing his gig at South Carolina State.

So, with his back against the wall and dreading the possibility of working in a cubicle, Taylor turned to one of the things he loved most besides football: poker.

The man who had been crushing opposing players with tackles and picking off passes as a defensive back just a few years prior made a living at the table, outwitting others while getting a little lucky with the draw.

Instead of reading the quarterback's eyes, Taylor read the expressions of his opponents. He studied probabilities instead of playbooks, sometimes taking a gamble on a hand the way he might have gambled on jumping a route.

That life feels worlds away now.

Taylor — who eventually returned to the gridiron after those few months at the poker table — became Mercer's newest head football coach in December. He succeeded Mike Jacobs, a coach who took the Bears to new heights. Taylor took over a program with some of the best momentum in the country at the FCS level.

He is already familiar with Macon, as he spent three years as Mercer's defensive coordinator from 2020-23 while the Bears began their climb to the top of the Southern Conference — he mentioned that he and his wife love the city, giving them more of a reason to return.

Though Taylor has big shoes to fill now that Mercer has won back-to-back SoCon championships, it seems like a home-run hire.

Indeed, Taylor's brief poker career does seem like a distant memory — until it doesn't.

Taylor's time playing poker was, in some ways, indicative of the incredible journey that led him to Mercer. It showed how his mind works, how he could apply his smarts to the field and make football decisions with both analytics and his gut feelings. It showed how willing he was to grind.

The chance of poker also mirrors Taylor's coaching career, which feels a bit like it is guided by destiny.

"People always said, 'You're going to be a coach one day.' I didn't know what they meant by that," Taylor said. "But now I love the game, and I understand."

#### A fish out of water...

Surprisingly, the Brooklyn-born, South Carolina-raised athlete who is now Mercer's head coach did not play football until he was in high school.

Baseball was Taylor's first love. He was a pitcher, first baseman and outfielder and enjoyed every second of it. After he broke his wrist two seasons in a row, though, he eyed football when he got to tenth grade.

"I was a fish out of water.



'YOU GOT TO KNOW WHEN TO HOLD 'EM...': Experience making the big decisions as a player, defensive coordinator, head coach and — briefly — pro poker player have Mercer's new head coach Joel Taylor ready to take on his newest gig back in Macon/SPECIAL PHOTO, courtesy UWG Athletics

I didn't know much about it," Taylor said. "I started out as a running back. I got smoked one time and I was like, 'Yeah, this is probably not for me.'"

It didn't take long for Taylor to find his niche as a defensive back. He quickly excelled in high school despite his late start, then moved on to South Carolina State. Though he was declared ineligible his freshman year because of academics — Taylor said he became a diligent student after that tough first year — he eventually became a team captain for the Bulldogs and finished his career with a conference championship.

Then there was the question all athletes must answer, the one some struggle with more than others: what's next?

"When my coach asked me that, I didn't know. I knew I didn't want to work in a cubicle ... but I had been kind of brainwashed to think I had to get a 9-to-5 job like that," Taylor said. "He said, 'Why don't you come work with me?' And that sounded pretty good."

There was just one problem.

"The next words out of my mouth after that was, 'OK, I can't pay you,'" Taylor said, recalling the interaction with a grin. "I was like, 'Huh? Are you kidding?' I just got my degree, I'm ready to get paid."

But by then, Taylor had fallen in love with football. It was too late to turn back. He took the job and scraped by until he became a paid assistant with the Bulldogs.

That was from 2005-08. After his brief foray into poker, Taylor joined the staff at Lenoir-Rhyne. He would return there later on, part of a trend of Taylor coming back to different schools for a second stint as a coach — just as he eventually returned to Mercer.

After heading back to South Carolina State from 2010-13, Taylor made a coaching stop at The Citadel that proved to be an impactful post for the budding football mind.

"That's probably my greatest memory, when we upset South Carolina," Taylor said. "I mean, we're talking about The Citadel. They don't always get the best players. We went out there, they played their

butts off and we beat an SEC team."

After that, Taylor kept moving up. He returned to Lenoir-Rhyne and became a full defensive coordinator for the first time, then moved to become Mercer's DC when head coach Drew Cronic stepped in.

From 2020-23, Taylor helmed a Mercer defense that produced the program's two all-time leading tacklers, Ken Standley and Isaac Dowling. The Bears reached the FCS playoffs for the first time ever in 2023.

Taylor's most recent stop was his first head coaching gig. At West Georgia, he only won four games in his first season but turned the team around for an 8-3 campaign in 2025 that saw the Wolves average more than 350 yards per game on offense.

Now it's time — as is the nature of a football coaching career — for Taylor's biggest challenge so far.

He's not too worried.

#### Taking it to the next level...

Taylor will have high expectations at Mercer. The Bears have grown tremendously in the past decade — Taylor was there for part of it under Cronic — but the past two seasons have taken that to a new high with back-to-back conference titles.

Previous head coach Mike Jacobs finished his time at Mercer with an incredible 20-6 overall record and a 15-1 mark in conference play. Taylor thinks he can sustain some of that momentum.

"The biggest thing for me coming back here was taking it to the next level. I kind of equate it to running a race, right? (First Mercer head coach) Bobby Lamb had the first leg, Drew had the second leg and Mike had the third one," Taylor said. "I want to be that last leg, the finisher."

To achieve that, Taylor recognizes he has to develop a culture and learn how to navigate the Southern Conference, one of the most talented FCS football leagues.

"I take a little bit from everybody. I call myself a chameleon," Taylor said of his coaching style. "I can be the motivator, I can be the schematic guy, I can be the guy that brings hell down on you. I can be cool, but I'm gonna be on you like white on rice. If you don't like it, you can leave."

Mercer's defense, which was one of the best in the country against the run last season, will look to thrive again under a defensive-minded coach. Taylor will also try to keep the offense rolling.

Mercer's immense success, ironically, makes said momentum harder for Taylor to sustain. The Bears have lost some significant playmakers — guys like Jerry Rice Award-winning quarterback Braden Atkinson and the Southern Conference's top defender, edge rusher Andrew Zock — to the

transfer portal, a fact Taylor readily acknowledges.

"In this era, the Braden Atkinsons of the world and the Andrew Zocks of the world, when they have tremendous years like that, you're going to lose those kids," he said. "The key is to keep as many quality players as you can... if you offer them development, you will get commitment."

Taylor hopes to instill that culture and have an intense focus on recruiting, which he says is more crucial than ever in today's college football landscape. He wants to build off of Jacobs' explosive success while carving out his own niche — one that players can immediately identify with.

"We're building relationships. That's what I want to be, a good relationship builder," the head coach said. "It might be like, 'For the first month or so, you gonna hate me. But after that, we'll be bonded for the rest of your life.' If you ain't buying into our standard, you can go kick rocks in flip flops."

That's Taylor's mindset — he's intense, but personable. He described himself as a "normal dude," but it's clear his passion for football has become immense.

"I did one interview where they asked me what my hobbies were. I said football," Taylor said. "My wife said, 'You can't say that.'"

The one hobby he does still engage with is — fittingly, even if it's on a limited basis — poker.

Taylor puts it on the TV while he pieces together plays, develops recruiting strategies and knocks out other coaching duties. He doesn't participate anymore, but something about that strategy always draws him in and offers a pleasant backdrop to his work.

With a dedicated leader and someone familiar with Macon at the helm for Mercer's next chapter, it seems the Bears — and Taylor — have been dealt a pretty good hand.

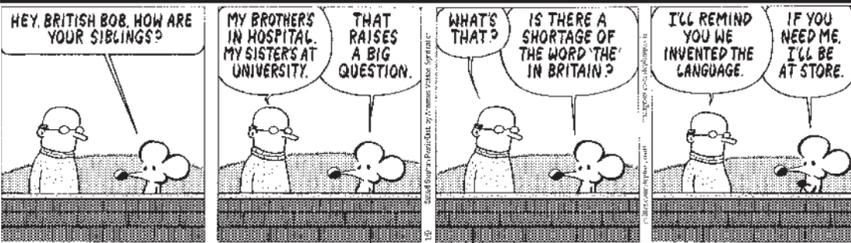


# Raiders celebrate successful softball season

The West Laurens softball team honored its region superlatives upon gathering to reflect on another strong season last month. The 2025 campaign concluded with a 31-5 overall record, and though a single region loss to Harlem would relegate them to 4-AAA runner-up, the Raiders took their streak of state tournament appearances to six as they advanced to Columbus along with the final eight, and were among the last three teams left in the running for the state title. Players achieving all-region recognition were (from left) Peyton Crabb (second team all-region), Demmie Moss (second team all-region), K.K. Wilson (first team all-state, first team all-region), Jacely Hogan (first team all-state, region player of the year), Maggie Shea Lord (first team all-region), Madison Brown (second team all-region), Allie Sahli (region honorable mention) and CheyAnn Phillips (region pitcher of the year, all-state honorable mention)/SPECIAL PHOTO

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

BY STEPHAN PASTIS



GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS



OVERBOARD

BY CHIP DUNHAM



DEFLOCKED

BY JEFF CORRIVEAU



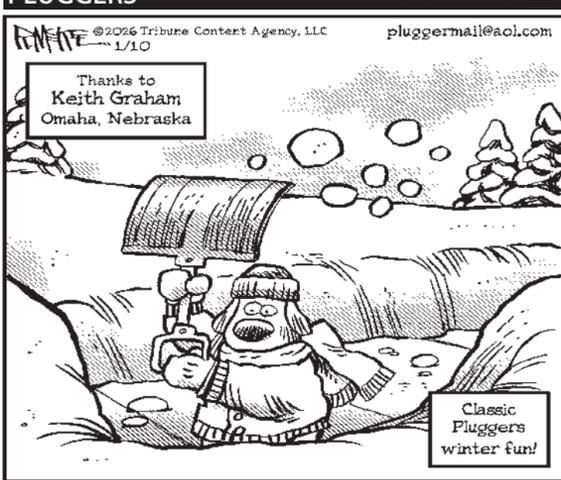
ZIGGY

BY TOM WILSON



PLUGGERS

BY JEFF MACNELLY



A pluggger has a hunch that shoveling snow could be dangerous, so he hires the neighborhood kid to test it out first.

Grandson has distanced himself from family



DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: My grandson "Ethan" and his fiancée lived with his mother until four years ago. When they moved out, they decided not to give his parents their new address. It has been several years since my daughter has seen her son. Apparently, they occasionally text.

Ethan was married seven months ago. He didn't invite his parents as he felt they would "make it about themselves" and distract from his day. He said I'd be invited to his wedding and would receive a nice picture from the photographer. The wedding date came and went. I saw pictures on social media, so I knew it had transpired. At the time, my gut feeling was that he felt awkward inviting me and his aunt but not his parents.

In the past, I have sent Ethan a check on his birthday and at Christmas and helped him financially with vehicle repairs. Although I was not invited, I sent a congratulatory card for the wedding, with a significant check enclosed. He cashed the check but did not acknowledge receipt of the card.

Because neither he nor his wife acknowledged my wedding gift, I am debating what to do for his next birthday. Should I ignore the occasion, or be an example of unconditional love and send a card? I will not send him money, as I think it was be-

until five years ago, when my husband and I faced a series of family tragedies that took all of my time and energy. The worst was losing a daughter who would have been graduating this year.

I'm ready to reconnect with my old friends, but how do I deal with casual conversations without making light of the situation or being a wet blanket? If someone asks, "How is your daughter doing?" I need to have a reasonable response that isn't going to be awful for both of us. The thought of having to talk about it makes me want to stay home. Advice? -- UNDECIDED IN LOS ANGELES

yond rude not to acknowledge my wedding check. What would Dear Abby do? -- ESTRANGED BY ASSOCIATION

DEAR ESTRANGED: Dear Abby would recognize that not being invited to the wedding, after being told I would be, was a breach of etiquette. That I lovingly sent a check as a wedding gift, which was cashed with no acknowledgment, would indicate (to me) that my grandson has chosen to distance himself from me. By all means, send a birthday card if you wish, but please don't be surprised when it, too, garners no response.

DEAR ABBY: My 25th class reunion is coming up, and I'm debating whether to go because I'm not sure how to handle a conversation that is sure to come up. I was very close to my classmates

DEAR UNDECIDED: Please accept my sympathy for the loss of your daughter. If someone at the reunion hasn't already heard about her death and asks how she's doing, respond with the truth, which is that she passed away several years ago. If someone asks for the details, simply say you don't want to discuss it further and change the subject.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH BOB JONES

©2026 Tribune Content Agency, LLC

EASY ERROR TO MAKE

Neither vulnerable, South deals

NORTH  
 ♠ Q 10 6 2  
 ♥ Q 10 6  
 ♦ Q 10 5 3  
 ♣ A K

WEST  
 ♠ Void  
 ♥ A K J 9 8 7  
 ♦ K J 2  
 ♣ 9 6 5 4

EAST  
 ♠ 9 8 5 4 3  
 ♥ 5 4  
 ♦ 8 4  
 ♣ Q 10 7 2

SOUTH  
 ♠ A K J 7  
 ♥ 3 2  
 ♦ A 9 7 6  
 ♣ J 8 3

The bidding:  
 SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST  
 1♠ 1♥ Dbl\* Pass  
 1♠ 2♥ 4♠ All pass  
 \*Negative

Opening lead: Ace of ♥

Four spades was the popular contract when this deal was played at a tournament some years ago. The defense usually started with the ace, king, and jack of hearts. Most of the East players ruffed with the eight of spades. Declarer over-ruffed with the jack and cashed the ace of spades, getting the bad news. They continued

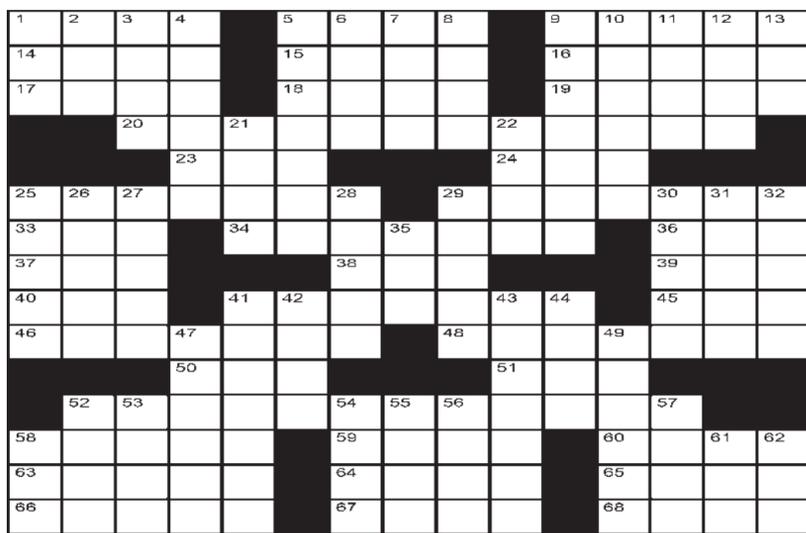
with a low diamond away from the ace. It did not matter whether West took his king or played low. If West played low, it didn't matter whether South played the queen or the 10 from dummy. If West played low and dummy won the trick, South just continued with a diamond to his ace and another diamond. Whatever West played after winning his diamond king, South was able to draw the trumps and make his contract.

There was a winning defense but not many found it. East should not ruff the third heart but rather discard a diamond. South had opened the bidding one diamond and he could only discard one diamond on the queen of hearts - not enough to avoid a diamond loser if he had had one. Declarer would not be able to draw East's trumps. If declarer tried giving up an early diamond trick, West would be able to give East a diamond ruff. Seems pretty simple to us, but many East players missed this play. Was it hard to see at the table? What do you think?

(Bob Jones welcomes readers' responses sent in care of this newspaper or to Tribune Content Agency, LLC., 16650 Westgrove Dr., Suite 175, Addison, TX 75001.)

THE Daily Commuter Puzzle by Stella Zawistowski

- ACROSS**
- Shady business
  - Unwanted fungus
  - Bits of info
  - "The Wizard of Oz" dog
  - Song in an opera
  - Big poker bet: 2 wds.
  - Pirate's plunder
  - Seagoing force
  - Immune system component
  - 6th-to-8th grade institution: 2 wds.
  - By way of
  - So far
  - City thoroughfares
  - Milk holders
  - "\_ you kidding?"
  - Winter and spring
  - Really impress
  - \_ and cheese
  - Hot breakfast drink
  - Bitter emotion
  - Plastic additive: Abbr.
  - Parish leaders
  - Hush-hush bureau: Abbr.
  - Pain-relieving pill
  - Activate
  - \_ Speedwagon (rock band)
  - Praiseful poem
  - Classic 1984 Dan Aykroyd comedy
  - Blood vessels
  - Working hard: 2 wds.
  - Box-office flop
  - Not from a major studio
  - Garden entrance
  - Notion
  - Company bigwigs, for short
  - Tool building
  - Real estate
- DOWN**
- The Cardinals' city: Abbr.
  - Dove's sound
  - Molecule part
  - Reason for action
  - Directive
  - Mouth-related
  - Not prerecorded
  - 24-hour periods
  - Dads
  - Louisa May \_
  - Scat singer Laine
  - Cash drawer
  - "Celebrity Jeopardy!" show: Abbr.
  - Perishes
  - Greenish-blue
  - Afro-Brazilian dance
  - Ensnarers
  - Sum up
  - Evening gown fabric
  - Shore
  - In debt
  - Like Odin and Loki
  - Solemnly promise
  - "\_ if I care!"
  - Irons
  - Violent protest
  - Ran slowly
  - Cole slaw or French fries
  - Wryly funny
  - Rodent kept as a pet
  - Baby boomers' kids: 2 wds.
  - \_ and seek
  - Totes and clutches
  - Provo's state
  - Location
  - Carbonated drink
  - Compete
  - "A Few Good \_"
  - Terrible



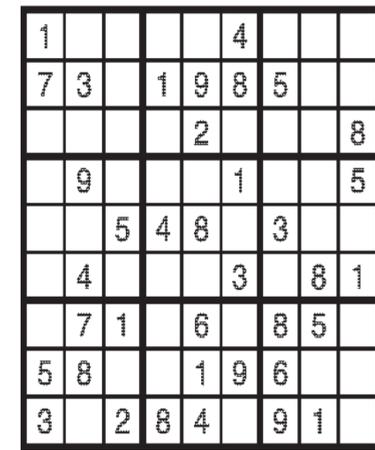
Created by Stella Zawistowski

9/12/25



©2025 Tribune Content Agency, LLC All Rights Reserved. 9/12/25

SUDOKU

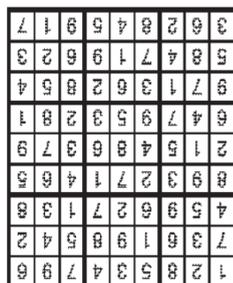


Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Here's How It Works:

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



ANSWER:

**SCHOOL BOARD**

Continued from page 1

who came up to receive a gift from the board.

“I really appreciate our board, school system, community and everybody who is involved in this,” Burdette said. “Winning is extremely difficult and I think anybody who has been in athletics knows how hard it is. There are a whole lot of people involved, we are really fortunate here and everything came together at the right time.”

Burdette said this year’s team was “the perfect storm.”

“We were very blessed,” he said. “I’m really excited to recognize these players.”

In other meeting news:

- The board approved Sports Turf Company to replace the tracks at East Laurens High School and WLHS.

“This would put both schools on the same rotation,” Hall said. “The tracks will be guaranteed for about 10 to 12 years. It should be a while before we have to do it again.”

Hall stressed that this work will not impact the upcoming track season.

“We will go through the season on the current tracks and then construction will start after that,” Hall said.

- Northwest Laurens Elemen-



Raiders football coach Kip Burdette discusses his team’s 2025 success on the gridiron during as last week’s board meeting/PAYTON TOWNS III

tary School was given the Clean School Award.

- West Laurens High School’s art was on display for board members and people in the audience to look at during and after the meeting.

- The board approved the new hiring of Kevin Daniel, maintenance.

- The board approved the retirements of Kathy Harrison, teacher at WLHS and Jeff Johnson, teacher at WLHS.

- The following resignations were approved: Abbie Fincher (food nutrition assistant at WLHS), Walter Lunsford (bus driver for Laurens County Schools), Amy McLaughlin (teach-

er at East Laurens Elementary School), Mary Ann Medina (custodian at WLHS), Charles Perez (bus shop for Laurens County Schools) and Denise Wooden (teacher at WLHS).

- The board approved the FY 27 budget development calendar.

- Ryan Dixon was re-appointed as legal counsel.

**COUNTY COMMISSION**

Continued from page 1

In other business, the commissioners:

• Approved the purchase of two sets of extrication tools, at \$32,000, for Rural Fire to be used at Minter and East Dublin fire stations.

• Approved the 2026 qualifying fees to run for county commissioner (\$144.14) and county school board (\$108).

• Approved a \$3,400 per month contract to Sikes Aviation to continue operating and providing fuel service at the county airport.

• Voted to continue serving as fiscal agent for Family Connection.

• Approved a request from the sheriff’s office to declare a Chevy Tahoe as surplus equipment to be traded in on a new Dodge Durango. The Tahoe was purchased with proceeds from the commissary, as will the Durango, said sheriff’s Maj. Alan Baggett.

• Accepted a bid from Midstate Striping for \$99,750 to re-stripe 32 miles of county roads currently being or scheduled to be repaved.

• Appointed Phil Bazemore to the Land Bank Authority.

• Approved a language access plan required for the federal Community Development Block Grant program.

**MLK PARADE**

Continued from page 1

relations experience working with progressive organizations to change public policy, promote diversity and inclusion, and create new inroads for future generations. His experience includes working with national civil and human rights

organizations to promote diversity and multiculturalism in various municipalities, foundations, corporations and Fortune 500 companies including Walmart, Compucredit, City of Atlanta, City of New Orleans, City of Pensacola, Barnes and Noble Books, Cracker Barrel, Kroger, Home Depot, Southern Partners Fund, Marguerite

Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, Veatch Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation, John Deere Tractors and the Southern Company.

Honorary escorts will be East Laurens High School Coaches Dwayne and Danielle Lowther. The Lowthers coach the ELHS softball team. Danielle, who is a graduate of East Laurens, is the Lady Falcons basketball coach. Dwayne, who graduated from Dublin High, is the Falcons boys basketball coach.

Hall said people will be able to register for the parade up to the day of the parade.

“It is set up where they can do it online electroni-

cally,” Hall said. “They can fill out the form, pay and jump in line.”

Besides the local high school bands, Hall acknowledged that Savannah State University Band will be attending as well.

“They will be bringing three buses for the Savannah State Band and there will be a lot folks from the band here,” Hall said.

Many churches will be participating and as of mid December, five participants on floats have signed up.

For more information about the parade, send Hall an email at dublingamlkparadecommittee@gmail.com or call him at (478) 697-1107.

**MLK BREAKFAST**

Continued from page 1

ty, the 100 Black Men of Savannah, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. Tau Beta Sigma Chapter and First Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church. He also serves on the board of directors of Senior Citizens Inc. and the Coastal Georgia Council, and is a member of the Savannah State National Alumni Association.

For tickets to the breakfast or for more information, contact Francis Wells at (478) 697-7858, Carol Edwards at (478) 998-0232 or any member of the Black Festival Committee.

**CHAIN**

Continued from page 1

working with you guys. Miss Brenda, I’d love to have you elected for four more years,” Mathis said. “We might not always see eye-to-eye on all things, but she’s a fair lady who is always willing to listen to both sides.”

In her announcement, Chain described herself as “a woman of integrity and value.”

“I value honesty, hard work and determination. My purpose for running for a third term is simple – to continue to be a servant leader. I will continue to be your voice by looking out for the best interest of the majority of Laurens County. I will forever represent the values of family and hometown.”

**Affordability a top concern ahead of legislative session**

By TY TAGAMI  
Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA — As lawmakers return to the Georgia Capitol this week, they will focus on affordability.

While President Donald Trump tries to address complaints about the cost of living, Georgia Republicans see the risk of a voter backlash.

They worry that the landslide defeat in November of two Republican incumbents on the state Public Service Commission could be a harbinger for the November general elections.

So, members of the state Senate and House say they will be pushing pocketbook proposals this year.

“We’re laser focused on pursuing an agenda — when we start back next Monday — that makes life affordable,” said House Speaker Jon Burns, a Republican from Newington.

In a briefing Wednesday, he said he and his chamber would focus on local property taxes, which he blamed for undermining the American dream of homeownership.

“For many of the families in our state, because of those property taxes, that dream appears to be unattainable,” he said. “We need to do something about it. And we’re going to do something about it.”

Senate Republicans are concerned about taxes, too. But they are targeting the state income tax.

On Wednesday, a Senate study committee recommended eliminating it on the first \$50,000 earned by individuals and \$100,000 for couples.

The committee, led by Sen. Blake Tillery, R-Vidalia, also recommended abolishing the \$16 billion tax entirely by 2032.

But first, he said, lawmakers must help those struggling most with rising costs by exempting them from the 5.19% income tax.

“Georgia families are feeling the burden of affordability,” said Tillery, who, as chairman of the Senate

Appropriations Committee, will have significant say over the state budget. “They’re talking about how high their power bill is. They’re talking about how much child care costs, how much their grocery bill is.”

Last spring and summer, legislators held hearings to study rising medical costs, a topic that could lead to legislation, as well. The House heard about a resulting lack of access to cancer care and about the impact of federal funding policy on the state public health system.

The end of COVID-19 era subsidies for people who buy health insurance through the Affordable Care Act is expected to make coverage unaffordable for hundreds of thousands in Georgia. The Congressional fighting over the issue could spill into state politics.

U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff, a Democrat, taunted Georgia’s Republican delegation to the U.S. House over the issue, targeting those who want to unseat him in November.

“They support throwing half a million Georgians off their health insurance. They support more than a million Georgians seeing their health insurance premiums double,” he said Thursday. Republicans should break with Trump and extend the tax credits, he said. It is a line he will surely repeat during this election season.

Health care was the second issue Burns said the state House would tackle this year. His concern centered on recruiting and retaining doctors. His plan is to establish more opportunities for future doctors to complete their residency in Georgia, since they tend to settle where they do that training.

The third top issue Burns mentioned was education. He said the state must do more to improve literacy rates, so he wants to put a literacy coach in every elementary school. It has been a major concern of his wife, Dayle, a retired educator who has been helping with a state literacy campaign.

**One Day:  
Dublin's Civil  
Rights Experience**

A reader's theatre honoring Hub Dudley,  
young MLK, and Civil Rights leaders.  
A community history event open to visitors and  
locals of all ages and backgrounds.

📍 First African Baptist Church | February 7th, 2026 | 10 AM

Tickets are \$8 plus fees.  
Online advance tickets only

Scan for Tickets | More Info at VisitDublinGA.org