



‘An Unbelievable Ride’

The Parry McCluer High School girls basketball players celebrate winning their third consecutive state championship on Saturday, after they defeated Surry County 58-45 in Richmond. The Blues became only the fifth Virginia High School League girls basketball team to three-peat as state champions. Afterward, PM head coach Adam Gilbert said, “It’s been an unbelievable ride.

This is historic. This doesn’t happen.” It was the final game for the Blues’ nine-member senior class. In addition to the state titles, over the last four years, the Blues won over 100 games, four Pioneer District championships, and two Region 1C championships. For the stories and photos from the Blues’ state tournament run, see pages A10-13. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)

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VOL. 216, NO. 11

Growing In Fairfield

Dynovis Plans To Add More Workers At Plant

By Ed Smith
Dynovis Inc. is adding jobs and making a new investment in its engineering and manufacturing facility in Fairfield.
“We are looking forward to building our operations in Rockbridge County,” said Mike Stolarz, Dynovis vice president for business development. “As we grow, we will post job opportunities to our website, [http://www.dynovis.com]”
A manufacturer of products for the defense and aerospace industries, Dynovis is increasing its Rockbridge County workforce from about 25 to 44 and making a \$592,000 investment in the former Bea Maurer plant it acquired last year.

See Plant, page 8



LOOKING OVER DRAWINGS are lead supervisor Joey Jones (left) and technician Patrick Durney at the Dynovis plant in Fairfield. The company produces deployable shelters and aerosats for the defense and aerospace industries. Dynovis moved into the former Bea Maurer facility just over a year ago. (photo courtesy of Dynovis Inc.)

Water Tower Site Sale Slowed

By Kit Huffman
Responding to stiff public criticism, Lexington City Council Thursday night voted 4-2 to continue a public hearing on the city’s proposed ordinance to approve the sale and development of the old Enfield water tower property. The matter will be revisited at Council’s next meeting, on Thursday, March 21.
Councilman David Sigler led the move to continue the hearing, saying that while the ordinance had been properly advertised for two weeks, the article printed the previous day in The News-Gazette “truly brought it to the public.”

See Tower, page 8

ACA Not Giving Up On BV Suit

Insurance Firm Seeks Rehearing

By Ed Smith
Being twice rebuffed by federal courts has not deterred the ACA Financial Guaranty Corp. from continuing with its litigation against Buena Vista.
Two weeks after a three-judge panel of the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court’s dismissal of the lawsuit, ACA this past Friday petitioned the panel for a rehearing of the case.
The filing came just barely within the 14-day deadline to request a rehearing. The appellants could have asked for

the entire Fourth Circuit to hear the case en blanc, but instead requested that the same three judges rehear the case. If not successful at this level, ACA has the option of appealing the dismissal to the U.S. Supreme Court.
Buena Vista City Attorney Brian Kearney expressed puzzlement over the latest filing. “Why petition the same three-judge panel? I’m not sure of the logistics. They have added nothing new to the brief. I guess they’re just trying to keep [the litigation] going.”
With its lawsuit against Buena Vista, ACA is attempting to convince a court to compel the city to resume making debt payments on

See ACA, page 9

Chavis’ Rise And Fall

Respected Educator Would Face Poverty

Editor’s note: Last week, The News-Gazette began a two-part series detailing the life of John Chavis, for whom Robinson Hall was officially renamed in a dedication ceremony Saturday at Washington and Lee University.
In the first part, Chavis’ life was recounted from his years as a Revolutionary War soldier to how he became the first college-degreed black man in America and began preaching for the Presbyterians.

By Lisa Perry
After a slave uprising near Richmond at the beginning of the 19th century, all free blacks were required to have “free papers” to prove they weren’t chattel, including John Chavis. Then 40 years old, Chavis gathered

See Chavis, page 2



ELIZABETH MUGO, a senior at Washington and Lee and president of the Executive Committee of the student body, speaks at the dedication of Chavis Hall Saturday afternoon. Behind her to the left is history professor Dr. Ted DeLaney, who was a member of the Commission on Institutional History and Community that advocated changing the name of Robinson Hall. (Shelby Mack photo for W&L)

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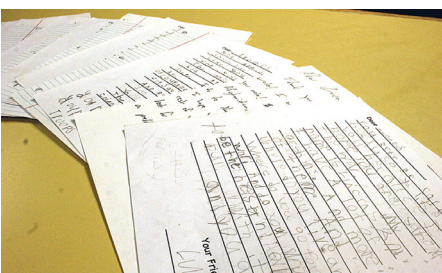
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High 61
Low 43

Thurs. Cloudy
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A Day Of Loss

Four Dead After Explosion At Market

By MATTIE MARSH

Four people have died and three others were injured after the devastating fire and explosion at the South River Market & Gas Station on Friday morning, May 10.

Roger Lee Roberts, 69, the owner of the South River Market and one of four injured in the explosion, died Saturday morning from his injuries at the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center in Richmond, according to the latest statement from Virginia State Police on Monday evening.

In a statement by the Virginia State Police Saturday, the Virginia State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation confirmed that three sets of remains were recovered from the site and were transported to the medical examiner's office for examination, autopsy and identification, which may take several days.

Although identities of the three deceased have not yet been released by state police, family members of Roger Roberts have said that two were family members of Mr. Roberts and the third was a customer in the store.

Names and physical conditions of the three injured victims transported to Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital Friday also remain undisclosed. Sgt. Richard Garletts of Virginia State Police said Tuesday he does not know if the patients have been released.

At approximately 9:20 Friday morning, the Rockbridge County Sheriff's Office and Rockbridge County Fire-Rescue & Emergency Management responded to reports of an explosion at the South River Market & Gas Station at the intersection of Old Buena Vista Road and South River Road.

Witnesses said bystanders rushed into the building im-

See Loss, page 2



FIREFIGHTERS work to contain the smoking debris from what is left of the South River Market & Gas Station after the fire and explosion on Friday. (photo by Mattie Marsh)



FLOWERS, crosses and wreathes hang along the chainlink fence surrounding the wreckage left from the South River Market explosion. (photo by Stephanie Mikels Blevins)



FLAMES engulf the South River Market in the immediate moments after the explosion on Friday. (photo taken from a video shared by Ryan Clark)

Witnesses Share Stories, Love Of Roger

By KIT HUFFMAN

Two witnesses to an act of heroism at the South River Market Friday morning think that the hero and the one or two others who helped him deserve recognition.

Eric Sheffield, a neighbor on the southern segment of South River Road, and Robbie Faulkner, a masonry contractor who was working on a project just up the hill from the

market, watched the disastrous fire from across Old Buena Vista Road, where they stood with other observers.

Sheffield told The News-Gazette this week that he was "seconds away [from the market] when it blew." He'd been heading up South River Road and had neared the intersection with Old Buena Vista Road when he

heard a loud explosion and saw the flames.

Like many, perhaps most, in the small crossroads community, Sheffield knew the market owner, Roger Roberts, and his son, Kevin Roberts, who were "such a center of the community," said Sheffield. He added, "Roger was South River Market."

The market was a great convenience for the neighborhood, Sheffield

said, supplying "gas, diesel, tomatoes, ice-cream, chainsaw oil ..."

"The store will be missed," he continued. "It really was the center of the community, along with the school (Mountain View Elementary)."

Unlike so many of the old country stores, which have either disappeared or changed dramatically over

the years, that hadn't happened at the South River Market, Sheffield noted. "It was very much the way it had always been – they had everything."

Most important, South River Market had Roger, who went the extra mile, literally, for his community.

For example, when Sheffield's

See Witnesses, page 3



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**ON HER WAY AGAIN
TO NATIONALS**
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**CELEBRATE THE NATION'S
BIRTHDAY
ALL WEEKEND!**

Balloons, Fireworks Return To Rockbridge Skies



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VOL. 216, NO. 27

More U.S. Charges Filed Against Higgins

*This Month's Trial
Could Get Continued*

By HARRISON MINES

Seventeen new charges against former Rockbridge Regional Jail Superintendent John

Higgins, 61, will likely cause major changes to the federal trial scheduled to begin July 23. In a superseding indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Roanoke on June 27, Higgins now faces two counts of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and 15 counts of mail fraud. These new charges are related to allegations that Higgins accepted prescription drugs

from the pharmaceutical company contracted to provide medication to inmates, and accepted things of value from the family of an inmate in exchange for providing preferential treatment to the inmate, and mail fraud. Higgins still faces four charges alleging mistreatment of inmates that were returned as part of the original indictment last August. Hig-

gins, who continues to serve as the Buffalo District member of the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors, now faces a total of 21 charges. Gary Hassler, 59, former head nurse at Rockbridge Regional Jail, filed a motion on July 1 to sever his charges from the initial 2018

See Higgins, page 14

Planners Approve New BV Apartments

By ED SMITH

Revised plans for student apartments off of 29th Street in Buena Vista were approved by the Planning Commission during a special meeting held last Tuesday, June 25.

The latest plans presented by developer Mike Bowling on behalf of property owner Darlene Stoddard call for fewer units on more space. Stoddard acquired an adjoining lot to the east (at the southwest corner of 29th Street and Aspen Avenue) to double the amount of space for the project. Also, the number of new units was reduced from eight to six.

The project now encompasses 218 and 210 W. 29th Street. An existing house on the newly acquired lot is to be razed in order to make way for a new building that will house four apartments fronting on 29th Street. The other new building, also fronting on 29th Street, is to contain two units and go on the west side of an existing duplex.

The new apartments are to be town-home styled, with each unit having two floors. The site is on the south side of 29th Street, two lots east of Advance Auto.

See Apartments, page 2

Fostering A Future Rising Numbers Highlight Need For Parents

By MATTIE MARSH

"It has been a steady climb," said Margaret Ann Paxton, foster and adoptive parent coordinator for the Rockbridge Area Department of Social Services, regarding the influx of children in foster care.

Currently, 45 children are under RADSS' care, which is more than double from the average of 20 children in care in 2015. In December, RADSS encountered a record high of 50 children in care.

Who are these children? Where are they placed? How and why does a child enter foster care? How does one become a foster parent? What does adulthood look like for former foster children? These questions and more will be answered starting this week in a new News-Gazette series, "Fostering a Future."

Who Are These Kids?

These are Rockbridge children. While RADSS oc-

See Fostering, page 13



'If we don't take care of our most vulnerable children, we are going to see them somewhere else that we don't want to.'

- Spencer Suter,
Rockbridge County
administrator

Company Helping To Find Parents

By MATTIE MARSH

"We need to see that children's issues are the community's issues. They are not just the issues of the Department of Social Services."

With this statement, Em Parente, foster care program manager at the Virginia Department of Social Services, described the initiative behind foster care awareness in Rockbridge County.

See Parents, page 13

Gas Prices Go Up

I-81 Fuel Tax Among Laws Taking Effect

By ED SMITH

Gasoline is getting more costly in localities along Interstate 81 in Virginia, and those under 21 years-of-age can no longer purchase tobacco, nicotine vapor or alternative nicotine products unless they are members of the military.

These are among the changes that took effect Monday, July 1, as a result of legislation approved by the Virginia General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Ralph Northam earlier this year.

A 2.1 percent fuel tax increase is pushing I-81 prices at the pump up by 7.6 cents and 7.7 cents per gallon, respectively, on unleaded gas and diesel fuel. Revenues generated through this tax hike are to help pay for \$2 billion in planned improvements for the interstate highway.

Virginia has become one of just 17 states that have raised the age for le-

See Laws, page 2

Friends On A Mission To Locate A Kidney

By HARRISON MINES

"I've known this was coming since I was 15," says Jonathan Burns, 36.

Burns, general manager of the Best Western Inn at Hunt Ridge, is seeking a living organ donor as a result of his battle with polycystic kidney disease.

After being diagnosed at an early age, Burns has endured a slew of health issues related to the illness. His friends and family are now on a mission to find a kidney donor, in an effort to give back to the man who means so much to them.

Burns and his wife of 13 years, Kayla, have five children between the ages of 10 and 2.

"It's been tough," he said of the impact of his illness on his family. "Raising our young children with no energy has been a challenge."

Burns inherited the genetic disease from his father, whose four brothers also share the condition. While the average kidney is the size of a fist, Burns and others with polycystic kidney disease have kidneys the size of footballs. Jonathan and Kayla's

2-year-old son recently tested positive for the disease.

Burns describes polycystic kidney disease as a bizarre illness in which health issues arise on an individual basis. As the severity of his condition has worsened over the past eight years, Burns has been hospitalized for high blood pressure and kidney stones and infections. He has also had surgeries to remove overgrown cysts from his kidneys, but the results are ultimately not long-lasting.

See Kidney, page 2



JONATHAN BURNS, in need of a living kidney donor, says his kidney disease has been tough on this family. Burns stands with his wife, Kayla, their five children, his cousin as well as his mother and father.

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