

AMHERST NEW ERA~PROGRESS

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Amherst County's only hometown newspaper

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Amherst, Va.

Vol. 137 - No. 31 / Two sections, 16 pages

Thursday, August 1, 2019

Wheaton to run for vacant seat

Ousted in 4-1 council vote for reasons not publicly disclosed; special election set for Nov. 5

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

Nearly three weeks after she was expelled by fellow Amherst Town Council members in a controversial decision, Janice Wheaton has filed to run for the seat in a Nov. 5 special election.

Wheaton, the embattled first-year town official who was ousted by four other councilors following a July 10 closed session meeting for reasons the town hasn't explained, filed paperwork Monday to run for the vacant seat. The town filed a petition July 18 for the special

election to have voters decide a replacement.

Amherst County Circuit Court Judge Michael Garrett approved the request Friday. A special election for the seat is set to coincide with the Nov. 5 general election. Amherst County Registrar Fran Brown confirmed Monday, Wheaton is the first person to file all the required paperwork to run for the town seat.

"I owe it to my community,



Wheaton

my family, my friends and myself to complete the job I was elected to do," Wheaton said in an email Monday.

The decision to remove her was made possible by the town's charter, which contains language that says council can expel an elected councilor

with concurrence of two-thirds of council. The decision sent shock waves throughout the Amherst community, with some criticizing the move saying it undermined the will of voters and set a bad precedent.

Wheaton, who was elected with 511 votes in the Nov. 6, 2018, election and joined council as one of two new members

SEE WHEATON | A7

SBC has raised \$63M in four years

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

Sweet Briar College recently announced it received gifts and pledges totaling \$18.5 million during fiscal year 2019, including donations from alumnae, supporters, foundations and corporations.

Of the total, \$10.2 million was for fiscal year '19 and \$8.3 million will come as future support, according to the college. Since 2015, the year the college was on the brink of closure following a previous administration's attempt, the college has raised \$63.9 million. Since 2015, when a previous administration unsuccessfully tried to close the college, it has raised \$63.9 million.

President Meredith Woo said in a news release S&P Global Ratings has upgraded the rating for bonds issued for Sweet



Woo

SEE SBC | A7

ANGELS GET THEIR CHAMPIONSHIP WINGS



LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst Angels All-Star Manager John Funk celebrates winning the state championship last week with his team. The local girls defeated Halifax in back-to-back title games and will head to Texas for the Word Series this week. For more coverage, see **Sports**.



EMILY ELCONIN/FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

All-area boys outdoor track and field athlete Kyle Mosteller poses for a portrait in the News & Advance studio on June 12 in Lynchburg.

Track standout reflects on career at ACHS

Lancer Kyle Mosteller's accomplishments include 4 state pole vault titles

By Ben Cates
bcates@newsadvance.com

For Kyle Mosteller, high school athletics can be summed up this way: A challenging start, a rapid rise and a solid finish.

The Amherst County High School standout and recent graduate didn't begin vaulting until his sophomore year and twisted an ankle the first day he practiced with track coach

Lance Carter. But Mosteller didn't give up. He won four career state pole vault titles, two as a junior before returning for his senior season to capture the indoor and outdoor championships again.

In June, Mosteller capped his career with a leap of 15 feet, 6 inches, just shy of his career high, 15-7, which set the all-time school record. He holds the school indoor record, too, a 15-3½. Pole vaulting changed

the direction of his education; Mosteller takes his talents to the University of Virginia in the fall.

Mosteller reflected on his accomplishments in a recent interview.

Q: You won your fourth pole vault state championship this spring. What was that day like for you?

A: Being my last high school meet,

SEE MOSTELLER | A8

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TOWN GRANTS LAND FOR ACP STORAGE

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A BETTER YEAR

AMHERST VOLLEYBALL LOOKS TO VETERAN SQUAD
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Thursday, August 22, 2019

Mayor addresses official's removal

Calls not divulging reason 'hard road to walk'; resident petitions council to nix charter's expulsion provision

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

As an Amherst resident, Ann Hubbard said she has taken part in every local election since she moved to the town more than four years ago.

"I had always assumed my vote mattered," Hubbard said to Amherst Town Council on Aug. 14. "Imagine my surprise when I found out my vote was overturned by the actions of the town council."

Hubbard presented the council a petition seeking a change to the town's char-

ter allowing for the expulsion of elected town council representatives following the removal of former councilwoman Janice Wheaton on July 10. Council voted 4-1 after a closed session to expel Wheaton for reasons the town has not disclosed. Wheaton, an Amherst native who has filed to run for the at-large seat again in a Nov. 5 special election, was first elected to a four-year term in November.

Hubbard, addressing council during

the citizen comments period, said she gathered 71 signatures, 56 from the town or nearby areas of Amherst, in an online petition that requests the council seek action from the Virginia General Assembly that would prevent it from removing elected members.

Hubbard said she doesn't blame council, as it ousted Wheaton under its legal

SEE AMHERST | A6

Riding high in Amherst



PHOTOS BY LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

ABOVE: Fair riders on the Full Tilt had multiple expressions while spinning around on Aug. 17. BELOW: A stilt walker towered over the fairgrounds while handing out balloons.



COUNTY FAIR DRAWS THOUSANDS, BUILDS ON A FOUNDATION CENTERED IN FUN

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

The song "Celebration" by Kool & The Gang played as the sun set over the backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains Friday, a fitting musical selection as several thousand were in a festive mood while soaking in the sights and sounds of the Amherst County Fair.

As night fell on the second leg of the four-day fair, bubbles flowed from a machine close to a cluster of attractions and a cool breeze greeted crowds waiting in lines for rides, funnel cakes and other treats.

Matt Giles, assistant principal at Amherst Middle School, enjoyed spending a fun night with his family and greeted students who roamed the fairgrounds.

"I love it. I think it's awesome," Giles said. "It's a good way to see everybody, build relationships."

Attracting thousands to Sweet Briar Drive near U.S. 29 in Amherst, the fair kicked off Thursday with some rainy weather and wrapped up Sunday evening. The event was resurrected in August 2018 to much fanfare after an absence of several decades.

Giles said the fair is a great addition to the county's slate of annual events and generates community pride and excitement. The students especially look forward to it, he added.

"I think our county is definitely going in the right direction, some awesome decisions are being made," Giles said. "Good stuff."

The Amherst County Agri-

cultural Committee, a group formed in late 2018 and appointed by the board of supervisors, took part in steering and organizing this year's event. Bus shuttles ran on continuous loops to bring gatherers to the fairgrounds from a nearby parking area and volunteers drove golf carts around to get folks to their vehicles.

Nate Young, the county's chief building official, said the department spent a few days inspecting the rides for safety purposes. On Friday he enjoyed looking on

ONLINE

» For more photos and video from the fair, go to neweraprogress.com.

MORE PHOTOS

» More sights from the fair, B2.

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Amherst County math SOL scores trend upward, others drop slightly

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

Amherst County Public Schools had slight drops across several subject areas while making major strides in math on the 2018-19 Standards of Learning Tests, according to Virginia Department of Education data released

Aug. 13. VDOE said changes in student test-taking patterns last year were caused by revisions to the commonwealth's diploma and school accountability standards, as well as the introduction of new mathematics tests in all grade levels.

"The achievement in

a school, a division or in the commonwealth as a whole must be viewed in the context of these changes in student test-taking patterns, standards and assessments," Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane said in a news release. "These

SEE SOLS | A5

Amherst jazz series launches at Second Stage

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

Second Stage Amherst will become a toe-tapping hotbed for musical enthusiasts with the launch of the Amherst Glebe Arts Response, Inc.'s "AGAR Amherst Java and Jazz Series," which kicks off Saturday.

Nine jazz concerts are slated for Friday and Saturday evenings from 6:30 to

8:30 p.m., through May 2020 at Second Stage, 194 Second St. in Amherst. Admission is \$10 per person and includes a free cup of coffee or soda from a new coffee shop and bookstore set to open soon at the arts venue center, according to a news release from AGAR.

Ernest Deane, who plays trumpet for the Lynchburg jazz band, Quintana, is

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MADISON HEIGHTS DIXIE ALL-STARS' DREAM ENDS

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Thursday, July 18, 2019

AMHERST TOWN COUNCIL

Wheaton expelled as member

Rare vote came after closed session, tense exchanges; former mayor calls move 'unprecedented'

By Justin Faulconer
 jfaulconer@newsadvance.com



Wheaton

In a highly unusual move, Amherst Town Council voted 4-1 to expel one of its newest members, Janice Wheaton, following a closed session last Wednesday night and several tense moments in recent meetings.

Wheaton, an Amherst native, was elected to a four-year term

in November 2018 and began serving in January. A newcomer to Amherst town government, she has voiced frustrations with her role in the town's decision-making in recent meetings, claiming she felt cut down and rendered ineffective. At one

point during a June 12 meeting, she was in tears as she spoke and walked out of the meeting before it concluded.

The town's charter has language that says council can expel a member "with concurrence of two-thirds" of council. Mayor Dwayne Tuggle in an email immediately following the meeting said he isn't commenting on the matter and deferred ques-

tions to Town Manager Sara Carter.

Council members Rachel Carton, Kenneth Watts, Sarah Ogden and Kenneth Bunch, voted to oust Wheaton, and none would comment on the matter when reached last Thursday. Wheaton opposed the measure.

"I don't know what to say. I would like for the community to know I tried to do all I could for them. I'm disappointed that I am no longer able to do so."

— Janice Wheaton

SEE WHEATON | A6

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS GET UPGRADE



PHOTOS BY LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Workers at Southern Air in Amherst last week installed new lighting at Lancer Stadium at Amherst County High School, the first time the stadium has received an upgrade since it was built several decades ago. Assistant Superintendent William Wells said the \$225,000 project wraps up major upgrades to a range of infrastructure needs throughout the county school system in recent years. The LED lighting is more energy efficient, modern and brighter, Wells said.



Man faces murder charge in shooting

Accused in June 25 slaying of 92-year-old woman in home; daughter also shot

By Justin Faulconer
 jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

An Amherst man was arrested July 10 in connection with a shooting at an Amherst County home that left a 92-year-old woman dead and her daughter injured.

Justin Jay Sales, 18, of Earley Farm Road, was taken into custody while at a residence on Littleton Lane in Madison Heights, Amherst County Sheriff E.W. Viar announced.

Sales is charged with first-degree murder, malicious wounding and two counts of use of a firearm in commission of a felony.

Amherst sheriff's deputies responded to a home on Bobwhite Road in Amherst at about 11:40 p.m. June 25 on a report that a woman had been shot.

When they arrived, they found Doris T. Puleio, 92, had been shot dead, the Amherst County Sheriff's Office has said. Deputies also located Puleio's daughter, 74-year-old Trudy Ann Goetz, who had sustained two



Sales

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Bridge dedication in slain officer's memory set for Aug. 2

Ceremony to be at Amherst High; signs unveiled at bridge over US 29 bypass

By Justin Faulconer
 jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

County High School's auditorium.

The Amherst County Board of Supervisors in March approved a resolution requesting the bridge on U.S. 29 Business/South Main Street over the U.S. 29 Bypass be named the



Dowell

in May.

Dowell, originally from Chilhowie in Southwest Virginia, was fatally shot

"Trooper Lucas B. Dowell Bridge." The Commonwealth Transportation Board approved the request

on Feb. 4, while executing a search warrant at a Farmville house. He was 28. The trooper patrolled Amherst County and was stationed out of Virginia State Police's Area 20 field office on South Main Street in Amherst.

Steve Martin, owner of Martin's Paint and Body Shop in Amherst, knew Dowell and began the pe-

tion to name the bridge in Dowell's memory. It gathered 2,194 signatures. Martin said many people asked about signing it weeks after he submitted it and he speculates overall it could have garnered about 5,000 names.

Martin described Dowell as a "sweet young man" who always performed his duties with a smile and

was well-respected in Amherst. Many have stopped by the shop to talk about the fallen trooper, Martin said.

"We shared a lot of good stories about Lucas," Martin said, adding of the bridge dedication: "I'm glad it all came together and am thankful."

SEE BRIDGE | A6

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