The Courier Herald

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10 local students competing to be the next Laurens County FLEX champ

By PAYTON TOWNS III
Senior Reporter

What began as 50 applications for becoming Foundational Leadership & Entrepreneur X-perience (FLEX) Companies in Laurens County, has been whittled down to 10.

Sara Kolbie, director of the Dublin-Laurens County Chamber Community Foundation, was happy to begin the second year of the Laurens County FLEX program, which will allow 10 high school business companies to compete for thousands in cash while operating their businesses. Organized by the Dublin-Laurens County Chamber Community Foundation and sponsored by local businesses and organizations, Georgia FLEX helps high schoolers start, grow, and expand their entrepreneurial dreams.

The top 10 selected for the Laurens County FLEX companies competition, are:

- Mariah Johnson, Dublin sophomore, with her press-on nail kit company called You Nailed It.

- Justus O'Neal, Dublin sophomore, with his snack company called Just Us Treats.

- Lara Fincher, East Laurens senior, with her sports and portrait photography business called Lara Zoey Photography.

- Deakon Dooley, Trinity Christian junior, with his convenient mobile car care company called Deakon's Detailing.

- Judson Outlaw, Trinity Christian freshman, with his handmade fishing lures company called Willy Fishing Lure Co.

- Paiden Rozier, Trinity Christian sophomore, returns for a second year with his customized student planners for his business called Plan Pal.

- London Dooley, Trinity Christian senior, wants to have fun with delicious drinks at local events with her business called Fancy Fizz's.

- Scotlyn Smith, West Laurens sophomore, has a business that will bring

STUDENTS
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We live in a community where there is almost a church on every corner. The Church Beat was created to share the stories of those houses of worship in this paper. Above: Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Dublin, Georgia/ DONNELL SUGGS

Church Beat: Church Matters

By SHERRI OTTO MCLEOD
Special to The Courier Herald

Church matters. People attend church service to draw closer to God, become better people, give their children a moral foundation, please their spouse, or find comfort during hardship or sorrow.

The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means an assembly or a group of believers called out. In Matthew 16: 18, Jesus tells Peter, "You are Peter, on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it." Jesus used the term not for a brick-and-mortar institution, but for a community of his followers gathered for a shared purpose.

We live in a community where there is almost a church on every corner. But our buildings and our biases don't allow us to have fellowship in the way Jesus was intending. Surely that is no surprise. Humanity is notorious for misusing blessings that God intended for love and mishandling the whole Godly purpose. So how about we take a closer look at how the Church might fulfill her purpose if we were to operate without bias or a building?

And why did I just use the pronoun her when I referred to the Church? The most prominent reason is the biblical metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is described as the bridegroom, and the collective body of believers, the Church, is described as his bride. Early Christian theologians, such as St. Augustine developed a concept of the Holy Mother Church. (See Genesis 1:27)

This implies that the fullness of the divine image requires both male and female reflections, placing God above or encompassing both genders rather than being limited to one. (See: Matthew 22:37-40)

Let's focus on what matters: How can we build fellowship beyond church buildings and biases?

Editor's Note: Church Beat was created to have believers of all faiths share their church-related stories. We can come together to share church outreach events in Laurens County, while also reflecting and sharing on God's Word. Church Beat will be used as a way to spread the good news no matter where you worship in the county.

D. Suggs
Editor & Publisher

RELIGION DIGEST

The First Rehoboth Missionary Baptist Association cordially invites you to attend its Annual Candlelight Service on Sunday, December 6, 2026, | 4:00 P.M.

Guest Speaker: Reverend Dr. Stanford L. Anderson

Moderator: Reverend David G. Flowers

Vice Moderator: Reverend Eric Carswell Pastor Anderson serves as Pastor of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church of Richmond Hill Ga. and the Pastor of Piney Grove Missionary Baptist Church. He also serves as the Moderator (also titled District President) for the First District of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, Inc., a regional leadership role he has held since 2013.

Attire: Missionaries: Red attire with a silver corsage. Laymen: Black attire with a red tie

Return to splendor: Chamber, Development Authority back home after historic restoration project

By RODNEY MANLEY
Staff Reporter



The front balcony had to be rebuilt, reusing as much of the classical balustrade railing as possible/RODNEY MANLEY

From Bellevue Avenue, the historic George T. Morris house remained a fetching sight.

Inside, however, the nearly 80-year-old home was showing its age. Water leaked through its roof and internal rain gutters. Plaster peeled from the walls. Green carpet, running wall to wall throughout the two-story manor, had long since faded.

Morris, a prominent Dublin businessman, built the home in 1938, from plans designed by Ellamae Ellis League, one of Georgia's first and most prominent female architects. In 1987, the family deeded the property to the Dublin-Laurens Development Authority, and it's served as headquarters of the authority and Chamber of Commerce since.

Now, thanks to some long overdue repairs and renovations, the home has been restored to its original splendor. With the two-month under wraps, Development Authority and Chamber officials moved back last week.

"Obviously, old buildings have their problems. You got to update them every now and then, but it ended up being quite the project for the Development Authority to get this building kind of where we all wanted it to be," Authority President Mitch Griggs told The Courier Herald podcast "Slightly Off the Record."

The reno was far more than just cosmetic. The home still had its original cloth- and paper-covered electrical wiring. Its second-story balcony had to be removed and rebuilt, reusing as much of the classical balustrade railing as could be salvaged. Window casings had to be replaced, and the entire building rewired and replumbed.

"The Morris heirs donated it to us, so we've been here for a little while, and are very happy to be here. But over the years, of course, older structures such as this require maintenance, and we've been kind of patching things along the way.

But it saw this coming, that there was a need for a real major renovation."

The work was daunting enough, but its location with a historic district and the restrictions that come with that presented more challenges. To lead the project, the authority turned to one of its own, Dublin's Charlie Garbutt, who happens to be perhaps the state's leading expert in historic preservation and restoration.

"We wanted to preserve the history of the building, the architectural integrity of the building, by all means. This is an important property in our community," Griggs said. "But we needed to make it functional, so that we could conduct our business here.

Garbutt's portfolio features numerous historic preservations and rehabilitations across the state, from the Fox Theatre and State Capitol in Atlanta to the old First National Bank building, better known as "Dublin's Skyscraper."

"This was in his wheelhouse," Griggs said.

Garbutt donated his time, free of charge, to serve as project manager, cutting out the need for a contractor and likely saving a six-figure sum. The work finished on time and under budget, with Garbutt managing to trim about $50,000 to complete it about $300,000. Officials had initially feared the renovation would cost two or three times that much.

The scope of the work meant the authority and chamber needed somewhere to work. Officials reached out to realtors Louie and Will Curry, who "came to our rescue" and allowed them to use the collaborative office space on the second floor of The Henry, another historic structure recently restored downtown.

"The Currys just did an extraordinary job with the renovation of that building. It was and is an outstanding space," said Griggs. "So we were just really, really blessed by their generosity and letting us be there for a little while. I would say, in some ways, I hate to leave there, but it's also good to be back home."

The work revealed lots of surprises, but not all of them unpleasant or costly. The old carpet was pulled up to reveal hardwood oak floors that, once refinished, are as beautiful as ever.

Workers also went to great lengths to preserve as much of the wallpaper in a downstairs office as possible. A consultant on an early walkthrough prior to construction spotted the paper – handpainted in Japan, likely on silk – as very valuable and historically significant.

The home also got fresh paint, both inside and out. And there's hot water.

"We haven't had hot water for 15 years," Griggs said. "One of the hot water pipes burst and nobody could figure out how to fix it.

Much of the deferred maintenance and deterioration was hidden to visitors and even industrial prospects, who looked past the faults to see "a lovely building." Griggs admits to doing the same on his first visit here, before he was hired last year.

Now, when a prospective new industry comes to town, he and others can know, without worry, that they're making the best first impression.

Hundreds of new jobs on tap as area industry expands

By KYLE DOMINY
Senior Editor

Hundreds of new jobs are forecasted to come to Laurens County in the coming months as existing industries plan expansion projects and new businesses put down local roots.

"There is a lot going on. It's been a busy 18 months," said Roger Folsom, chair of the Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority.

The largest job growth will come from one of the area's newest members of the manufacturing landscape. Korean auto part maker Hwashin, with a current workforce 250 strong, is expected to reach full employment, Folsom said, within the next 18 to 24 months. At capacity the plant will need 475 workers.

Georgia's car manufacturing industry has boomed over the past few years and was recently bolstered by the announcement of a new Audi plant coming to Middle Georgia. Hwashin began operations supplying components to Hyundai and Kia, however the facility recently installed an assembly line to build parts for U.S.-based auto maker Ford.



Hundreds of new jobs are forecasted to come to Laurens County in the coming months as existing industries plan expansion projects and new businesses put down local roots/RODNEY MANLEY

"We hope to see more opportunities in the auto parts sector with Audi building so close by," Folsom said.

Hwashin is already in preliminary talks with the development authority to double its footprint, while another Korean parts

INDUSTRY
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OBITUARIES



Cecil Cleo Chalker

Graveside services for Cecil Cleo Chalker, 76, were held at 11 a.m. Monday, Nov. 16, 2026, in the Mt. Olive Church of the Nazarene Cemetery. The Rev. Dwayne Clements officiated.

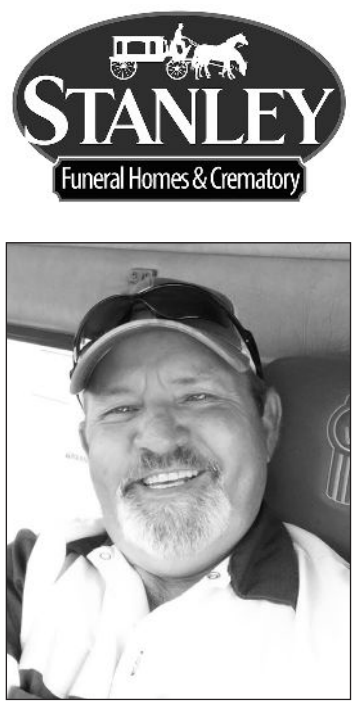
Mr. Chalker was born on March 8, 1950, in Johnson County, Georgia. He worked for Rockwell Automation in the maintenance department. He was preceded in death by his parents, Cleo and Ida Mae Fulford Chalker; sister, Helen Henderson; sister-in-law, Nancy Smith; father -in- law and mother-in-law, Bud Mimbs and Mary Mimbs; brothers-in-law, Robert Mimbs, James Henderson and Lester Dickerson; and nephew, Bryon Mimbs. Mr. Chalker passed away on Saturday, Nov. 14, 2026, at Wrightsville Manor Nursing Home after a brief illness.

He is survived by his wife, Debbie Mimbs Chalker; daughter, Christy (Emory) Stubbs; sister, Rosalyn Dickerson; and a granddaughter, Kaitlynn Stubbs.

Pallbearers were Van Savage, Benny Bridges, Earl Sapp, Jack Bell, Ben Knight and Ray Cannon. Honorary pallbearer was Ronnie Shoemaker.

The family received friends on Monday from 10:30 to 11 a.m. at the cemetery.

Stanley Funeral Homes and Crematory/Wrightsville Chapel had charge of the funeral arrangements. To sign the Online Register Book please visit www.stanleyfuneralhome.com.



John Elliott

John "Johnny" Elliott, born April 14, 1956, in Fort Valley, Georgia, passed away on Nov. 13, 2026, at Atrium Health Navicent in Macon, Georgia.

He worked as a truck driver for Scruggs Company, a role that reflected steadiness, endurance and dedication. More than anything, Johnny loved his family, and that love shaped the life he lived and the memory he leaves behind. He was an avid collector of guns and enjoyed riding motorcycles. He enjoyed watching football, but the most enjoyable games he found to watch was those that his grandson was involved in. He loved his family but loved his grandchildren more. He had many friends, but his best friend was his "lil puppy" Beau and any stranger Johnny came in contact with instantly fell in love with him and became a friend as well.

He is survived by his daughter, Melinda “Mindy” Young, and her husband, Brad Young, of East Dublin; his grandsons, Brantly Young and Maddox Young, of East Dublin; his brother, Don Elliott, and sister-in-law, Wanda Elliott, of Dublin; and his brother-in-law, Jeff Askew. He is also lovingly remembered by his niece and nephews: Crystal Garnto and her husband, Chad Garnto, along with Jeffrey Askew Jr., Peter Askew and Don Elliott Jr. In the circle of those who remain, his family carries forward the affection and closeness that meant so much to him.

He was preceded in death by his father, the Rev. James Elliott; his mother, Delores Smith Elliott; his granddaughter, Jessalyn Young; his sister, Pat Elliott Askew; and his brother, Christopher Elliott. Their memories were part of his own story, and they remain joined with him in remembrance.

A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 21, 2026, at Northside Baptist Church, 328 Parker Dairy Road, Dublin, Georgia, followed by interment at Minter Baptist Church Cemetery, 856 Bush Road, East Dublin, Georgia.

The family will receive friends from 6 until 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 20, 2026 at Townsend Brothers Funeral Home.

The family may be contacted at 112 Pinecone Drive, East Dublin, Georgia 31027.

In lieu of flowers, make contributions to the Lucky Dog Rescue Ranch by visiting www.wixsite.com.

Please visit www.townsendfuneralhome.com to sign the online memorial register.

Townsend Brothers Funeral Home has charge of the arrangements.

Ronald Deese

Memorial services for Ronald (Ron) Deese will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 21, 2026, at Jordan Redeemer Church downtown.

All-girls Christian school opens in Cochran, with mission to "transform the lives of God's precious daughters”

By CAROLINE WEATHERSBY
Staff Reporter

Beauty From Ashes, an all-girls Christian academy for girls grades four through seven, has opened in Cochran.

Head of School Sonya Wright says that in 2025, God called her out of her teaching position at Central Fellowship Christian Academy to form an all-girls program. Within just a few months, she had quit her job and was running a successful all-girls youth program from her home.

The program lasted six weeks, with workshop topics ranging anywhere from art to health and wellness. At the end of the program, 15 girls graduated.

Then, Wright turned the program into a real school.

“When people always ask me, ‘Why an all-girls school?’ I say to them, ‘One, because the Lord told me,’” Wright said. “‘And two, our girls are in trouble. They really don’t know who they are.’”

Wright grew up in what she describes as a rough area in Brooklyn, New York.

According to her, she struggled a lot with her identity growing up, and because of that, she often found herself in a bad position fighting with “the enemy,” until one day, she told herself she’d need to make a major change in her life if she wanted to keep living.

“I just went through a lot of hard things, and most of it was because of identity,” she said. "I just didn't know who I was or who I belonged to."

That’s when, she said, she surrendered her life to God, and suddenly there was a change in her life. She started to feel more comfortable in, not only who she was, but ‘whose’ she was.

In February of 2026, she moved to Kathleen with her husband Lee, and in August, the two opened Beauty From Ashes.

“Our desire is to really to help transform the lives of God’s precious daughters,” Wright said.

The school is located inside the Elevation Worship Ministries church, where Lee serves as pastor.

The school itself makes up much of the church’s dining hall, decorated with butterflies, famous women of history and learning materials.

The reading corner, to the side of the dining area, is dedicated to Wright’s grandmother, Mary Magdalene Bowden, who Wright says taught herself how to read during a time it was illegal for her to attend school.

According to Wright, the girls have classes Monday through Thursday each week.

On Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the girls learn core academics including math, science, history, English, spelling and Bible. On Thursdays, the girls have “leadership enrichment,” where they learn things like financial stewardship, music, home economics and social justice.

Sometimes, the girls are visited by special guest teachers, like Mayor Carla Coley, who on Nov. 5 taught the girls a lesson on mimicry and helped them build their own models.

The title itself “Beauty From Ashes,” comes from Isaiah 61:3.

“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." (KJV)

“Beauty From Ashes stems from…God taking these broken pieces in your life and turning it into something beautiful,” Wright said. “All of these girls have a story at eight, nine, ten, eleven years old, but I want to remind them that the story they have is the story God has given them specifically.”



Sonya Wright, seen above teaching students, and her husband Lee, opened Beauty From Ashes, an all-girls Christian academy, in August/CAROLINE WEATHERSBY

“No matter how bad it is, or how great it is, it's a beautiful story. It's like a butterfly,” she continued. “Everybody dismisses the butterfly when it’s in a cocoon. It looks ugly. But it’s going through the process, and it turns out into all these beautiful butterflies.”

Because of this, the school mascot is a butterfly.

“When I see all the butterflies,” she said, “I see how unique God created people.”

Beauty From Ashes is currently accepting girls in grades four through seven.

Tuition is listed at $6,000- $6,500 per year per student, but Wright said scholarships are available.



A classroom at Beauty From Ashes/CAROLINE WEATHERSBY

BIRTHDAYS

Nov. 17
Valery Pooler
Maurene Smith
Cynthia Williams

Nov. 18
Brandon Colson
Kristen Price
Ricky Roberts

ANNIVERSARY

Nov. 17
Alvin & Kim Salter
Saul & Lakeisha Fuler


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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Steve Buckins is initiating a rezoning for Parcel D10E 155 (109 Vernon St), 3.50 acres more or less. The parcel is currently zoned as P Professional and is being considered for rezoning as R1 Single Family Residential. Proposed use is single family residential.

Notice is hereby given that Gail Yates, Yates Properties is initiating a rezoning for Parcel D10C 123 (1619 Rice Ave), .49 acres more or less. The parcel is currently zoned as R-1 Single Family Residential and is being considered for rezoning as P Professional. Proposed use is counseling services.

Notice is hereby given that Janet Lee Hudson has submitted an annexation application Parcel D05C 001, 1.0 acres, more or less, and Parcel 100 080A, .21 acres more or less. Request to annex the property into the city limits of Dublin as M2 General Industrial. Proposed use is for industrial development.

The Mayor and Council will hold the *Public Hearings* in the Council Chambers of the Dublin City Hall in Dublin, Georgia on Thursday, **December 3, *2026*** at ***5:30 P.M.***

All interested persons are invited to attend.

NEWS DIGEST

Preseason's Greetings Dublin Decked out for the holidays

With the holiday season fast approaching, City of Dublin workers got a jump on decorating downtown for the Christmas holiday. On Thursday, November 12, a crew moved from lamppost to lamppost, putting up wreaths, banners and bows. The holiday trimmings can be seen all over downtown.

Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce

The Laurens County Chamber of Commerce is hosting "Business After Hours" on Tuesday, November 17 at Georgia First Bank. The networking and fellowship event will run from 5:30-7pm.

Georgia First Bank is located 303 Industrial Blvd. in Dublin.

The Laurens County Democratic Committee

The Laurens County Democratic Committee will meet on Tuesday, November 24 at 6pm in Our Place, which is located 114 E Johnson St. in Dublin.

The committee will also meet on Tuesday, December 15, 2026, at 6:00 PM to hold elections.



Additional holiday trimmings can be seen all over downtown, including on the Laurens County Courthouse /DONNELL SUGGS

OF CHARACTER AND HOPE

By STEVE BULLINGTON

While there seems to be broad agreement now about the discontent that drove the midterm election – the cost of living, a seemingly pointless war with grave consequences, corruption in high places, ICE overreach – less attention has been given to the kind of candidates and the kind of politics people voted for. Young people for instance, disappointed with government insensitivity to the world they're inheriting, turned out in force this time for particular candidates. They were looking for hope and seemed to find it. The candidates in this election mattered. Many of them won, not because they were beating a partisan drum but because of their authenticity. They listened and made a real connection with their constituents. And a number of those elected are folks whose faith strongly informs their political vision and approach. The new Congress will include five more ordained clergy, plus three others who are seminary trained. Perhaps no one illustrates this new brand of politics and the hope it's inspiring better than Senator-elect James Talarico of Texas. Here are excerpts from his victory speech, all of which is worth listening to:

... this win is for every underdog who's been counted out and left behind. This win is for every teacher and every nurse, for every farmer and every rancher, for every young person who's trying to put food on the table. This win, this win if for every Texan who's ever wondered if anyone was listening. I heard you. We need you ... To the Texans who supported this movement, I am humbled by your trust and I will work every day to be worthy of it. And to the Texans who didn't vote for me, I will be your senator, too. I will always serve you. I will always fight for you. This win is not about the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. It's much bigger than that.

There is something broken in America. Our economic system is broken. Our political system is broken. Even our relationships with each other feel broken. That's because the most powerful people in the world want it that way. My granddad was a Baptist preacher in South Texas, and when I was little, he told me that we follow a barefoot rabbi who gave us two commandments, love God and love neighbor, because there is no love of God without love of neighbor. Every single person bears the image of the sacred. Every single person is holy, not just my neighbor who looks like me, not just my neighbor who votes like me. I am called to love all of my neighbors the way I love myself.

... The election was about chasing a vision of what this state can be. Texas public schools that are the envy of the nation, a Texas economy that is second to none, and Texas families that are stronger and healthier than they've ever been before. It won't happen overnight but a giant state deserves giant dreams. And we know how to get there. We must get big money out of our politics, so no billionaire or trillionaire can buy our elections. We must unrig this economic system that only benefits the top 1%. We must pass universal healthcare, so no one goes bankrupt just because they get sick. We must invest in our teachers and our students, so every underdog has a fighting chance. We must end those corrupt forever wars that are driving up prices and killing our great men and women in uniform. And we must heal the deep spiritual corruption at the root of all of these crises. We must bridge the divides between us and repair the ties that bind us. We forged a new kind of politics here in the Lone Star State, an answer to this decade of division ...

Other newly elected hope-inspiring candidates include Adam Hamilton of Kansas (11/6 PBS interview) and Sarah Trone Garriott of Iowa (7/31 Winner, Winner interview). We can be encouraged to have voices like these heading for Congress.

STUDENTS

Continued from page 1

peer-support to the community through her company The Next Step.

- Kalah Davis, West Laurens senior, shares her faith with her jewelry company called Kalah & Adonai's Jewelry.

- DaJunek Jackson, West Laurens senior, provides glam make-up and make-up kits with her company Uniqkie Milan.

These businesses will be on display during the December Business After Hours, a Dublin-Laurens County Chamber Event, which be held from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the DuBose Porter Center, on the campus of Oconee Fall Line Technical Center, 560 Pinehill Road.

"This will be an opportunity for them to sell their products," Kolbie said. "Even if you are not a chamber member, they can register (with the chamber) and attend this event. We will also be giving them opportunities at some of the local Christmas markets and we're working on those dates as well."

The FLEX program is a statewide initiative that has high school students develop real-world entrepreneurial and leadership skills through hands-on learning and community engagement. Kolbie said Laurens County is one of 27 rural communities in the state chosen for this program.

During the next six months, the students will attend business workshops and be mentored by local business owners. While doing this, they will also operate their own company. On Friday, Oct. 27, the FLEX Top 10 companies went to their first business workshop hosted by Vallant Bank. Lucas Cowart, market executive and Chamber Community Foundation Chair, led the students in a tour of the bank before eating lunch.

Whitney Kilgo, Vallant Bank's director of marketing, led the students in a discussion about the importance of symbolic company branding and customer service. Students were later offered a $200 seed loan at zero percent interest to help start their new businesses.

The second workshop was held at Curry Companies and led by Will Curry on Nov. 2.

"Will basically did a Business 101 finance course in one hour," she said. "He had a full packet of information. By the end of class, he had them doing their own clash flow statement, balance statement and income and loss statement. He did an incredible job. Through the four workshops that they do, we are trying to equip them with the business skills that they need to operate their business that they are already operating."

In February, the 10 companies will be reduced to the top three for the finals in March where the local champion will win up to $5,000 and have an opportunity to compete for a $10,000 grand prize at the state level.

"The students are excited," Kolbie said. "We have seen the students gear up quicker for the competition this year."

For more information about FLEX, go to www.chambercommunityfoudnation.org



POLICE BEAT...

Dublin Police Department

Cami Lane Childs, 27, was charged with financial transaction card theft and financial transaction card fraud at a restaurant on Veterans Boulevard around 10 a.m. on Oct. 16.

An officer responded to the restaurant regarding a stolen debit card that had happened on Oct. 14. The officer talked with a man who said a woman had contacted his corporate office and advised her debit card had been stolen. The man had video footage of the theft and wished to have the person trespassed from the property. He also explained store policy requiring any card left behind to be immediately turned over to the manager and secured in the store safe.

The officer was able to go to another business on West Jackson Street to talk with the card's owner. She said someone had taken her debit card to the restaurant around 1 p.m. on Oct. 14 to purchase food. The employee there folded a receipt and placed it in the bag. The woman believed the debit card had been placed in the bag.

The card owner later received a call from her bank asking whether she had authorized transactions at a location. She advised the bank that she had not, and began searching her purse and the restaurant bag and was unable to find her debit card. She then provided the officer a printed transaction sheet from the bank showing 11 attempted transactions. Only one of the transactions, in the amount of $20, was successfully processed before the card was blocked.

The officer reviewed video footage showing a card lying next to the register. It showed Childs attempting to push the card to the side of the table twice before eventually picking it up and putting it in her pocket. When the officer talked with Childs, she said, "I never stole that card." Childs said she had placed a sports card in her pocket and reported to the manager on duty that she had accidentally given a card to the wrong customer.

She was transported to the Laurens County Sheriff's Office and turned over to personnel. During transport, Childs said that it was her Spruce card and that she had never taken the blue credit card. The officer noted the statement and the fact that he had not mentioned the color of the card.

- Fernando Gonzales Argueta, 56, was charged with driving while unlicensed at the intersection East Jackson Street and Rodgers Street at 8:27 p.m. on Oct. 19.

An officer was patrolling the area and saw a white Ford F-350 Super Duty with both tag lights out. The truck came to a stop at a residence on East Gaines Street.

The officer made contact with Argueta. The officer asked Argueta if he has a valid driver's license to which he would respond, stating that he does not. The officer then ordered Argueta out of the vehicle and placed him in handcuffs.

Argueta was transported to the Laurens County Jail and would turn him over to jail staff.

Laurens County Sheriff's Office

- On Oct. 12 at 4:15 p.m., a deputy was dispatched to U.S. 441 in reference to property damage.

- A firearm was stolen on King Richard Drive at 3:14 p.m. on Oct. 10.

- Property was damaged on Mount Olive Road between Oct. 4 and 5.

- A deputy responded to Duggan Street regarding a dispute that happened at 11:49 a.m. on Oct. 7.

- A deputy talked with a woman in reference to deposit account fraud that happened between Oct. 8 and Oct. 13 on Wren Lane.

- A vehicle was stolen on Woods Way at 4:43 a.m. on Oct. 18.

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 the deadline.



Dublin Christmas Parade
Sponsored by the Exchange Club of Dublin
Saturday, December 5th, 2026

Check out our Facebook page, Dublin Exchange Club for more information!

All entries must be decorated with a Christmas Theme and well Lighted.
The parade will begin at 6:00 P.M. Line-up starts at 4:30 P.M.
Entry Fee: $100 – Check/Cash/Venmo Deadline for Entry: November 20, 2026
Before November 27, 2026, late applications will be considered with an entry fee of $150
No entries will be accepted after November 27, 2026 – NO EXCEPTIONS

Entry Name: _____

Primary Contact Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Email Address: _____

Signature of Primary Contact: _____

By signing above entrant and all participants within your group agree to hold the Exchange Club of Dublin harmless from any loss or injury resulting from participation in the Christmas Parade and follow all rules and regulations of the City of Dublin for Parades. See Parade Rules at the following website: **www.cityofdublin.org/business/permits-and-licenses**

Please select your type of entry (Circle One):

Float (Truck and Trailer); Car (2 Cars Per Entry); Motorcycle or Bike (6 Per Entry); Walking (30 Per Entry)

Do you want your entry to be judged (circle one): YES or NO

If yes, please select your category (circle one): Church or Organization or Commercial/Business

1st Place - $100 2nd Place - $50 3rd Place - $25

- Entry forms must be received with valid payment and be properly filled out to be considered for entry.
- We will contact you on the week of the parade with your line-up number.
- Please be sure that your entry can maintain a steady pace through the entire parade route.
- Per City Ordinance, Horses must be bagged while inside the city limits and during the Parade.
- Due to safety requirements, please do not throw any items, including candy, from floats, vehicles, or while walking during the parade.
- Floats will not be allowed to unload passengers until they reach the Christ Chapel parking lot.
- It is the desire of the Exchange Club of Dublin to have only one Santa Clause participate in the Parade. The Santa Float will be at the end of the Parade.
- The Christmas Parade is a family event. The Exchange Club of Dublin reserves the right to refuse or remove any participant that we deem inappropriate for this event.
- If the Parade is cancelled, refunds will not be given.
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P.O. Box 381, Dublin, GA 31040
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Entry forms can be dropped off at 702 East Jackson Street, Dublin GA (Middle Georgia Mechanical)
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1006 Bellevue Avenue, Dublin GA (Redeemed Realty)



The cast of "Polter-Heist" following the final performance on Halloween night/SPECIAL PHOTO

Having fun up front for another show

MAN ABOUT TOWN...



By PAYTON TOWNS III

The sound of the music was rapidly reduced as I received a nod from our sound man, Blythe McCoy. It was showtime.

There was no spotlight, and honestly, no stage. A few props around me and a whole bunch of people sitting around tables, and the majority were looking my way. Once I started talking, those who were not looking my way suddenly turned their attention toward me.

Playing the role of Master of Ceremonies in the Dublin Main Street Players production of "Polter-Heist" had been months in the making. As with any production, there had been changes throughout the process, but nothing I or the cast could not handle.

For me, it was an honor to be a part of the "Polter-Heist" cast. I have seen Christy Blue, John Daniels, Jarred Lord, Nichole Padgett, Heather Rodgers and Tracy Soles in many of the DMSP plays for approximately 10 years or more. From murder mysteries to comedies, my wife Jill and I have always enjoyed going to one of their productions.

It was an added treat to have our friend Mia Berry, who was the backstage director in "Guys & Dolls" and "Annie" play a big part in "Polter-Heist."

The chance to gather with this group week after week for three months, along with the opportunity to see what it takes to put on one of their productions, was fun.

In the past, I had the opportunity to interview many of them and watch them practice. But usually, when I am there to do a story, I do not stay for more than 45 minutes. I get the information, take pictures and head home.

And while I did write the preview for "Polter-Heist," this time I already knew all of the characters and the actors who were playing them.

What also made this special was the fact that I had the opportunity to read lines and play parts for every part in the production. It was funny to see the reactions from my various cast mates.

Before I knew it, the dates for the performance were upon us and it was time for tech week, also called production week. Depending on what's going on, this is when microphones, costumes, props, sound and other things are brought into practice for the first time.

It would be nice if things would naturally come together, but it is usually an intense time that involves a lot of frustration. It reminds me a lot of a newspaper deadline when things are going crazy and the reporter gets a late breaking story with only minutes to have it ready.

And while it can be stressful, and practices are typically longer, there is relief knowing that rehearsals are done and that the next night will be performing in front of a live audience.

The Ice House was the venue for the two-night show. Everyone there was great. They helped with the meal and with other things we needed done.

The time came when McCoy handed me my microphone and I took my place for the introduction. I was able to watch every moment of the show from different parts of the room. By the time of the performances, I knew which scene was coming up so that I could be ready to interact with the audience.

When the show is over, there is a good feeling that it is done. It feels great to see the audience's reaction and hear what your family and friends have to say about the show.

When the performance is completed, that show and the time with the cast ends. I may like returning to my time after work, but there has always been a part of me that misses being around the cast. For months, we formed a family, worked on a show and performed it. When it is done, there is some sadness that it is over.

What I look forward to are more shows either with Dublin Main Street Players or Dublin Community Theatre. And if I am not in them, I do plan to go see them.

My wife and I have a theatre family. It is a good group to be a part of. One I hope to rejoin, and maybe expand, in the future.

INDUSTRY

Continued from page 1

company is launching its own operation.

Seoyon E-Hwa, a maker of consoles and ductwork for car AC and heat, has taken up shop in the former Flexsteel building on Industrial Blvd. The company is improving the building and installing its machinery and when operational will need up to 80 workers.

The green energy sector has also seen an area resurgence. In late 2025 solar panel manufacturer Sun Element, upgrading the former Rockwell building. Production has begun with 175 workers running three shifts at the plant. The company announced plans to hire 25 more employees in the next two months. Beginning early next year, plans are in place to double production and hire another 200 workers.

Other major companies continue to invest in the area, shoring up their Georgia operations.

YKK AP recently wrapped up a $50 million upgrade project at its Dublin plant. The Japanese company has built construction components locally for decades. This investment, Folsom said, ensures the business stays in Laurens County for years to come.

"That is the third major investment they have made since locating here," he said. "It anchors that facility here for years to come and they have been a great corporate citizen here."

Coca Cola United is returning to Laurens County with a new distribution center in the development authority's small business park. While the operation won't bring a lot of jobs, it brings a world-recognized name with a state-of-the-art logistics facility. The company is scheduled to break ground on the new building Nov. 18.

The development authority is undergoing expansion of its own. The group, a quasi-governmental body that works to support local employers and attract new businesses to the area, recently moved back into its office in the Morris house. The century old building, a local historic landmark, underwent a much-needed preservation over the past few months. The group is currently recruiting a business retention and expansion manager, adding a third member to the authority's permanent staff, as well as upgrading its website.

Other projects include continued land development at the Hwy 257 and small business park. The UGA Archway program is assisting with landscape design and signage for the properties, helping increase visibility and recruitment efforts.

"Our existing industry is our best advertising," Folsom said. "Having key projects visible is good for the community and for prospects to see who's here."

Improvements are soon to begin at the Heart of Georgia Megasite in the eastern part of the county, thanks to state money procured by Rep. Matt Hatchett. Work to improve infrastructure accessibility will be key to attracting the best buyer of the property, Folsom said, with several already interested in the 2,000-acre site, though company names cannot be divulged.

Folsom said such work could not be completed without support from city and county leaders.

"Our elected officials work together for the good of the community," he said. "I hope we never lose sight of that, working together to create good quality jobs."

DAILY SCRIPTURE...

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

- 1 Corinthians 13:11 (KJV)

THOUGHT FOR TODAY...

"Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

- Unknown

EVERY DAY'S A HOLIDAY...

Nov. 17, 2026 is...
- World Prematurity Day
- National Unfriend Day
- National Hiking Day
- National Bread Day
- National Entrepreneur's Day
- National Baklava Day

YOUR TURN:

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

TELL IT!

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

Dublin-Laurens consolidation could pave the way for countywide water and sewer, unlocking growth beyond city limits. That long-term opportunity belongs on the table. It would be huge for this county.

Local municipalities would have the option to join in on consolidation or not. That's not a deal breaker. Minor. No one would force them to do anything.

Want a local example of consolidation? Look at EMS. It serves the city and county. What does each pay toward it? Let's look at how it works and whether sharing more services could benefit us.

I had a doctor's appointment today. Remember when you used to go to the doctor and you would visit with those in the waiting room. Today there were around 10 people waiting. No one said a word. There was no talking, no pleasantries exchanged and no communication. Why? Because everyone had their phones in their hands. I'm not really sure if that's a good thing.

There is a street light out at the bypass and Claxton Dairy Road. Please can we get the light repaired for full illumination of this dangerous intersection. The street light bandit.

Many Dublin City School classes are overcrowded and teachers and para pros are stressed. All DCS bus routes need monitors and bus divers are at their wits ends. Many will be leaving via retirement or if they can secure jobs elsewhere when this school year ends if not before. The current system is not working and not getting better. Something needs to happen sooner rather than later. State School Board where are you?

Protect Wednesdays and Sundays from sporting events. Do you want to be the reason you kept someone from their relationship with the Lord?

This broke my heart today. I went to (an organization's) food and clothing they were doing. My family and I were burnt out. Some lady told me that if I didn't live in Laurens County, they could not help me with anything. They couldn't get me any of the clothes or the food, which we didn't want. I thought a clothing bank was to help anybody at a time of need.

Why does anybody want to go to the Dublin City Board of Education school meetings? The new board is like the old board. They are going to do what they want to do regardless of who attends those meetings. They are saying it is only going to go up so many dollars. Last year it was the same thing and the year before that it was the same thing. It's going to continue to be the same thing with the Dublin City School Board.

I love the new flags hanging downtown for November. Very patriotic.

TELL IT! GUIDELINES

Have something to say about life in Dublin and Laurens County? We want to hear it. Tell It! is a space for community voices: praise, frustration, questions and everything in between.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Keep it local. Submissions should focus on issues, people and places in Dublin and Laurens County. We are not the right venue for commentary on national politics or public figures outside our community.

Be civil. Personal attacks, profanity and hate speech will not be published. Criticism is welcome; name-calling is not.

Stick to the facts. Submissions must not contain false statements of fact about identifiable individuals or organizations. We cannot publish content that is defamatory or exposes the Courier Herald to legal liability.

The Courier Herald reserves the right to edit submissions for length and clarity, and to decline any submission at its sole discretion. Submission does not guarantee publication.

The Courier Herald

LOCAL MATTERS

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

WEST LAURENS 28, WESTOVER 13

Special teams, strong second half sends Raiders past Patriots, on to Peach County in second round

By CLAY REYNOLDS
Sports Editor





Jaden Stanley (left) extends to block a Westover punt and J.D. Hogan (right) recovers in the end zone for a touchdown to extend the West Laurens lead to two scores late in the third quarter/DANNY SCARBORO

Second halves at home have been a sore spot this year for West Laurens, which in five home games before Saturday's first-rounder, had produced just 13 points after the break.

That pattern of strong starts followed by shaky finishes didn't have the Raiders encouraged as they went to the locker room trailing 7-6 after a turnover, and just three offensive possessions through two quarters.

But they'd come back out with as strong a second half as any they've played all year, scoring three touchdowns and holding for a second fourth-down stop of the night to put away Westover confidently for a 28-13 win at The SHU.

"It was kind of nice to kind of pull away with that thing after a rough start," said West Laurens head coach Kip Burdette. "I'm really pleased with how we played in the second half. We had some big stops in the red zone again, and we've played excellent red zone defense all year. We're going to have to keep doing it, but we get another opportunity to try it out."

The Raiders, who advance in the GHSA state playoffs for a second-straight year, will go on the road Friday to take on No. 1 seed Peach County.

The tale of two halves in this one was much different as West Laurens, in a definite first at home, saved its best football for last. And the Raiders started playing it right away to reverse the game's trajectory as they took the third quarter kickoff and, in under three minutes, drove 53 yards to score and take its first lead.

Justin Blash had authoritative runs on two of the five plays, but J.D. Hogan took a direct snap and powered his way over the goal line from six yards on the last to help put the home team up 13-7.

"It was straight wildcat, where I've got Maxx (Chafin) and (Devin) Watkins leading up for me," Hogan said. "That was the first time we've run it this year, so I'm glad we finally got to."

The offenses were mostly idle on the next three possessions before the Raiders' recently opportune special teams unit came through with a massive play as Jaden Stanley stretched out to block a punt from deep in Westover's own territory. Hogan recovered it in the end zone for what felt like the game-breaking touchdown.

"I've been trying to block punts all year, and then I sat out four games, and I was like, I gotta to get me one," Stanley said. "Coach (Matt) Starley was telling us we need to block this one, 'cause the operation time isn't good. The outside 'backer, he kind of blocks out and blocks down, and I told Nick (Hester) to go down inside of me so he'll block down and get him, and I'll come free. And that's what happened."



Raider assistant coach Brandon Edmond celebrates with Jamari Blash after his game-sealing interception in the fourth quarter/DANNY SCARBORO

"It just happened to basically fall right into my hands, I'm not gonna lie," Hogan said. "It bounced right to me, and luckily, I got a chance to fall on it and score."

The Raiders went wildcat again, this time with Stanley behind center, and "The Franchise" ran right for the two-point conversion to get the lead to a clean 14.

Westover got its only other touchdown on the end of a 71-yard drive in response.

Patriots quarterback Gabriel Hopper, a runner that West Laurens defenders struggled to get accounted for in passing situations, pulled the ball down after a drop back to scramble off the left-hand side to convert a fourth and five, and pull Westover within eight, on the 14-yard score.

But its extra-point kick missed the mark, and at the end of the busy 12 minutes, the Raiders had outscored the Patriots 15-6. It was their best third quarter of the whole season.

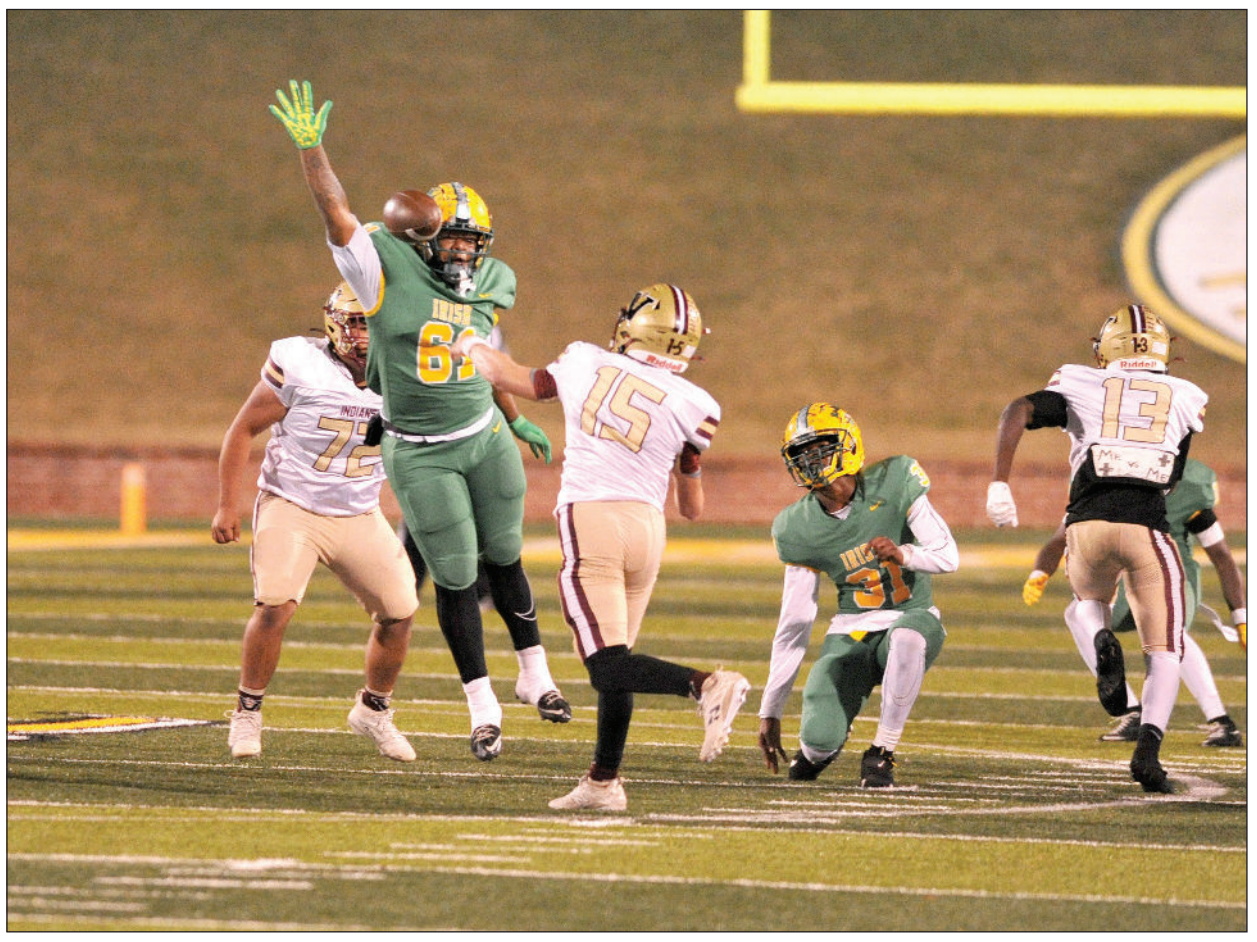
"We played well," Burdette said. "It was nice to score on the opening drive right there, and

RAIDERS
Continued on page 6

DUBLIN 60, VIDALIA 20

Irish roll past Indians in playoff opener

By CLAY REYNOLDS
Sports Editor



REJECTED!: Dublin's "Mando" Stanley knocks down a Vidalia pass in the first quarter/CLAY REYNOLDS

You'll take postseason victories however they come.

But Dublin's Friday had a lot for the Irish to like as they blasted Vidalia for a second time in three weeks to advance in the GHSA playoffs for the fifth-straight year.

The Indians had a few more points up their sleeve than they did in the teams' original meeting at Buck Cravey Field Oct. 30, when Dublin's only touchdown given up was the second-half kickoff return of Tyler McKinney.

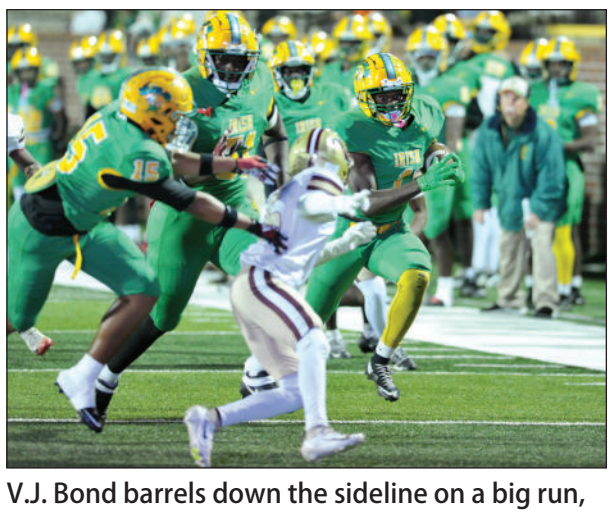
Vidalia's offense emptied the playbook, and found the end zone once in the first half, and twice in the second. But it had no additional answers for an Irish attack that once again scored at will to run away with it easily, 60-20.

"I thought we played pretty good," said Dublin head coach Roger Holmes. "We had about every trick play run on us tonight. I thought overall, we moved the ball whenever we wanted to. Defensively, I thought we did a better job with pressure tonight than we have the last couple of weeks. It's just good to get a win, anytime this time of the year."

The Irish pass rush was among the most noteworthy of impressive details that stood out. It only came up a few sacks, one with participation of almost half the defense on a jailbreak blitz for a fourth-down stop in the final quarter, but much more often got hands on passes of Vidalia quarterback Gavin Reynolds to cause other forms of disruption around the line of scrimmage.

"Any time you can do that it's good," Holmes said.

Jalen Dardy, Mandarian Stanley and a number of others came up with those deflections. Jamarcus Knight had two tackles for loss. Domimarkeyo Walden also made the recovery of a fumbled exchange in the second quarter to force the game's only turnover.



V.J. Bond barrels down the sideline on a big run, just a few plays before scoring his second rushing touchdown/CLAY REYNOLDS



DARDY DANCING: Dublin's Jalen Dardy does an Irish jig on the way to the postgame handshake line after Friday's win to advance in the state playoffs/CLAY REYNOLDS

Irish defenders admitted there were some things they'd like to have done better, but were mostly pleased with the performance.

"We read our keys," said senior linebacker Zion Porter. "When he got to switching the personnel looks it got a little different, but we did good tonight. We were wrapping up."

The game also had a playoff feel to it: But mainly for the chilly temperatures that make the hits, both those you take and deliver, sting a little harder and leave a feeling that lingers longer than in the regular season.

"It's just cold," Porter added. "The weather change plays a big impact on football for

IRISH
Continued on page 7

JEFF DAVIS 14, EAST LAURENS 13

Blocked PAT breaks hearts of Falcons at end of Pinelands possession battle

By CLAY REYNOLDS
Sports Editor

From overtime at Southeast Bulloch and a disappearing second half vs. WACO to last month's near miss against Bleckley County, it's been a season of heartbreakers for the East Laurens Falcons.

Friday night's first-round loss to Jeff Davis in the Pinelands might've been the toughest to take so far they took a third team seeded in AA's top five to the wire, only to fall by just a point,14-13.

The Falcons couldn't take full advantage of a potentially game-tying touchdown as Bryson Hazley slipped loose and dashed to the end zone for what had the makings of an equalizer, and a message of "Game on!" for the final seven and a half minutes.

But the Yellow Jackets' special teams crew had other ideas, and Jaiden King snuck through to block the extra point kick to keep Jeff Davis in front by a nose.

And East Laurens wouldn't see the football again as the home team – on a last of its multiple time-consuming possessions – ran off every bit of the remaining time on a final drive that managed to go as far as you can without scoring.

A kneel-down to drain the final seconds sent the Jackets (10-1, 5-1 region 1-AA) to the second round, where it will be back home Friday to face the Laney Wildcats.

The dejecting finish spelled season's end for the Falcons, who wrap up with a 3-8 record (2-4 region 2-AA), but the satisfaction of having left a lot on the field in three final games against measuring-stick opponents with whom their talented squad proved it can hold its own.

But much like the aforementioned losses from earlier in the season, the play or two needed to push them over the top was elusive.

And that started with the fateful point-after kick, following Hazley's run after the catch on a screen that wound in and out of traffic on a twisting 51-yard route to the end zone.

East Laurens had a viable option to go for the lead as a Jeff Davis special teamer

FALCONS
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JOHNSON COUNTY 48, GREENE COUNTY 0

Trojans tread past Tigers, on to second round

By RALPH JACKSON
Correspondent

Ground gains and defensive dominance moved the Johnson County Trojans past Greene County and into the second round of the state playoffs with a 48-0 win Friday night at the Blue Monster.

In the schools' first meeting on the football field, the Trojans rolled up 535 yards of total offense, including an impressive 514 yards rushing, while their defense held the Tigers to just 159 yards and kept them off the scoreboard.

Junior running back Jeremiah Scott led the ground attack with 330 yards and three touchdowns on just 12 carries. His performance was the highest single-game rushing total for a Johnson County player since the Trojans' 1979 state championship game.

The victory continued a season-long pattern of high-scoring performances by Johnson County, which entered the playoffs undefeated after completing its second consecutive 10–0 regular season.



Jeremiah Scott sets up some blocking behind D.J. Abrams during Friday's first-round win. Scott rushed for 330 yards and three touchdowns on just 12 carries as the Trojans defeated Greene County/RALPH JACKSON

The Trojans averaged 13.7 yards per offensive play and scored seven touchdowns despite running only 39 plays from scrimmage.

The game did not begin with the offensive fireworks that would eventually define it. Greene County held Johnson County scoreless in the first quarter and mounted a scoring threat of its own, advancing inside the Trojan 10-yard line.

But Johnson County's defense turned the Tigers away, preserving the scoreless tie and setting the stage for the offensive explosion that followed.

Head coach Don Norton said the defensive stand was one of the most satisfying moments of the night.

"Great teams are able to do that and have a goal-line stand," Norton said. "Like I've always said, we play defense here at Johnson County."

The Trojans broke through in the second quarter, scoring three touchdowns to take a 21–0 halftime lead.

Scott opened the scoring with a three-yard touchdown run, completing a 76-yard drive. Jacaden Webb followed with a six-yard touchdown run to finish a 77-yard possession.

Then Scott delivered one of the night's biggest plays, breaking loose for a 72-yard touchdown run that pushed the advantage to 21–0.

Johnson County continued its offensive assault in the third quarter, adding another 21 points.

Webb scored his second touchdown on a nine-yard run before Scott raced 73 yards for his third touchdown of the evening.

Quarterback Chance Wombles then connected with Kelsey Waters on a spectacular one-handed, 21-yard touchdown catch, extending the Trojans' lead to 42–0.

Morgan Prosser completed the scoring with a 13-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter.

The Trojans' seven touchdowns came from four different players, with Scott scoring three, Webb two and Waters and Prosser one each.

Wombles acknowledged that Johnson County had difficulty getting its offense started.

"We started off slow in the first quarter," he said, going on to explain that some of the plays the Trojans had prepared during the week did not work as expected, requiring adjustments before the offense found its rhythm.

Once it did, Greene County had few answers.

Scott's rushing performance was particularly remarkable. He averaged 27.5 yards per carry, with touchdown runs of three, 72 and 73 yards. He also had a 52-yard run that helped set up the third-quarter touchdown pass to Waters.

Despite his individual success, Scott was quick to credit his teammates.

"The line, like everybody did their assignment," Scott said when asked what made his performance possible.

Norton echoed that assessment, praising the offensive line for its work against a Greene County team that held a size advantage at nearly every position.

"Our kids were pretty quick and pretty tough and did a fantastic job tonight," Norton said.

JOCO
Continued on page 7

RAIDERS

Continued from page 5

then we had the big blocked punt that got us some points right there too."

A Westover comeback opening remained, but West Laurens managed to chew some clock... and got an extra few bites at that apple thanks to a big third-down throw from Duggan Malone to find Stanley for 20 yards over the middle that extended a drive on the first play of the fourth quarter.

It ended in a punt, but at least two minutes later and after a Malone kick that pinned the Patriots inside their 15 (one of three he placed inside the opposing 20).

Their lengthy journey back down the field, taking the clock south of the 3-minute mark, would turn this into a final opportunity. Westover, despite battling its way back to the red zone for a fifth time, ended up turning the ball over on downs.

The fateful series began with a third-and-short conversion as Michael Daniels absorbed a blow from Tripp NeSmith and surged past the line to gain. Hopper hit Jordan Joyner for nine to get within a yard and a half on second down, after Jamari Blash dropped Legend Brown for a yard loss on the preceding play.

Daniels slipped down on his way back to the line of scrimmage and took another loss on third down, leaving two for Westover on a do-or-die fourth. And Chafin, Watkins and Stephen Odom all helped out in collapsing the left edge on a keeper by Hopper that was short by a yard.

West Laurens took over with around 2:30 to go and covered 85 yards in just a few plays to drive home the dagger.

Justin Blash attacked a huge hole up the middle for close to 55 on the very next play that brought a visibly frustrated Westover head coach Corey Joyner steps onto the field with some more words for the referee. In the midst of the exchange, he'd be hit with a double unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and ejected.

The short drive resumed with a Kaden Bloodsaw carry up the middle to the 1, and a Patriot timeout with just under a minute to go. Malone came back to sneak through the middle for the TD.

"Justin's run was huge in that moment," Burdette said.

Westover's last possession was a single play, as Hopper's deep heave was intercepted by Jamari Blash, one of several newcoming starters on this year's Raider team who have now followed up last year's junior- and senior-led ride to the semifinals with a winning season, region title and playoff victory to call their own.



Justin Blash rushed for 143 yards on 12 carries to lead the Raiders on the ground/DANNY SCARBORO

"Last year, they set a standard for us, and we've been living up to that standard since they graduated," he said.

Saturday-night special (teams)...

This was West Laurens' fourth-straight game with a touchdown in the kicking game, and its third in a row blocking a punt.

It was one of two different types of block for the Raiders, who stuffed a field goal to hold Westover off the board after a third-down stop with goal to go on its long drive to open the game, well before the punt block and recovery that was a big second-half turning point.

"Special teams is a big part of the game, and that was a momentum swing, most definitely," Stanley said. "After that, you see what happened... We put another touchdown on the board and the defense kept getting stops... People don't really realize that, but when you see it happen in games, you'd be like, oh special teams won us this game or special teams lost us this game. We saw it on film that special teams wasn't their big suit, and if we could just beat them on special teams, we'd come out with a big win."

The kicking department, thinking back to multiple recent wins, has been a tremendous equalizer for West Laurens in the second half of the season.

"It's a big part of the game, being one third of it, and our kids just follow the gameplan week to week and just change the aspect of the game," Raiders' assistant coach Matt Janufka said during a pregame conversation.

"We have had a lot of big plays," Starley added. "The best part about it all is the buy-in from the kids and celebrating those electric moments. It's the purest thing in football to me."

The third phase, much like the rest of the game, didn't exactly get off to the best start, as Kingston O'Neal's muffed collection of a bouncing punt led to the game's first turnover early in the second quarter.

What would have been only a second offensive possession for West Laurens turned into Westover's third, and the Patriots took advantage of the plus start at the Raiders' 42 to end the scoreless tie on a one-yard keeper from Hopper.

But Malone would chip away on field goals from 26 yards and 39, to extend his career long by three, in the latter part of the quarter to get things turned back in the right direction.

Tripp Mascaro and Jeremy Brownlee also logged a couple of quality returns, averaging about 20 yards each, to start off two of the Raiders' fruitful drives in Westover territory.

"We had the muff in the first half, but it was big to come back in the second and play well," Burdette said. "Jeremy had a big return. We did good on our two-point conversions, had two big field goals in the first half and continue to play well on the special teams. We're gonna need 'em next week."

Going to halftime, the situation looked a bit more discouraging on the scoreboard than it was in reality.

While the Raiders trailed by one, with a certain sense of missed opportunity on two great shots at grabbing touchdowns, they were an important 2-for-2 getting points from red zone trips.

Westover, by the same token, had been within scoring range three times, but was only able to punch the ball in once, and thanks to the West Laurens mistake.

The Pats ran the ball well on an opening drive that reached goal to go after starting from its 35, but they were victimized by some issues after transitioning to a goal line package featuring freshman rusher Jalen Mack behind center.

A procedure penalty before second down, then an overhead snap on third allowing Hogan to make a tackle for loss back at the 12 brought out the field goal team.

It was unclear which of multiple rushers breaching the protection that got a hand on it, but Tripp NeSmith appeared the likely candidate on what would have been his third special teams deflection of the season.

Hester and O'Neal combined for the break-up of a fourth-down pass into the end zone as Westover came up empty on another chance between Raider field goals in the second.

Justin Blash didn't find the end zone, but rushed for 143 yards that served as the glue holding the Raiders' offensive gameplan together.

"We had to get our momentum up," he said. "Once we start playing with more physicality and get on the ball quicker, it starts making a big difference."

Malone, between his clutch throws for some third-down conversions on a 6-of-11 line for 72 yards, and Jace Williams, who had 33 all-purpose yards on three touches, also made some valuable plays that might get lost in the mix.

Watkins led tacklers with 13 total. Jamari Blash was right there with 12.5. Chafin made two for loss.

For West Laurens (7-4, 5-1 region 3-AAAA), the victory is a 30th in the career of the current senior class, which now stands tied with those of 2019 and 1991 (seasons) as the school's winningest all-time. This is also the only the Raiders' third time in program history with a playoff win in consecutive seasons (others coming in streaks of two years and four from 1990-91 and 2014-17).

"We're glad to be here," Burdette said. "It's a big win, and that's a good Westover team we beat tonight. Coach Joyner, I got to talk to him before the game. Lot of respect for him. They're a good outfit, and we were fortunate to come away with the win tonight."

After getting a long week to prepare for the first round, they now have a short five-day turnaround in advance of the next one. And that had the West Laurens staff right back on the clock as they climbed the hill to the offices to start working on an unbeaten Peach County team that had shredded East Jackson 49-0 a few hours beforehand.

"They're the No. 1 team in the bracket for a reason," Burdette said. "We're going to find out all we need to know when we turn that film on in a couple of hours."



The Raiders block a Westover field goal to deny points on the Patriots' opening drive/DANNY SCARBORO



Ayden Moore brings down Westover quarterback Gabriel Hopper on a sack in the second half/DANNY SCARBORO



J.D. Hogan runs for the go-ahead West Laurens touchdown early in the third quarter/DANNY SCARBORO

IRISH

Continued from page 5

me, but I've just gotta push through."

Vidalia (2-9, 0-7 region 2-AA) made some noise in likely the best performance so far from its first-year passer, which Dublin had held to only six completions and intercepted once in its visit late last month.

Reynolds, who took over as starter in mid-October, made some major strides in this one as he completed roughly 9 of 18 for close to 100 yards.

"Their little quarterback's gonna be alright," Holmes said. "He was throwing that thing around pretty good."

A couple of his best throws of the night figured into a long march to score and keep things slightly interesting late in the first quarter.

Ja'Marcus Bouyer caught a looping pass that cleared at least three Dublin sets of hands, and outran some pursuit to get inside the 10 to set up the touchdown run of Jah Robinson, who punched it in on a fourth and goal from the three despite getting leveled by Porter at the line. The Irish lead was reduced to 14-7 with a minute and a half to go in the first, but the rest of the opening half was heavily tilted in Dublin's direction.

Both of the first two Irish drives found the end zone on runs to the left-hand side by V.J. Bond.

He capped off a 60-yard opening drive that took less than two minutes, then one of 29 and only three plays just after a Vidalia turnover on downs as punter Ryan Brantley – with triple-barrel rush right in his face – opted to throw a an incomplete shovel pass just over his line of scrimmage rather than taking the chance of losing yardage, or worse on a potential sack or block.

Moments later, the Irish gave it back to Bond on a reverse to the left, with Ryland Yates blocking out in front, for the score to go ahead two touchdowns.

"We gotta get 'em down while you can," Bond said.



Dontavious Cannon breaks away toward his second rushing touchdown of the night late in the second quarter/CLAY REYNOLDS



Domimarkeyo Walden holds the ball high in celebration after recovering a Vidalia fumble in the second quarter/CLAY REYNOLDS

The ball hardly left Vidalia's half of the field in the second quarter as four more quick, simple scoring drives built up the lead to 39-7 by half.

Dontavious Cannon had two touchdown runs, a first going up the middle from about 22 yards, and a second two possessions later off the right to make the score 27-7.

Trav Bostic scored his in between, and some shrewd clock management allowed a final drive to grab one more handful of paydirt as Yates screened one out to Will Wallace for a catch-and-run of 16 with a few seconds to go.

Dublin led the yardage differential 241-99 after two quarters.

Vidalia elected to take a running clock in both final quarters, though some big plays headed both directions had it stopped a little more than you'd figure after five more touchdowns.

The Irish struck for three on Knight's 51-yard run, another Yates touchdown pass of 22 to Na-Zyon Mitchell and the late five-yard carry of Jabari Bell, which was set up by a 35-yard jaunt from Royce Harrell.

Robinson threw to Damarion Griffin from 62 yards out for the first of Vidalia's pair, and Eric Jones broke free on a 54-yarder for the other.

"Vidalia's got a lot to look forward to," Holmes said. "Their kids play hard, they never quit and Zach Grage is gonna get that bunch going pretty good."

The Indians threatened on another drive, but were held at the 40 on the team-wide rush involving Cannon, Wallace, Bond and Blake Luecke that was a nice exclamation point for the Irish varsity before giving way to some reserves.

"It makes us feel really great to get off the field and watch our offense go score the ball," Porter said. "We feel pride in getting stops on defense."

Yates was 4-of-5 for 71 yards passing.

Knight, with 90 yards, and Cannon, with 82, led the way for the Dublin backfield. Bond and Bostic added about 50 each, and Yates and Harrell rushed in the 40s.

Knight and Jaydon McRae also added receptions.

Dublin (10-2, 7-0 region 2-AA) has a second-straight region rematch on its hands in round 2 with Swainsboro set to revisit the Shamrock Bowl following its 31-6 home romp over Screven County.

The Tigers gave the Irish the best game of anyone in 2-AA other than Bleckley or Dodge, keeping it tight before an Irish score late put away their 27-12 victory back in the regular season, and primarily for a physical identity that's embodied by tailback Kyle Johnson, who scored twice on 31 carries for 185 yards in Friday's home win.

The Irish will have their work cut out in slowing him down over four more quarters.

"He'll be an SEC running back," Holmes said. "He's just a sophomore, good physical kid. Good speed overall. I think he's got a great chance.

"We're going to need a big crowd here next Friday night. Swainsboro has played us as tough as anybody ever has for as long as anybody in Dublin can remember. It should be a good atmosphere in the Bowl, and hopefully we'll be ready to go."

SCOREBOARD

FOOTBALL
Friday
Dublin 60, Vidalia 20
Jeff Davis 14,
East Laurens 13
Johnson Co. 48,
Greene Co. 0
Dodge Co. 41, Berrien 22
Bleckley Co. 59,
Jefferson Co. 14
ECI 36, Montgomery Co. 0
Treutlen 35, Wheeler Co. 6
Rockmart 56,
Washington Co. 14

Saturday
West Laurens 28,
Westover 13

PREP SCHEDULE

FLAG FOOTBALL
GHSA Playoffs, Round 1
Wednesday
Elbert Co. at East Laurens
/TBA

FOOTBALL
GHSA Playoffs, Round 2
Friday
Swainsboro at Dublin
West Laurens at Peach Co.
Clinch Co. at Johnson Co.
Pepperell at Bleckley Co.
Treutlen at Lincoln Co.
/7:30 p.m.

Dodge Co. at Thomasville
/8 p.m.

BASKETBALL
Thursday
Claxton at WL
(scrimmage)**/5 p.m.**

Saturday
STC Tip-off Classic
(Vidalia)
WL (girls) vs. Bacon Co.
/2 p.m.
Hugh McBride Tip-off
(at Jeff Davis HS)
WL (boys) vs. Coffee
/5:30 p.m.

CONTACT US:
Email sports information to tchsports77@gmail.com, or call (478) 272-5522, ext. 110

FALCONS

Continued from page 5

jumped offside on the initial try for John Thang. The Falcons took the half-the-distance penalty, but stayed with the plan to kick and tie it up.

King was able to find a small crack on the right side of the protection to knife-through, and dove to cover up the kick nearly before Thang's foot made contact with the ball.

That left it up to the Falcons' defense, which had shined in holding the Jackets to the same two touchdowns on their 249 yards, every bit rushing, by forcing four punts, a fumble and a turnover on downs.

But a stop to halt the progress of their steady ground attack wasn't to be found as Jeff Davis covered 66 yards on its second drive of the night to exceed seven minutes, with wingback Jacob Laney and fullback Garrison Coleman carrying on the bulk of its 14 plays.

An opportunity for East Laurens did present itself with just under four minutes to go as the Jackets faced a fourth and one at the plus 27. And what's more? A bad QB-center exchange had quarterback Mark Durden diving underneath a pile of his own blockers in search of the football with certain disaster afoot.

Somehow, he managed to salvage the loose rock and advance it to move the chains, which officials stretched out to prove the spot good enough by an inch or so.

Two more conversions from that point would give the Jackets all they needed to use up the remainder of time.

Coleman rushed 28 times for 128 yards. Laney carried on eight plays for 71, and Durden nine for 48.

East Laurens outgained Jeff Davis by 57 in the total yardage count, building on a healthy 96 yards rushing with the 208 passing yards of Za'Norrion Ellington, a surprise starter at quarterback in place of Skyler Snead.

The Falcons' usual trigger man was said to have been a possibility to play, though only a week removed from an ugly injury that knocked him from the game in the first half at Dublin.

Ellington, coming off an early-season IL stint himself, was a revelation with his command of the offense.

The sophomore led rushers on 12 attempts for 48 yards and was 12-of-18 throwing it, with seldom an incompletion on an opening drive that had the Falcons streaking down the field in search of an answer to the Jackets' earliest touchdown.

But Ellington's impressively strong arm was a double-edged sword, as three of his deeper tries got picked off to end drives including that first one, just shy of the end zone, for a first of two interceptions by Mark Durden.

In no hurry at all...

Jeff Davis went on the board first after its opening drive, even with the jump start of a 50-plus yard kickoff return from Jaiden West, ate up roughly five and a half minutes on the way to the single-yard touchdown run of Coleman.

Ellington and East Laurens came out with guns blazing in response, picking up first down after first down on their way from a start at the Falcon 15.

J.J. Wright and Aveone Wicker moved the chains on screens, Rozier on a resilient run and Ellington on a scramble. But rather than Blackjack, the drive proved a bust as the Falcons were dealt the turnover card on their last hit.

Durden, one of a majority of defenders dropping into coverage, sprung from the shadows near the goal line to grab the football as Ellington scrambled around on an extended play and put one in the air with 1:16 left.

The Jackets would suffer a similar fate on their ensuing possession, but not before taking another set of more than seven minutes off the first-half clock.

They fumbled at the East Laurens 21 as a ball was clubbed out from behind, and recovered by Hazley.

The Falcons, once again, raced down the field with Ellington completing a 50-yard pass to Demarcio Holliman to cross midfield. But Jeff Davis stood tall on the next series to keep them from moving forward, and Logan Gibson punted the Jackets down to their 6.

An inevitable kick back gave East the football one more time with a chance to drive from its own 40. Ellington found Hazley on the first play for about 20 to get within reasonable striking distance. But after some additional attempts to move closer fell through, he was forced to hang one up in the end zone with time on the brink of expiration.

Durden brought it back down, and nearly took it back to the other end zone before being tackled by Ellington with about 20 yards left to go to send things to halftime.

The Falcons finally broke through for some scoring to tie it after taking the third-quarter kickoff.

Ellington found J.J. Wright in double coverage for a 46-yard gain and Ja'Bryan Bigham carried for double digits to set up the TD on a Houdini scramble, as Ellington ducked away from a sack and then sprinted up the middle to the end zone.

A Cristofer Vasquez PAT evened the score at 7.

Jeff Davis was once again primed to answer and go back on top, as East Laurens' attempt at a surprise onside kick gave the Jackets prime position at midfield.

But they'd lose the ball again on a Coleman run toward daylight up the middle as Major Floyd came in from behind and popped the ball from his grasp. Holliman made the recovery.

West and Jeff Davis reciprocated the takeaway on a deep pass moments later, and the Jackets made much quicker work of moving the football in position for the lead, which came on a 27-yard Laney touchdown run only three minutes later.

They threatened again after forcing a Falcon punt, but had to kick it back after a heavily penalized series (one holding call nullifying a second Laney touchdown) sunk the drive.

East Laurens made the best of this final opportunity, working from its 22 with the help of a penalty to get near the 50 for the clutch touchdown of Hazley, who led Falcon receivers with three catches for 76 yards, and tacklers with 10.

Wright added four receptions for 75 and Jeremiah Rozier five carries for 34 yards.

JOCO

Continued from page 6

Phenomenal, as expected...

While the offensive numbers were impressive, Johnson County's defense delivered a performance equally worthy of recognition.

The Tigers managed only 80 rushing yards on 30 attempts, an average of 2.7 yards per carry. Greene County completed eight of 19 passes for 79 yards, but failed to reach the end zone.

The Trojan defense also limited Greene County to one conversion in 10 third-down attempts and stopped all three fourth-down attempts.

Daezon Devero intercepted a Greene County pass in the third quarter and returned it 10 yards, setting up Scott's 73-yard touchdown run on the next play.

The shutout was particularly impressive coming in the opening round of the state playoffs.

"Our defense was phenomenal, as the expectation is," Norton said.

Grayson Jackson connected on six of seven extra-point attempts for the Trojans. Daezon Devero also handled the team's only punt, a 39-yard kick.

With the victory, Johnson County advances to the second round, where the Trojans will again play at home, this time against Clinch County.

The matchup carries some history for Johnson County, particularly for Scott, who was a freshman when Clinch County eliminated the Trojans from the 2024 playoffs with a 28–6 victory.

"We want to be prepared," he said. "We gotta get back after my freshman year. We lost 28–6."

Asked whether the upcoming matchup was about revenge, Scott made his feelings clear.

"This is a revenge game, all next week," he said.

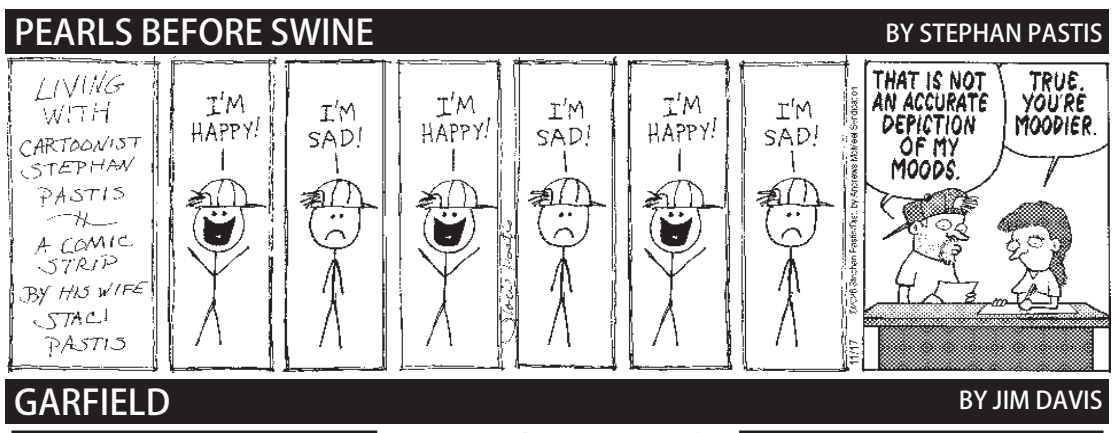
Wombles also expects a challenge from Clinch County, particularly its defense. But he remains confident about the Trojans' postseason possibilities, describing their pursuit of a state championship as "like a little movie."

For Norton, the immediate reward is another opportunity to play in front of the home crowd.

"We get to play one more time here, right here in the Blue Monster, so that's pretty good," Norton said.

After another commanding victory, the undefeated Trojans are one step closer to their championship goal, with a familiar playoff opponent standing in their way.

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE — BY STEPHAN PASTIS



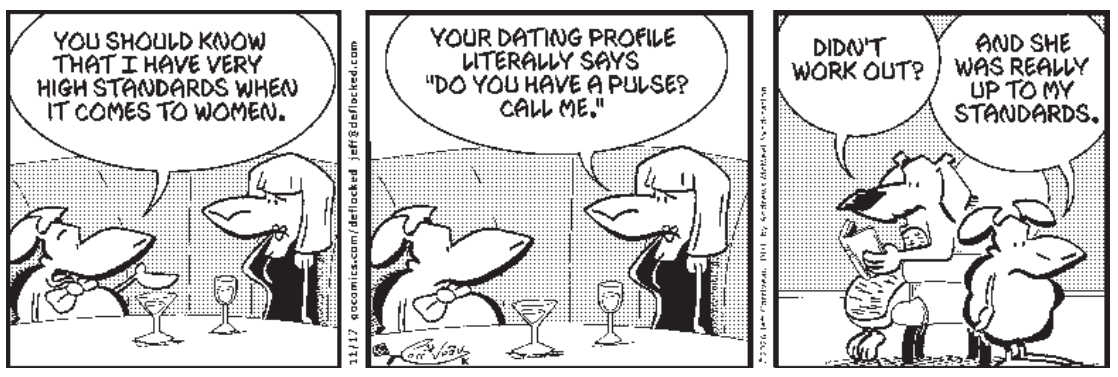
GARFIELD — BY JIM DAVIS



OVERBOARD — BY CHIP DUNHAM



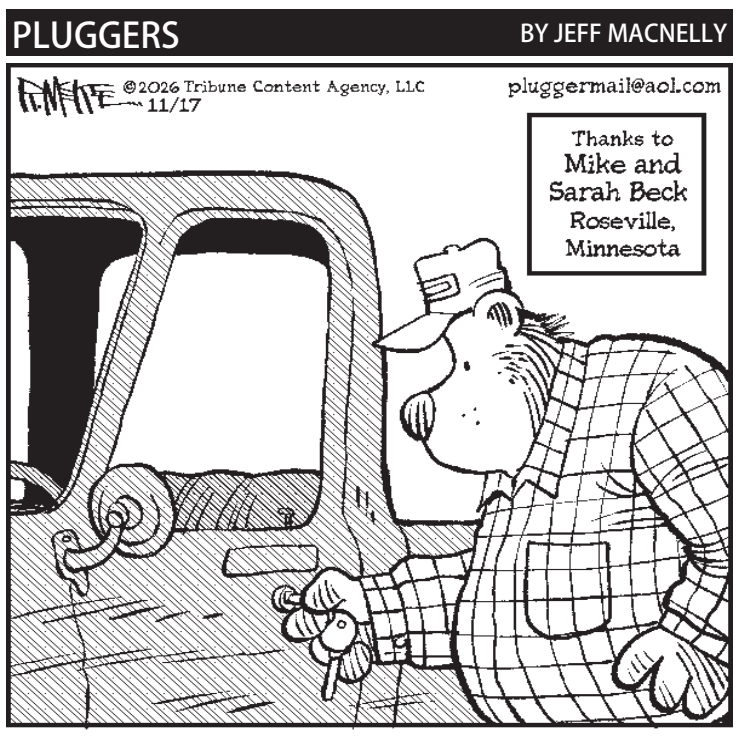
DEFLOCKED — BY JEFF CORRIVEAU



ZIGGY — BY TOM WILSON



PLUGGERS — BY JEFF MACNELLY



You're a plugger if all of your vehicles still use an actual key.

Departing friend wants to deliver parting shot



DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I've been friends with a married couple for over 40 years and knew them both before they knew each other. She's popular, has a great sense of humor and is an excellent wife, mother, grandmother, neighbor, etc. I actually became "friends" with the husband first (quotes because he basically forced his friendship on me).

Recently, I realized I like her more than I like him, and I know she likes me. (She mentioned it to him before they married.) He has some character issues and has cheated on her in the past. It's my belief that if I were to continue being friends with them, there would be an affair. (These things tend to sneak up on people.)

I'm semi-retired and ready to move to a warmer climate, and I want to have closure in our friendship to avoid a future awkward moment. I think the best way is to explain to them at the same time that the reason for my avoidance is because I am fonder of her than him. How do you recommend I address this issue? -- CHARACTER WINS ESTEEM

DEAR CHARACTER: This type of "closure" would serve no constructive purpose. His infidelity is none of your business, and it's not your place to teach him a lesson about character. Instead of hurting your friend's feelings at the moment you exit his life, bid him and his wife a fond farewell, thanking them both for all the good memories you share. Do not maintain contact with the wife after you move. An affair can't "sneak up" on you unless you leave the door open.

****

DEAR ABBY: I'm a first-time grandma. I'd like to move back to Texas to be closer to my grandbabies. My family all lives here in California, including my mom. My adult kids have amazing jobs where they are. It would just be easier for my husband and me to move back so I can be with them.

My brother and all his children and grandchildren live close to where Mom is living, so she won't be left alone. I would like for her to come meet her great-grandkids as she has done with my brother's grandkids, but she doesn't want to do it because she feels her great-grandchildren here wouldn't know her. I am asking only for her to come live with me a few months to get to see the little ones. Am I a bad person for wanting to have my time now with all my kids? -- PLANNING A MOVE

DEAR PLANNING: You are not a "bad person" for wanting to establish a relationship with your grandchildren. There is a defined role that grandparents can play in a child's life. However, due to the complications of age, great-grandparents can be forgiven for not wanting to play a similar role. If your mother is up there in age and reluctant to travel, don't force it. Go, enjoy your time with your grandchildren, visit your mother as often as is feasible and bring pictures and videos for her to enjoy.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren. For nearly four decades, Jeanne Phillips penned this column, which was founded in 1956 by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 270135, Kansas City, MO 64127.COPYRIGHT 2026 ANDREWS MCMEEL SYNDICATION, 1130 Walnut, Kansas City, MO 64106; 816-581-7500.

Monday, November 16, 2026

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH BOB JONES

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WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ ANSWERS

Q 1 - East-West vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ J 10 3 ♡ A J 3 2 ◇ Q J 8 ♣ K 5 4

Right-hand opponent opens one spade. What call would you make?

A - Perhaps this hand meets the minimum qualifications for a takeout double, but with the worst distribution in bridge (4-3-3-3), we prefer 14 points to double. Pass.

Q 2 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ A K ♡ Q 10 9 ◇ K Q 10 4 3 ♣ 6 4 3

Right-hand opponent opens one spade. What call would you make?

A - Another tempting take-out double, but a T/O double asks partner to pick the trump suit. Instead, we want to suggest our good suit as trumps. Bid 2D.

Q 3 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ 4 ♡ K Q 5 4 ◇ A K 9 4 ♣ K 8 7 3

Right-hand opponent opens one spade. What call would you make?

A - A perfect takeout double. In fact, this hand is good enough to make a voluntary raise at our next turn, showing 18 points, regardless of which suit partner bids.

Q 4 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ Q 7 6 ♡ A K Q 8 3 ◇ 7 6 4 ♣ A Q

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♡	Pass	1♠	Pass
?			

What call would you make?

A - This hand, with its excellent 5-card suit, is worth 18 points. The diamond holding is a worry, but not enough to deter us from describing our hand properly. Bid 2NT.

Q 5 - North-South vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ A K 10 3 ♡ 4 ◇ A J 8 5 ♣ 10 9 3 2

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♡	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	?	

What call would you make?

A - Tempting to look for slam, but partner is unlikely to have a 4-card minor or he might have bid it rather than 2NT. We have a combined 30-31 points, but with no suit fit, it is unlikely to produce 12 tricks. Go quietly. Bid 3NT.

Q 6 - Both vulnerable, as South, you hold:

♠ K 9 ♡ A J 9 4 ◇ K 7 5 ♣ A K Q 2

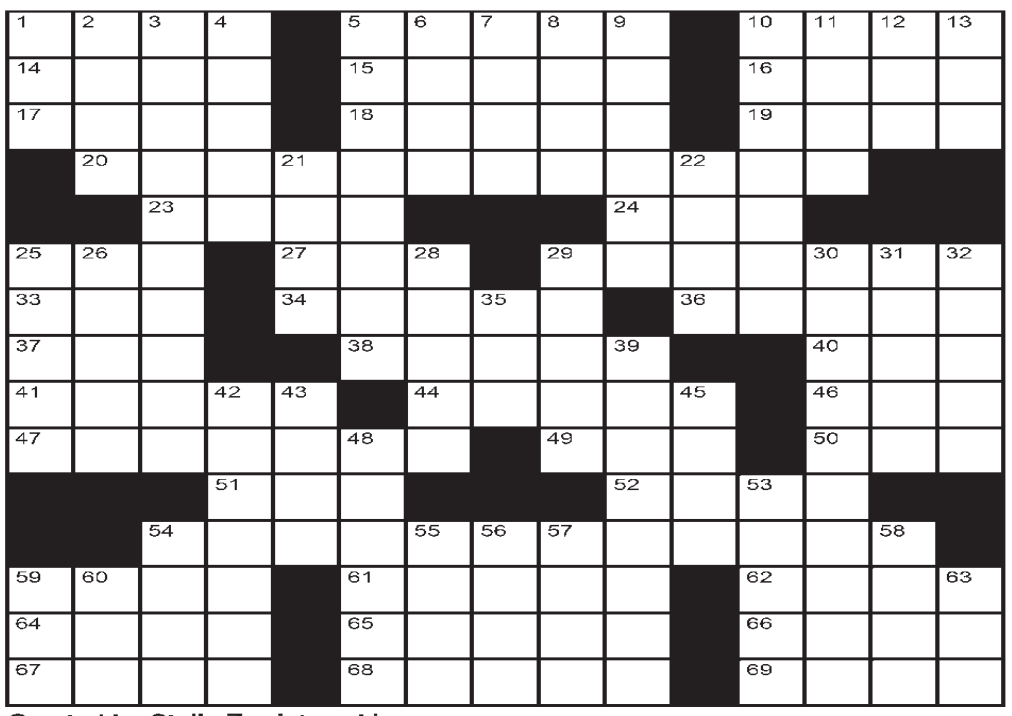
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2NT	Pass	3◇*	Pass
?			

***Transfer, 5 hearts any strength**

What call would you make?

A - Not knowing about the excellent fit will cause partner to pass three hearts with many hands that would give you adequate play for game. 4-card support and a ruffing value call for aggression. Jump to 4H.

THE Daily Commuter Puzzle by Stella Zawistowski



Created by Stella Zawistowski

ACROSS

1 Violently strike
5 Middling grade: 2 wds.
10 Hormel product
14 "Seems to me," in texts: Abbr.
15 Blood-pumping organ
16 Assistant
17 Entryway
18 1974 benefit law: Abbr.
19 Openwork material
20 Eatery owner
23 Part of a pair of pants
24 Musical ability
25 Complete collection
27 CBS procedural since 2026
29 Breaks free
33 That lady's
34 Patterned texture on a barbell
36 Artist Damien
37 Singer Lennox
38 Collection of people
40 Midwestern interjection
41 Strong breezes
44 Actor Quinn
46 "Case of the Ex" singer
47 Folkloric tales
49 Pitching stat: Abbr.
50 Belief system
51 Comedian Martin
52 "So be it"
54 Swiss tennis star born 8/8/81: 2 wds.
59 Garden area
61 South Florida city
62 Once more
64 Relaxed state
65 Revisions
66 "The Lion King" villain
67 Got older
68 Thickly packed
69 Elusive

DOWN

1 Auction action
2 Love, in Spanish
3 Sneaker lace
4 Hoofed animal
5 Breaking the rules
6 Lima's land
7 Animal den
8 ___ Major (constellation)
9 Says aloud
10 Japanese warrior
11 Boardwalk area
12 Promo spots
13 "It's not so great"
21 Pushpin
22 "To ___ their own"
25 Shoulder covering
26 Creepily scary
28 Faint glows
29 Get away from
30 Celebrity status
31 Athletic awards
32 Hot water vapor
35 King, in French
39 Perfect place
42 Lowered in rank
43 Unforeseen issue
45 "What's in a ___?"
48 Considered
53 Wipe chalk from
54 Went upward
55 Taxi trip
56 Gladly, to poets
57 First responders: Abbr.
58 Not fake
59 Sphere in a pod
60 Trail behind
63 Ironically funny

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

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SUDOKU

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

Level: Beginner

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:

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

Board association to lead superintendent search

By DEIDRE LEDFORD
Editor, The Johnson Journal

The Johnson County Board of Education has approved the Georgia School Board Association to oversee the search for the next School Superintendent. During the October board meeting, Julia Brunet spoke to the board about the extensive process GSBA goes through to review potential candidates.

Board member Kevin Brantley advised Brunet that he and Donald Smith would be coming off the board in January 2026 and he thinks the new members coming on board should have a part in the selection process. Brunet explained that the interview process would probably not begin until the new members are in office. She thanked the board for allowing GSBA to help with the superintendent search.

Unanimous approval was given.

In other business, Superintendent Dr. Chris Watkins asked the board to approve the new Work-Based Learning Diploma. He also discussed a proposal from the Wrightsville Church of the Nazarene regarding a Blessings Box. He said they are not asking for assistance, only permission to place a box at the school. Both items were approved.

The board discussed purchasing 2.75 acres of commercial land that is adjacent to the current Board of Education building. Watkins explained they learned about the property being for sale on Zillow and realized it was between the BOE office and the 4-H office. The board approved to purchase the property for $18,556.

Watkins presented the state of the school district presentation. A few key points include:

The CCRPI System Demographics show a total of 1,041 students enrolled. Of this number, 40.8% are Black, 0.1% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.7% are Hispanic, 3.7% are Multiracial, 51.7% are White, and 15.8% are Students with Disabilities.

A total of 63 students graduated in 2026 with seven students listed as dropouts and eight students transferring. JoCo's graduation rate was 88%, which is just shy of the state rate of 88.5%.

Johnson County scored in top place over all of the counties in the RESA district (Putnam, Washington, Baldwin, Wilkinson, Hancock) in the following areas: 7th Grade Math, 8th Grade Math, 8th Grade Science, 8th Grade Social Studies and Highest Overall in Social Studies.

Watkins pointed out that JoCo is ranked first or second on most Milestones Testing for Core Content Areas.

The Elementary School recognitions include: John Hancock Banner and Ribbon of Distinction Recipient; 2nd place in Oconee RESA Math Competition, multiple winners in the Oconee RESA Stem Fair, a third place winner in the RESA Art Competition, and three first place RESA Young Georgia Author Winners.

Middle School achievements include: Girls Basketball-region runners up, Baseball-region champions, Boys Track-region champions, Girls Track-region champions, and a 4-H student representative elected to the Southeast District Junior Board.

High School athletic achievements include: Football-region champions, Softball-region champions, Girls Basketball-state playoffs, Boys Basketball-state playoffs, Baseball-state playoffs, Girls Tennis-Region Champions-state quarterfinals, Boys Tennis-Region Champions and State Champions, Boys Track-region runners up, Girls Track-region champions and 4-H student representative elected Board member and President of the 2026-2027 school term.

Five year accomplishments include: new district motto/slogan, completed renovation of Elementary School, added four new tennis courts to the existing four tennis court complex, added a full-time director of student services, completed Middle School Softball and Baseball fields, resurfaced track for Track and Field events, Middle/High School Book Vending Machine as part of Literacy Initiative, added an additional School Resource Officer assigned at ES, awarded USDA RUS Grant of $589,179 for Distance Learning and Telemedicine Equipment, and adopted a new 2025-2030 GSBA Five-Year Strategic Plan.

More Five Year Key accomplishments include: securing the first district Bond for stadium renovations, completing football stadium renovation/upgrade $2.1 million dollar project, purchased and installed Centigix Security System throughout district, new school level Literacy Coordinators, added an additional School Nurse so there's one at each campus, combined Director of Student Services and Human Resources role, adopted new transportation plan for extracurricular activities, adopted new season passes initiative and returned supervision to school leadership, and purchased 2.75 acres of land adjacent to the BOE.

A long road to motherhood: Inside Georgia's maternity care deserts

By NATHANIEL JORDAN
The Macon Telegraph



Storm Savage said driving to her OBGYN appointments in Macon from her rural home in Peach County became a stressful ordeal as she progressed in her pregnancy. Nathaniel Jordan / THE TELEGRAPH

Until recently, the thought of a long drive never bothered Storm Savage.

When the 23-year-old and her boyfriend left metro Atlanta and moved to Peach County, she made peace with their decision to settle into a rural home with goats and cattle within earshot.

But now, she's in her third trimester of pregnancy, and the highway is becoming grueling. Her twice-monthly, 60-mile roundtrip drives to Macon to see her OB-GYN are exhausting. Soon enough, she'll have to make the trek every week.

With each mile, a worrying scenario plays out in her mind: What if she goes into labor at home in Peach County and has to navigate the drive herself?

Savage lives in what March of Dimes calls a maternity care desert — one of 69 Georgia counties with no birthing facilities or dedicated obstetric clinics, according to the nonprofit's most recent report. With recent hospital closures and a dwindling number of physicians, Georgia finds itself among the worst places to have a child, especially for Black women, like Savage.

It's a problem that Mercer University's School of Medicine has been working hard to combat for more than four decades. Yet, despite the school's efforts, experts warn the rural doctor shortage could get even worse in the coming years.

Dire statistics

With her boyfriend working long hours as a firefighter, Savage sometimes has to make the drive to Macon for doctor appointments alone. She fears that's harmful, both to her body and mental health.

The couple came to Fort Valley to live in a home that has been in her family for years. If finances weren't a factor, Savage says, she wouldn't be in Peach County, which has a small hospital, but no labor and delivery unit.

"It's a sacrifice to live all the way in the country. But I feel like, unfortunately, it's just kind of what you have to do to save money," says the New York native who graduated from Kennesaw State University in 2025.

According to the March of Dimes report, Georgia's maternal mortality rate is 30% higher than the national average — making it one of the deadliest states to give birth. Atlanta-based March of Dimes director Tamara Mason says you can't talk about maternity care in Georgia without addressing the disparities for women of color. For Black expectant mothers, the risk of death is about three times higher than all other races.

It's a systemic issue that has loomed over the U.S. for decades, says Michael Kramer, a maternal and child care epidemiologist at Mercer.

"What we know really clearly is that it isn't about bad behavior or bad choices," he says. Instead, the dangers for Black mothers stem from decades of poor medical research, practice and advice.

In maternity care deserts, Mason says, women often miss vital appointments due to finances or lack of transportation.

The 2025 infant mortality rate for Peach County, which is 44% Black, is 15.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, nearly double the state average. By comparison, Bibb County's rate is 10.2.

Black children are twice as likely to die within a year of their birth, according to March of Dimes.

"Those are dire statistics," Mason says. "When you get down here to Georgia, we're honestly doing an awful job."

Later this year, when the March of Dimes releases its annual report cards, Mason expects that Georgia will be graded with an F for the fifth straight year. The mother-of-two adds, "I'm also a Black mom, so a lot of these statistics hit home for me."

For expectant mothers like Savage, statistics make the options feel grim.

She says that she argued with doctors for three years to receive a diagnosis for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

The common disorder can cause missed periods and hormonal imbalances. It can also lead to weight gain and an increased chance of developing type 2 diabetes.

"I had a lot of doctors just literally laugh in my face and be like, 'No, we're not going to run tests for that,' and I ended up having (PCOS) anyway," says Savage.

PCOS is a leading cause of infertility, and it's the reason that Savage didn't think she would have children.

Weighing this with other past medical traumas, she and her boyfriend have decided that they'll try and switch to a birthing center in Forsyth.

"It's led by a Black OB-GYN, and I felt more comfortable," she says. "I feel like she understood my concerns and experiences and didn't really brush them off as just things I was paranoid about."

If the couple chooses to go to Forsyth, the drive would be nearly an hour long.

"It is not at all uncommon for people to drive past a closer hospital to get to one that they feel more secure about," Kramer says.

Sometimes, he says, driving farther to more specialized care could even improve the outcomes for high-risk pregnancies.

Mason says women shouldn't have to make judgment calls like this.

"That's not the norm. And it shouldn't be normal," she says.

According to March of Dimes, "normal" in the U.S. is about a 16-minute trip to the nearest birthing facility, about half of Savage's current ride.

Sometimes, he says, driving further to a better place could even improve the outcomes for high-risk pregnancies when mothers need more specialized care. "Every woman needs the right care at the right time, at the right place."

The medical pipeline

Mercer's Rural Health Innovation Center launched a program in 2021 that places medical students into rural OB-GYN offices across the state. It's open to students from other schools, and often attracts applicants from Morehouse School of Medicine, a historically Black institution.

To tackle broader issues in healthcare, Mercer's medical school intentionally recruits students from rural communities with the hope that it will create a medical pipeline back to the areas where they were raised. In 2026, Mercer reported that about half of its med school graduates work in rural or underserved Georgia communities. Mercer defines rural using the legislative definition, which is any county with less than 50,000 people.

Savage's birth plan is contingent on Medicaid coverage, which she says is surprisingly helpful so far. Peach State Health Plan helped her get a breast pump, car seat and potentially free meals when she gives birth. She's waiting to hear if the Forsyth birth center will accept state insurance.

Mason says Georgia's Medicaid is still far behind. It's one of the last states holding off on an expansion to its coverage. A potential expansion could cover doulas, an increasingly popular option for mothers seeking an advocate in the delivery room.

Mason and Savage are also doulas.They acknowledge the out-of-pocket costs are too much for most mothers.

"I feel like the work we do is very important. But, unexpectedly, I also feel like this job shouldn't really have to exist," Savage says. "I feel like it exists because of the disparities the United States healthcare system kind of pushes onto women."

They aren't there to deliver babies, but doulas act as a support system for mothers before, during and after delivery. Many experts argue they can even help prevent racial biases in medical settings, though the data isn't conclusive yet, Kramer says.

"We wouldn't expect it to make a huge difference in rare outcomes like maternal death. But. even if having a doula made you more comfortable, that seems to me like a positive outcome," he adds.

Savage says research, doula care and physicians can only help so much. Her main concern is the missing infrastructure. If there's no labor and delivery unit, there's nowhere for mothers to go.

According to the Georgia Hospital Association, 18 hospitals in the state have closed since 2013, and 22 remain at risk. Kramer says experts "need to fundamentally rethink the economics of rural hospitals."

Georgia can help address maternity care deserts in a few ways, Mason says. The most direct solution is state legislation that would expand Medicaid, particularly to cover doulas and midwives.

While waiting on lawmakers, Mason says, communities can help support women through pregnancy with local programs and carpool services. She believes the classic "It takes a village" approach needs to be applied to maternity care.

The country is facing an OB/GYN shortage that will affect all but six states by 2035, according to the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration.

The rural health center continues to push for more OB-GYNs in counties like Peach, but its goals for a maternity care pipeline can only reach rural delivery rooms where they exist. And if they don't exist, mothers like Savage will have to continue their lengthy, uncomfortable rides to the hospital.

Savage, whose due date is in early January, hopes that maternity care will improve for her daughter.

"I would like for her to grow up in a world where her concerns will be heard and not met with laughter," Savage says. "I hope doctors, when they are presented with issues, would look at the patient and really hear them out instead of projecting their own implicit biases onto them."

That world might be miles away from her quiet lawn, but Savage says she's confident that her baby will be born healthy. Her pregnancy has moved along quite smoothly, other than the potholes on the way to Macon.

If her boyfriend isn't available to drive her to a medical facility when it's time to give birth, she'll lean on family members who live nearby. Still, she knows there are other pregnant women who don't have that option.

"I can't even begin to imagine how that must feel to not have a village of people to help you through anything," she says, "let alone having a baby."

Women living in maternity care deserts might face long journeys, but, Mason says, "Us moms, we do what we have to do."

Classifieds

Employment

METER READER

The City of Dublin is accepting applications for the position of Meter Reader. This Team Member will perform routine work in reading and recording water and gas meters consumption. Performs mechanical work in repairing, testing, and replacing water meters. Work involves keeping accurate meter records according to established forms so that proper billing procedures result. Employees normally follow designated routes, receiving specific work instructions and referring unusual questions to the supervisor for a decision. The work involves frequent public contact, often involving complaint situations. Applicants must have the ability to work outdoors in various weather conditions and perform physically demanding tasks. Work is performed under the direction of the Meter Department Supervisor.
Starting salary is $18.08 an hour. An extensive fringe benefit package including health, dental, and life insurance is also offered. Successful applicants are required to have a high school diploma or GED, three years of related work experience, pass a drug test, and have a valid Georgia Driver's License.
Applicants may apply online through our website www.cityofdublin.org. Position will remain open until filled. The City of Dublin is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Miscellaneous For Sale

Shelled Pecans: $10/Quart $40/Gallon. 478-875-3309

Real Estate

For Rent/Lease

Efficiency-House for rent at 714 Blaine St, Dublin, GA. One bed/full bath, combined kitchen & dining room, with large yard. Rent $500, Deposit $500. Stove/Refrigerator included. Contact Jerry Davis 478-697-6817.



KIDS' CORNER

Brought to you by Dublin-Laurens County CHAMBER COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Vol. 036 | Follow Herald the Hound every Tuesday on Kids' Corner from The Courier Herald

CLASS OF THE WEEK: Mrs. Todd's second graders at Southwest Laurens



Herald the Hound is still making his rounds to visit every second grade class in Dublin, Laurens County. He recently stopped at Southwest Laurens Elementary School to visit with Mrs. Amy Todd's class. The students learned about the different ways to tell a story, including through pictures. Each student recieved a template to draw there own comic strip. Herald can't wait to see what they come up with!





Worksheet of the week

Compare and contrast: Write a paragraph about cats and dogs. How are they the same? How are they different? Which one is your favorite?

Puzzles4Kids

by Helene Hovanec

RIDDLE SEARCH – ALL KINDS OF FOOD

Look up, down, and diagonally, both forward and backward to find every word on the list. Circle each one as you find it. When all the words are circled, take the UNUSED letters and write them on the blanks below. Go from left to right and top to bottom to find the answer to this riddle: **Where do hungry football teams play the championship game?**

BACON
BREAD
BURGER
CAKE
CARROTS
CEREAL
CHEESE
CHICKEN
FRUIT
HOT DOG
PASTA
PICKLE
PIE
POPSICLE
POTATOES
RICE
SPAGHETTI
TACO

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

Riddle answer: __ __   __ __ __   __ __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __ __.

MINI SUDOKU

5				4	
	4		6		
					5
3	6			1	
	5	1			

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 6-box square contains all of the numbers from one to six.

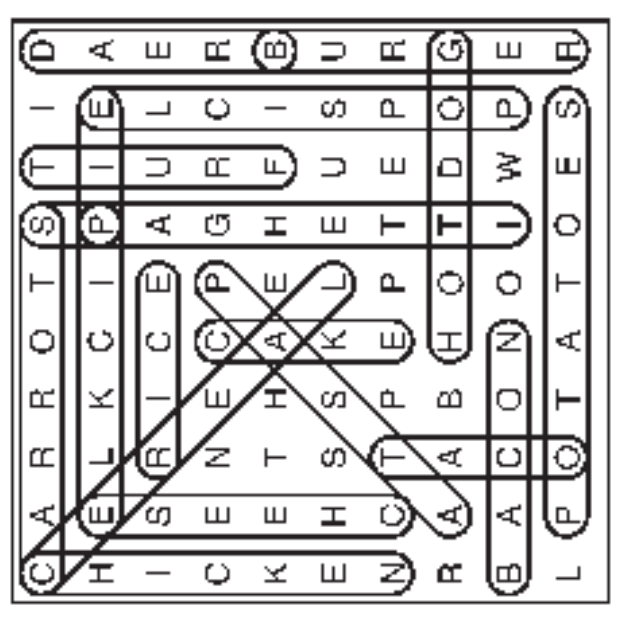
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ANSWER KEYS

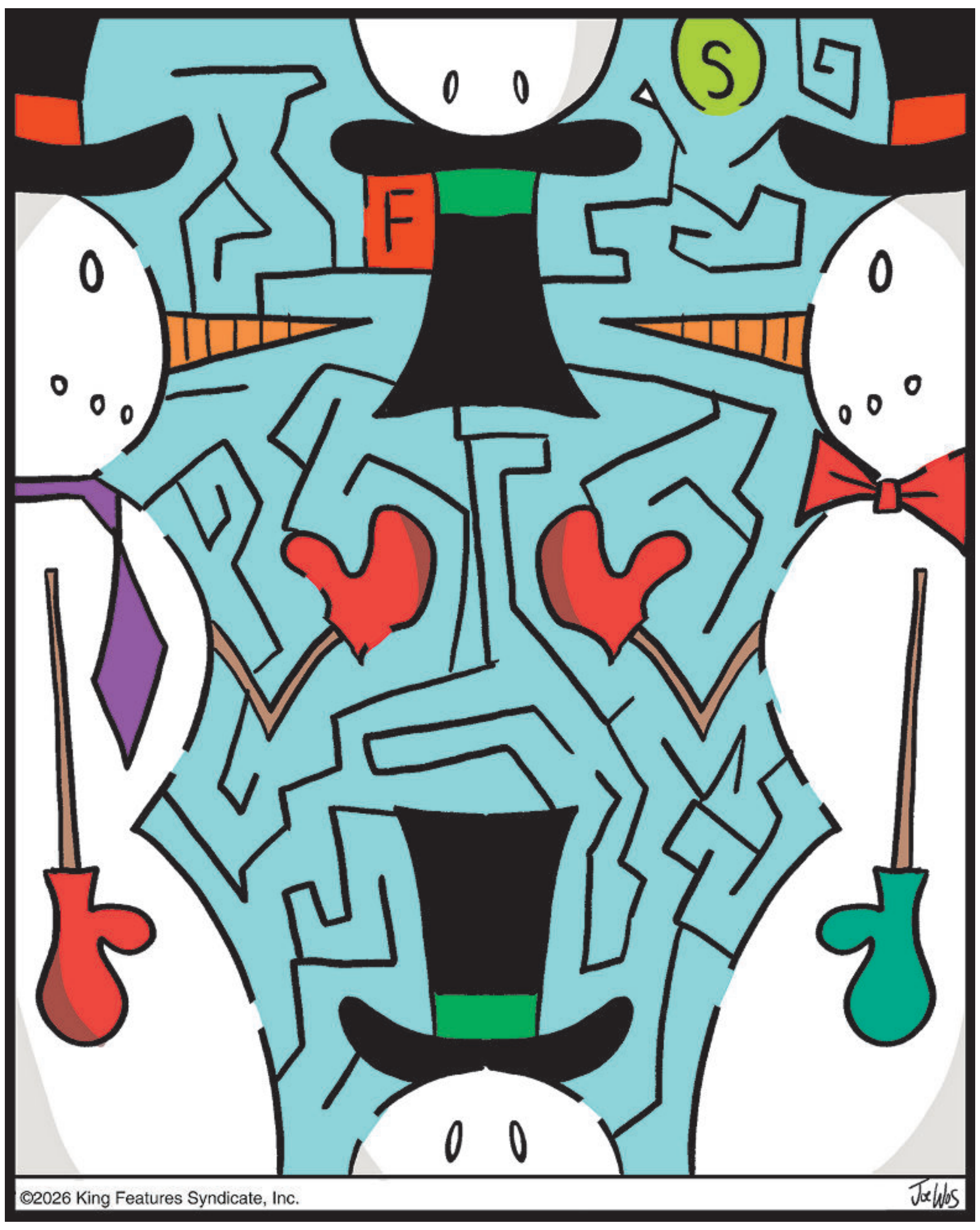
MINI SUDOKU ANSWERS

5	2	6	1	4	3
1	4	3	6	5	2
4	1	2	3	6	5
3	6	5	2	1	4
6	3	4	5	2	1
2	5	1	4	3	6

Puzzles4Kids Answer



Riddle Answer: In the Supper Bowl.



TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Teachers, do you want us to visit your classroom? Students, do you have artwork, poems or stories you want to submit for possible publication? Email us at read@courierheraldtoday.com.