

**OPINION: Career programs great alternative to four-year degrees A4**

**Farm-fresh restaurants profiled in Vogue A6**



# Washington County News

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VHCC classes bring drone operations up a notch

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## Supervisors approve roofing contracts, debate Airbnb

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — The Washington County Board of Supervisors approved three roofing contracts at its Tuesday meeting at a cost below the \$242,000 included for the work in the county's capital improvement fund.

That includes awarding bids and approval of contracts for roof replacements to Cornett Roofing for \$104,184 on the government center building; Cornett Roofing

for \$73,520 on the Washington County Courthouse; and \$42,208 to Leonard Roofing for the Washington County Public Library at Abingdon.

Also on Tuesday, County Treasurer Fred Parker and Commissioner of Revenue David Henry said they have no idea how much lodging tax is being collected in the county through a California-based booking company, Airbnb.

This company contracts with the owners of homes, rooms or

other places to stay. At present, Parker and Henry say as many as 200 places are being offered as lodges in that company's online listings for overnight rentals in Washington County.

"You'd be surprised some of the places on there," Parker said as part of the officials' Tuesday presentation on revenue projections for the upcoming 2019-20 budget.

The officials proposed hiring a company, Host Compliance, for

\$6,071 to try auditing such rentals to determine if the local rentals are paying the tax.

Not knowing whether these taxes are being collected has "grown into something of a problem," Henry said. "It's a big unknown. ... We have no idea who these people are. ... We could be leaving a lot of money on the table."

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College students take advantage of Emory & Henry's Appalachian Trail program

Tilghman Moyer is the first transfer student to enroll in the Semester-A-Trail program at Emory & Henry College. The program combines academic learning with an outdoor adventure on the Appalachian Trail. Moyer is pictured taking a break while hiking a portion of the AT near his home in Pennsylvania last year.

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

EMORY, Va. — A Philadelphia student is fulfilling a big dream at Emory & Henry College this semester

while also blazing the trail for other transfer college students.

Tilghman Moyer traveled more than 500 miles to the college in January just to take part in an outdoor program that culminates

with an attempted thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail, the world's most popular hiking route.

Moyer is the first transfer student to enroll in the Semester-A-Trail program, an experience that

combines academic learning with an outdoor adventure of a lifetime — all while earning college credits.

After completing the semester-long program, Moyer will transfer back to Temple University, where he will finish his senior year in the fall.

"We're the only college program in the country that specifically built an academic semester around an attempted hike on the Appalachian Trail," said James Harrison, architect of the

See **TRAIL**, Page A5

## Budget restores some at-risk funding for SW Va. schools

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

A compromise state budget agreement restored some, but not all, At-Risk Add-On school funding, generating a combined \$1.94 million for Southwest Virginia school districts.

Last weekend, budget conferees rejected a House of Delegates plan to increase funding through the Virginia Lottery and freeze funding through At-Risk Add-On — which would have directed more money into larger, more populated school divisions and generally reduced funding for most small and rural districts.

In its place, budget conferees — and ultimately, the General Assembly — approved a compromise plan to increase the At-Risk

Add-On funding stream — designed to support school divisions in communities struggling with high poverty rates.

With the approved version, area divisions will receive \$1.94 million over the biennium or about \$700,000 more than the House version of the plan.

"It wasn't everything we wanted, but we appreciate every penny we get," Bristol Virginia Superintendent Keith Perrigan said. "We're indebted to the Southwest delegation for stepping up to the plate, as they always do, for our kids. ... They always advocate that we get an equitable amount of funding."

Perrigan also serves as president of the Virginia Coalition of Small and Rural Schools, which represents about 70 divisions statewide,

and lobbied lawmakers for the compromise. Statewide, the compromise recovered about \$2.2 million in education funding.

"The At-Risk Add-On will be increased. The governor's original proposal was to move the cap from 14 [percent] to 16 [percent] this year and 16 [percent] next year, and the House wanted the increase to all come from lottery, which doesn't really benefit the high poverty or small divisions," Perrigan said. "With the compromise, the cap will move to 14.5 percent for the present year and 16 percent next year."

A 2018 report by the Education Law Center gave Virginia a failing grade in equitable school funding, stating that the state fails to adequately fund schools based on

poverty and student need.

Divisions can expect a small check at the end of the fiscal year on June 30, with the majority of the funding coming during fiscal 2019-20.

The At-Risk Add-On specifically targets divisions with high numbers of students who receive free and reduced price lunch and localities with a lower composite index, or less ability to fund education.

"Virginia's budget funding formula is very complex, and we recognize it takes a lot of consideration to reach these decisions," Perrigan said.

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# Trail

From Page A1

program and director of the Outdoor Program at the college.

The program, which began in 2006 specifically for Emory & Henry students, is now a draw for students from other institutions who can return to their school of origin after completing the program.

The professor hopes the unique program eventually gains national recognition, encouraging more transfer students to participate.

"Tilghman is the first student to take advantage of the transfer program. He's our model," said Harrison.

The college has hired celebrated filmmaker and photographer Chris Galoway, based out of Black Mountain, North Carolina, to document the excursions of Moyer on the Appalachian Trail. The film will be used on the college's website as a marketing tool for the program.

"We want to reach out to every college and college-aged student around the country — if not the world — and let them know they can transfer here for the program and transfer back to their college."

## Take a hike

Last Saturday, Moyer and resident student Sadie Burton, who is also in the program, began the first leg of a northbound journey on the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountains of northern Georgia.

The Appalachian Trail stretches 2,200 miles through 14 states from Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine.

The students have spent the semester preparing for this day, when Moyer begins a thru-hike of the trail and Burton starts a 500-mile stretch from Georgia to Damascus. With backpacks filled with necessities, the student hikers have relinquished common luxuries for the next few months — things like a warm bed, a hot meal, a toilet and a television.

Both students, who will travel at their own paces, expressed their excitement — and, perhaps, anxiety — as they began preparing for a journey that will test their trekking skills and take them through some of the most amazing views in the world.

Anticipating a gamut of weather conditions along the way, the student hikers are carrying backpacks strategically filled with clothes, jackets and rain gear. Prepackaged noodles, oatmeal, instant potatoes, peanut butter and cheese will offer sustenance until each of them can leave the trail to resupply, take a shower and maybe catch a good night's sleep in a hostel before their hiking resumes.

Moyer anticipates finishing the excursion in July. Burton said she will be on the trail for about 50 days before reaching Damascus.

## Earning college credit

Students in the Semester-A-Trail program enroll in 12 semester hours of coursework that prepares them academically and physically for the journey.

"When Tilghman returns to his home, he's going to carry with him this awesome life journey. He will have engaged in meaningful project-based learning to support his degree and study goals — and the journey that comes along with an Appalachian Trail hike," Harrison said.

"Hiking an average of 15 miles a day, the thru-hike will be harder than you ever thought it could



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Sadie Burton (left) and Tilghman Moyer will soon begin long treks over the Appalachian Trail — Burton plans a 500-mile stretch ending in Damascus, Virginia, while Moyer will aim for the entire 2,192 miles, ending in Maine.**

be, but it will be far more beautiful than you could ever imagine," said Harrison, who, along with his wife, Aliese, hiked the entire trail in 1997.

Coursework for the students included nature writing, taught by Harrison, who also teaches English courses at Emory & Henry.

The students learned how to engage in nature writing and to be good observers of nature.

"We learn to write in a

manner that makes the readers feel like they are in our shoes," said Moyer.

The Semester-A-Trail program also offers students the opportunity to build independent studies and projects that support their areas of study.

Moyer, who is majoring in environmental science at Temple University, has worked with Dr. Ed Davis, professor of geography, to learn about human geography — the patterns of cultural landscapes. Moyer

learned about phenology, the study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events, from Dr. Laura Hainsworth, associate professor of chemistry and environmental studies at the college and also director of the Bartlett-Crowe Field Station.

Burton, who is majoring in creative communications, is completing three independent studies to accompany her hike. Her project entails a documentary project that focuses on gratitude, documentary photography and nature writing.

Before the hike began, students engaged in a hiker preparation program that focuses on physical training, nutrition on the trail, skill-building, backcountry cooking, purification of water on the trail and other problem-solving skills.

Gaining familiarity with these things, the students went on an earlier shake-down hike, a shorter backpacking trip in preparation for the long trip on the Appalachian Trail.

## Drawn to nature

Moyer said he searched other colleges online until he found the Semester-

A-Trail program at Emory & Henry. "Growing up in the city, I've always been attracted to the outdoors. There was a patch of grass outside our townhouse in Philly. I wanted to be somewhere that was fresh, green and lush.

"I can't pinpoint what I want to do with my environmental science degree, but I hope my hike on the Appalachian Trail will help me figure out some things."

Burton, who grew up on a farm in South Carolina, said a 50-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail when she was in high school whetted her appetite for adventure. In middle school, she developed a love for photographing nature.

Burton recommends the adventure to other students. "But students need a good work ethic. We have access to resources and help on the trail, but we're on our own for the most part. We have to hold ourselves accountable."

## Building relationships

Meeting new people and building relationships are paramount objectives in the program.

"I'm really looking forward to meeting the people — not just the

people on the trail but the people in the towns," said Moyer. "People all over the world attempt to hike the trail every year. The weekend we're starting is one of the busiest weekends this season.

"For anyone who is on the fence about taking a journey that's very daunting, just do it. It can be scary, but it's also awesome. The unknown is such a cool place to be."

Harrison said communing with nature is a spiritual thing — appreciating sunrises and the sound of water.

"In today's society, we spend so much time in artificial environments, but there are so many wonderful discoveries to be made when you forest. Your senses awaken, and you have real conversations with people."

He hopes the students come away from the experience with elevated senses and a stronger connection to the earth.

"All of the things that you need to be happy in this world can fit into a simple backpack."

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

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## Highlands Announces Chief Banking Officer, Mike Hill And TriCities Market Executive, Jeff Fritts



Mike Hill



Jeff Fritts

## Community Focus

### Mike Hill

- Present Board Member of Keystone Dental
- Leadership Johnson City Graduate
- Past Board of Directors- Kingsport Chamber
- Past Board of Directors- Girls, Inc.
- Past Board of Directors- United Way of Greater Kingsport
- Leadership Kingsport Graduate
- Vice Chairman Fund Raising -Friends in Need

### Jeff Fritts

- Leadership Washington County Graduate
- Leadership Johnson County Graduate
- Past member - Johnson County's Long Range Planning Committee for Economic Development
- Former member - Board of Directors of Johnson County Champion Community
- Past Treasurer - Johnson County Community Foundation
- Member - Board of Directors and VP of the Johnson County Trails Association

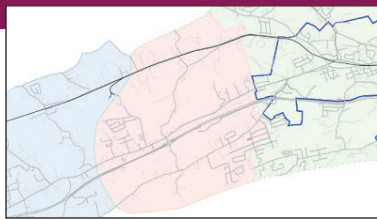
## The Combined Experience of over 40 years Community Banking!

Highlands Union Bank is please to announce the appointment of Mike Hill as Chief Banking Officer and Jeff Fritts as TriCities Market Executive. Hill, the former TriCities Market Executive, joined Highlands in 2016 and has over 25+ years in banking. Fritts, a former Commercial Relationship Manager in the Southwest Virginia market has been an employee of Highlands for over 12+ years and has spent his career serving the local community for the past 40 years.



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**Sewer service expansion will include full Lee Highway corridor A2**

**Strangers help family escape a crashed vehicle that ran into creek A3**



# Washington County News

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**BUSINESS**

## Construction picking up at The Meadows



**BY JOE TENNIS**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
ABINGDON, Va. — Steve Smith drove his six-man truck onto a graded pad and then parked at what will one day be the front door of a new Food City in Abingdon.

"We're sitting inside the store right now," said a smiling Smith, CEO and president of K-VA-T Food Stores, the parent company for the grocery chain.

Here, at The Meadows on a sunny Wednesday, construction

crews have been on the job for about 16 months.

But, according to Smith, it's been tough and slow going — until just a few days ago.

"I think all of us were tired of the rain and the gray that we've faced for the last 12 months in this region," Smith said.

Yet this Wednesday marked a time when, finally, construction crews could get some actual work done on what's poised to become



DAVID CRIGGER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
The historic house on The Meadows property sits between the retail development and the new sports fields being built.

See **MEADOWS**, Page A5

The Gallery @ Barr Photographics stays ahead of technological advances **» B1**

## VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**ART**



1980s exhibit allows audience, museum to reflect on the past **» B1**

**BOOKS**



First Highlands Writers Fair focuses on regional talent **» B2**



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
Mary Sue Thomas checks under the hood of a tractor-trailer, just one of the many things she must learn to do in order to pass a pretrip examination.

## Trucking on

Driver training course sees increase in female students

**BY CAROLYN R. WILSON**  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
ABINGDON, Va. — After spending nearly four years delivering pizzas around town, 46-year-old Janet McLean is looking for a different kind of career — one that will

give her the adventures of the road and the freedom to work independently.

The single mom from Bristol, Virginia, is training to be a tractor-trailer driver, a profession traditionally imagined as being held by burly men wearing caps

and dressed in lumberjack shirts.

"My kids are grown, and I'm ready to see the country. I'm taking to the road full time before the grandbabies come along," said McLean, who has completed

See **TRUCKING**, Page A6

## Suboxone film strip maker indicted in Abingdon

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
A federal grand jury in Abingdon indicted Indivior Inc., a British drug manufacturing company, on charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, mail fraud and health care fraud, based on the company allegedly downplaying the addictiveness of its Suboxone film strips.

The drug is commonly prescribed in the region to treat patients for opioid addiction.

According to the indictment, Indivior obtained revenue from the Suboxone film prescriptions by deceiving health care providers and health care benefit programs into believing they are safer, less divertible and less abusable than other opioid-addiction treatment drugs, including the tablet form of Suboxone.

The company promoted the film as a safer alternative to the tablet form, "even though the company lacked any scientific evidence to support those claims," the indictment states. The company made the claims in marketing materials and through representations to physicians, pharmacists

See **OPIOID**, Page A6

## Greg Hogston running for Washington County sheriff

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
Greg Hogston, a former Washington County Sheriff's Office lieutenant, announced his bid for the Democratic nomination for sheriff on Friday.



Hogston

Hogston is the latest candidate to run for sheriff since Fred Newman announced he's retiring.

Hogston began his law enforcement career in 1996 and understands firsthand what problems communities face on a

daily basis, he said in a news release.

"This is why his platform is communities first with his campaign being operated on three core principles of honesty, integrity and transparency," the release states.

"My decision to run for sheriff was based on the tremendous encouragement from people within our communities, law enforcement and civic organizations," Hogston said. "The decision was not about me, but about how we, together, can continue to better our communities and families through strong positive partnerships."

Hogston said he would continue a positive direction in local law enforcement.

"The Sheriff's Office works for the citizens of Washington County and must function diligently to serve and protect you," Hogston said. "Our Sheriff's Office will work actively in every community, for all citizens, to protect them from abuse, neglect and crime."

As a father and grandfather, Hogston said he understands the importance of keeping children safe in schools. His plan to do so would be through an enhanced School Resource Officer program

and by continuing DARE education in classrooms.

Hogston said he wants to retain highly trained and dedicated individuals, along with continuing to train and improve personnel to ensure that citizens are provided with the highest level of law enforcement services.

Hogston joins Blake Andis and Rex Carter in the sheriff race.

Andis is a lifelong Washington County resident who serves as police chief at Virginia Highlands Community College. In his an-

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# Suboxone

From Page A1

and health care benefit programs throughout the country, the indictment adds.

"The Department of Justice intends to hold accountable those who are in position to know the harm opioid abuse inflicts but instead choose to profit illegally from the pain of others," said Principal Deputy Associated Attorney General Jesse Pannuccio with the Department of Justice. "Manufacturers, distributors, pharmacies and doctors should all be on notice that they must follow the law and act responsibly."

The scheme, the indictment claims, converted thousands of patients over to Suboxone film and caused state Medicaid programs to expand and maintain coverage at substantial costs to the government.

"We are extremely disappointed in this action by the Justice Department, which is wholly unsupported by either the facts or the law," the company, which is currently based in the U.K., said last Tuesday.

Indivior said key allegations made by the Department of Justice are contradicted by the government's own scientific agencies, based on years-old events from before Indivior became an independent company in 2014, and "they are wrong."

Recently, Indivior lost in court when it tried to stop companies from producing and selling generic Suboxone film.

Last year, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions created the Prescription Interdiction & Litigation Task Force to fight the prescription drug crisis that has plagued the country. The task force was expected to deploy and coordinate all available criminal and civil law enforcement tools to reverse the tide of opioid overdoses in the country, with a particular focus on manufacturers and distributors.

The prosecution against Indivior is part of the task force's efforts, according to public affairs specialist Brian McGinn with the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The Abingdon division has an established history of expertise in pharmaceutical prosecutions, McGinn said Wednesday. Federal prosecutors in the district and nationally have been successful in taking civil and criminal cases to court in Abingdon.

Abuse and diversion of Suboxone strips have been reported throughout the region, according to authorities. Deputy Darrell Dickenson, a spokesman with the Washington County Sheriff's Office, said deputies deal with Suboxone tablets and Suboxone film on a weekly basis.

# Trucking

From Page A1

five weeks of a six-week training course.

McLean and two other female students at Virginia Highlands Community College are participating in a Workforce Development course provided through the community college in partnership with the Virginia Truck Driving Academy, operated by Roger Roe of Roger's Trucking.

The training course will prepare the women to receive their commercial driver's licenses (CDL) and join a field that is currently only 6.2% female, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Kellie Crowe, coordinator of public relations and marketing at the community college, said the college only had one female student when the CDL program started in 2016 — until this semester.

The CDL program was initiated to fill a need for qualified drivers in the community. It's estimated more than 48,000 additional truckers are needed nationwide.

All of the female students said they are ready for a change and to embark on a career that can lead them just about anywhere.

Mary Sue Thomas, of Meadowview, said she loves to travel and believes her new truck-driving career will be an opportunity to make a good living.

"That's the exciting thing about it," said Thomas.

But getting involved in the field can be as much about learning the culture as picking up new skills. The women in the course had to pick a CB radio handle name to communicate with other truckers on the road.

Thomas chose "Booshie" for hers. "It kind of means 'uppy,'" she said.

"When our instructor told us to wear old clothes because we were going to get dirty, I thought he looked right at me," she said, laughing.

"The first day of class, I did come with my hoop earrings, blue jeans and boots. I've downgraded quite a bit since then," said Thomas. "But I always keep my nails done."

Ruth Thomas, also of Meadowview, has been a medical assistant and worked in medical records for numerous years. "I've wanted a new career. I have friends who are truck drivers, and I've been interested in it for a long time."

## FastForward

Because the Workforce Development course is provided through the community college, Virginia



CAROLYN R. WILSON/ FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**Janet McLean (left), of Bristol, Virginia, Mary Sue Thomas (center) and Ruth Thomas, both of Meadowview, are participating in a training course that is preparing the women to receive their commercial driver's license (CDL), making them among only 6.2% of occupational drivers who are female, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.**

residents have access to a program called FastForward, which was created by Virginia lawmakers to boost workforce training to meet the needs of businesses in each region of the state.

According to FastForward's website, more than 14,000 credentials have been awarded throughout Virginia since the program was launched.

"For people looking to get a job, advance their career or create more opportunity to support themselves and their families, FastForward is the quickest, most affordable option in higher education today," according to materials published by FastForward. "The program is a short-term workforce credential program to train Virginians for top, in-demand jobs across the commonwealth. Most programs take between six to 12 weeks and are built so that students can get their education while they work."

Crowe explained that a typical CDL course costs \$4,000, but through FastForward, which is partly subsidized through a state-provided grant, the classes are only \$1,333 for Virginia residents. If students qualify for financial assistance, the price would drop to \$133.33, she said.

Robert Phillips, coordinator of Workforce Development at the community college, said, "Individuals' lives and the financial situation for families in our service region have been greatly enhanced as a result of the FastForward programs. CDL is just one of those programs."

## Behind the wheel

According to Stacy Bayse, instructor at Roger's Trucking Co., the course offers classroom instruction and behind-

the-wheel training, all of which prepares the students for pretrip, driving and road trip examinations at the Division of Motor Vehicles.

"During the pretrip examination, students have to identify more than 100 parts of the truck. They have to know what it is, the condition it's in, how it's mounted and what could be wrong with it," said Bayse.

"Before they start a trip, they need to check marker lights on top of the trailer and tractor, check the windshield, look for leaks under the truck, check the grill, headlights, turn signals and bumper. They need to check air filter canisters, heater hoses and water under the hood."

"It's a lot to learn in a short amount of time. Then, throw that on top of having to learn how to back a truck — especially for someone who's never done it before. We're going completely against the grain of everything you know."

The women truckers said one of the most difficult things to master was maneuvering the trailer.

"You have to learn the lingo, too," said Mary Sue Thomas, with a laugh.

"Put the truck back up under' means to put the truck

under the trailer while backing up to make it even with the trailer."

McLean said downshifting was probably the hardest thing for her to learn.

"This is nothing like driving a stick shift. If you ever drove a stick shift, you have to forget about driving that stick shift because this is a whole different ballgame," she said.

The women confessed there have been many days when throwing in the towel seemed like the easiest option.

"There were a lot of days when I wasn't sure about anything," said Mary Sue Thomas. "Some days I got in the truck and everything went smoothly, and other days I couldn't hit a gear or back it up. It's a learning process."

"The trainers here are awesome. They sense when you're getting stressed and encourage you to take a breather."

## Women in trucking

"We really like the fact that more females are showing an interest in truck driving," said Phillips. "When you think about their attention to detail, their tendency to be meticulous about things and how they are safety-conscious, I just think it's a perfect fit for women who want this type of career."

The students said they already have started looking for potential employers.

"You'd be surprised how quickly companies will call you once you like them on Facebook. It's almost immediate," said Mary Sue Thomas.

According to the American Trucking Association, there were 3.5 million truck drivers in the United States in 2018. More drivers are needed to keep up with the increasing numbers of consumer items carried on America's highways.

Bayse said he's seen more women become interested in truck driving in the past few years.

More trucking companies are hiring women truckers. According to a report by the American Transportation Research

Institute (ATRI), women outperform male drivers in safety behavior, resulting in fewer crashes.

An analysis by ATRI found that male truck drivers are 20% more likely to get into a crash than their female counterparts.

Some of that could be credited to biology. Women are more risk-averse because of their maternal roots, according to the agency, and women are more willing to admit what they don't know, to ask for help and to learn and listen, said the ATRI website.

"I think it's all about personality," said Bayse. "I've seen women who were fearless in the face of anything, but I've also seen fearless men, too. However they are at life, they usually go at this truck driving the same way."

As the female students prepare for their new careers, they believe it's only normal to have some fears starting out. Their advice to others is to give it a try, despite the challenges they may face.

"Every day gets a little better," said Mary Sue Thomas. "You get more comfortable with what you're struggling with the day before. Driving a truck takes a lot of skill, but if women set their minds to this, they can do it."

"Truck drivers are held to a higher standard because we're professional drivers. And once you get behind the wheel, all the fears go away."

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

**FISH DAY**  
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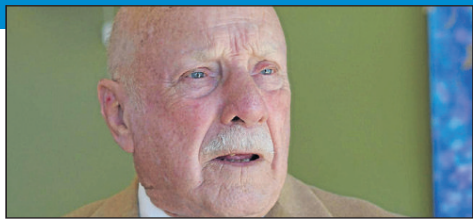
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**Veteran who served on Air Force One dies at 80** **A8**

**New artwork on display at Town Square Center** **B2**



# Washington County News

Wednesday, May 8, 2019 ♦ Washington County News www.swvatoday.com ♦ Vol. 74, No. 18 ♦ \$1.00

**BUSINESS**



Mendota native reopens landmark store for community **» B1**

## Abingdon's new town manager takes over

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Jimmy Morani drove into Abingdon on March 9, just to check out the town.



Morani

He had already completed a telephone interview a couple of weeks earlier with a job recruiter. But he wanted to make sure that Abingdon was the right fit for him.

So, after spending the night with a relative in Louisville, Kentucky, Morani moseyed into the area, stopping at

the Barter Theatre, Zephyr Antiques and the Coomes Recreation Center.

He popped into Food City and Food Lion.

Morani checked out the ongoing construction site at The Meadows. He explored the downtown district. And he ate a late lunch at Bonefire Smokehouse BBQ.

"I kind of walked the whole downtown," Morani said. "I just kind of surveyed around as much of the town as I could."

Turns out, to Morani, Abingdon was just as

See **MANAGER**, Page A8

## Meth in the Mountain Empire now an imported problem

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Law enforcement officers searching for a man Wednesday in Scott County, Virginia, said they discovered thousands of dollars worth of methamphetamine in his vehicle — a problem authorities say has "exploded" recently in the Mountain Empire.

The meth was found in a vehicle that was stopped on Roberts Creek Road in the Hiltons community. The Scott County Sheriff's Office stopped Timothy Ray Manuel, 28, of Bristol, Virginia, who fired upon the deputy and fled on foot. He was later shot and killed following an hours-long manhunt, the sheriff said.

"We are seeing an increase in meth cases and arrests," said Washington County Sheriff Fred Newman, whose officers assisted in Wednesday's manhunt. "However, we are not seeing the manufacture of meth in Washington County."

Newman said he believes meth is being imported into the area, most likely from Mexico.

"It appears to be cheaper to buy than manufacture," Newman said.

Meth is becoming a common occurrence in traffic stops in Bristol, Tennessee, according to city Police Capt. Charlie Thomas.

"Meth and opioids are causing us lots of grief," Thomas said. "One of our guys got over 100 grams on a traffic stop the other night, and it is a common occurrence to find it on traffic stops today, even more prevalent than marijuana."

In Sullivan County, District Attorney General Barry Staubus said meth coming into the area is cheaper to purchase and is likely from Mexico via Atlanta.

"We are seeing much less homemade meth," Staubus added.

Sullivan County Assistant District Attorney Gene Perrin said meth is currently being pushed into the Mountain Empire by Mexican drug cartels and other groups, primarily due to low prices.

"Our locals no longer make meth," Perrin said. "They buy it in large quan-

See **METH**, Page A3

**ART**



Plein Air Abingdon participants painted through rain and shine **» B3**

**THEATRE**



New musical at Barter puts opera singer amid a county fair **» B3**

## HUNGRY MOTHER RESERVOIR



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Fisheries technician Chanz Hopkins (left), of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, talks to VHCC students Nathan Ferguson (center) and Kalin Davis (right), explaining how the dace ear bone indicates the age of the fish.

## Looking for clues

VHCC students dissect non-native fish to help conservationists study patterns, habitat changes

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Students at Virginia Highlands Community College are learning that fish bones can be good storytellers.

Nearly 40 students — not all of them biology majors — dissected fish last week in search of a special type of ear bone called an otolith that can reveal the age of fish.

The purpose of the research project is to learn more about the population growth of the mountain redbelly dace, a fish that has been discovered in the streams at Hungry Mother State Park that is not native to

the area. Its presence there has worried some conservationists, who hope to preserve native fish populations by keeping the mountain redbelly dace confined to its natural habitats.

The project is an ongoing collaboration with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and Virginia Highlands Community College.

According to Dr. Kevin Hamed, a biology instructor at the community college who is leading the study, efforts have been made in the past two years to collect and remove

mountain redbelly dace from an unnamed tributary that feeds into Hungry Mother Reservoir. While mountain redbelly dace are abundant in other river systems in Virginia, North Carolina and West Virginia, they have occasionally made their way into other ecosystems, likely with the help of fishermen who use them as live bait.

Hamed explained that the mountain redbelly dace pose a problem to their sister species, the Tennessee dace, also located in a stream at Hungry Mother State Park. Tennessee dace are rare in Virginia and are

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# Fish

From Page A1

That means removing any mountain redbelly dace found in Hungry Mother and transporting them to Hamed's students, who dissect them to learn how rapidly they may be reproducing. There is concern that the mountain redbelly dace could out-compete the Tennessee dace — or hybridize with them — threatening the population. Hamed is also concerned that the invasion of the redbelly dace will prevent ideal conditions for the Tennessee dace to spawn and reproduce.

## Rings in their ears

Nathan Ferguson, a freshman at the college, has helped Hamed with the research project throughout the year. He is using his work with the project to fulfill requirements for an honors component course, designed to sharpen skills and deepen knowledge in the biology field. After earning his associate in science degree from Virginia Highlands Community College, Ferguson plans to transfer to Virginia Tech to receive a dual major in wildlife conservation and environmental studies.

During the project, Ferguson and the other students take the removed mountain redbelly dace and dissect them, recording each fish's sex and the number and weight of any eggs. The last step is to remove the ear bone of the invasive dace to help learn about the aging process.

"The ear bones, or otoliths, act as tree rings do," said Ferguson. "Throughout the spring and summer, the fish eat a fair amount but slow down throughout the fall and winter. This causes the fish to grow during the spring and summer. Once the spring and summer ends, then the otolith has a dark band entered in the bone, which looks like a ring. This continues throughout the life of a fish.

"Through this project, we are able to control the number of mountain redbelly dace within Hungry Mother, and one day we hope that we can erase them from that specific area," said Ferguson.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Nathan Ferguson has chosen dace research as his honors component as he completes his associate degree at VHCC with plans to transfer to Virginia Tech.**



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Dissecting to measure the ear bone will tell researchers whether the dace population is under control.**

Mountain redbelly dace are mostly found in the New River System but hardly anywhere in the Tennessee River System, where Tennessee dace thrive.

"The research will indicate if our efforts are having an impact with the population of the invasive dace. Maybe the population is becoming older, which may mean there is less reproduction going on," said Hamed.

## Conserve, connect, protect

Chanz Hopkins, a fisheries technician for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, said his role was to instruct the students on removing, prepping and aging the otoliths so they can collect the data.

"This is a similar exercise that is taught at Virginia Tech in the fisheries techniques and ichthyology classes," he said.

"Tennessee dace have not yet been observed in the same tributary as the mountain redbelly dace, but they exist in Hungry Mother Creek just above the reservoir, so we want to keep the mountain redbelly dace from spreading in the system, where they could compete and possibly overtake the native Tennessee Dace," said Hopkins.

"We work hard to conserve and manage all of the state's wildlife resources, and a project like this one is also a great outreach opportunity to connect and help educate students who will have a future role in our field of study. This study correlates with our mission statement: Conserve, Connect and Protect," he added.

Hamed said research projects like this one help to fuel students' eagerness to learn.

"Many of the students who are helping with the project are considering careers in fisheries biology," said the instructor. "This project will give them the tools to make them better prepared.

"The project is offered to all students across different majors who want to learn more about preserving our natural resources."

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**THURSDAY JAMS:** Abingdon, Va. Thursday, May 9, 7-9:30 p.m., Abingdon Market Pavilion, 100 Remsburg Drive. The first Thursday Jam of the season features Morgan Wade & The Stepbrothers. The event is free and open to all and will feature local food trucks and Wolf Hills crafted beer. Proceeds from the Beer Garden will benefit Abingdon Main Street. Parking is available adjacent to the Abingdon Market Pavilion. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. For more information, visit [www.abingdonmusicexperience.com](http://www.abingdonmusicexperience.com). Other performers coming up: Town Mountain on May 16, Nora Jane Struthers on May 23 and Flow Tribe on May 30.

**DAMASCUS TOWNWIDE YARD SALE:** Damascus, Va. Saturday, May 11, 7 a.m.-3 p.m., Town Park by Beaverdam Creek. A townwide yard sale will take place all over town in Damascus on May 11, centered in the Town Park. For more information, call 276-475-3831 or email [clerk@visitidamascus.org](mailto:clerk@visitidamascus.org).

**TRAIL DAYS FESTIVAL:** Damascus, Va. Friday, May 17, 8 a.m. -Sunday, May 19, 4 p.m. The celebration of the Appalachian Trail and the town of Damascus will take place all over town on the weekend of May 17. The festival will include live music, gear vendors, repair stations, food, talent shows, a parade and more. For more information, visit [traildays.us](http://traildays.us).

**CROOKED ROAD YOUTH MUSIC FESTIVAL:** Saturday, May 11, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace, One Heartwood Circle. Fifteen bands and traditional music programs, featuring over 200 young regional musicians, will perform throughout the day, including the Blue Devil String Band, Galax JAMS, VHCC Old Time String Band and the Bristol Bearcat Bluegrass Band. The festival is family-oriented, and admission is \$5 for adults, \$2 for children 6-12, and kids 5 and under free. For more information, call 276-492-2409 or email [info@thecrookedroad.org](mailto:info@thecrookedroad.org).

**RICHARD LEIGH SONGWRITERS FESTIVAL:** Abingdon, Va. Friday, May 24, 5:30 p.m., and Saturday, May 25, 6:30 p.m., Virginia Highlands Community College, 100 VHCC Drive. A group of Nashville's leading songwriters will join local, up-and-coming talent for a celebration of song, headlined by Grammy Award winner Richard Leigh. On Saturday, they will take the stage to perform a selection of hit songs, with all proceeds benefitting VHCC's Great Expectations Program. Tickets can be purchased for two nights of performances and showcases. Friday offers general admission tickets for \$15 to the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace, with doors opening at 5 p.m. General admission seats for the Higher Education Center on Saturday are \$25, with doors opening at 6:30

p.m. Weekend passes and special reserved seating are also available. For more information, call 276-739-2532 or email [songwritersfest@vhcc.edu](mailto:songwritersfest@vhcc.edu).

**PLUMB ALLEY DAY:** Abingdon, Va. Saturday, May 25, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Plumb Alley. Some 6,000 to 8,000 residents are expected on Abingdon's Plumb Alley during the one-day event that will feature food, music, dancing, activities and a massive yard sale sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. More than 130 vendors will sell pottery, art, photographs, crafts, jewelry, antiques and other items. Attendees should park on Main or Valley streets or in one of the town's several parking lots.

**HOWLING CRAFT BEER AND MUSIC FESTIVAL:** Abingdon, Va. Friday, May 31, 5 p.m., and Saturday, June 1, 3 p.m., Wolf Hills Brewing Co., 350 Park St. Wolf Hills Brewing Co. announces its fifth annual Howling Craft Beer and Music Festival. A kickoff party at 5 p.m. on Friday will feature special beer offerings, food and music from C2 & The Brothers Reed, 49 Winchester, Strong Water and The Double Hearted. On Saturday, doors will open at 3 p.m. with two stages of live music, food trucks, craft vendors and live art. Saturday will feature The Black Lillies, Revel in Dimes, Moonbeau, Jake Quillin, Indighost, Pointer Brothers and Ragged Sally. Also on Saturday morning, The Howling 5K on the Virginia Creeper Trail will donate proceeds to United Way. Signup for the race starts at 8 a.m., and the race is at 9 a.m. Wolf Hills Brewing will also be open free on Sunday from 1 to 6 p.m. with special events. Call 26-451-5470 or email [admin@wolfhillsbrewing.com](mailto:admin@wolfhillsbrewing.com) for more details.

**GLADE SPRING HIGH/ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REUNION:** Glade Spring, Va. Saturday, June 1, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Glade Baptist Church Family Life Center, 414 S. Monte Vista Drive. A pot luck will take place on June 1 to celebrate a reunion for anyone who attended the old Glade Spring High or Elementary schools, graduation or no. The Family Life Center is located directly behind the main Glade Baptist Church building. Contact Sylvia Tuggle Ratliff (276-608-5976) or Mary Nutter McFarlane (276-944-3036) for more information.

## SEND US YOUR PLANS

Is there an event you'd like to make sure the rest of the community hears about? Send notices to [news@washconews.com](mailto:news@washconews.com). Submission deadline is Monday at noon for the upcoming week.

# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Washington County Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Carol Jones, of BHSS Jones Property Group, on April 23. Jones Property Group is a full-service brokerage family representing the best and brightest in real estate. The group is now a member of Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, a brand that Jones said will help her agents win additional business. "The brand is fresh, sophisticated and well-suited to our market niches," she said. "We believe clients will appreciate the Berkshire Hathaway Home Services name and understand its marketing advantages." BHSS Jones Property Group will be open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 153 W. Main St. in Abingdon. Contact them at [www.bhhsjones.com](http://www.bhhsjones.com) or by calling 43-989-3100.

# Sunset Digital becomes Point Broadband

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

BRISTOL, Va. — Customers of the former BVU OptiNet telecommunications network will see a new name on their bill and some new service options.

Sunset Digital and Sunset Fiber, the Duffield-based firm that purchased OptiNet last year, has been rebranded Point Broadband. That is the West Point, Georgia-based firm that financed the August 2018 purchase. The change was announced in a written statement.

"Today we mark an important transition from two pioneering brands — Sunset Digital and OptiNet," said Todd Holt, CEO of Point Broadband. "These brands brought critical fiber technology to rural Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee. Point Broadband has the resources, experience and knowledge base that will further the expansion efforts already underway, and will

enhance the customer service capabilities for customers across the region."

Point Broadband's "Fiber-to-the-Premise" technology powers the most data-intensive applications so that residential and commercial users can surf, stream, download, upload and work online simultaneously, according to the statement. Point Broadband's fiber-optic network delivers faster download and upload speeds compared to traditional coaxial cable networks.

"Our local team is proud of the service and support we've been able to provide to our customers. This new chapter will give us the tools and support that we need to continue to pioneer new, reliable service to benefit consumers and the local economies here," said Weldon Feightner, CEO of Sunset Digital and chief operating officer of Point Broadband.

The company will offer an

increase in speeds for streaming video and a new home security Wi-Fi product that supports "smart home" devices, according to the statement.

"The resources available through Point Broadband enable us to expand Gigabit Internet networks in the region, providing the best online experience for residents and businesses in our communities," Feightner said. "With the increased demand on high-speed broadband service, it's vitally important to have reliable broadband connections and fiber is the best there is."

Point Broadband also plans to facilitate new offerings from Sling, Hulu and other streaming services to their users, including a Dish Network partnership that provides traditional programming with a two-year price guarantee.

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