

AMHERST NEW ERA-PROGRESS

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2018 A YEAR OF COMING TOGETHER 2019

Tornado recovery, fair and community outreach among top stories of 2018

BY JUSTIN FAULCONER
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In crisis and in celebration, the Amherst County community rallied together and shined a spotlight on civic pride in two pivotal events in 2018.

One was a natural disaster no one saw coming while the other was a gathering that took months of planning and a wide range of community support to pull off.



NEWS & ADVANCE FILE PHOTO
Volunteers help move debris into a dump truck at David Neighbors' house on April 18 in Elon.

On the evening of April 15, an otherwise normal Sunday turned into one of the most memorable nights in Amherst County's history when a powerful tornado brought winds well above 100 miles an hour, causing millions of dollars in damages and destroying or severely damaging more than a 100 structures across the county.

Fortunately, no one was killed and the outpouring of support in the aftermath brought many people together for a common goal of helping the county recover.

In mid-August, thousands joined for a resurrection of the Amherst County Fair, an event that had not been seen in several decades in Amherst and brought laughter, entertainment and a wide range of activities over a four-day span on East Sweet Briar Drive near U.S. 29 in Amherst.

Here is a look at the year's Top 10 stories selected by the New Era-Progress.

Tornado devastates county; Amherst community rallies around recovery efforts

Over a span of seconds, dozens of families and individuals had their lives uprooted when a tornado swept through in mid-April. One of the heaviest hit areas of Elon had homes leveled and overall roughly two dozen homes were completely destroyed.

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JUSTIN FAULCONER/THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

The Ferris Wheel attracted steady, long lines and provided a gorgeous view of the Ambriar Plaza shopping center during the Amherst County Fair in August.

'A unique experience'

County officials, survivors reflect on April tornado's damage, recovery efforts

BY JUSTIN FAULCONER
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Eight months after the April 15 tornado tore through Amherst County, Teresa Bartholomew often spots curious onlookers driving by her home on Nottaway Drive in Elon to see the damage.

The Bartholomew's home was one of the dozens of structures damaged by the storm, requiring months of repairs in a remodel. The family returned to the home on Oct. 15.

"It's good to be back in the neighborhood," said Bartholomew.

Some families have moved back since she and her family returned in October, but others have not, she said. The street feels half empty, she said, and much of the landscape has changed.

Where debris and large piles of rubble scattered the neighborhood in the immediate aftermath of the twister, the street and other parts of Elon now have newly constructed or repaired homes. The wooded area along Virginia 130, which had many household items and other swept-away materials in the tree line this past spring, is mostly back to normal with torn tree limbs placed into piles.

Barry Tucker, pastor of Elon Presbyterian Church who has volunteered with recovery efforts, said he recently drove by the neighborhood. Some scars of tornado damage remain, he said, but the area has come a long way in returning back to normal.

Nate Young, Amherst County's building official, attended a disaster training session in Norfolk a month before the tornado struck. That training proved useful in the days and weeks after the storm damaged more than 170 structures, bringing with it the largest-scale response to a single event Young said his office has handled.

By April 20 the county's building and inspections department assessed nearly 300 structures, with roughly two-dozen destroyed completely and 25 severely damaged and restricted from use until repaired; another 126 homes had minor damage.

The estimated residential damage exceeding \$4.5 million was a monumental task to assess, Young said.

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» Families in Elon community rebuild homes after tornado. **A3**

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Probation officer 'steps out of comfort zone' to help youth in volunteer work

BY JUSTIN FAULCONER
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Here we go.

It's the mantra Amherst County native Alonzo Mathews would say to himself after a long day of work before arriving at the field to coach children in neighboring Appomattox County. He needed to find that second gear to get motivated, he said.

Physically drained, the mantra served to energize him and he noticed it had a positive effect on players who repeated it as they geared

up for competition.

"Even to this day, I still use it," said Mathews, a 1995 graduate of Amherst County High School who once was a standout athlete on the school's football, baseball and basketball teams.

"Sometimes you need a little pick-me-up. 'Here we go' — is it."

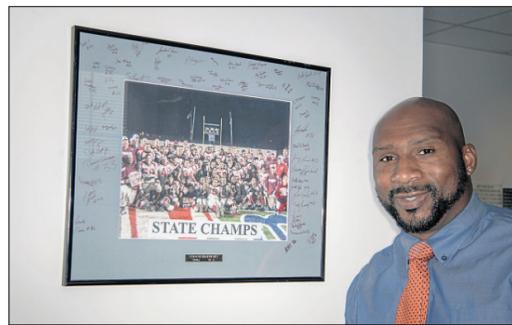
For years, Mathews brought that motivation and spirit to youth in Amherst County, serving as a football coach at the high school from 2001 to 2007 and, for the past nine years, as a co-director of IRON Lives, Inc., a nonprofit youth mentoring program in Amherst and

Lynchburg.

The nonprofit works with young people in developing positive character traits, including professionalism, leadership, respect and community service, as well as teaching them the importance of education, self-discipline, culture and history.

Mathews said the program strives to provide a positive influence for children when much negativity is coming at them.

He also volunteers as an umpire from Amherst County's Dixie Youth baseball program and provides



LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Alonzo Mathews stands beside a photo of the 2006 Lancer state championship football team, which he coached as an assistant, at his office in the Amherst County courthouse.

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

Former Lancer basketball standout player CJ Loving, now part of the Randolph College Wildcats, shoots around a Bridgewater College defender during an earlier season game.

CJ LOVING

Lancer to Wildcat



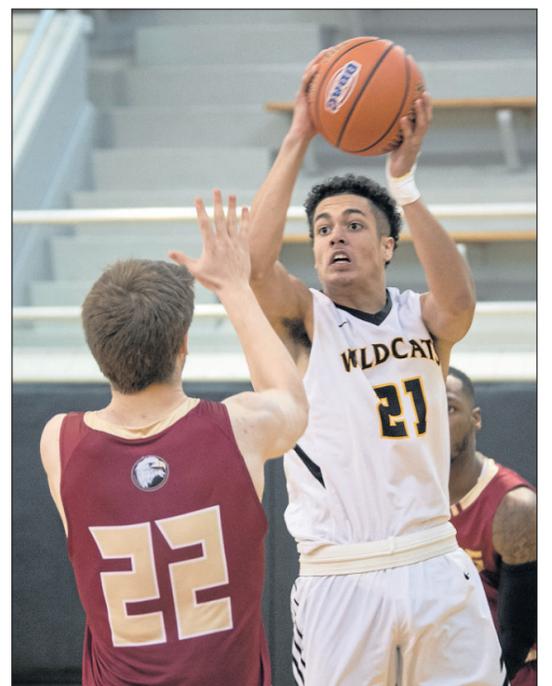
BY LEE LUTHER JR.
For the New Era-Progress

Former Lancer standout basketball player CJ Loving is the third Amherst graduate to attend Randolph College and take part in the Wildcats program.

Loving is in his second season and is the starting small forward/shooting guard. He is part of the bridge former Amherst County High School player Charlie Hudson started between the high school and the college in Lynchburg.

Hudson played for the Lancers in the 1970s, came back to ACHS a few years ago to serve an assistant coach for several Lancer head basketball coaches. For the last few years Hudson has been an assistant for the Randolph College Wildcats just across the James River.

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LEFT: Loving (center) defends against a Bridgewater College shooter during an earlier-season home game in Lynchburg. ABOVE: Loving pulls down a rebound against Bridgewater College.

RESIDENTS MOURN
FALLEN STATE TROOPER

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**TALENTED
STUDENTS**
MIDDLE SCHOOLERS SHOW
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Board of Supervisors

Pay study presented to county officials

Data looks at staff positions compared to market average, costs of potential adjustments

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A study of Amherst County employees' compensation states adjusting salaries for a slew of positions to the market average would cost \$438,000 if approved in the county's upcoming fiscal year 2019-2020 budget. The analysis was presented to the Amherst County Board of Supervisors during a budget workshop last Tuesday. County Administrator Dean Rodgers said costs to operate county government are on the rise while the overall economy is improving.

"We reap the benefit of that as people move to better their position," Rodgers said.

In 2018, the county lost 28 full-time employees, 13 of whom left for better-paying jobs, according to Rodgers' report.

He said the county is not yet in a crisis where it can't replace those workers but it is getting difficult in dealing with turnover. When new employees start from scratch, Rodgers said it slows the county workforce down as a whole.

Salary survey data compiled from surrounding and similar-sized localities presented to supervisors shows the vast majority of 96 county employees outlined in the report are paid less than the market average salaries for their jobs. Linda Warner, director of human resources, said the county's employees carry a tremendous workload with a "positive, customer-friendly attitude."

"We are very leanly staffed, probably the most leanly staffed county I have ever worked for or worked with," Warner said. "The cost of living rises each year. Last year

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LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Winton Country Club's Sarah Henry Manor House is named after the mother of Patrick Henry. Her gravesite is on the Amherst County property.

'A bright new future'

BY JUSTIN FAULCONER
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Winton Country Club's sale to Petersburg company finalized

A new era for the Winton Country Club property was ushered in last Thursday with the closing of the site's sale to a Petersburg developer.

Waukeshaw Development Inc. purchased Winton for \$800,000 and plans to develop existing facilities with additions and renovations that

will lead to restaurant, a brewery and a hotel, according to Amherst County officials.

The majority of the nearly 290-acre site was placed in a conservation easement to retain its rural character. The company gave the county about 70 acres for a permanent fairground and large events venue

and roughly 20 acres is targeted for a retirement community or facility, county officials have said.

The Winton site on Virginia 151, several miles north of the town of Amherst, had been in the county's possession since 1967 after it was donated for the purpose of operating a country club and golf course. A nonprofit corporation operated the site in a lease arrangement with the county and encountered financial problems in recent years with membership decline and other challenges, county and club officials have said.

Dave McCormack, president of Waukeshaw, said the company's goal is to keep the property bucolic and preserve its open space.

"We're super excited to be the new owners," McCormack said in a phone interview after the sale

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"We're super excited to be the new owners. We think it's got tremendous potential. The property is beautiful and we can't wait to get started on our plans."

— Dave McCormack, president of Waukeshaw Development Inc.



PREPARING FOR LAUNCH

LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst County High School's top pole vaulter, Kyle Mosteller, gets in some wind sprints last week while getting ready for the district championship meet. Mosteller won the district pole vault competition Feb. 8 in Lynchburg. Lancer Amani Hankton was named Female Athlete of the Year in track while also winning the 55 dash and 55 hurdles. Lancer Caleb Coles took the boys championship in the high jump.

Phelps Road apartment plan lands \$295K grant

Construction on \$7M project slated to begin this summer

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Amherst County was awarded a Virginia Brownfields Remediation Grant of \$295,000 to aid in the redevelopment of a former school on Phelps Road in Madison Heights into apartments, the county's economic development authority announced Monday.

The former school closed 28 years ago and has fallen into disrepair. Waukeshaw Development, Inc., a Petersburg company, is working with the EDA to repurpose the facility into about 40

market-rate apartments.

"Retaining and restoring this historic building will help it become a unique focal point for the community, add vibrancy to a neighborhood in decline, and be a catalyst for further revitalization in Madison Heights," a news release from the EDA states.

The Virginia Brownfields Restoration Assistance Fund was established to provide grants to local governments to promote restoration and redevelopment of brownfield sites and address environmental problems or obstacles

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